Principal Leadership: Communication, Support, Management, and Evaluation in Literacy Education in Michigan Elementary Reward Schools Beating the Odds

Jason Michael Surian
Western Michigan University, phxlas2000@yahoo.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations

Part of the Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons, Educational Leadership Commons, and the Elementary Education and Teaching Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations/597

This Dissertation-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP: COMMUNICATION, SUPPORT, MANAGEMENT, 
AND EVALUATION IN LITERACY EDUCATION IN MICHIGAN 
ELEMENTARY REWARD SCHOOLS BEATING THE ODDS

by

Jason Michael Surian

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College 
in partial fulfillment of the requirements 
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy 
Educational Leadership, Research and Technology 
Western Michigan University 
June 2015

Doctoral Committee: 
Patricia Reeves, Ed.D., Chair 
Walter Burt, Ph.D. 
Lauren Freedman, Ph.D.
This instrumental case study investigated the instructional leadership role that elementary school principals play in shaping literacy instruction in schools designated as “Reward Schools” through the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) accountability system, explicitly those schools noted as, Beating the Odds; i.e. outperforming predicted student achievement based on school and student demographic variables. The study looks specifically at the principal’s knowledge and application of literacy instruction, his/her mental model for the school’s literacy program, and his or her leadership of the school’s literacy program. The study examined these characteristics of principal leadership in literacy instruction through staff communications, literacy program support, management, and evaluation as it relates to instructional strategies, student achievement, and teacher implementation of the school’s literacy program.

The study participants included three building principals employed at Michigan elementary schools, and teacher focus groups consisting of 3–6 teachers at each respective site. Interviews were conducted with 17 total participants. School artifacts, including school improvement plans were examined. Qualitative coding techniques were used to analyze the data for themes and subthemes, within and across the three cases.
Four major themes emerged from this study within and cross-case analysis, regarding principal leadership and involvement in literacy instruction. Teachers and principals alike noted the four following influences that impacted the building literacy instruction and plan: (1) trust in professional judgment; (2) encouragement for growth; (3) shared leadership in literacy instruction; and (4) collaborative data review for student success. These four themes suggest a series of professional practices for elementary principals to utilize in demonstrating greater literacy achievement in their respective buildings. Future research could explore principal leadership strategies and behaviors on other curricular areas.

This study supports findings from previous research that links positive outcomes in student achievement to principals being actively engaged in and supportive of faculty work and sharing ownership for decision-making. The findings from this study further add to the literature by providing a deeper understanding of the roles principals play and the behaviors they use to influence and impact the instructional environment, literacy education, and student reading achievement.
Copyright by
Jason Michael Surian
2015
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am truly grateful for the people who have assisted and guided me on this project. To my committee members, who have provided direction, expertise, constant encouragement, and assistance throughout the dissertation process so I would like to acknowledge the support of Dr. Patricia Reeves, Dr. Walter Burt, and Dr. Lauren Freedman.

Secondly, without the support of my family and friends, I do not know if I could have persevered on this journey. This tumultuous and at times, frustrating journey. They provided the constant praise and encouragement to continue forward to complete what I started, following my aspirations.

Finally, I would like to recognize my colleagues over the years, especially Twinnie and S.B., who have helped me with my program and with my goal to complete the dissertation. Each of them offered their expertise, time, and most importantly their excitement as the conclusion to this journey drew near. I want to personally thank each of them for believing in me and lending an ear when I needed it most of all.

Jason Michael Surian
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles and Responsibilities of Elementary School Principals</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal as Literacy Leader</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose and Research Questions</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingency Theory</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Leadership</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational Leadership</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Leadership</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Legislation</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Preparation</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal as Literacy Leader</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and Support</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ Perceptions on Building Leadership</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology Overview and Rationale</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Recruitment Process</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection and Instrumentation</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures for Data Analysis</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity and Reliability</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Researcher</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. CASE DESCRIPTIONS</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Participation</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Table of Contents—Continued

## CHAPTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Process</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Study Findings</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Descriptions</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Building Stories</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Elementary</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Elementary Interview Findings</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Elementary Principal Leadership Themes</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Elementary</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Elementary Interview Findings</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Elementary Principal Leadership Themes</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Elementary</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Elementary Interview Findings</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Elementary Leadership Findings</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Findings</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-Case Analysis</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Theme One: Trust in Professional Practice</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Theme Two: Encouragement for Growth</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Theme Three: Shared Leadership in Literacy Instruction</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Theme Four: Collaborative Data Review for Student Success</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Table of Contents—Continued

## CHAPTER

V. **CONCLUSIONS** ................................................................................................................... 142

Review of the Purpose and Research Questions ......................................................... 144

Research Question 1 ........................................................................................................ 145

Research Question 2 ........................................................................................................ 146

Research Question 3 ........................................................................................................ 147

Research Question 4 ........................................................................................................ 149

Research Question 5 ........................................................................................................ 150

Comparison of Study Findings with Previous Research ........................................ 152

Conclusions ......................................................................................................................... 155

Implications for Practice ................................................................................................. 159

Suggestions for Future Research ..................................................................................... 160

REFERENCES ....................................................................................................................... 163

## APPENDICES

A. Requesting Participation Letters: Teacher and Principal ......................................... 177

B. Consent Document ......................................................................................................... 180

C. School, Principal, and Teacher Profile Data Collection Protocols .......................... 183

D. Interview Protocols ....................................................................................................... 188

E. HSIRB Approval Not Needed ....................................................................................... 193
# LIST OF TABLES

1. Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP), Percent of Students Achieving Proficient Scores for Reading (2008–2013) ............... 6
2. Functions of Management and Leadership ........................................... 30
3. Types of Management and Leadership Models ....................................... 32
4. The 21 Leadership Skills and Their Correlation with Student Academic Achievement ................................................................. 41
5. Professional Staff Demographic Data – First Elementary .................... 97
6. Discovered Themes at First Elementary .............................................. 109
7. Professional Staff Demographic Data – Second Elementary ................. 111
8. Second Elementary Guided Reading Rubric ........................................ 116
9. Discovered Themes at Second Elementary .......................................... 121
10. Professional Staff Demographic Data – Third Elementary ..................... 123
11. Discovered Themes at Third Elementary ........................................... 132
12. Summary of Cross-Case Findings .................................................... 134
### LIST OF FIGURES

1. Conceptual Framework ................................................................. 24
2. The Effects of School Leadership ................................................... 40
3. Wallace Foundation Framework Examining the Leaders’ Learning and Experiences and Their Impact on Student Achievement .................. 52
4. Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design ......................................... 86
5. First Elementary Enrollment Data, 1988–2013 ................................ 96
7. Third Elementary Enrollment Data, 1988–2013 ............................. 122
8. Revised Conceptual Framework ...................................................... 157
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The primary role of the elementary principal revolves around his or her ability to lead all stakeholders to accomplish school improvement goals and demonstrate student achievement. Leadership is multifaceted and not easily defined. Elementary principals must not only demonstrate strong educational leadership; they must also possess the core skills of instructional leadership, including literacy leadership if they are to foster a culture conducive to learning.

This dissertation was conducted as a descriptive, qualitative study that investigated the instructional leadership role that elementary school principals play in shaping literacy instruction in schools designated as “Reward Schools” through the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) accountability system. The study looked specifically at the principal’s knowledge of literacy instruction, his/her mental model for the school’s literacy program, and his or her leadership of the school’s literacy program. The study examined these characteristics of principal leadership in literacy instruction through staff communications, literacy program support, management, and evaluation as it related to instructional strategies, student achievement, and teacher implementation of the school’s literacy program.

The setting for this study was in Michigan where the State has a federal waiver for an alternative model of ranking schools under the requirements of the No Child Left Behind legislation (NCLB). Under the waiver-based Michigan school rating and ranking
system, schools that show exceptional levels of academic performance and/or rates of improvement in academic performance are designated Rewards Schools. The specific subgroup of Reward Schools selected as instrumental cases for this study were “Beating the Odds Schools” which are recognized by the MDE as having achieved high levels of improved or better academic results on state assessments than the school’s demographics would predict. They are “Beating the Odds” by overcoming traditional barriers and outperforming schools with similar factors and demographic make-up (https://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-22709_62255---,00.html). Other Reward Schools include “High Performing Schools” (schools that made adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the NCLB school rating system and were in the top 5% of schools on the state “Top-to-Bottom” list) and “High Progress Schools” (those in the top 5% of schools making the greatest gains in achievement).

Beating the Odds Schools with strong reading student achievement were of particular interest for this study, as they were also likely to be schools with strong literacy programs. Schools designated as Beating the Odds are often found in rural or urban areas with limited access to resources, consist of racially and economically diverse student populations, and their building achievements and student success typically go without recognition by the public education system. While Reward Schools all demonstrate proven success in literacy, this study focused on Beating the Odds Schools to present a unique voice from the building’s leadership and instructional faculty.

This first chapter provides an introduction to current legislation and yearly statistics of literacy achievement and instructional accountability, a description of the skills necessary for today’s school principals, their professional preparation, and their
leadership with literacy education. This chapter also provides a statement of the problem, the study purpose, and related research questions along with the conceptual framework for the study. A brief overview of the significance of the research, methodology, and definitions are also included.

Background

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* revealed disturbing statistics regarding the American Education system. The all-inclusive study uncovered that approximately 40% of 17-year-old students were functionally illiterate and 40% were unable to draw inferences from written text. The report concluded that the field of education no longer drew from a talented pool of academically skilled educators, and that curriculum had become weak, students spent less time on schoolwork, and the expectations of America’s schools had decreased (A Nation at Risk, 1983). The references set forth in *A Nation at Risk* assured lasting reform through insisting “the best effort and performance from all students, whether they are gifted or less able, affluent or disadvantaged, whether destined for college, the farm, or industry” (U.S. Department of Education, 1983). *A Nation at Risk* was the beginning of an evolution in achievement testing and standards-based education reform and for the first time, gave rise to the involvement of policy makers in the realm of accountability for student achievement.

While the initial report generated considerable attention in the media and opened a new national dialogue about what this country expects of its students and the schools that educate them, it was a full decade before Federal legislation actually took action by laying out a new agenda for public education. In 1994, the fruits of the initial
conversation in the U.S. reached every classroom with the passage of the *Improving America’s Schools Act* of 1994 (IASA). IASA reauthorized the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* of 1965 (ESEA), which was enacted as part of President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty and intended to focus federal funding on underprivileged schools with low achieving students through a major programming initiative called, Title I. To this day, the Title I program remains the foundation of ESEA with the aim of improving public education for disadvantaged children. Since its initial authorization and throughout several subsequent reauthorizations, Title I has assisted school districts in providing additional support to millions of disadvantaged children, particularly in basic skills, such as literacy education (www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA).

In January 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. The goals of this legislation were threefold: first, to initiate comprehensive standards-based state assessment systems, ensuring that all students master grade level benchmarks and standards for learning; second, to link funding directly to accountability, thus initiating the nation-wide practice of state systems for data collection; and third, to create public reporting to demonstrate a school’s effectiveness in teaching and learning. Additionally, NCLB established a national expectation for literacy attainment starting with the stated purpose that all students in the U.S. public school system should be reading proficiently no later than the third grade. Such clearly stated expectations helped NCLB launch a new trend in annual reporting by state and federal education agencies to track progress on meeting NCLB academic progress (including literacy) criteria.
In 2005, the U.S. Department of Education released the first National Reading Report Card since the passage of NCLB. This report noted that, at that time, only 31% of the students in fourth grade and eighth grade read fluently. This was only a 2% increase in reading achievement since the enactment of NCLB in 2002 (U.S. Department of Education, 2005), an indicator of the slow progress to be realized over the next decade.

Four years later, a report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation revealed that one out of three students still scored “below basic” on the 2009 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) Reading Test (http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/-2011459.pdf). Reports such as these are both troubling and daunting for educators and policy makers alike when a specific system of accountability has been in place for all K-12 public educational institutions for over a decade. Subsequent to these reports, a number of annual assessment reports and studies have continued to show slow, incremental rates of improvement despite increasingly stronger state and federal accountability measures.

In the state of Michigan, NCLB directives are observed through the MDE accountability system. Between 2008 and 2013, student achievement was monitored via test scores on the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP). The most current MEAP results demonstrate that, in 2013, 61% of third graders and 73% of eighth graders were proficient in reading, compared to the results in 2008 where, 59% of third graders and 52% of eighth graders were proficient in reading on the MEAP assessment. These numbers indicate measurable but varying and slow growth in reading on the annual MEAP assessment during that five-year period for grades 3–8. Table 1 summarizes the percentage of Michigan students achieving proficient MEAP scores for reading from
2008–2013. Not only has improvement been slow, but also early gains through 2009 leveled off for grades 3–6. Real gains in reading achievement only began to appear for grade 8 in 2012–2013. Several factors may account for the growth noted in grade 8, including: changes in assessment practices, better curriculum alignment, implementation of new high school standards, and rigorous, standards-based, teacher instruction.

Table 1

Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP), Percent of Students Achieving Proficient Scores for Reading (2008–2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighth</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the original NCLB target of 100% student reading proficiency by 2014, growth statistics for most other states show an equally disappointing picture for achieving the national literacy goals. In a recent study of reading proficiency at Yale University, researchers discovered that 75% of students’ nationwide who had not achieved the proficient benchmark in third grade reading were not proficient readers when assessed in high school. The implication of this statistic is more striking when coupled with the further finding that 49% of at-risk children in fourth grade and 53% of children in high poverty schools do not reach the basic level of performance (proficiency) in reading. Additionally, the Yale study found that, by high school, the students who do not reach the basic proficiency benchmark by fourth grade are more likely to be behind than grade
level peers who are not supported through Title I programming. However, it is noted by Richard Allington (2003), that, “the reading achievement of fourth grade students has inched up on each assessment since 1988. The achievement levels have risen primarily in states that have invested in teacher development” (p. 7).

After almost two decades of an explicit federal literacy improvement agenda, state assessment systems are showing only minimal positive change in nationwide student literacy rates, even after several rounds of reauthorization policy changes to high stakes accountability through ESEA and IASA. Despite, and perhaps because of, the weak evidence of closing the literacy achievement gap in U.S. schools, the U.S. Department of Education continues to up the stakes and pressure states to achieve functional literacy for all U.S. students. Clearly, the problem is not a lack of emphasis on literacy as a precursor to achieving other education goals. According to Richard F. Elmore, a professor at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education, “Accountability for student performance is one of the two or three prominent issues in policy at the state and local levels right now” (Quality Counts, 1999, p. 140); because children will do better on tests they can read (Elmore, 2000). Reflecting on the importance of early intervention and the successful implementation of high quality reading instruction, many local and state education agencies continue making reading education a top priority. As a result, improved literacy programs have become a key feature of school improvement and redesign across the country.

While there are a number of highly successful designs for school literacy programs, study after study (Gresham et al., 2000; Kovaeski et al., 1999; Telzrow, McNamara, & Hollinger, 2000) finds that schools often fail to fully implement literacy
programs with a research-based promise or with high fidelity. The reasons for failure to implement literacy programs with a promise include: the complexity of the programs, lack of material and resources, and the perceived effectiveness of the literacy program when implemented with fidelity. Several studies corroborate the importance of fidelity of implementation to maximize program success (e.g., Foorman & Moats, 2004; Foorman & Schatschneider, 2003; Gresham et al., 2000; Kovaleski et al., 1999; Telzrow, McNamara, & Hollinger, 2000). Many such studies find that the implementation of a research-based program for reading with fidelity is critical in evaluating curriculum.

A variety of studies have isolated any number of factors that impinge on the adoption and full implementation of high quality literacy programs with most of those studies pointing to the importance of principal leadership in literacy program adoption and implementation. For instance, the research work of Fink and Resnick (1999) illustrates that those schools with successful literacy programs are often led by principals who, in addition to fulfilling their roles as instructional leaders, demonstrate strong leadership and expertise in literacy instruction and assessment. Likewise, Marlo Ediger (2001) found that the corrective action of improving literacy education rests at the hands of the administrator as they serve as the leader of literacy instruction.

The requirement for school administrators to enact and implement change in literacy based on student achievement data rests upon principals and their professional preparation to lead change in curriculum and to make instructional decisions. Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, and Meyerson (2005) identified programs that produce the most highly qualified school administrators. They found that, “programmatic approaches to leadership development vary, with some reformers emphasizing leadership and
management skills over academic proficiency, while others support the cultivation of teachers” (p. 3). The research pertaining to effective school administration and the training and development of high-caliber principals is vast, and individual state programs for principal preparation vary in approach, curriculum, and practice.

That said, however, most states approve principal preparation programs based on explicit knowledge and practice standards that emphasize responsibility for a high quality instructional program that meets the needs of all students. For instance, the state of Michigan has practice standards for the preparation of school principals (plus, one internship standard), all of which tightly align with the six Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC, 2008) standards for the preparation of school leaders developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). In both the ISLLC and Michigan standards, the work of school leaders is defined around the central responsibility of creating opportunities for all students to learn and insuring success for all students.

In an effort to create programs that produce higher student achievement and quality of leadership, the Southern Regional Education Board (2007) led research into high quality programs for leadership and used the studies to implement statewide reform. They found that: “Quality principals result in quality schools that produce higher student performance. And the opposite is also true: Poorly prepared principals lead schools nowhere and once certified, they remain in the system for many years, obstructing school improvement” (SREB, 2007, p. 10).

The same could be said about preparing school principals to be leaders in literacy education. When educational leaders work with classroom teachers in the adoption,
implementation, and evaluation of comprehensive literacy programs, these pieces work in favor of the students the educational institution serves. According to Williams (2006), “Principals can become agents of change who create schools which are learning centers; that is, places that advance learning through collaboration and the exchange of ideas and best practices” (p. 2). This extends to the collaborative work principals lead to engage teachers in school-wide literacy initiatives that promote greater levels of student achievement in reading as the leading target of school reform under the accountability provisions of state and federal policy. To achieve the requirements of NCLB, respond to the increased level of accountability for academic results, lead comprehensive school improvement, find and develop highly qualified teachers, and reach established state and federal targets for student achievement, the importance of the highly effective administrator remains at the forefront.

When schools fail to reach state assessment accountability targets, NCLB dictates sanctions that may be imposed upon those schools. Under the guidelines established by NCLB, the number of failing schools has increased dramatically. For example, in Michigan, “82% of Title 1 school buildings are listed as priority (failing) schools, in comparison to 12% of Title 1 buildings qualifying as Reward schools. Sixty-four percent of all elementary schools in Michigan are listed as priority or focus schools” (MDE, 2013). Failure to demonstrate proficiency or improvement towards established mastery targets produces the possibility for legislative sanctions for priority schools. Hallinger (1996) described how the accountability for schools to demonstrate effectiveness in instruction and student achievement became the catalyst for school districts to change principals into instructional leaders of their respective schools.
States have addressed the task of turning around persistently underperforming schools in a variety of ways. In many states, including Michigan, the state department of education can take control of schools designated as failing, effectively removing building administration and teaching faculty, revising building budgets, changing school curriculum, and rewriting the school mission and school improvement plan. Others may receive teams of qualified professionals to provide assistance in school improvement and teaching initiatives. In all states, awarding control to private education management companies to form charter schools is another option. This is evident in the recent charter school legislation and emergency manager takeovers in the state of Michigan. Despite each of these strategies required by NCLB being implemented in several states, none have worked consistently to increase student achievement (Brady, 2003) or literacy rates as measured by state accountability systems. Something else must be done to prepare school principals for the increasing demands of school accountability.

Roles and Responsibilities of Elementary School Principals

For the elementary principal, instructional leadership serves as the driving force of change with three core concepts at the heart of instructional leadership: (1) leaders’ efforts to improve the organization (Leithwood et al., 2006), (2) instructional support for classroom teachers (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Leithwood et al., 2006; Yukl, 2006), and (3) the importance of influence throughout the school community (Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996; Leithwood & Duke, 1999; Leithwood et al., 2006; Yukl, 2006). Integrating these characteristics into instructional leadership, the plate of the elementary administrator is widening with responsibilities and obligations to the children, teachers,
district, and community for whom they serve. As the educational world understands the increased drive for success and the competency of educational administrators, the increased demand for accountability continues to rest at the feet of all elementary principals when preparing to meet the policy demands of the educational and political arenas.

In many of today’s schools, principals are responsible for setting the agenda for a wide variety of school improvement criteria to ensure the successful day-to-day operations of the school. Reflecting on a “2010 survey of school and district administrators, policy advisers, and others in the education world, researchers found that ‘principal leadership’ was second only to teacher quality among responses from superintendents and professors of education. The survey asked respondents to rank in importance 21 education issues, ranging from special education and English language learning to school violence and reducing the dropout rate” (Simkin, Charner, & Suss, 2010, pp. 9–10). Studies investigating effective schools and the demonstration of strong leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2001; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstom, 2004; Marzano, 2005) identify the principal as a key factor in a school’s success with a strong relationship between how principals function, how school reform progresses, and the rate and degree of increased student achievement. The importance of this characteristic of leadership is supported by Leithwood (2004), who notes that leadership has as much influence on student achievement as does classroom instruction. Given that, the principal’s role in improving teaching and learning is at the core of school reform.
NAESP’s Proficiencies for Principals, examined the present state of the characteristics and job responsibilities necessary for principals in today’s schools. The list of proficiencies includes:

1. Communication. Principals must be able to communicate orally and in writing.

2. Group Processes. Principals must be able to facilitate meetings with teachers, parents, and colleagues.

3. Curriculum and Instruction. Principals should know what effective teaching is and be able to provide feedback. They must be able to model effective teaching.

4. School Climate. Principals must be able to create a caring, productive school environment in which teachers, students, and parents can pursue life-long learning.

5. Community. Principals must understand the importance of building a sense of community in the school, where every member contributes.

6. Fiscal Management. Principals must manage the school budget to assure materials and resources are present for all instructional staff and students.

7. Leadership. Principals must recognize the need to be leaders of leaders.

(NASSP, 2007, p. 50–51)

This is not an exhaustive list, since the role of the principal and the responsibilities to ensure his/her effectiveness are constantly evolving to meet local, state, and federal mandates in education. The challenges facing school principals run across a spectrum of issues, including meeting increased demands for student achievement and
accountability; educating all children with various learning styles; providing inclusive education to children with special needs; hiring highly qualified teachers; preparing budgets with dwindling funds; increasing parental involvement; maintaining the safety and security of the building; and competing and marketing the school program in a culture of choice. “There is broad consensus in the literature that effective school leaders focus on tasks related to improving classroom instruction in addition to the time they spend on the managerial aspects of their jobs” (Steiner & Kowal, 2007, p. 24).

In reflecting upon the job description of the school administrator, the ultimate goal is to ensure high academic standards for all students. Secondarily, the purpose is to close the achievement gap that exists between subgroups of the student population, while moving forward toward mastery of standards and benchmarks. This requires principals to balance prioritizing these responsibilities along with all other job responsibilities for the day-to-day functioning of the school. In the K-5 classroom, closing the achievement gap is primarily focused on literacy including integrating reading, writing, listening, and speaking into all core areas of instruction and improving English Language Arts instruction and achievement for all students so they may become successful in all areas of the core curriculum.

Principal as Literacy Leader

In elementary schools, the principal is being asked to foster a culture of literacy in every classroom. According to Ediger (2001), “The principal of the school needs to be highly knowledgeable about the most effective and research-supported practices and programs for reading instruction. The principal must work in the direction of helping
teachers teach so students achieve at a higher rate” (p. 4–5). Thus, the principal needs a solid grounding in the practices and programmatic elements of literacy education in order to enact the changes in classroom instruction that support improved student literacy rates and success in other academic areas. That means that, within a generally focused effort for improving student performance, principals must pay particular attention to the literacy status of students and the instructional strategies and practices that support literacy competencies for all students.

Booth and Roswell (2007) define literacy principals as those who have an interest in literacy, are knowledgeable about pedagogy in literacy and language arts, and become the literacy leader in their school. As such, the elementary principal must be cognizant of the current structure and framework of the literacy instructional model in each classroom, as well as, possess masterful levels of knowledge regarding literacy content, instructional practices, and methodologies. The elementary principal adjusts and adds to the school’s literacy program through collaboration with faculty. Brumley (2010) notes that administrators who desire a positive change in student achievement in literacy assist in the development of a culture and environment rich in literacy building learning experiences. Additionally, literacy-focused administrators monitor classroom instruction to insure that the school’s model for literacy instruction is implemented with fidelity.

Despite a plethora of studies about research-based practices for literacy instruction, educational theory, and sound instructional leadership characteristics, there are few studies that drill down to the necessary and/or effective characteristics of a literacy principal, i.e. the principal who insures school-wide fidelity implementation of a high impact literacy model. Booth and Roswell (2007), however, describe overarching
characteristics for a principal in pursuit of demonstrating success as a literacy principal in today’s schools. The literacy principal is one who: (a) creates a shared literacy vision in the school; (b) understands the textual worlds of students, appreciating their communities; (c) works collaboratively on the school literacy team, sharing in the decision-making processes, and honoring the specific expertise that each member brings; (d) builds in time and opportunities for professional development for stakeholders; and (e) mediates the world outside of and within the school, with an awareness of literacy in the community, and the current status of district implementation in raising literacy scores and student achievement (Booth & Roswell, 2007). As such, the leadership role of the principal is instrumental to the process of literacy instruction and student achievement.

The principal’s support, management, communication, and evaluation of literacy set the stage for the vision and implementation of strong literacy programs. Where this is coupled with increasing student achievement, models for literacy leadership in elementary schools can emerge. Through studies that examine the principal’s role in literacy development and success at the building level, it appears that the principal’s impact is delivered in a variety of ways including: “analyzing student data, promoting reading motivation programs, engaging parents and the community in literacy, staying abreast of scientific reading interventions, advising teachers in assessing needs and techniques for student engagement, developing and monitoring the school literacy plan, and designing professional development for building professionals” (Taylor, Moxley, Canter, & Bouleware, 2007, p. 24). Such findings suggest that bridging multi-faceted instructional leadership practices into the classroom drives the success of the literacy framework and the building administrators’ role in the process.
Statement of the Problem

Previous studies have illuminated a body of findings regarding: (a) the importance of literacy, (b) its impact on student achievement across the curriculum, and (c) the principal’s role with student achievement in the core area of literacy. In a study of principal instructional and leadership practices, Mendez-Morse (1991) found that in schools where at-risk students are achieving success, principals: (a) support classroom teachers’ instructional methods; (b) allocate resources and materials; (c) make frequent visits to classrooms for instructional observations; (d) solicit and provide feedback on instructional methods and techniques; and (e) use data to focus attention on improving the curriculum or instructional approach. Understanding the need for improving the literacy rates of all children, these studies form a picture of the elementary principal as one who works diligently with all stakeholders and is knowledgeable about content and curriculum.

The research conducted to date identifies a number of known practices and behaviors principals employ to help schools achieve generally improved student results. The specifics of leadership found in such studies are not just a listing of the correlates of effective schools; rather they include behavior and practices related to five domains: Vision, Mission, Culture, Curriculum, and Classroom Instruction (Cohen et al., 1972; Mintzberg, 1980; Schein, 1985; Yukl, 1989). Clark (1982) aggregated approximately 97 studies of urban school achievement and concluded that leadership is crucial in defining school success and that this leadership is typically attitudinal and motivational, and capable of improving an achievement climate. Sebring and Bryk (2000) state that, “the
behaviors and practices of the principal have influence on all aspects of the learning community, which leads to school success” (p. 441). Additionally, studies that specifically examine the principal’s role in leading schools to higher achievement in literacy found that those principals who establish a vision, create a culture, and become deeply involved with classroom instruction demonstrate greater achievement.

Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) make two important claims regarding principal leadership. First, “leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” and second, “leadership effects are usually largest where and when they are needed most” (p. 7). Without positive leadership, distressed schools are unlikely to be turned around. The authors state, “many other factors may contribute to such turnarounds, but leadership is the catalyst” (p. 7). While these findings are instructive in describing general or broad strategies principals can use to work with teachers on raising student achievement (including literacy achievement), current research stops short of describing in detail how principals actually adapt those general research identified strategies to their own schools given the unique characteristics of the settings in which principals work. Specifically, further study is needed to drill down on previously identified approaches and behaviors that principals employ to lead literacy improvement.

Principals have many different areas of school operations that demand their attention including curriculum and instructional areas that require focused and immediate attention to address glaring achievement problems and gaps. Since principals do this work in a wide variety of school contexts, general frameworks for principal practice are not always sufficient to guide principals in the leadership of a given instructional
improvement initiative, such as a school-wide literacy initiative. For that reason, practicing school leaders and teachers, alike, often seek out explicit examples to guide their day-to-day actions. When principals and teachers can access multiple examples for carrying out a general strategy, they broaden their repertoire and have more options for meeting the variations in circumstances they encounter with students, parents, staff, community, and even the central office influence. Currently, there are limited studies that examined the highly nuanced variations on general instructional leadership that principals employ to achieve high fidelity implementation of successful literacy programs. Thus, the literature offers limited explicit examples for real principals to use in real school settings to respond to a variety of conditions. Studies that focus more on delving into the nuance of literacy leadership as principals adapt their general leadership practices to the implementation of a school-wide literacy initiative could provide a richer source of understanding of the complexity of this work. Such studies could also provide the “shading” and fine detail of principal leadership practice that is missing from more generalized studies.

There is a critical need for research to provide rich examples of the ways that various principals in various settings with varying conditions actually play their role as a leader of successful literacy improvement initiatives. Principals simply do not have the time or the politically safe environment to fill out their repertoire of instructional leadership strategies by trial and error. They need explicit models of how other successful literacy leaders actually communicate, focus, reinforce, guide, reward, and manage their way through the process of implementing high yield literacy initiatives at the school level. Principals also need additional insights about how other principals adapt
their strategies as conditions evolve and new ones emerge within their schools. Research has shown that, as the instructional leader the principal can help ensure all teachers are providing students with access to high-quality literacy instruction and keeping reading at the forefront in achieving student success goals and driving professional practice. Further research on the nuanced elements of this work can serve to shed a clearer light on the way forward for many principals in the complex environments of their schools.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to extrapolate the nuanced practices of several principals whose schools achieved major gains in literacy results as a result of implementing a literacy improvement initiative. Specifically, this study mapped out a variety of on-the-ground strategies these principals employ in each of the specific categories of literacy leadership that have emerged over multiple previous studies. This study examined instrumental cases of principal literacy leadership behaviors, practices, and strategies against the unique characteristics of their school setting. In this way, this study sought to begin cataloguing some of the adaptive work principals are doing in each of the established categories of literacy leadership to provide more in-depth understanding of the situational work principals do to provide just the right balance of literacy leadership each school needs.

This study engaged a lens of general principal literacy leadership strategies distilled from the research and summarized into a conceptual framework within which to drill deeper into the nuance work of principals. The general literacy leadership practices
categories that served as a frame for this study was: principal support, communication, management, and evaluation of literacy practices in the school context.

To gain a greater understanding of the principal leadership in literacy education (communication, support, management, and evaluation) in the K-5 environment, this study described the work of principals of Michigan Beating the Odds Reward Schools in 2012 and 2013, whose students have achieved the highest reading gains over a two-year period. Specifically, the study sought to understand and describe how principals communicate, manage, support, and evaluate the school improvement process to achieve literacy gains. The following questions were used to guide this study:

1. What role did/does the principal play in shaping the literacy plan for the school?
2. What was/is the principal’s communication to staff and others concerning literacy initiatives and practices in the elementary classroom?
3. What specific strategies did/does the principal use to support classroom teachers and improve student achievement progress in literacy?
4. How did/does the principal manage and monitor literacy practices in the instructional classroom?
5. How did/does the principal monitor, evaluate, and adjust the implementation of the literacy program?

Methodology

This study was conducted utilizing the instrumental case study approach. This approach involves collecting multiple forms of data to gather the essence of the behavior
and approaches. Yin (2003) states that “the case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points; …relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion” (pp. 13–14). Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) explain the instrumental case study approach as one that investigates and analyzes what is occurring in specific cases in order to develop a wider understanding of issues that transcend cases. For this study, those issues were the ways in which principals develop highly contextualized variations of general instructional leadership practices in order to achieve successful implementation of a school-wide literacy initiative resulting in meaningful gains in student literacy achievement. Each building principal brings to their school a unique set of education and experiences that ultimately dictate their leadership style in driving school improvement. Interviews were conducted with building principals, school improvement chairs, reading consultants, Title 1 reading teachers, and teacher leaders in the area of literacy.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was to gather specific information about principal leadership in reading and literacy that may bring about changes in current practicing principals’ behaviors that will maximize student achievement and teacher productivity in instruction. Understanding the nuanced ways that principals communicate, manage, support, and evaluate reading practices is instrumental in learning how these behaviors are interpreted, presented, and ultimately perceived by classroom teachers in bringing foundational change in elementary schools and their school-wide process of teaching
reading. Efforts were made in this study to determine those behaviors that impact reading instruction and increase student achievement. When these behaviors are found to have a positive impact, they should be reinforced and practiced.

Conceptual Framework

The justification for this work is based upon the concepts central to the study, principal communication, management, and support for effective literacy instruction in the elementary classroom. The following table shows the relationship between principal leadership in literacy and the effective implementation of school-wide initiatives in literacy and the impact on student achievement.

Using principal communication, management, support, and evaluation as the criteria for leading literacy education in the classroom, this study worked to describe what strategies principals use to communicate the literacy practices in the school improvement process; how the building principal supports literacy instruction; how the principal adapts school management to support the literacy initiative; and how the principal evaluates the literacy practices producing the greatest achievement in reading. The following framework provides the format necessary to understand the flow of this study of principal leadership focused on guiding and facilitating the implementation of a school-wide literacy initiative.

Figure 1 presents a framework for considering the leadership practices of the principal at the K-5 building level where the school adopts a school-wide literacy improvement initiative. The framework for examining specific principal behaviors
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

includes analyzing the principal’s support, management and communication of literacy education. The framework also provides a lens for examining the building administrator’s literacy knowledge and how the application of that knowledge impacts the school improvement process, classroom instructional strategies, classroom management practices, and the evolution of the school-wide literacy practices to demonstrate increased reading achievement in Michigan Beating the Odds Schools.
The conceptual framework also presents a set of influences the principal might affect in the process of leading a school-wide literacy improvement initiative; e.g. the school improvement process, teacher evaluation, instructional models, classroom management, and student assessment. The conceptual framework for this study was intended to provide a broad frame from which rich descriptive data can shed some further light on the more nuanced variations on how principals effect changes in student success through the implementation of a school-wide literacy model.

Summary

This first chapter outlined the background, problem, purpose, and significance of this study designed to delve deeper into the importance of the building principal in providing literacy leadership, management of literacy practices, and communication and support to teachers and other stakeholders as the school embarks on a school-wide literacy initiative. The following chapters will provide a comprehensive literature review, a description of the study methodology and procedures, a presentation and analysis of the study findings, and a final chapter that examines study implications, conclusions and recommendations.

Definition of Terms

The following definition of terms is used to provide clarity to the reader of this study.

**No Child Left Behind.** No Child Left Behind is a federal legislative act passed in 2002 with the purpose of reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of
1965. Proponents of the law intended to improve the performance of primary and secondary educational systems through increased accountability by way of standards-based instruction, testing, and provided parents with options in choosing schools for their children (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).** An individual state’s measure of yearly progress toward achieving state academic standards. Adequate yearly progress is the minimum level of improvement that states, school districts, and schools must achieve each year, according to federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. This progress is determined by a collection of performance measures that a state, its school districts, and subpopulations of students within its schools are supposed to meet if the state receives Title I federal funding (Ed Source, 2014).

**Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).** Passed in 1965 as part of the “War on Poverty.” ESEA emphasizes equal access to education and establishes high standards and accountability. The law authorizes federally funded education programs that are administered by states (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

**Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA).** Passed by Congress in 1994. It was an extension for a five-year period, aspects of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

**Instructional Leader.** An instructional leader is an individual functioning as a leader to other educators in the continual pursuit of enhancing instructional practices and academic subject areas. The instructional leader must be mindful of the educational practices that include both teaching and learning among teachers, students, and administrators (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2003).
Leadership. In this study, the term *leadership* refers to school-based principal leadership (Mackey et al., 2006).

Leadership Content Knowledge. The combination of subject matter knowledge principals hold and leadership actions principals take to support the instructional program and teachers at their school sites (Stein and Nelson, 2003).

Literacy. Literacy is defined as both task-based and skills-based. The task-based definition of literacy focuses on the everyday literacy tasks an adult can and cannot perform. Literacy is the ability to use printed and written information to function in society. The skills based definition of literacy focuses on the knowledge and skills one must possess in order to perform tasks. These skills range from basic, word-level skills to higher-level skills such as drawing inferences (NAAL, 2003).

Literacy Instruction. Literacy instruction will be defined as instruction related to the ability to read, write, and communicate.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Now, more than ever in education, building leaders are torn in multiple directions to become curriculum leaders, facility managers, community builders, directors of school budgets, counselors and social workers, masters of instruction, and legal experts. One moment a principal is greeting children and families upon their arrival for the day, the next she is completing a series of classroom observations, or attending required meetings at central administration regarding legislative changes that impact the school budget or curriculum, all the while concerning him or herself with the daily instruction and achievement of students. As a result, a multitude of theories guide the leadership and management of principals.

Kotter (1990a) distinguishes the differences between leadership and management roles in school settings, describing the function of management as a focus on providing order and uniformity through the intricacy of organizational structure and procedures, and leadership as providing change and movement within the organization to stakeholders with guidance and direction from the school’s mission and vision. Cuban (1988) explains that leadership is the change element, while management is seen as a “maintenance” activity in driving the organization. Therefore, effective leadership and management need to be present in education if principals are to effectively lead their institutions and student achievement in literacy to greatness. Importantly, leading and managing are distinct, but both are critical to a school’s success. According to Bolman and Deal (1997), “The challenge of modern organizations, including public schools, requires the objective
perspective of the manager as well as the vision and commitment leadership provides” (pp. xiii–xiv). Principals are seen as the visionaries of the organization at the school level. They lead, support, and review current practices in the organization that change the way in which their buildings do business. They also manage the implementation of these practices and align them to building and district policy.

Bush (1998) explains that leadership represents the values of the organization, where management emphasizes the implementation of initiatives (p. 328). For principals, implementing new strategies and objectives in their respective buildings requires a great deal of research and discussion concerning these strategies and objectives. The principal takes the lead in making these ideals a part of the vision, but also is required to manage and evaluate the implementation of new ideas as they impact progress towards mastery and student achievement. Table 2 illustrates how leadership and management represent distinct and equally important functions in an organization.

School principals exhibit their management and leadership styles through a variety of means. Their distinct management styles are seen in how they establish, disseminate and oversee policies that impact student attendance, student drop-off and pick-up procedures, building schedules, school budgets and resources, student discipline issues, and the hiring and support of classroom teachers and support staff. In a study by Stanford University, Hornig and Loeb (2010) surveyed 800 school principals, 1,200 assistant principals, conducting more than 250 observations. The researchers found that in schools demonstrating high student achievement outcomes, principals exhibited strength in management and organization. Hornig and Loeb (2010) share, “schools that
Table 2
Functions of Management and Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Produces Order and Consistency</td>
<td>Produces Change and Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and Budgeting</td>
<td>Establishing Direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish agendas</td>
<td>Create vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set Timelines</td>
<td>Clarify the big picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allocate resources</td>
<td>Set strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing and Staffing</td>
<td>Aligning People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide structure</td>
<td>Communicate goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make job placements</td>
<td>Seek commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish rules and procedures</td>
<td>Build teams and coalitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling and Problem Solving</td>
<td>Motivating and Inspiring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop incentives</td>
<td>Inspire and energize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generate creative solutions</td>
<td>Empower subordinates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take corrective action</td>
<td>Satisfy unmet needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


demonstrate academic improvement are more likely to have effective organizational managers” (p.67). Likewise, principals demonstrate their distinct leadership styles through their handling of broader issues, such as ever-increasing demands from state and federal legislation concerning student achievement and accountability, changes in teacher evaluation systems, and adopting, implementing, and monitoring curriculum. Strong instructional leaders are able to provide support to classroom instruction for all teachers (Hornig, Loeb, & Mindich, 2010). Therefore, principals’ management and leadership styles permeate all they do, both in terms of day-to-day activities, and in their broader school missions and visions.

While school districts provide school administrators the authority to lead their buildings, principals need significant leadership and management abilities to lead a
school successfully. The literature concludes that both leadership and management must coexist in the personality of the school principal. Bennis (2007) states that “Managers do things right, while leaders do the right things” (p. 12). They need to ensure that procedures, policies, and paperwork are accurate, but they must also create and implement policies that do what is best for students, their families, and staff on a daily basis. Yukl (2010) characterized leadership and management as independent activities and functions that might cross at times, but if they are to operate successfully simultaneously, the principal should demonstrate knowledge and skill in these functions and activities. Therefore, despite their differences, leadership and management must coexist in a synergistic relationship, rather than as isolated separate functions in order to promote a successful school environment.

In the late 1990s, Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999) described the synergistic relationship between leadership and management in their foundational study of the six models of school leadership: (1) instructional, (2) transformational, (3) moral, (4) participative, (5) managerial, and (6) contingent. Each of these models of leadership is apparent in the practices of principals today, and each also requires a form of management intertwined into their implementation. Leithwood, et al. found that a positive form of a management style is essential to the steadiness of an organization. The dimensions of management necessary to establish a synergistic relationship with leading a school organization include: staffing, instructional support, evaluation and monitoring of school activities, policies and procedures, as well as community ideation.

The models of educational leadership defined by Leithwood, et al. (1999) filtered into Bush and Glover’s (2002) review of educational theory and management models
over the course of 20 years. Table 3 presents the Bush and Glover placement of the nine leadership models with their six corresponding management models to illustrate the relationship between forms of leadership and their corresponding form of management for leaders. Today, these models of management and leadership often serve as the initial study of educational leadership for pre-service principals.

Table 3
Types of Management and Leadership Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Model</th>
<th>Leadership Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal Managerial</td>
<td>Participative Transformational Interpersonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegial</td>
<td>Transactional Post-Modern Contingency Moral Instructional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Access to a variety of leadership models is especially relevant to school leadership because the management style of every building principal is unique, and driven by each school’s unique environmental influences. Of the nine leadership models in the Bush and Glover (2002) study, *Instructional* and *Transformational* are the most relevant in terms of principal literacy leadership in schools, and serve as the overarching leadership models through which to view the role of principals as literacy leaders in their schools.
These two models were selected for this study based upon their influence to change a culture, involving all persons within the school context. These leadership styles, when exercised by the building administrator, can bring about improved student learning outcomes (e.g. Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Southworth, 2002). Both Instructional and Transformation styles of leadership look at bringing the group together for a common purpose. According to Burns (1978), transformational leaders are particularly adept at inspiring group members to look beyond their personal interests to the larger interests of the group. Both transformational and instructional leaders look at cultivating teacher leadership in-house, and moving the organization forward through a cultural and collegial style of management.

Importantly, principal leadership does not occur in isolation, rather in response to a situation created in the complex context of school accountability. Therefore, this literature review will begin with an understanding of the leadership characteristics of principals leading literacy initiatives in Beating the Odds Schools and examine those leadership characteristics via the theoretical model of Contingency Theory (Fiedler, 1964). This classic leadership theory examines the characteristics of leaders and the success of their leadership based on leadership traits and behaviors, management of tasks, and positional power, with an emphasis on their interaction with a specific situation in a given environment. This theoretical framework will inform our understanding of principals’ interactions with instructional faculty, as they work together to improve literacy education and raise student achievement.

This literature review also examines current school accountability legislation, current issues in principal preparation, especially as they relate to principals’ readiness to
effectively lead in an era of increased public accountability for student achievement, and principals as literacy leaders, particularly with regard to communication and support, professional development opportunities, and teacher perceptions of principals as literacy leaders.

Contingency Theory

Contingency Theory is a classic, theoretical model for organizational leadership that was developed by Fred Fiedler (1964, 1967, and 1971). The model asserts that effective leadership is a derivative of the leader’s style in a response to a set of operating conditions, or the situation or environment in which the leader is functioning. The model focuses on four ideas: leader traits, leader behavior, leader effectiveness, and a given context or situation. According to Contingency Theory, leadership behavior that may be successful in one environment may not be in another, depending upon the situation presented. Moreover, the success of the leader depends on the direction for which they drive their focus within the organization. The direction for which leaders emphasize their focus and intention to improve instruction and achievement must be one of organizational need, exhibited through consensus of the stakeholders through discourse and dialogue, building and establishing relationships within the organization, thereby collecting support for the tasks ahead.

Fiedler also proposed that leaders could either be “task-oriented” or “relationship-oriented” (Dunham, 1984, p. 365). Leaders who are task-oriented tend to put tasks first, before developing and using relationships to move the organization forward, and use their positional power to standardize and control tasks. Leaders who focus on tasks are
concerned with getting the job done. Task-oriented leaders set goals and are concerned with production and achievement; they explain what to do, set structure, and implement sanctions. On the other hand, leaders, who are relationship-oriented, focus their intentions on their stakeholders, and use their positional power to gain support. They are concerned about people and their place within the organization, so they facilitate social interactions, and trust their employees. They use their relationships with people to accomplish the task. They create incentives, support systems, and are concerned with the well-being of all colleagues. Their colleagues are more apt to take risks in achieving goals, as they know they will receive support from the relationship-oriented leader.

According to Fiedler (1964), the institutional factors that determine effectiveness for all leaders of an organization are: “(a) How clearly defined and structured the job scope is, (b) How much positional power the leader has, and (c) The relationship between the leaders and the followers” (p. 13). So, for example, if there is trust, the task is well defined, and the leader has power within the organization, then the ability of the leader to handle a given situation is favorable. Likewise, however, if one of the three institutional factors is missing from the leaders’ current state, their leadership will be ineffective. Understanding that every situation will be unique, Fiedler (1967) wrote:

Leadership performance depends then as much on the organization as it depends upon the leaders’ own attributes, except perhaps for the unusual case, it is simply not meaningful to speak of an effective leader or an ineffective leader; we can only speak of a leader who tends to be effective in one situation and ineffective in another. (p. 261)

Fiedler’s theory on the effectiveness of leadership style readily applies to school leadership, as well. When creating an environment rich in teaching and learning, principals must connect their leadership style to the present situation in their respective
buildings. They must serve as the influence and model that drives the school vision and goal, building collaboration and collegiality to impact the greatest change. According to Busser, Dwyer, Rowan, and Lee (1982), “no single style of management seems appropriate for schools. Principals must find the style and structure most suited to their own situations” (p. 38). In the school setting, the principal must demonstrate influence within the organization, working with the environment and all stakeholders, to promote a culture conducive to learning and strong instructional practices that impact student achievement.

The performance of the school is truly contingent upon two factors: the principal’s leadership style and the situation at hand. For Michigan Schools Beating the Odds in the era of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), public accountability for student achievement serves as the contingent factor that influences administrators’ literacy program leadership, as well as their ability to impact student achievement. Therefore, in order to develop strategic plans and goals for literacy instruction, principals must foster positive relationships with all stakeholders. The attainment of these goals is instrumental in transforming and improving student achievement in literacy.

Educational Leadership

Educational leadership is the term applied to school administrators who strive to create positive change in educational policy and processes. Bush (2003) noted in his work Educational Leadership and Management, “There can be little theory in educational administration. It is an applied field ultimately dependent on human will acting within a social context” (p. 22). As principals interact with stakeholders on a
daily basis, upholding the vision and mission of their schools and district, their leadership style guides their decision-making, applying their knowledge and experiences, facilitating their social interaction. For example, principals working collaboratively with their teaching faculty attempt to cultivate leadership within the teaching ranks; provide support and encouragement; use their influence to direct teacher leaders; and provide up-to-date knowledge regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Within most definitions of educational leadership, there are two functions: providing direction and exercising influence (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Educational administrators organize and work with a variety of players involved in the school community to accomplish the vision and goals of the school as outlined in their respective school improvement plans. Coupled with directives from central office, and legislative policy handed down from the state, principals are given a variety of mandates, all of which create unique situations in their buildings and affect the current level of student achievement.

Leithwood conducted empirical studies related to the effects of leadership behaviors and positive school outcomes (Leithwood, 1994, 1995; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1996). These studies included schools that were undergoing organizational reform, and primarily compared principals who were more successful at school improvement than their less-effective peers. Leithwood (1995) found a strong effect of leadership on the conditions of the organization, and a moderate, but significant, effect on student achievement. He also found that administrators influence their colleagues and promote education change with curriculum, instruction, and assessment, utilizing their content
knowledge skills, and leadership abilities, to make their intentions purposeful when influencing and directing their colleagues. Therefore, when serving in the leadership role, administrators must be cognizant of their influence on their colleagues during organizational reform.

Hattie (2001) demonstrated a similar correlation in his study of principal effectiveness. He found a 0.76 statistically significant result emphasizing the relationship at the elementary level with the principal influencing academic instruction and student achievement. In order to learn, students need access to high-quality instruction and a well-designed curriculum. Hattie’s findings point up the importance for high quality leadership, where educational leaders are vested in the instruction process and student achievement outcomes. In summary, Hattie finds effective principals guide and direct instructional decisions, exerting their influence on teaching faculty via an active role in the instructional process with the end in mind to promote and increase student achievement.

Research and common sense tell us the most influential individual in students’ daily learning is the classroom teacher (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Hattie, 2013; Vandevoort, Amrein-Beardsley, & Berliner, 2004). Students work within the classroom for 7–8 hours per day under the guidance of the classroom teacher. However, the principal also has a significant impact on student achievement, which Glanz (2006) attributes to the principal’s role as “gatekeeper,” as he/she “coordinates, facilitates, and oversees the institutional process on a school-wide basis” (p. 19). As such, Glanz believes that “the principal is the most important link or ingredient to ensure high student achievement” (p. 20), because he/she is consistently working with all stakeholders to
ensure the necessary components are present to facilitate an instructional program and school community focused on student achievement. Moreover, according to Peterson and Kelly (2001), principals are responsible for a plethora of activities to facilitate the strength of the school culture and success, including:

…identifying and articulating the school’s mission, providing instructional leadership, managing and administering policies and procedures, developing budgets and coordinating resource use, organizing improvement efforts, supervising staff and assessing student learning, building effective parent involvement programs, and shaping positive school cultures. (p. 2)

As such, the principal must work together with all stakeholders to create a shared vision and direction focused on student engagement and achievement. As a collective educational team, teachers and principals work to formulate a strategic school improvement plan to meet the needs of all learners, pushing the learning threshold. The educational team is instrumental in building and developing school capacity focused on student achievement.

Newmann, King and Youngs (2000) found that “school capacity,” the ability to promote sustainability of school programming (such as classroom instructional models, professional development, and coaching to facilitate the direction of the school initiatives) is the serious component in affecting instructional quality and corresponding student achievement. Figure 2 shows that educational leadership drives capacity with the faculty by providing safe and stable working conditions, while providing necessary resources for instruction. By providing the aforementioned, the administrator develops motivation and commitment from faculty to alter the current practices that ultimately increase student achievement. After successful development of capacity, paired with
motivation, commitment, and positive working conditions, this newfound capacity serves as a strong to provide influence on changing practices and student learning. The leadership of the principal serves as the starting point for bringing about organizational understanding; building school capacity in curriculum, instruction, and professional collegiality; and driving a culture of success and sustainability.

Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) created an educational leadership framework of 21 essential responsibilities for school leaders today (Table 4). Their meta-
Table 4
The 21 Leadership Skills and Their Correlation with Student Academic Achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>The extent to which the principal …</th>
<th>Avg. r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Culture</td>
<td>Fosters a shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Order</td>
<td>Establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Discipline</td>
<td>Protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Resources</td>
<td>Provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Curriculum, instruction, assessment</td>
<td>Is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Focus</td>
<td>Establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school’s attention</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, assessment</td>
<td>Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Visibility</td>
<td>Has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Contingent rewards</td>
<td>Recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Communication</td>
<td>Establishes strong lines of communication with teachers and among students</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Outreach</td>
<td>Is an advocate and spokesperson for the school and all stakeholders</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Input</td>
<td>Involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Affirmation</td>
<td>Recognizes and celebrates school accomplishments and acknowledges failures</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Relationship</td>
<td>Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Change agent</td>
<td>Is willing to and actively challenges the status quo</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Optimizer</td>
<td>Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Ideals/beliefs</td>
<td>Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Monitors/evaluates</td>
<td>Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Flexibility</td>
<td>Adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Situational awareness</td>
<td>Is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Intellectual stimulation</td>
<td>Ensures that faculty and staff is aware of the most current theories and practices, and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school’s culture</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** From “Balanced Leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement” pp. 4-5 by Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2003. MCREL. Reprinted with permission.

analysis began in 2001, reviewing more than 5,000 studies reporting the effects of principal leadership on student achievement. These studies, based on their reliability and
relevance, were conducted between 1978 and 2001, covering 14,000 teachers, 2,802 principals, and over 1.4 million students. From the meta-analysis, 69 studies were included based on inclusionary factors, one of which was student achievement.

Accompanying each of the 21 responsibilities is a descriptor of an exhibited principal trait and the positive correlation of that trait with student achievement. Waters et al. (2003) found that situational awareness (0.33), intellectual stimulation (0.32), input from teachers (0.30), operating as a change agent (0.30), and culture (0.29) had the most significant impact on student achievement. This makes sense because strong leadership requires understanding the situation at hand, involving all stakeholders in the decision-making process, and challenging the current state of affairs to promote continuous improvement in teaching and learning.

Waters, Marzano, and McNulty’s work delineates other important work of the elementary principal, including demonstrating strength in design and implementation of curriculum practices (0.26), working collaboratively with teaching faculty to drive the instructional vision of the building (0.24), and integrating research-based instructional practices into the daily work of the classroom (0.24). Their work demonstrates that the educational leader needs to exhibit the ability to develop excellence in teaching and learning; build the organization through the involvement and collaboration of all stakeholders; be reflective in his or her own practice; and be charismatic in developing relationships.

By understanding the characteristics of successful leadership, practitioners in school leadership roles can develop their craft, strengthen relationships, and move the school forward in accomplishing school improvement goals and objectives. For the
purposes of this research, educational leadership served as a foundational platform, through which the impact of transformational and instructional leadership styles will be analyzed in terms of increased student achievement in literacy. Therefore, the following is a review of the literature regarding transformational and instructional leadership, and their respective effects on student achievement.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational Leadership is a leadership style that primarily focuses on stimulating and inspiring people by valuing them and satisfying their needs, so they are motivated to change, to improve themselves, and be led (Northouse, 2001). Transformational leaders start at the level of individual commitment to the organization, and then build on group dedication to increase productivity and engagement, and meet the organization’s goals (Bass & Avolio, 1997; Chew & Chan, 2008; Geijsel, Sleegers, Stoel & Krüger, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Marks & Printy, 2003). According to Burns (1978), the pioneer of transformational leadership theory, the transformational leader unites the organization so it functions at a higher level of consciousness, creating a greater social and cultural awareness throughout the organization.

In addition, Burns (1978) asserts that transformational leaders, or moral leaders, “must be willing to transform society, or parts of it, if that is necessary to realize moral principles” (p. 170). Building on Burns, Leithwood and Duke (1999) “believe transformational leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality” (p. 20). Northouse also agrees that it is through the process of engaging with
others that the transformational leader builds a connection, and ultimately raises the motivation and morality of all parties (Northouse, 2001). As such, the transformational approach creates significant change in the life of people and organizations. It redesigns perceptions and values, and changes expectations and aspirations of employees (Burns, 1978).

According to Northouse, transformational leadership “emphasizes ideals, inspirations, innovations, and individual concerns. It requires leaders to be aware of their own behavior and how it relates to the needs of the organization and its changing dynamics” (1997, p.147). Bass (1985) identified the five behaviors of transformational leadership as: attributed idealized influence, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, all focusing on the followers within the organization. When leaders are cognizant of their behaviors in relationship to the organization, they are more apt to develop a climate and culture that is conducive to learning by the building faculty, raising faculty interest in the organization, improving interpersonal relationships between the administrator and teaching faculty that benefit the organization. The goal of transformational leadership is to build relationships with all stakeholders, through collegiality, collaboration, and increasing motivation. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) describe transformational leaders as those who interact with their colleagues in the following ways: through individualized support, shared goals, vision, intellectual stimulation, culture building, rewards, high expectations, and modeling. When, and only when, the educational administrator exhibits these interactions in a positive fashion with building colleagues, can the focus
of the group as whole, turn toward improving student learning and academic achievement.

In the school setting, principals who exhibit transformational leadership focus and direct the attention of all followers on the academic achievement of students by working collaboratively with all stakeholders during the school improvement process, including the development and implementation of reading instruction and curriculum. The principal actively works with teachers of reading, through collaboration, communication, support of professional development initiatives, unit and assessment design, and a focus on reading instruction and, ultimately, student achievement. In this way the principal establishes a social and cultural process, implementing routines and structure, correlating the instruction of reading to the school improvement goals and objectives, where all members have a voice in the process. The principal, in partnership with all teaching faculty, illustrates that the commitment and dedication of the educational team, operating as one, can change perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors within the organization. Through this collaborative process, the transformational leader utilizes his/her relationships with others to alter the school culture.

Leithwood and Duke (1999) write that transformational leadership is focused on the “commitments and capacities of organizational members” (p. 48), with a focus on the people and mission of the organization, and creating a change in perceptions and values. They further describe transformational leaders as charismatic and engaging, and able to change perceptions and values in the culture of the organization. Motivating followers is a critical characteristic of the transformational and effective leader in today’s school
environment: they are aware of their positional influence and establish trust, build relationships, and engage others in the organization.

Fullan (2002) describes effective leaders as those who are aware of the society and community at large. “Leaders must set action. They must have a moral purpose, be cognizant of the change process, build relationships with individuals, create and share knowledge, and engage others in the development of action and innovation” (p. 35). Given their sphere of influence and moral charge, the principal serves as a key factor in the development of a successful school program and student learning. Developing trust with all stakeholders will transform the school culture to one focused on results of student achievement, conducive to learning, revealing the power of transformational leadership.

Hallinger (2003) agrees and adds, “Transformational leadership seeks to build the organization’s capacity to select its purposes and to support the development of changes to practices of teaching and learning” (p. 330). This level of leadership is noted by Hallinger to begin development of the organization from the “bottom-up,” delivering upon the professional goals of individuals as they relate and drive the instructional goals of the organization.

Bolman and Deal (2008) add to the discussion of transformational leadership in schools through a reframing process that helps school community members create meaning in an organization that unites all stakeholders. A prime example of bringing together all stakeholders is the annual design of the school improvement plan required under current legislation. Feedback is gathered from administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members to build and design goals for all core areas of instruction focused on student achievement and current levels of academic progress.
By creating meaning, the school community can formulate appropriate goals and values to further the organization. Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) assert that the establishment of a building vision and school goals are the first dimensions in transformational leadership. This process involves all stakeholders of the school community in the decision-making processes as they ultimately interact and affect student achievement. As leaders, we need to inspire others to bring them to a greater awareness of our current priorities in the organization, raising their awareness in the school leadership process for accountability and increasing student achievement.

Transformational leadership is not only linked to organizational change, but also to the professional growth and development of individuals. Bass and Avolio (1993) explain that transformational leadership works to raise the commitment of stakeholders, encouraging and supporting them for the greater good of the organization. It is a model that requires educational leaders to support, guide, and develop their faculty, to bring together the needs of stakeholders, to establish a culture of collaboration, and to help each individual reach their fullest potential (Hallinger, 2003 and Northouse, 2007). Moolenaar et al. (2010) writes that the leadership on the transformational levels is positively associated with a school and its climate towards innovation, motivating stakeholders to go above and beyond expectations. Developing a culture that inspires and motivates all stakeholders is the key to improving student literacy achievement in schools today.

Instructional Leadership

Created in the 1980s during the effective schools movement, the Instructional Leadership Style views the principal as the main source of educational expertise. The
aim of instructional leadership is to create a consistent practice of effective teaching, establishing expectations, supervision of students, staff, and curriculum, and monitoring student achievement (Barth, 1986). Hallinger and Murphy (1985) provided a functional definition of instructional leadership that represent the concepts of (a) framing and developing school goals; (b) communicating the school goals to teachers, students, and parents; (c) supervising and evaluating instruction; (d) coordinating the curriculum and special programs; (e) monitoring student progress; (f) protecting instructional time; (g) maintaining high visibility; (h) providing incentives for teachers; (i) promoting professional development; (j) developing and enforcing academic standards and norms; and (k) providing incentives for learning (p. 224).

As the instructional leaders of their schools, principals organize and work with others to accomplish the vision and goals of the school, focusing specific school improvement goals on teaching and learning. They also work with others to create a shared vision and direction, driving forward with the goals and purpose of the school, while encouraging others to be effective. Effective instructional leadership is a conglomeration of a variety of tasks and relationships centered on instructional practices that a principal must exemplify.

Principals emphasize instructional practices daily, through communication, walkthroughs, and classroom observations, communicating with teachers’ effective practices to promote student achievement. School principals must be positive, proactive instructional leaders. Instructional leadership is associated with strong, directive leadership (Hallinger, 2003, p. 329). As a result, principals who exemplify instructional leadership closely monitor teachers’ actions by directing (Eyal & Kark, 2004, p. 220) or
coordinating, controlling, supervising, and developing (Hallinger, 2003, p. 331) curriculum and instruction as it is carried out in the classroom, through collaboration and shared leadership practices. Therefore, instructional leadership focuses on improving students’ academic achievement by improving teachers’ classroom practices (Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marks & Printy, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2009). All of these characteristics of instructional leadership can facilitate a “sharing” of the instructional leadership between teacher and principal which, in turn, can serve as a more powerful influence gathering greater results in student achievement.

Murphy (1990) and Fink and Resnick (2001) studied schools with highly effective teaching practices where student learning accelerated beyond peer schools. Murphy (1990) discovered the leaders of these schools used the conventional approach of instructional leadership by verifying four activities to increase student learning and teacher awareness of instruction. These activities included: (1) creating a school mission and school improvement goals, (2) monitoring and evaluating school curriculum, instruction, and assessment, (3) developing a climate for learning, and (4) promoting a supportive work environment. Using the conventional approach of instructional leadership permitted the school principal to take an active role in the design, implementation, and evaluation of sound instructional practices to monitor student achievement alongside building colleagues. Regarding instructional leadership, Leithwood (1994) wrote, “Principals are in a position to foster greater collaboration among teachers. Such collaboration often leads to improvements in teachers’ instructional practices; these improvements, in turn, enhance student learning.” As a
result, student achievement in the schools studied showed improvement in student learning objectives and outcomes annually.

The concept of instructional leadership is at the core of leadership for the elementary principal when creating a structure rooted in teaching and learning. The primary necessity for the building principal is to increase student achievement, but also teacher knowledge and effectiveness. Elmore (2000) identifies instructional leadership as “the equivalent of the holy grail in educational administration” (p. 7). This is because successful instructional leadership is so rare that often today’s principals do not practice it as they lack knowledge of effective instructional practices and how to lead classroom teachers to become reflective of their own instructional practice.

King (2002) cautions that in terms of instructional leadership, there is “no litmus test for its presence” (p. 63). According to King, instructional leadership is “…an integral, almost invisible part of how a school community works, lives, and learns together” (p. 63). For practitioners today, instructional leadership should be the way in which principals lead, teachers teach, and the way schools conduct business. However, principals today spend the majority of their time on the day-to-day operations and management of schools. Additionally, multiple case studies (Levine, 2005; and Murphy, 1990) found that principal involvement in instructional practices is one of the least common practices of school principals.

For building principals today, the implementation of effective instructional leadership is critical to developing and promoting continuous school improvement. The understanding and knowledge around instructional leadership is necessary for delivering high performing schools in the age of accountability because principal instructional
behaviors and expectations are continuously under scrutiny and the focus of educational research.

The National Association for Elementary School Principals (NAESP) has outlined six specific standards for “What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do” (NAESP, 2001). These include:

*Standard One:* Lead schools in a way that places student and adult learning at the center.

*Standard Two:* Set high expectations for the performance of students and adults.

*Standard Three:* Demand content and instruction that ensure student achievement of agreed upon academic standards.

*Standard Four:* Create a culture of continuous learning for adults tied to student learning and other school goals.

*Standard Five:* Use multiple sources of data as diagnostic tools to assess, identify and apply instructional improvement.

*Standard Six:* Actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student and school success.

These standards outline the instructional practices necessary for building principals to be successful in designing a comprehensive instructional program. Principals should focus on learning within the school community, both for students and faculty. For professional staff, this includes professional development, and district mentoring programs for teacher. Principals should use data to drive the decision-making processes for continued professional development, engaging the learning community to develop school improvement goals establishing high expectations for both students and
teachers alike. Working collaboratively will provoke a sense of social and professional responsibility centered on student learning and achievement.

Figure 3, from the Wallace Foundation, demonstrates the relationship between a variety of factors influencing and being influenced by principal leadership, primarily the leaders’ learning and their respective instructional leadership and their results on student achievement. The school leadership of the building principal is at the center of all influences in the school environment.

Figure 3. Wallace Foundation Framework Examining the Leaders’ Learning and Experiences and Their Impact on Student Achievement. (Reprinted from Preparing school leaders for a changing world: Lessons from exemplary leadership development programs. Reprinted with permission The Wallace Foundation, 2007, p. 10.)
Figure 3 also demonstrates that outside factors, policies, funding, local, federal and state mandates are out of the control of the building administrator. These pieces interact with the instructional leadership of the building administrator. The professional preparation and experiences of the principal are the internal factors for leadership that affect their leadership knowledge in developing school reform and initiatives centered on student learning. The work of the Wallace Foundation demonstrates the extraneous factors at play in public education and how those factors either influence or impede school leadership and ultimately student achievement.

Instructional leadership theorists assert that there is a sound connection between instruction and learning. Principals exhibiting instructional leadership as a cornerstone of their leadership focus on the greater capacity for teaching and learning. Fullan (2002) emphasized that “effective school leaders are key to large-scale sustainable educational reform” and that these leaders must be both instructional leaders and cultural change agents (pp. 16–17). Marks and Printy (2003) suggest sharing instructional leadership with teaching faculty can produce substantial results in student learning and achievement. The principal serving in a transformational capacity brings the group members to higher levels of commitment (Burns, 1978). As the instructional leader, embracing a shared instructional approach, the principal also collaborates with teaching faculty for school improvement goals for teacher and learning. Embracing the notion that school principals are agents of change, and that changes in curriculum and instruction that result in student achievement are a derivative of instructional leadership, it should be noted the principal and his/her instructional practices, coupled with instructional leadership from teaching faculty, can transform the learning community.
School Legislation

As principals work to integrate instructional leadership in their schools to promote teaching and learning, the evolution of the job description continues to change, in part due to legislation that provides a series of mandates holding principals accountable for student progress and achievement. Over the last three decades, there has been a continued examination of public education in America. In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* described in detail the need for a more rigorous curriculum in response to a decline in educational performance (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). It also called for effective school leaders to improve student achievement, and pleaded with school districts to hold educational leaders accountable in the process (Leithwood et al., 2004; Levine, 2005). Likewise, the U.S. public had been exasperated over the low math and science scores when compared to students in other countries. Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, which described the lackluster performance of America’s school-aged children in comparison to their counterparts, there has been an urgency to improve public education in the U.S.

On January 2, 2002, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, a reauthorization of President Johnson’s War on Poverty, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. Under this ambitious plan, schools are required to ensure all students achieve proficiency as measured on statewide-standardized tests by the 2014-15 school year. In addition, schools are required to achieve Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP) targets set by the federal government. Schools receiving Title I dollars that fail to achieve AYP targets are subject to penalties
and corrective action plans (USDOE, 2001). NCLB was implemented to improve the achievement of students in targeted ethnic groups, with disabilities, in families with low incomes, and English-learner students by closing achievement gaps in the areas of mathematics and English Language Arts (USDOE, 2001). During the course of the 21st century, it quickly became evident that NCLB failed to move all schools and student achievement proficiencies towards established targets, forcing President Barack Obama and his education cabinet to make quick changes to legislation.

President Barack Obama’s plan for the reauthorization of NCLB: A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act (USDOE, 2010) reiterates that every child in America deserves an outstanding education regardless of their circumstances. The reauthorization includes adjustments that explain five major areas of reform for K-12 public education: (1) college- and career-ready students, (2) great teachers and leaders, (3) equity and opportunity for all students (4) higher standards and greater rewards for excellence, and (5) the promotion of innovation. The method of school funding changed from only the allocation of Title I funds to inviting states and school districts to apply for the “Race to the Top” competitive grants. School Leadership Grants were also made available to strengthen and improve the effectiveness of school administrators (USDOE, 2010). This reauthorization, designed by President Obama, accentuates the importance of having effective teachers and principals in every school.

For school leaders in the state of Michigan, the legislation impacting school accountability is at the center of attention. Schools receiving a designation of “Priority” status are under public scrutiny to reform their current academic structures, whereas schools receiving a designation of “Reward” status are touted as schools with best
practices in place, where student achievement continues to rise or places the school in the top 5% of schools statewide. Schools designated as “Beating the Odds” may not have the highest levels of student achievement as measured by the MEAP assessment, but they are consistently outperforming their peer schools with similar demographics. The role effective teachers and principals play in successful schools is currently a hot button issue in the state of Michigan, with new evaluation systems in place to evaluate teacher and administrator performance, incorporating student achievement data as 25% of a teacher or principal’s overall evaluation rating in the 2014-2015 school year. It is vital that all schools have strong administrators in place to assist and lead through these challenging times.

Principal Preparation

Given that principals are the central focus for cultivating a culture conducive to learning, improving student achievement, and developing a structural team focused on results in the age of public accountability, the need to prepare educational leaders is paramount in improving our nation’s schools. Grogan and Andrews (2002) note the increased need to revise principal preparation programs so future leaders are focused on increasing student achievement, developing the school improvement process, and meeting the challenges of standards-based accountability.

Arthur Levine (2005) raised the stakes in research surrounding principal preparation programs in America’s colleges and universities by assessing the quality of educational administration programs. Levine utilized a survey of practicing principals and education school deans, chairs, faculty, and alumni, as well as case studies of 25
school principal leadership programs. Levine discovered that “the majority of educational administration programs range from inadequate to appalling, even at some of the country’s leading universities” (p. 23). Levine’s (2005) research concluded that most of the instruction in principal preparation programs lacked a clear, distinct focus on school curriculum management, a necessary component for school improvement plans, classroom instruction, fidelity of programming, and building culture. It is also essential that principals know how to use data in order to drive student achievement and develop comprehensive school improvement plans, an area not commonly instructed in today’s principal preparation programs.

Current legislation in the state of Michigan is requiring school districts to use student achievement data in the evaluation of administrators and teachers beginning with the 2014–2015 school year. Cheney and Davis (2011) report that “principals account for 25% and teachers 33% of a school’s total impact on achievement” (p. 5). Embracing this fact, it is critical schools today employ effective leaders and teachers in our schools. According to Duke, Grogan, and Tucker (2003), “Leadership during this Age of Accountability has become more stressful, more political, more complex, and more time-consuming” (p. 212). On the other hand, they also believe that school leaders have been given unprecedented “clarity of mission” and “leverage to bring teachers into line” (p. 212).

Tucker and Coddington (2002) suggested that preparation should stress the “principal’s role as the driver for results” and embody “the crucial role of data in the drive for results, from the careful setting of targets to the collection, display, and analysis of implementation and outcome data and to the use of data for setting goals, monitoring
progress, allocating and reallocating resources, and managing the school program” (p. 37). This is particularly important for school administrators in Michigan who will be evaluated on student achievement data beginning with the 2014-2015 school year. However, Reeves and Burt’s (2006) study of principals concluded that principal preparation programs did not equip them with adequate strategies to analyze data and improve student learning and achievement. Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) found that 69% of principals shared the same sentiment. The importance of data collection and disaggregation is necessary in our elementary buildings, focusing on early intervention services and reading across the curriculum in literacy education. The building principal must be the instructional leader focused on results and use the data to alter and enhance existing literacy curriculum and instructional approaches.

Farkas et al. (2003) found that 67% of principals reported, “typical leadership programs in graduate schools of education are out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today’s school districts” (p. 39). Making the study of leadership and principal preparation programs a priority in preparing current educators to lead our schools. According to the Southern Regional Education Board (2007), “traditional models of training provided to school principals are still out of sync with the challenges faced by today’s leaders” (p. 3). As a result, principal preparation programs have been under scrutiny for several years, with numerous studies documenting the lack of adequate preparation (Archer, 2005; Azzam, 2005). Traditionally, the procedures and standards by which many principal preparation programs screen, select, evaluate, and graduate candidates often lack precision and do not adequately prepare principals for the multifaceted role of an effective instructional leader.
Recent research and discussion has focused on the need to redesign the principal’s role so school leaders are more focused on increasing student achievement, driving school improvement in all core areas, and meeting the challenges of standards-based accountability (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Grundlach, 2003). Cusick (2002) concluded that fewer people were applying for principal vacancies, and many of those who applied were poor candidates. School districts in Michigan have solved this quandary by rehiring retired administrators, who were deemed effective, until replacements could be found or the districts’ financial conditions improved.

Many educators with leadership potential see the principal’s job as unappealing and riddled with demands. Principals work more days a year with longer hours in a day, the level or responsibility and accountability has increased, and the stressors of the job continue to multiply. Among other issues, principals must deal with parents, teachers, students, and the pressure of accountability from the school district, state, and federal governments (Cusick, 2002; Gravel, 2006).

Successful schools rest firmly on the shoulders of effective principals (Cotton, 2003; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005), which is why the mission of principal preparation programs has always been to produce school leaders who can develop a community of learners where the fundamentals of teaching and learning permeate every classroom and lead to high academic achievement. However, in an age of accountability, principal preparation must also focus on producing principals who can communicate, manage, support, and evaluate effective instructional programs and faculty to produce significant improvement and continued growth in student achievement.
Principal as Literacy Leader

Ainley and Fleming (2003) write literacy leadership is a collaborative endeavor that engages the principal, the school leadership team, and building teachers of reading. The principal as the literacy leader supports school literacy teachers and promotes the continuity of literacy instruction and valid practices. The literacy leader will also support the design, development, and delivery of an effective literacy curriculum.

Hallinger et al. (1996) investigated the area of principal-based leadership practices and student reading achievement and found that principals could impact student reading achievement through the development of a positive learning environment. In their study of student achievement results, and the impact of the principal on reading achievement, they concluded through establishment of higher teacher expectations, students’ opportunity to learn, a clear mission, and groupings for instruction, that principals had a positive impact on reading achievement at the elementary level. The literacy principal can promote increased reading achievement through a proactive response and increased expectations for teaching and learning.

School leadership, school achievement, and other school variables are interrelated (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). This is evident in the design, implementation, and evaluation of school improvement goals, objectives, and strategies for reading instruction. Through the school improvement planning process, principals can provide the support, management, and evaluation processes needed for successful reading achievement improvement initiatives. With a clear system of accountability for improved literacy
instruction, the principal has a direct influence in the building system of data collection, instruction, and accountability for student performance.

Booth and Roswell (2002) noted that, “schools that have successful literacy programs show evidence of strong principal leadership, with focused attention on setting a literacy agenda, supporting teachers, accessing resources and building a capacity for further growth” (p. 15). Booth and Roswell further conclude the need for comprehensive literacy instruction in later research (2007) finding that “literacy education (among all other core academic areas) as the instruction with the longest lasting impact for educational change and student achievement success” (p. 47). If children can integrate reading, writing, listening, and speaking more effectively, they can apply these skills with greater success in all areas of learning. This concept has lead to the “reading and writing” across the curriculum approach to improve vertical and horizontal articulation among all core areas of instruction. Permeating literacy education throughout the school improvement plan, facilitated by principal support, management, and evaluation of practices will assist in developing greater student achievement.

Research suggests that principals, as school leaders, play a key role in ensuring that reading initiatives designed to secure greater student achievement are actually implemented in schools (Fullan, 2006; Schmoker, 2005). Working through the school improvement process (SIP), literacy is at the core of the elementary SIP and principals who respond to accountability for student success understand that the quality of the core instruction is modeled, monitored, and differentiated to meet the needs of all learners. Biancarosa, Byrk, and Dexter (2010) implemented a four-grant study to investigate the value of the Literacy Collaborative in grades kindergarten through second as part of the
school improvement process. During the four years of grant-funded study, teacher expertise in literacy increased and the rate of improvement in literacy instruction directly correlated to the amount of coaching received over the time of the grant. Through the Literacy Collaborative, schools design and implement their own research in the development of initiatives to improve school performance. The implementation is aligned with an extensive training cycle to promote leadership in-house. This process is directed by the administrative leadership team and focused on literacy education and literacy behaviors of the administrator.

From his examination of the four domains through the “lens of leadership,” Murphy (2004a, b) identified clusters of specific literacy leadership behaviors and practices employed by principals that promoted “high levels of literacy for all students” (p. xiii). His findings formed into a literacy leadership framework, which comprised 10 functions or dimensions of leadership: (1) establishing literacy as a priority in schools; (2) developing an appropriate platform of instructional beliefs; (3) ensuring quality instruction; (4) maximizing learning time; (5) constructing a high quality program; (6) assessing student and teacher performance and ensuring accountability; (7) creating a clear and aligned reading system; (8) fostering staff professional development and promoting communities of learners; (9) building links between home and school; and (10) ensuring capacity. This leadership lens provides school principals a comprehensive frame to address a variety of components that will assist in shaping the literacy instructional model operating in their schools.

Today’s schools need to design high quality research based programs that established literacy as a priority and are delivered by effectively trained professionals
who use data to drive instruction. These are cornerstones of the leadership focus needed in this time of accountability. Literacy leadership, with the building principal serving as the catalyst, is imperative for the successful execution of an instructional program that encompasses multiple components of high quality instruction in literacy education.

For a principal to set the stage for literacy, he or she must be cognizant of the latest trends and research in literacy education. To lead the staff in selecting and implementing high impact literacy strategies, the principal must also understand the basics of reading instruction. The basics for reading instruction are noted by Harn (2008), who stated: School-wide beginning reading improvement involves the integration of two complex systems: (1) the scientific knowledge base of reading in an alphabetic writing system, and (2) the design and implementation of the knowledge base in a complex host environment (i.e., schools) comprising people, practices, pedagogy, and policy. Understanding the basics of teaching reading, the elementary principal as literacy leader can bring best practices and pedagogy to the faculty.

Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, and Lee (1982) described the principal as “a model and an encourager and celebrator of literacy, as an adult and professional in the school” (p. 67). The principal’s role in providing literacy education drives the instructional practices implemented in the classroom of the teacher. The goal is to provide an increased knowledge and understanding of reading practices in education, while actively promoting and supporting reading. Giving teachers the support and management for effective instruction results in higher student achievement in reading and this is evident through data collection on standardized assessment results.
Critical tasks for principals in the area of reading instruction are described in a guide from the Florida Center for Reading Research (2007). Among the tasks recommended for principals to be effective literacy leaders:

1. Ensure teachers have excellent, ongoing, professional development.
2. Ensure teachers have adequate materials to support high quality instruction.
3. Monitor classroom instruction through principal walk-throughs. (p. 21)

The design of professional practices in literacy can create a culture that celebrates and builds literacy. Teachers, serving as leaders in reading instruction, often struggle with changes in reading instruction. These teachers must understand and see the principal, who serves as the literacy leader, as the mechanism for reading improvements, reform, and research based initiatives.

In the work, *Teaching All Students to Read in Elementary School*, the authors listed specific content-related suggestions for principals as effective instructional leaders in the area of literacy (FLCC Torgesen et al., 2007). These steps include:

1. Develop a school schedule that allows sufficient time for interventions.
2. Provide sufficient personnel to deliver the interventions in small groups.
3. Identify appropriate instructional programs and materials to support effective interventions, and provide appropriate training to those who will implement the program.
4. Provide oversight, energy, and follow-up in managing the intervention system.

Bringing best practice instruction and literacy to the hands of all teachers, through instructional leadership, creates a community centered on student achievement in the area of reading. The role of the principal as the literacy principal is to work collaboratively
with teachers and to build leadership capacity within the school setting, eliminating the achievement gaps among subgroups of students. The NAEP reading data provide strong evidence of the extent of the rich/poor achievement gap. Twice as many poor fourth grader students scored below the basic proficiency level as students who were not poor (Allington, 2003, p. 11). Fullan (2007) notes that literacy stands as one of the most effective catalysts for school change in instruction and improvement and that success in literacy ensures success in other curricular areas. The elementary principal must communicate this understanding to all colleagues responsible for the instruction of students in literacy and provide the necessary support to manage the literacy program to fruition.

Communication and Support

As teachers embark on new ventures in curriculum and instruction, the focus of the school, their mission, vision and strategic plan are all facilitated by the leadership of the principal and the communication and support that principal provides to help develop teachers’ instructional practice. Fullan (2002) wrote about the importance of the ability of a leader to communicate ideas. Fullan’s point extends to the importance of a principal’s communication skills. Gupton (2003) included non-verbal communication and listening skills as important characteristics of the building principal, as well. This concept of nonverbal communication can be demonstrated in the effect of the principal walk-through during instruction followed by written communication in the form of observation notes and followed even further by the principal’s personal modeling of literacy behaviors and practice. Principal’s observations of teacher instructional practices
promote ongoing communication focused on improving teaching and learning.

“Leadership has been found to be important in creating positive, innovative learning cultures and the facilitation of quality teaching and learning” (Dunham, 1984, p. 341). This is often facilitated by effective principal communication.

Sparks and Hirsch (2005) also emphasized the importance of the principal’s role as a communicator. “Communication can be categorized as a trait that circumvents all leadership processes. The inability to communicate can derail the educational leader’s ability in all areas. Without supportive communication a principal does not develop trust; manage the basic operations and align procedures; convey a vision; help others through the change process; or turn an organization into a teaching and learning group” (p. 40).

Communication and support are prevalent in many research studies of educational leadership, as they are powerful attributes for a successful instructional leader. Researchers Biancarosa and Snow (2004) defended that leadership is necessary to an effective literacy program, expressing that “without a principal’s clear commitment, communication, and enthusiasm, a curricular and instructional reform has no more chance of succeeding than any other school wide reform” (p. 21). In the age of accountability, educational administrators need to work, support, and communicate effectively with their colleagues to further the vision of the building. Spillane, Hallett and Diamond (2003) defined instructional leadership as “an influential relationship that motivates, enables, and supports teachers’ efforts to learn about and change their instructional practices” (p. 104). This is highly evident in the instructional leader’s communication and support of instructional practices. Motivation and communication
are characteristics necessary for the effective implementation of systemic changes and processes in literacy instruction.

“Instructional leadership consists of direct or indirect behaviors (by principals) that significantly affect teacher instruction and, as a result, student learning” (Leithwood, 1996, p. 114). The drive to influence behaviors through communication, fostered through transformational and instructional leadership, shows the support administrators provide through their actions and showcases an increase in student achievement. The support, management and communication for literacy instruction are paramount in providing the assistance and collaboration necessary for teachers to effectively implement research based literacy practices in the classroom.

Wanzare and Da Costa (2001) describe instructional leadership as having four workings focused on improving teaching for all learners. Instructional leadership is (a) directly related to the process of instruction whereby teachers, learners and the curriculum interact (Glasman, 1984); (b) includes those activities undertaken by the principal with the object of developing a productive and satisfying working environment for teachers and desirable learning conditions and outcomes for students (Greenfield, 1985); (c) consists of those actions that a principal takes, or delegates to others to promote growth in student learning (De Devoise, 1984); and (d) consists of the ‘principal’s role in providing direction, resources and support for the improvement of teaching and learning in the school” (Wanzare and Da Costa, 2001, p. 271). Principals must provide support in the way of professional development, teacher resources, constructive feedback, data analysis of reading achievement, and support for curriculum instructional decisions in literacy education.
“School leaders are critical to helping improve student performance” (ISLLC, 2008). The principal’s focus on improving teacher instructional techniques and on bettering the quality of the curriculum to help support teachers will ultimately increase student achievement in literacy. The principal should possess content knowledge expertise in appropriate instructional methods and an understanding of literacy education and instruction to promote student growth and achievement. “The ability of students to read, write, and communicate (a set of skills that by tradition are collectively referred to as ‘literacy’) stands among the most current concerns pertaining to academic achievement in public education” (Leithwood, 1996). The recognition of student achievement in reading, for the state of Michigan is measured via the MEAP assessment and current results continue to show stagnant to limited growth.

Professional Development

Professional development is a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement (Hirsch, 2009, p. 12). To meet the demands of the public education setting, teachers and all school personnel must have access to professional learning opportunities throughout their careers (Fullan, 2010; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Garrett, Yoon, & Birman, 2002). Allington shares, “Future research might as well center on teacher and learning situation characteristics rather than methods and materials” (2003, p. 16).

Professional development is necessary for high quality instruction in all areas of the curriculum. High quality professional development is a key indicator of organizational transformation and the emergence of collaborative culture (Fullan, 2007).
Teachers who actively engage in ongoing professional development promote change and leadership within their organizations. The instructional faculty, including the principal must provide and take advantage of these opportunities to promote growth in job-embedded practice. Working through professional development in a collaborative style, the principal sets the example for instructional faculty, regarding the importance of this necessary support tool.

Two major reviews of the literature on professional development (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Desimone, Garet, Porter, Birman, & Yoon, 2002) agree on the following fundamental characteristics of effective professional development: (a) extends teachers content knowledge; (b) helps teachers connect content knowledge to students' needs; (c) facilitates active scholarship in authentic contexts; (d) has with school, district, state, and national goals and objectives; (e) is collaborative and shared; and (f) provides continued support for teachers' ongoing learning over time.

Collaborative professional development is particularly effective (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Teachers and principals working together exemplify a positive model for instructional design and implementation of reading practices.

The feature of effective professional development in reading instruction is that it occurs on the job. Therefore, the professional development contextualizes teachers learning about evidence-based reading instruction in their own classrooms, providing hands-on interaction with changes in curriculum instruction, assessment, and intervention. Job-embedded professional development can promote changes in teachers’ use of evidence-based practices with the teaching of reading. When these changes are supported and managed by building leadership, the focus shifts to ongoing discussions
and developments in the building instructional model for reading education. The discussion of reading and literacy achievement creates the climate for continued professional development and a focus on teaching and learning for building professionals. The principal as the literacy and instructional leader must identify strengths and weaknesses in reading instruction and provide professional development opportunities for all faculty involved in literacy instruction that are aligned with the building goals and vision.

Teachers’ Perceptions on Building Leadership

Building leadership is instrumental in bringing all stakeholders into the learning community, embracing the building vision. Perceptions of teachers on the building administrator play a key role in the work and direction the principal takes in leading their respective schools. Leithwood’s (1996) study reported positive effects of principal leadership behaviors based on teachers’ perceptions of such behaviors. Leithwood used a theoretical framework adapted from the work of Lord and Maher (as cited in Leithwood & Jantzi, 1996) to explain processes associated with teachers’ development of leadership perceptions. From their work, Lord and Maher identified two ways teachers’ perceptions of leadership behaviors are formed: (1) information on leadership prototypes is stored in the teacher’s long-term memory, and the recognition of principal leadership behavior is activated by observed behavior on the part of the principal and compared to leadership behaviors stored in the long-term memory, and (2) through a series of observable events and experiences in which the principal is involved, perceptions of the principal result from the teacher’s judgment that those events had desirable results. As principals exert
their influence on changes in instructional practices, their interactions with faculty, and
the relationships they have developed, either positive or negative, will dictate the
perception of the teacher, when new processes are directed from the principal.

Lord and Maher (1991) explained, “the influence associated with leadership
depends on a person’s behavior being recognized as leadership by others who thereby
cast themselves into the role of followers” (p. 513). Teacher’s perceptions of leadership
create the make or break scenario for school improvement and change in instruction.

Teacher attitudes concerning organizational change have been directly related to
principal leadership in numerous studies (Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006),
indicating that principal leadership has a strong influence on the school environment and
directly alters teachers’ perceptions of the school environment and their commitment to
change and organizational learning. In addition, teachers who express satisfaction with
their principal put forth more effort and more commitment to organizational
improvement in their buildings. Principal leadership also has an impact on changing
attitudes of teachers who historically did not support a program because teachers who
perceive principal leadership to be appropriate tend to grow in commitment, professional
involvement, and willingness to innovate (Hallinger, 2003). Principals exhibiting strong
leadership traits, as perceived by teachers, will stimulate a greater commitment from
faculty when changing or altering instructional practices, such as reading.

Changing teacher perceptions and attitudes centers on the leadership practices in
place and those implemented. Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) identified three broad
categories of transformational leadership practices, which may enhance teacher
perceptions of leadership. The first category, setting direction, includes the scope of
building school vision, developing specific goals and priorities, and holding high performance expectations. Principals could demonstrate these dimensions by helping to clarify the rationale for implementing new strategies and curriculum (specifically, for reading instruction) and aligning school improvement goals to increase student achievement.

The second category, developing people, contains the dimensions of providing intellectual encouragement, offering support, and modeling professional practices and standards. This would include providing support to teachers, such as coaching, mentoring, and professional development. Principals who focus on developing people encourage teachers to consider new ideas for teaching and learning by providing time, support, management, and resources for teachers to grow professionally. They also model high levels of professional practice by attending and conducting professional development and collaborative meetings (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). As principals embark into new arenas for reading instruction, it is imperative to provide learning opportunities for all faculty on the reading program and practices to be put in place. It is critical that the principal take an active role in designing and participating in the professional development and learning alongside his or her colleagues. The principal will thereby lead by example, demonstrating the importance of continued growth and changing the building culture.

Redesigning the organization is the third category, which includes the dimensions of developing a collaborative culture focused on teaching and learning, creating new structures to foster participation in school decisions, and creating fruitful community relationships. Principals who focus on redesigning the organization provide greater
opportunities for collaborative work among teachers. They develop leadership by creating conditions for shared decision-making processes. They also build good relationships with parents and external stakeholders as part of the school’s priority.

Summary

Since the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) there is a greater need for school accountability and student achievement in all core areas, but none more than reading. This is reflected in the Blueprint for Education Reform, initiated by President Obama, which spawned new state-level reform processes as states pursue new funding to implement changes in instruction, curriculum, teacher effectiveness, and administration. These federal and state reform initiatives emphasize that children need sound instruction in reading, delivered by high-qualified teachers, and monitored and evaluated by knowledgeable and reflective principals.

In achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), an effective literacy program is a crucial component of promoting student success. The literacy learning and instruction is a direct result of principal instructional leadership in the elementary years. Principal support, management, communication, and evaluation of reading practices, coupled with professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators alike are integrated criteria for the accomplishment of a successful literacy program.

The principal as the instructional leader must establish clear goals and a vision for literacy learning for the school building and instructional staff. These goals must be rooted in best practice and promote shared values and ideals. Principals must use their content knowledge in literacy education to work with their building teams to ensure the
development of the literacy program and to continually evaluate the success of the program through student achievement data and teacher feedback and consistent implementation with fidelity.

The literacy principal possesses content knowledge in reading. A solid foundation in literacy content knowledge is important because it structures the support and management of the program. Principals do not need to have a complete command of literacy knowledge, but they need to understand the fundamentals of good literacy instruction and engage teachers in exploring and critically assessing improvements to their instructional practices.

Many colleagues working with the building administrator have their perceptions of leadership and literacy and those principals who take action upon perceptions can use the information to mold a stronger program in literacy through dedicated instructional leadership. Examining teacher perceptions on support and communication in this study adds to the leadership research in literacy education, principal preparation, and student achievement and success. This information will be useful to future administrators, school districts, college principal preparation programs, and teachers of reading.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Chapter III discusses the methods used to conduct the research. The purpose of this study was to provide a comprehensive insight into the specific strategies principals use to communicate, manage, support, and evaluate literacy practices in schools designated Michigan Beating the Odds schools for reading achievement. The research study also examined the principal’s role and behaviors in designing an instructional model, facilitating interactions with faculty, providing and participating in professional development, and enhancing current building practices in literacy instruction to increase student reading achievement.

Specifically, this study mapped out a variety of on-the-ground strategies these principals employ in each of the specific categories of literacy leadership that have emerged over multiple previous studies. To elicit data to create such a mapping of on-the-ground strategies, this research studied specific instrumental cases of principal literacy leadership behaviors, practices, and strategies against the unique characteristics of their school setting. In this way, this study attempted to begin cataloguing some of the adaptive work principals are doing in each of the established categories of literacy leadership to provide a more in-depth understanding of the situational work principals do to provide just the right balance of literacy leadership each school needs.

The study also examined how the principals employ various means of providing teacher support; creating and sustaining communication about the literacy initiative;
managing the implementation process (procedures, resources, processes); and monitoring and evaluating both the process of implementation and the outcomes of implementation. Pertaining to the monitoring of results from the literacy initiative, this study examined how the principals track and relate the implementation of the school’s reading (literacy) initiative to changes (either increases or decreases in reading scores on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) and other reading assessments). Finally, this surveyed each instrumental case to describe the interactions between building faculty and building principals in the Michigan Beating the Odds Schools sampled for this study.

Methodology Overview and Rationale

The methodology for this research was an instrumental case study. Yin (1984) defines the case study research method as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (p. 23). During this study, interviews, principal communications, school improvement plans, building agendas and notes from reading committees, and observations served as the multiple forms of evidence.

Principals shared through interviews and observations their leadership style and adaptive work and on-the-ground strategies employed in driving school instructional practices in literacy. Stake (1995) describes the case study as a form of inquiry where the researcher examines the phenomenon of interest through the experiences and actions of one or more individuals. Bound by time and activity, the collection of materials in a case study occurs over a period of time. This approach allowed this study to examine the role
of the principal in elementary school settings designated as “Beating the Odds Schools” for reading (literacy) achievement through the Michigan accountability system. This study focused on cases that can be instrumental in learning the processes principals in such schools employ for communication, management, support, and evaluation of literacy initiatives.

Merriam (1998) writes that considering all strategies in qualitative design, the case study is particularly useful when studying a process. In this study, monitoring (the description of the context and population) refers to the observation of the extent to which the program or processes are implemented and the causal explanation, “discovering or confirming the process by which the treatment had the effect that it did” (Merriam, 1998 p. 33). Through observations and interviews, this study explored the working strategies participating principals use in their respective school buildings to monitor and achieve fidelity with the schools literacy program.

An instrumental case study methods approach will allow for the analysis within each school and across various school sites. Yin (2003) states that “the case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points; …relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion” (pp. 13–14). Working in various school settings this study extrapolated and exposed the working strategies of principals as viewed through the transformational and instructional leadership lens. Using a variety of artifacts (meeting agendas, notes, email communications, school improvement plans, and observations) within this instrumental case study of elementary principal’s leadership in
literacy provided a clearer picture of their support, communication, management, and evaluation strategies these principals use within in their respective settings.

Yin (2003) based his approach to the instrumental case study on a constructivist paradigm. Constructivists assert that truth is relative and that it is dependent on one’s viewpoint. Observing and communicating with building principals working in Michigan Beating the Odds Schools, through multiple interviews, interactions, and collection and review of historical documentation of literacy practices used in their respective buildings, provided the structure and meaning making for the basis of this study. To further explain and understand the phenomena of the instrumental case study design, Yin (2003) explains the instrumental case study approach as one that investigates and analyzes the experiences. Each building principal brings to their school a unique set of education and experiences that ultimately dictate their leadership style in driving school improvement.

Creswell (2007) defined the case study as a “good approach when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases” (p.74). The instrumental cases for this study were schools designated by the Michigan Department of Education as Beating the Odds. The schools selected for this study are outperforming schools with similar demographics and are led by principals who have been present before and during the school’s designation as Beating the Odds. Using the units of analysis (communication, management, support, and evaluation) in literacy provides the necessary information for developing a deeper understanding of the commitment and process of the building principal, the creation and implementation of the building specific school improvement plans strategies and activities, that produce greater results in reading as documented through the MEAP.
Research Questions

To further understand the impact the instructional leadership of the building principal had in literacy initiatives through communication, management, support, and evaluation, the researcher posed the following questions:

1. What role did/does the principal play in shaping the literacy plan for the school?
2. What was/is the principal’s communication to staff and others concerning literacy initiatives and practices in the elementary classroom?
3. What specific strategies did/does the principal use to support classroom teachers and improve student achievement progress in literacy?
4. How did/does the principal manage and monitor literacy practices in the instructional classroom?
5. How did/does the principal evaluate the implementation of the literacy program?

Sample

The sample population for this study included three schools in western Michigan from among those schools identified as Beating the Odds through the state waiver system for NCLB accountability for the years of 2010-2013. The pool of potential participant schools for the three cases included all schools designated by the State of Michigan as a school demonstrating dramatic increases in reading scores measured by the MEAP assessment during a five-year period from 2010-2013 and receiving the Beating the Odds
designation. MEAP ELA information for each district in the potential pool of case schools was collected from the Michigan Department of Education (http://www.michigan.gov/mde) with historical data retrieved from 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013. Schools included in the pool of potential case study schools were noted by the State of Michigan as outperforming their peer schools with similar school demographics, based upon collected MEAP data.

Further inclusionary criteria included the requirement that a participating school has a principal who has been in place for more than three years and serves student populations in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Three schools were recruited from among those schools that meet the inclusionary criteria with preference for the inclusion of one rural, one urban, and one suburban school. While school demographics will be profiled for each participating school, demographics will not be used to differentiate potential participating schools.

For the years of 2008-2013, the State of Michigan identified 205 K-12 schools showing significant increases in reading achievement. Seventy-four of these were elementary buildings. The 15 elementary Beating the Odds Schools showing the largest gains in reading were invited to participate in the study and the study included the first school in each of the three school setting categories (rural, urban, and suburban) where consent is obtained from the superintendent, principal and a sufficient sample of classroom teachers to carry out the research design. However, no urban schools were included in this study, due to the decision of the superintendent.

Participation in the study was voluntary and no identifying information about any school or the school’s teaching personnel or principal was divulged in the findings or
presentation. Building administrators of participating schools were provided contact information for the purpose of recruiting teachers to participate in interviews, observations, and focus groups.

According to Yin (2003), an instrumental case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study; (c) you want to discover contextual conditions because you trust they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. For the purposes of this study I investigated how the building administrator communicates, supports, manages, and evaluates literacy education and initiatives in their respective buildings, through the collection of building artifacts, and completing interviews with building principals and focus groups with teachers at each building.

The Recruitment Process

The recruitment process began by examining the data collected from the state of Michigan Department of Education to determine which five rural, urban, and suburban schools on the Michigan Beating the Odds list with a principal who has been in place for at least five years, have the highest growth in reading achievement over the years of 2008-2013. The five schools in each category were ranked in order from highest to lowest growth in reading achievement. From this pool of 15 schools, the recruitment process began with the top ranked school from each of the three categories (rural, urban, and suburban). The recruitment process began by seeking permission from the 15 district superintendents to recruit participation by the school principal and teachers.
Upon receipt of permission by the district superintendents, a recruitment letter was emailed to each principal of the 3 participating schools. Principals were invited to communicate directly with the researcher if they were interested in learning more about the study and considering participation. The researcher provided a complete description of the study and the details of participating in the study to all principals who responded to the recruitment letter. If a principal wished to participate in the study, the researcher reviewed the consent form and upon receipt of a signed consent, the principal began recruiting teacher participants for focus group participation.

The principal provided contact information for teachers and the researcher emailed potential teacher participants a recruitment letter. The principal scheduled a time when the researcher could meet with teachers who were interested in the study to review full study details and conduct the consent process. The goal was to conduct a focus group of 6–7. As soon as the researcher received the needed consents from both the principal and the needed number of teachers in a school, that school was accepted into the study for the category from which the school was recruited—rural, urban, or suburban. See Appendix A for recruitment letters and consent forms.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

The framework of case study research is the use of multiple data sources, a procedure that also enhances data credibility (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003). Potential data sources included, but were not limited to: documentation, interviews, physical artifacts, direct classroom observations, and participant-observation. Stake (1995) writes, “unique in comparison to other qualitative approaches, within case study research, investigators
can collect and integrate quantitative survey data, which facilitates reaching a holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied. In case study, data from these multiple sources are then converged in the analysis process” (p. 47).

The data for this research was collected through the use of an online survey to collect demographic data on the school and for each participant. The researcher developed the one survey for demographic data on the school (enrollment, free/reduced lunch, student demographics, etc.) and principal (years of experience, gender, education, etc.) and another for demographic data on the teacher participants (years of experience, gender, grade level, etc.) used for this study (Appendix B). The purpose of the surveys was to profile the study participants and the school.

In order to gather an in-depth understanding and exploration into the communication, management, and support presented by the building administrator in literacy, multiple data collection methods were used. Lincoln (2005) stated, “Qualitative research is inherently multi-method in focus. However, the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question” (p. 5). The six sources identified by Yin (1994) are: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. Data collected in this case study included one or two teacher focus groups at each respective school site, one-on-one in-depth interviews with the school principal with the possibility of follow-up interviews as needed, informal observations in the school setting, selected school documents including reading assessment data, school improvement plans, principal communications, staff meeting and teacher meeting agendas and other documents the principal selects to demonstrate his or her work in leading the literacy
initiative for the school. The protocols for both the teacher focus group interviews and the principal interviews can be found in Appendix C.

The principal interviews were conducted in-person at a time and in a private location convenient for the principal and included: (a) A pilot interview to refine the instrument and questions, (b) audio-taking and full transcription of each interview, (c) opportunity for the principal participants to member-check the transcription and make additions or clarifications; (d) a review of documents compiled by the principal to illustrate the process he or she used to lead the literacy initiative; and (e) a follow-up interview after the teacher focus groups to clarify or expand upon what was learned from the first interview, document review and focus group.

The units of analysis for this study were the strategies, practices, and behaviors of the principal related to communication, management, support, and evaluation of the school’s literacy initiative. The principal served as a key informant with teachers also serving as key informants through focus group participation. The focus groups were conducted in person at the school site at a time and in a location that was convenient and comfortable for the teacher participants. While the researcher was in the school for the principal interview and teacher focus groups, he also spent some time observing the school environment and school processes, paying particular attention to aspects of environment and process that relate to the school’s literacy initiative or to student literacy in general, e.g. displays of student work, teacher classroom displays, walls and spaces that communicate literacy messages, etc.
Procedures for Data Analysis

When using qualitative research, the researcher must organize the data in order to analyze it and reduce all data collected into themes through the process of coding to demonstrate emerging patterns (Creswell, 2007). Throughout data collection and analysis, the researcher will sustain reflectivity (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) through frequent memoing to capture researcher observations, insights, perceptions, and impressions. The memos were used to bracket researcher assumptions and predispositions and maintain conformability of the analysis to the data.

First the data was organized and prepared for analysis. Interviews, focus group data, and field notes were transcribed and word-processed. Data was arranged according to source and coded anonymously with pseudonyms to replace any identifying labels or names. All information was read multiple times to determine a sense of what participants from all focus groups and administrator interviews were conveying prior to data reduction, and, ultimately, extrapolating patterns and themes.

The coding process for the interview data began with the extraction of in vivo codes to maintain close conformability of meaning units to the actual transcribed interview. After initial coding, the researcher began the process of clustering or grouping meaning units (codes) around like categories of meaning, until the groupings held up across all three interviews. The meaning categories were used to elicit understandings around the four areas of focus for the principal’s leadership of the school’s literacy initiative: (a) communication, (b) support, (c) management, and (f) evaluation and the five research questions.
Analysis of focus group and observation data followed the same process until all possible elements of meaning pertaining to the four categories of principal leadership for literacy and the five research questions were exhausted. The resulting final set of meaning categories were translated to emergent themes and sub-themes and as best fits each case for a within case analysis. The themes and sub-themes that fit each case served as a frame for conveying the essence of each case. Finally, the themes and sub-themes that applied across all three cases were identified and used to confirm the findings around the research questions.

Creswell (2007) shows the process of data collection and analysis in the figure below.

*Figure 4. Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design. (Adapted From “Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among the Five Approaches” p. 184-186, by J.W. Creswell, 2007, SAGE Publications. Reprinted with permission.*)
As described above, this research study will use a general inductive approach for analysis of qualitative evaluation data. The rationale for using an inductive approach are to: (a) place raw data into a summary; (b) establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings from the raw data; and (c) to acquire a framework of the underlying experiences or processes that are evident.

Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Creswell, 2009) established that the research should ask, “What lessons were learned?” to guide the interpretation of results or lessons learned derived from the comparison of findings. Findings were captured in individual case descriptions, followed by a cross-case analysis to highlight common themes present in the instrumental case study findings.

Validity and Reliability

Creswell (2009) explains that validity is the means where the researcher checks for accuracy by employing procedures to check the date. To trust the findings of all interviews and focus groups are accurate, the following validity strategies were utilized. Prior to completing the interviews for building principals, a pilot interview was conducted.

To provide further confirmation of the findings, the study employed a triangulation of data sources (interview, observations, documents, and focus groups) both within and across case analysis. The use of consistent member checking, “taking the final report or descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate” helped to insure that the data provided a complete rendition of how each principal views his or her own work in leading the school’s literacy
initiative. Visual techniques for data collection during the focus groups also assisted in maintaining conformability of what is distilled from the focus group conversations and what the participating teachers wished to convey. Finally, protocols for interviews, focus groups, and observations (see Appendix C), consistent procedures for data coding and analysis, researcher memoing and log trails during the entire process of data collection and analysis, and researcher strategies to maintain reflexivity all contributed to the overall trustworthiness or validity of this study.

Limitations

This study is limited to three schools in Michigan, one rural, one suburban, and one urban derived from an elite pool of schools determined through the state accountability process to be “Beating the Odds.” No further selection criteria were used to insure demographic comparability or regional distribution. The small sample allows for an in-depth examination of what is going on in three instrumental cases, but it does not support any level of transferability. Additionally, the data collected forms a retrospective look at how each principal carried out the process of leading his or her school through a literacy initiative to the point of achieving better student literacy gains than other schools that are demographic peers in the state. As such, the data is derived primarily from the key players looking back on their experiences rather than direct observation as those experiences unfolded over time.

It should also be noted that many factors have an impact on a students’ level of academic performance. These factors include parent involvement, parents’ level of education, class size, district spending per pupil, absenteeism, teacher efficacy, and
classroom environment (http://www.ppic.org). For the purposes of this research, these components are beyond the scope of the presented project.

The Researcher

My educational background consists of a Bachelor of Arts degree from Grand Valley State University, with a major in English and minor in elementary education. I possess a Master of Education degree from Aquinas College, a Master of Education in Early Childhood Education from Northern Arizona University, and a Master of Arts in Educational Leadership from Western Michigan University, where I am pursuing my Ph.D. in Educational Leadership.

My work experience includes employment as the elementary principal in three school districts in Michigan. During my tenure as principal, our collaborative community created an environment rich in experiential learning for our 460 students, from preschool through fifth grade, earning the Michigan Exemplary Blue Ribbon Award. With a constructive shared approach, providing an individualized education for all, our students embraced learning and played an active role in their education on a daily basis, involving all stakeholders in our learning community. During this time we designed and implemented a student teaching cohort program with Grand Valley State University, where their education students were our assistants in the fall semester and completed their student teaching during the following spring semester within our building, creating a gradual transition for our intern teachers to assume the teaching role within our elementary community. Our building team also provided professional development in the areas of differentiated instruction, response to intervention, reading instruction, thematic
instruction, and data collection and assessment to schools throughout the state of Michigan and via state and national conferences.

Prior to working as the elementary principal, my work experience included a full time elementary teaching assignment in grades kindergarten, first and second. During this time I also worked for the Summer Migrant Bilingual Program, providing an educational experience for migrant students in grades kindergarten through second.

As principal in a small, rural community we collaboratively provided a comprehensive education to children in grades prekindergarten through second. During my tenure as principal we developed and approved the implementation of a Young Fives program, streamlined our special education and child study process, developed our MTSS model, strengthened community partnerships, increased volunteer hours and opportunities, all to ensure that all children were successful and received instruction rooted in best practice. As principal, our building moved from the 27th percentile in the fall of 2010, to the 75th percentile in 2012 and received the Michigan Department of Education REWARD status. This drastic school improvement occurred by providing differentiated instruction to all students, using data to drive classroom and intervention instruction in reading and mathematics, ongoing professional development at the building level, effective teacher collaboration and evaluation, and using research-based practices in the classroom. Therefore causing a desire to complete research surrounding educational leadership and literacy initiatives in the elementary years.
Summary

This chapter described the design and methodology used to investigate the communication, management, support, and evaluation of the building principal in Michigan schools demonstrating high levels of reading achievement during a five-year period as measured by the Michigan Educational Assessment Program. The research questions were identified and the population sample for the study was described. The structure, validity, and reliability were also discussed in detail and the methods of analysis for the research questions were explained. Chapters IV and V describe the results and conclusions of the study.
CHAPTER IV

CASE DESCRIPTIONS

Introduction

In this chapter, narratives from principal interviews and focus group interviews offer insights into the leadership in literacy practices in three Michigan elementary schools, designated as Reward Schools, *Beating the Odds*. Each focus group participant provided his or her description and understanding of principal leadership in literacy, including the support, communication, management, and evaluation of the school literacy practices. Building principals described their roles in the overall implementation of the school improvement plan and how they specifically provide guidance in the aforementioned areas of literacy leadership. Many of the participants provided specific instances and scenarios of principal leadership behaviors, their involvement, and the impact these interactions play in driving student achievement, school culture, and influencing classroom instruction in literacy.

Subject Participation

The researcher contacted a list of fifteen school superintendents of districts with an elementary school designated as a Michigan Reward school “*Beating the Odds*” requesting permission to approach the school principal with a formal invitation to participate in the study. The superintendents represented seventeen qualifying schools.
Two superintendents agreed to participate in the study, and those superintendents forwarded the principal recruitment communication included in Appendix A to the corresponding building principals. Each of the three building principals contacted the researcher and agreed to participate in the study. Upon receiving the permission of the three principals to contact their staffs, the recruitment process was extended to the teachers with the teacher recruitment letter included in Appendix A. In the first school, five teachers agreed to participate in the focus group interview; in the second school, six teachers agreed to participate in the focus group interview; and in the third school, three teachers agreed to participate in the focus group.

Data Collection Process

The data collected for this study included one semi-structured interview with the principal of each school, followed by semi-structured focus group interviews with teachers. Additionally, the researcher used observations of classroom literacy instruction to learn more about the building’s use of literacy practices and application in the classroom. Finally, structured profiling protocols were used to collect background data on participating schools, principals and teachers. The protocols for background data collection are in Appendix C. Creswell (1994; 2003) suggests observations, collected data, and journaling (note-taking by the researcher), strengthens the reliability and validity of the findings in qualitative research. The data collection protocols used for the principal interviews and the teacher focus group interviews are in Appendix D. The researcher used open-ended note taking to collect data from the classroom observations and the documents shared by the principals.
Information collected through the use of researcher-designed instruments was the basis of this research. More specifically, the findings of the study are the result of semi-structured, in-depth interviews, collected artifacts (school improvement plans, principal communications, newsletters, school data) provided by the building principals, and observations collected from the researcher.

The focus group and principal interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, reviewed, and shared with the participants for member checking. Over the course of a 3-week period, interviews, observations, and data were collected. Each interview lasted between 35–45 minutes. The interviews took place at the elementary school, outside of instructional hours, in a classroom or conference room. Focus groups ranged in size from 4 to 6 participants and the principals were interviewed individually. The transcriptions were analyzed for themes and sub themes from each interview. In-depth interviews were conducted with three focus groups and three building principals, from West Michigan elementary schools, designated as Reward schools, Beating the Odds.

The schools were chosen for the study based upon their Michigan Department of Education Recognition and for their scores in literacy as measured through the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP). Two schools are classified as rural, and one school suburban. The student populations for the buildings range from 200 to 328. Teachers participating in the focus group interviews were referred by the building principal due to their leadership in the respective school’s literacy program described in the school improvement plan. Demographic information was also collected from all teachers in the specific sites. Participants in the focus groups covered a wide variety of
teaching assignments from classroom teachers, Title I reading teachers, Reading Recovery Specialists, to special education teachers.

The Study Findings

The next section of this chapter presents the study findings within holistic case descriptions. All data collected in each school were analyzed around the four meaning categories identified through the literature review to provide insight into the principal leadership of the school literacy program. The meaning categories will be used to elicit understandings around the four areas of focus for the principal’s leadership of the school’s literacy initiative: (1) communication, (2) support, (3) management, and (4) evaluation. The findings will be discussed around these four sub-units of analysis to gain a holistic picture of the principal’s literacy leadership in each case school. All references to the schools, principals, and teachers use either participant numbers or other devices to protect anonymity.

Case Descriptions

Patton (1990) describes what is necessary to begin individual case studies where variations in the case studies are the primary focus of the research. This process requires completion of a case description for each unit, prior to doing a cross-case analysis. For this study, the case descriptions describe the current demographic make-up of each school district, the elementary building, demographics of teaching faculty, and description of the building principal. The description of each case will also provide information as told by focus group members and the building principal in regards to the
specific on-the-ground strategies and behaviors principals use with literacy instruction. The units of analysis are leadership support, communication, management, and evaluation of literacy initiatives.

The Building Stories

First Elementary

First Elementary initially received the MDE Reward school status in 2013 and has maintained the status for the subsequent years. Projected to test at the 13th percentile, the school reached the 64th and 68th percentiles respectively in 2013 and 2014. The demographic data of the school reflects the following: current enrollment is at 200 students, with 20% of their student population represented by migrant students. In the fall of 2014, the school enrollment was 246, with 46 students listed as migrant. Approximately 49% of the student population is white, 46% Hispanic, 3% African American, and 2% identify as Two or More races. The following figure represents the historical enrollment for First Elementary.

![Figure 5. First Elementary Enrollment Data, 1988–2013](image)
First Elementary School is located in a rural area of southwestern Michigan, in a larger school district with current enrollment figures at 2,258. The district houses four elementary schools, a middle, and high school. During the past several years, restructuring efforts have changed grade configurations and the district has closed two schools due to lower enrollment numbers. The current superintendent is in his second year with the district. At First Elementary, the building has 18 teachers. Two teachers at each grade level (K-5), specials teachers for physical education, art, music, Title I, and migrant education. Additional staff members at the building also include six paraprofessionals to support Title I and Migrant education, one secretary, and one custodian. The following table shows the demographic data of teaching faculty currently working at First Elementary:

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Ed.</th>
<th>Average Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Average Years at this Building</th>
<th>Service Lead Teacher/SIP Chair</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA 44%</td>
<td>12.8 years</td>
<td>7.5 years</td>
<td>67% No</td>
<td>87% White</td>
<td>87% Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA/M.Ed 56%</td>
<td>12.8 years</td>
<td>7.5 years</td>
<td>67% No</td>
<td>13% Native American</td>
<td>13% Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The building principal has worked in education for 26 years; the past 17 years as a building principal. His teaching experience includes a variety of assignments in K-5 education as a general education classroom teacher. He is in his fourth year as principal at First Elementary, coming from another school district in southwestern Michigan, where he previously served for nine years as an elementary principal.
First Elementary Interview Findings

The teacher focus group for First Elementary consisted of five building teachers referred by the building principal for their leadership in literacy and their participation in the development of the school improvement model, leadership on the Teacher Assistance Team (TAT), and their unique qualifications. Of the five teachers, four were female, one was male. Two teachers were certified Reading Recovery Specialists with one serving as a general education first grade teacher, one special education teacher, and the others representing fifth and second grade. All teachers included in the focus group have been at the elementary building for at least the past six years. The interview protocol was closely followed, with extending questions presented to probe deeper into the specific characteristics and on-the-ground behaviors of the building principal.

The literacy story of First Elementary is rooted in a team approach to meeting the needs of all students. The level of support provided by the principal, as well as past principals in the school programming was noted during the focus group interview. First Elementary has had three principals in the last 10 years. Participant 3 explains, “We’ve had a lot of changes in principals. And I think there have been different things that each one of those principals have done to help our building in order to become a Reward School.” Principal leadership plays a vital aspect in the development and implementation of literacy instruction.

The teaching of literacy at First Elementary is teacher directed and student focused. The principal states accountability is the cornerstone for moving literacy rates in the building. “Accountability to what we are doing, using the evaluation system, walkthroughs, and observations, and revamping those to fit our literacy program provides
support and coaching for teachers.” Teachers receive 12 required walkthroughs during the academic year. The principal explains, “teachers are aware of this from the beginning of the year. It is communicated throughout the year, and we follow up together following all walkthroughs.” There is no required amount of walkthroughs or observations that center on literacy, but the principal makes note to observe literacy instruction 5–6 times for each teacher during the year. Lesson plans are submitted weekly and the walkthroughs are not scheduled. The principal selects dates and times, logs them in an online calendar, and distributes results to teachers with suggestions and observations. This tool is “using the accountability approach to support literacy instruction and to assist teachers in identifying students who may need additional supports in reading.” Teachers as well as administrators assisted in the creation and design of the walkthrough and observation instrument used throughout the district, taking ownership and accountability in the instruction of students.

Teachers hold themselves accountable for literacy instruction and use the feedback from the building principal in their instruction. Focus group participant 2 explained, “The walkthroughs occur randomly and he (our principal) is in the classroom for about 20 minutes.” The teachers meet with the principal at the end of the day to review the observations and recommendations are made for instruction, because “he (the principal) is also aware of individual student data.” Participant 3 explains further, “he pays close attention to the data and he knows what students are on target and those that are receiving interventions. Sometimes he makes recommendations to observe another teacher or asks about a specific student he observed.” The feedback the principal
provides assists the teachers in designing their instruction in literacy, allowing teachers to make professional decisions regarding materials, resources, and teaching time.

First Elementary does not require a mandated literacy block, instead the teaching of literacy is integrated into all core areas of instruction with teachers using the time they need in class to meet students where they are. Participant 1 stated that, “We teach reading, but not for a required 90 or 120 minutes. Having the flexibility and being able to make the call is a level of trust—because if my students aren’t getting something, then I want to push further. Or if they are able to go deeper, I want to go deeper. I think the flexibility with time is a benefit for our students and our reading progress.” Supporting and managing the literacy plan comes from school improvement directives. The building principal states, “95% of our instruction is based on the school improvement plan; the additional 5% is the opportunity to make changes in instruction.”

When the current principal arrived at First Elementary (currently in his 4th year) several pieces were already in place including, Reading Recovery, summer school programming for migrant students, as well as after school tutoring for students identified as needing additional support in reading. The group noted that the current principal provides extra support for the reading program through investigation of current practices and provided insights into interventions for early readers. “I need to make sure that teachers have the tools, manipulatives, professional development, and resources,” explained the principal. The teachers in the focus group reinforced this point by noting that teachers who observe new practices or want to use new materials have the opportunity to approach the principal for approval. If a teacher has observed a new practice, program, or intervention that could be successful with students, they need only
to discuss the options with the principal, show the research behind it, and are given the chance to implement. Participant 1 elaborates, “I know from my experience, he brought and introduced us to Corrective Reading and Reading Mastery. These were very helpful for our upper elementary students, but we have the opportunity to explore new options as well, he sees us as leaders in instruction.” The principal also provided support for professional development and implementation of these programs, and additional strategies brought from teaching faculty into their building intervention plan to service the needs of students. These intervention practices are closely monitored by building faculty, including the principal.

First Elementary students are selected to receive reading interventions based upon a triangulation of data collected at grade level. The building teachers collect benchmark data three times per year using NWEA Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments, Fountas and Pinnell running records, Slosson word lists, and teacher assessments. Students below grade level are prioritized and interventions are selected through a team approach, referred to as the Teacher Assistance Team (TAT). The TAT meets as needed for students during the year and also following benchmark assessments. The team members include the classroom teacher, principal, reading specialist, Reading Recovery teacher, and other personnel as requested. Based upon student need in fluency, phonics, or comprehension, a prescribed intervention is used and the student is progress monitored using running records every two weeks. A building requirement is for each classroom teacher to bring 2–5 students to the TAT each school year. Teachers are evaluated on the number and success of the students brought to TAT annually by the administrator.
The principal supports the TAT process through active participation, his experience with interventions, and by providing the time to meet and discuss student progress. Focus group participants state, “We are fortunate to have time to explore interventions together as a team, we meet three times as a TAT before bringing in the school psychologist for formal testing.” The building goal is to service the lowest 20% through Title I interventions and services. Reflecting on past building numbers and the success of the intervention program, First Elementary building staff has been able to service the lowest 30% in past years. The focus group explains that through their available interventions and service capabilities, they have observed greater student success, largely due to the partnership with their migrant teaching staff providing time for migrant students at all grade levels. Migrant students also receive additional instruction through Title I programming, providing them “a double-dip of literacy.”

In recent years, First Elementary has seen an increase in the migrant student population and the need for bilingual staff and new interventions to assist these learners in the school programming. Participant 4 stated that, “Our migrant staff that we have during the regular school year work our summer program, they work closely with classroom teachers and the time they provide our students is important. Our principal has always supported the additional intervention time for our migrant students during the school year and throughout the summer.” Written in the school improvement plan for First Elementary is the implementation of the extended school year for migrant students, a district operated summer school program, and after school tutoring in literacy for students receiving interventions, providing the gift of time. Additional time, for student
learning and teacher professional development, is also supported by the building principal.

Time is allowed for teachers to observe other teachers using interventions and to observe those who are building experts in literacy instructional practices. Participant 3 explains, “We have a very close staff, teachers are talking about students and instruction every day” and Participant 2 elaborates, “If something isn’t working in your classroom, you can talk to any colleague to ask and observe what it is that they do successfully in reading.” Exploring new ideas and research-based practices is ongoing at First Elementary. The focus group described how the principal and the district support the implementation of new ideas into the intervention time at First Elementary:

If a teacher happens to have a colleague that teaches in another district, or another building in our district that is using an intervention and they’ve talked with the teacher, maybe they’ve gone over and visited and watched the intervention, then the district and leadership is really good about allowing the building to decide if they want to use the intervention.

The building principal supports this model of professional development. The principal explains, “A teacher just mentions or asks if they can observe and I look for ways to provide coverage . . . we will make adjustments to free that person up to go.” This in-house professional development approach is important with the literacy intervention plan that is in place, as new interventions are tried and successful. The key discussed by the teaching team is the consistency with instruction, including classroom strategies, and intervention practices.

The reading intervention plan at First Elementary provides a 40–45 minute time for students not at grade level. The interventions are selected from the building TAT team during their benchmark meetings and subsequent meetings scheduled throughout
the calendar year. The intervention time serves as the supplemental support for reading instruction. Additional interventions utilized by First Elementary include: Reading Eggs, Reading Recovery (first grade students), Road to the Code, Corrective Reading, Reading Mastery, and small group guided reading instruction. Managing and communicating the use of the interventions is a team approach, designed in coordination with building professionals, including the principal, and building and district calendar and schedule.

The management and support of the literacy program is facilitated through the development of the building schedule, created by the building principal. The schedule does not lock teachers into teaching literacy at a certain time or for a set duration. The freedom and flexibility to teach literacy is at teacher discretion. Teachers are provided interventions and support based on student needs from the data collected and time for intervention is available based upon teacher schedules. Participant 3 stated that, “looking at our data collection spreadsheet, we can see which students are the lowest in each grade level. That helps to identify who receives support.” Not all teachers receive the same amount of assistance in literacy interventions; it is based on student need. The spreadsheet of student achievement data is also a means for accountability and allocation of resources as determined by the principal. First Elementary principal states, “I bring many reports to staff meetings, TAT meetings, and grade level meetings, so we can consistently review the data and determine needs and resources. We are data driven, but need to look at our structure to make change.”

As needs change the building schedule is flexible and the principal alters the schedule to meet the needs of students, doing so in coordination with the building reading specialist. Not every classroom receives the same amount of support; it is based on
student need, with the principal listening to teacher needs for support in planning literacy interventions and instruction. Ongoing dialogue and communication with the building principal is instrumental in allocating resources, time, and personnel to meet student needs in literacy.

Focus group members indicated through communication with the principal, he works to provide the resources and time necessary. Participant 2 explained, “We have a great deal of communication about whether or not we think something in our building is working. We sit down and look at pros and cons, student achievement, and through one-on-one and group conversations, we make changes.” The building principal explains that, “communication is ongoing through the day and the year; it helps hold us accountable to our expectations and student success in literacy.”

An example provided by the focus group centered on Reading Recovery. Both first grade teachers are trained Reading Recovery teachers. This program requires one-on-one instruction for up to one hour per day. Both teachers felt the need to work with their classroom for that hour, not using another teacher to teach their children. Professional development supports were brought in to train additional staff members, allowing the classroom teachers to remain in the classroom. The building principal provided the funding in the school budget to hire the two additional staff members and provide the training, listening to the voice of the first grade team. Participant 2 repeated, “He is open to suggestions from teachers, given it is doable and research-based.” The group states that following the implementation of a new practice or strategy, the building leadership team for literacy will sit down together, with principal participation, to evaluate the effectiveness on student achievement. “We have high expectations for our
students, and our principal has high expectations for us. But we do it together and I think that makes the difference.”

In summary, the profile of the principal at First Elementary breaks down as follows across the four sub-units of analysis related to leadership of the literacy program in the school:

1. Communication is ongoing through active engagement between the building principal and faculty at First Elementary. Through observations and walkthroughs, teachers and the principal discuss literacy instruction and practices observed, sharing feedback and recommendations. Additional communication occurs through peer-to-peer interactive professional development, and observation. Expectations and practices for literacy instruction are communicated through the school improvement plan, as well as district initiatives. This communication carries over into Teacher Assistance Team meetings, where individual student progress is analyzed and recommendations for interventions are made. The principal is active in this process and is present at all TAT meetings.

2. Support from the building principal comes in a variety of ways to enhance literacy instruction. The principal is supportive of teacher leadership, professional development, and teacher innovation in instruction. There is a level of trust conveyed upon the teachers. The principal also seeks to obtain additional materials and resources for students, and works to create a building schedule to implement reading interventions and literacy instruction. The principal allows teachers to make professional decisions concerning changes in literacy instruction and supports teacher judgment based upon student need.
3. Management occurs through observation and walkthroughs by the building principal, but also happens through discussion and reflection with individual teachers following the collection of observation data. The principal collects literacy data in multiple forms, to determine successful programming, and to make recommendations for changes in instruction regarding literacy.

4. Evaluation of literacy is ongoing through data collected at benchmark periods throughout the school year. Prior to the conclusion of the school year, the reading school improvement team, which includes the building principal, evaluates the collected assessments to determine student achievement in reading to make recommendations for the upcoming school year. The principal also collects anecdotal information through walkthroughs and observations to assist the building in determining successful practices in reading instruction and these pieces are relayed to the team as well as district officials.

First Elementary Principal Leadership Themes

Following focus group and principal interviews, literacy instruction observations, and review of collected documentation, several themes emerge from the study of First Elementary School.

Teacher leadership in driving school improvement is paramount to the success of literacy instruction and student achievement in First Elementary School. Teacher leadership is fostered through the communication, support, management, and evaluation of the building principal. Teachers work collaboratively at and across grade levels, reaching out to specials teachers, intervention specialists, and administration for guidance, resources, support, and program implementation. The teacher directs decisions
in the classroom and works collaboratively with the building administrator for support in their classroom instructional model. Teachers at First Elementary are not required to use a basal reading system, but are afforded the opportunity to use materials necessary to teach the CCSS for reading.

The ownership in the classroom provided by the principal allows flexibility for teachers to capitalize upon the teachable moments, diving deeper into instruction. The principal believes in the teachers and their professional abilities to direct sound instructional practices in the classroom, supporting their decisions, and working collaboratively with them.

Teachers meet to support other teachers and observe new instructional practices proven to be successful in other classrooms. This opportunity for innovation holds teachers accountable for student learning in literacy and facilitates continued professional development, and implementation of research based instructional and intervention strategies and practices. The principal, to help teachers learn from one another, “building team” in an already successful school building, embraces in-house learning and professional development.

Finally, data tells the story. Observing higher student achievement in learning the building is aware of current levels of student academic progress and can celebrate the work the building has put forth to raise student achievement. The building principal is knowledgeable about students, their levels of reading and the interventions they receive. Using the data, the principal works in conjunction with teachers to set goals for reading achievement, provides celebrations, and suggestions for future growth in literacy. Data is presented and shared by the building principal, but also by teacher leadership at grade
team meetings, TAT meetings, staff meetings, and district school improvement teams.

The principal at First Elementary has taken a backseat with his eyes on the driver seat, affording teachers the opportunities to teach and to make decisions to best implement sound literacy instructional practices in their classrooms.

The overarching themes present in the communication, support, management, and evaluation of the building principal at First Elementary are current knowledge of student reading performance, providing opportunities for teacher leadership, goal setting with students and teachers surrounding reading, peer-to-peer professional development support models, collaboration, discussion and evaluation of reading data, and allowing teachers to take ownership for instruction based upon professional judgment and current levels of students progress in reading. Table 6 demonstrates the themes discovered through the collected documentation.

Table 6
Discovered Themes at First Elementary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Elementary</th>
<th>Focus Group Interview</th>
<th>Principal Interview</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Reading</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Leadership</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Setting</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-to-Peer Professional Development</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Use</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Ownership</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Second Elementary

Receiving the MDE Reward school status in 2014, Second Elementary is *Beating the Odds*. The elementary school tested at the 67th percentile, outperforming their peer group by 30%. The demographic data of the school reflects the following: current enrollment is at 266 students. The school has been restructured in the past five years, changing from the district intermediate school to a K-5 school. Approximately 56% of the student population is white, 27% African American, 8% identify as Two or More races, 6% Hispanic, and 3% American Indian. Second Elementary School has seen a steady decline in student enrollment since 2010 when school enrollment topped at 337. Figure 6 shows the historical data for student enrollment at Second Elementary.

![Figure 6. Second Elementary Enrollment Data 1988–2013](image)

Located in a rural area of southwestern Michigan, in a larger school district with current enrollment figures at 2,258, Second Elementary is located 15 minutes from the Indiana border. Second Elementary is considered a neighborhood school located in the city center. The majority of students at Second Elementary walk, or are transported by
parents to and from school. The district houses four elementary schools, a middle school, high school, and alternative education center. During the past several years, restructuring efforts have changed grade configurations and the district has closed two schools due to lower enrollment numbers. At Second Elementary, the building has 26 teachers: two or three teachers at each grade level (K-5), special teachers for physical education, art, music, Title I, and migrant education. Additional staff members at the building also include five paraprofessionals to support special education, Title I, and migrant education, one secretary, and one custodian. Table 7 shows the demographic data of teachers currently working at Second Elementary:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Ed.</th>
<th>Average Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Average Years at this Building</th>
<th>Service Lead Teacher/SIP Chair</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA 44%</td>
<td>12.2 years</td>
<td>6.3 years</td>
<td>44% Yes</td>
<td>100% White</td>
<td>89% Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA/M.Ed 56%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>56% No</td>
<td></td>
<td>11% Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The current building principal has served at Second Elementary for the past seven years. Prior to her leadership role, she served in a variety of teaching capacities in the school district. She has 13 years of teaching experience, including 9 years in kindergarten, 2 years in elementary music, and additional years as a Title I reading teacher, and one year as a 6th grade math teacher. As a former student in the district, she expressed her understanding of the changing community and how the environmental impact, loss of business, higher unemployment, and changing community demographics have impacted student enrollment at Second Elementary and throughout the school district. She has earned a masters degree in educational leadership.
Second Elementary Interview Findings

The teacher focus group for Second Elementary consisted of six building teachers selected by the building principal for their leadership in literacy and the time they have been assigned to Second Elementary. During the previous years of district restructuring many of the teachers currently working at Second Elementary were displaced from other schools in the district (due to low enrollment numbers) causing the elimination of sections at their respective buildings. The teachers included in this focus group have been at Second Elementary since the arrival of the building principal. Of the five teachers, four were female, one was male. Four teachers were general education classroom teachers, representing kindergarten, first, second, and fourth grades. One teacher serves as the Title I Reading Recovery teacher and the other works in the special education program.

Examining the practice of literacy instruction at Second Elementary the expectations are high beginning in kindergarten. The building faculty has committed to developing pacing guides at all grade levels, including benchmark criteria for all students. Second Elementary benchmarks all students three times per year. They use MLPP, NWEA Measures of Academic Progress, Slosson Word Lists, Sound-Symbol hearing tests, Fountas and Pinnell Running Records, one-minute fluency reads, and dictation. The building has committed to a 90-minute literacy block, in all grades every day. The time is created through the schedule developed by the building principal. The principal explains, “Our schedule is an evolving process, looking at needs and who needs assistance. When we see which children need the greatest supports, we provide the
personnel and time, working around our specials schedule.” Second Elementary shares a physical education, music and art teacher with another school in the district, therefore these times are locked at the beginning of the year. Teachers schedule their literacy times around these predetermined times. The support of intervention time comes in 30-minute blocks in addition to the core reading instruction.

The literacy intervention process at Second Elementary begins with a focus on the bottom 20%. Participant 3 shares, “We look at the bottom 20% during our data review which occurs before interventions begin in the fall. We look at the variety of assessments and we service the lowest of the low, scheduling Reading Recovery students in first grade as a priority.” The reading leadership team meets following benchmark collection days, and the use of interventions and determination of resources falls into the hands of teachers, the experts of the building.

Teachers explain the principal will work in conjunction with classroom teachers who are assigning interventions by asking questions such as, “What about this student? Do you think this is a fluency issue?” but she provides no mandates for service times or the program to be used. The principal states, “I am no longer the expert in reading. The teachers are the experts and I take a backseat, supporting and believing in their decisions to provide intervention and instruction.” The literacy interventions used in the building exist as push-in, pullout, and small group instruction. The need for additional personnel to assist in delivering these interventions is the priority for Second Elementary and the “crafty” use of school budgets, and additional federal funding play an important role in determining these personnel needs for the school according to the building principal.
The principal explains when extra funding is available for the building through Title I or 31A, she uses the funds to support hours for additional support, “we don’t need stuff, stuff doesn’t teach children, teachers teach children.” The focus of support for the literacy program comes in the form of additional staff for after school tutoring, bringing in retired teachers for a few hours each day to support guided reading in the classroom, or staff the library. Teachers express gratitude for the additional staff members. Participant 2 explains, “I can run smaller groups and provide more focused instruction, when I have an extra set of hands.” The manpower to work in literacy is supported by all faculty. The principal reiterates, “it takes people, and we believe in having all hands on deck to work with our students, especially in reading.” The principal supports and schedules extra personnel throughout the year. This is done to meet the needs of students and the intervention and reading schedules of the classroom teachers. The focus group explains, with the principal providing additional manpower, they are able to focus on school goals in reading.

The team at Second Elementary began teaching literacy with a “laser focus” on student achievement and results. As a collaborative group they launched into MiBLSi (Michigan Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative) several years ago, believing that the management of a school building, eliminating student behavioral issues, would increase student achievement in all areas, specifically reading. Teachers noted that the change in climate and the culture of the building exploded in the last few years, allowing for the building team to focus on academics, with reading a priority. The participants in the focus group noted that the principal supports ideas and finds a way to unite the group, but we all have a voice.
“Year after year we have a focus that is chosen by the team” the principal states, this year the focus has been on guided reading instruction. Second Elementary began looking at the core components of guided reading instruction and what it should look like through consensus. The group compiled a rubric (Table 8) to assess personal guided reading instruction in the classrooms and this has been a framework throughout the year. The previous year (2013–2014) the pilot was initiated. Developing the consistency has been “instrumental in bringing everyone on the same page for teaching reading. We can evaluate our own work and make changes or recommendations through dialogue with colleagues and our principal,” explains Participant 1.

The rubric for guided reading is used during teacher work time, collaborative planning, staff meetings, and during principal walkthroughs and observations where guided reading instruction is occurring. Results collected and areas marked by individuals and the administrator serve as action areas, which are then used to direct in-house professional development. Participant 1 states, “she leads with the question, is there anything I could do to help you. When we talk about teachers using the model in their classrooms, The principal finds coverage for us to go and observe, so we can take these pieces back to our classroom”. The in-house professional development model at Second Elementary helps to develop the consistency with instruction, opening more dialogue at and across grade levels, serving as the catalyst for the reading leadership team.

During monthly reading meetings, the leadership team consisting of Title I, Reading Recovery Specialists, and the principal review building data to assess progress
Table 8

Second Elementary Guided Reading Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Level of Performance</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
<th>Minimally Effective</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Highly Effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td></td>
<td>My books and other materials are not enough to teach using guided reading.</td>
<td>I have enough books to practice my teaching but I have not constructed a level set yet.</td>
<td>I have a leveled set of books.</td>
<td>I have a leveled, well-organized set of books.. I have an area established for guided reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td>I have not established centers, routines, or reading work for my students to use during my reading time.</td>
<td>I have established some centers, routines, or reading work for my small group lessons. I can work with a group with some interruptions.</td>
<td>I have established many centers or a variety of reading work that students can work on independently during my small group lessons. I can teach my groups with very few interruptions and I have routines in place.</td>
<td>I have a variety of appropriate activities in centers and reading work. Almost all children work independently so I can work without interruptions with small groups. My routine is well established and predictable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping</td>
<td></td>
<td>I am just beginning to group children. Usually I teach whole group.</td>
<td>I have formed and met with some groups in guided reading and am beginning to observe them.</td>
<td>I have established several groups for reading. I take regular running records for student progress.</td>
<td>My groups are formal on the basis of systematic observation and using running records.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Decisions</td>
<td></td>
<td>I am not sure how to make teaching decisions and I am concerned that my teaching points do not connect with what my children know.</td>
<td>I am making some good teaching points and am observing movement. I need to work on decision making using running records.</td>
<td>I am generally pleased with my observation during reading but have areas to improve I am observing students making progress.</td>
<td>My decisions are well timed and allow children to use what they know. Children show evidence of strategic processing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

in reading. Participant 2 explains, “When we review data, we review our process, and the movement of students on assessments,” this is when additional instructional changes are made and provides a focus for upcoming walkthroughs and observations by the administrator. The principal explains the walkthrough process. “Walkthroughs are unscheduled, but when I visit during reading times, I look for engagement, research-based reading strategies, and the use of small group guided reading, outside of whole group instruction,” the results are shared with teachers on an individual level and
discussed as a whole group during monthly staff meetings. The observations provide our
focus on “uncompromising” results.

The principal logs all walkthroughs and observations through an Excel document
that includes individual teacher goals for reading. She notes each time she visits, the
duration, the subject area, and creates a link to the walkthrough results, emailing these to
teachers. The goal is to complete seven walkthroughs for each teacher, outside of two
formal observations during the school year, one of which must be centered on reading.
The principal, “Within 24 hours I have them come to me or I go to them, and we say,
Let’s talk about the lesson, what went well, what are you struggling with, and here’s what
I saw that went well, and what you’re struggling with.” The purpose of the increase in
walkthroughs is to open communication with teachers and administration on the teaching
of reading. The use of the walkthrough tool has created a “community of trust” with
teachers and administration.

Ultimately the evaluation of reading and literacy instruction comes through data
collection and student achievement results in reading. Throughout the school year, goals
are established for students, teachers, and the school building. The principal states, “We
report out on the success of our goals, so everyone takes pride in the accomplishments of
others.” The team at Second Elementary celebrates reading achievement through
monthly festivities including school wide assemblies, office rewards for students who
come down to read to the principal or secretary, visits from local high school athletes,
and community members. The focus group shares the celebrations around reading. “We
have lots of celebrations, we have family reading nights, visiting readers from the
Council for Aging, prizes for students, March is Reading Month activities, and teachers
celebrate classroom goals in the classroom,” the culture is centered on reading. Focus
group participants added:

“Our culture, the principal, she sets the tone, and she believes we are the
best staff in the district. I think we not only have the support from our
leader, but from one another, and we are always looking at ways to
improve. We are all approachable. I think the culture is huge. We are not
afraid to express our ideas and thoughts, we have flexibility, and there is a
level of trust afforded by our principal, she allows us to use our toolbox,
she hasn’t forgotten what it’s like to be a teacher”.

Second Elementary Principal Leadership Themes

Through careful observation, and interview completion several themes of
principal leadership emerged at Second Elementary. These themes centered on student
success through data collection, teachers as leaders with instruction, assessment, and
accountability, and the sense of trust between teachers and administration.

The purpose and drive for the team at Second Elementary is directed by a
consensus view that all children will succeed in literacy. The collaborative group
developed and devised a literacy program centered around the needs of students, with a
focus on providing small group guided reading instruction. The role of the principal in
the process was to unite the teaching team, develop the culture, and to open
communication around what is critically needed to improve student reading achievement.
Teachers serve as the leaders, while the principal supports and communicates the
building needs by facilitating open conversations around literacy and providing the
resources to the teaching team.

Needing access to more time and personnel, the principal has allocated funding
for people, not materials, to lower the student to teacher ratio during reading instruction,
evaluating the effects of increasing personnel on student reading achievement. The principal listens to the teaching faculty and learns from them to facilitate and direct a comprehensive literacy program at Second Elementary.

The use of walkthroughs and observations opened the conversations at Second Elementary, so teachers are reaching out to other teachers, who successfully implement building strategies and practices aligned with the school improvement plan. All members of the faculty are vested in the reading achievement of students and the flexibility for teachers to observe other professionals in the building, the professional decision-making to use materials students will benefit from most, and opportunities for the collective group to review and discuss data are driving the literacy instruction. Thus, the teaching faculty feels supported in the school environment, the culture is positive, and the student needs are being met at their current level of academic progress.

The building has established a shared leadership model in literacy education; there are experts in-house who lead the masses in sound instructional practices. The principal developed this culture conducive to learning by establishing a “trust” level among all building professionals and Second Elementary is thriving as a Reward School, *Beating the Odds*.

In summary, the profile of the principal at Second Elementary breaks down as follows across the four sub-units of analysis related to leadership of the literacy program in the school:

1. Communication is a powerful tool uniting the team at Second Elementary. Principals and teachers alike, are engaging in student centered conversations, regarding data, core literacy instruction, interventions, successes, and walkthrough and
observations. Teachers rely upon the open communication of the administrator when reflecting on their teaching practices in literacy to support student learning.

2. Support from the administrator comes in a multitude of facets. The use of monies to provide personnel and materials in reading instruction in the classroom is recognized by the teaching faculty. The fluidity of the building schedule to provide ample time for literacy instruction and targeted interventions based on student needs is another area supported by the administrator through collaborative efforts with the building faculty.

Teachers are also supported and encouraged by the building principal to observe the “experts” in house allowing for building professional development. The professional development is supported by the building administrator providing time, classroom coverage, and follow-up meetings to review the observed practices.

3. Management of literacy initiatives is completed through data collection at benchmark periods, mandated walkthroughs and observations by the building administrator, where following walkthroughs and observations discussions occur regarding the implementation of literacy practices, and how the principal can continue to support teacher learning, professional development, and student achievement.

Through shared leadership and decision-making the building teaching faculty also manages their own student progress in literacy and shares the information with their grade team, administrator, and building school improvement team. The building principal attends all meetings regarding school improvement to work collaboratively and support the implementation of the literacy program.
4. Evaluation of student achievement in literacy occurs through the collection of benchmark data four times per year. The building faculty also evaluates their practices monthly at staff meetings, reading school improvement meetings, and discussions with colleagues, including the building principal. The ultimate evaluation of student academic progress comes from the analysis of MEAP results.

Table 9
Discovered Themes at Second Elementary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second Elementary</th>
<th>Focus Group Interview</th>
<th>Principal Interview</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Leadership</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-to-Peer Professional Development</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Use</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture/Trust</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Third Elementary

Third Elementary received the MDE Reward school status in 2014, following recognition as a National Distinguished Title I School and a Michigan Academic Champion School. Third Elementary has been recognized for Beating the Odds, based on high performing status, outperforming their peer group on compiled demographic data. In the fall of 2014, the school enrollment was 328 students. Approximately 39% of the student population is African American, 37% white, 12% Hispanic, 6% identify as Two or More races, and 5% Asian. Figure 7 shows the historical demographic data for Third Elementary beginning in 1988.
The school is located in a suburban area outside of Grand Rapids, Michigan, in a school district with current enrollment figures at 8,588. The district houses an early childhood center, ten elementary schools, three middle schools, a freshman center, a 10-12 high school, and an alternative education center. The current superintendent is in his second year with the district, having served as an Assistant Superintendent in the same district. At Third Elementary, the building has 17 teachers; one to two teachers at each grade level (K-5), special teachers for physical education, art, music, and Title I. Additional staff members at the building also include four paraprofessionals to support Title I math and reading programs, two administrative assistants, after school coordinator, social worker, and behavior interventionist. Table 10 shows the demographic data of teachers currently working at First Elementary.

The principal at Third Elementary is entering her third year with the building, her tenth year in education. Her classroom teaching experience was spent in fourth grade at
Table 10

Professional Staff Demographic Data – Third Elementary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Ed.</th>
<th>Average Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Average Years at this Building</th>
<th>Service Lead Teacher/SIP Chair</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA 30%</td>
<td>21.6 years</td>
<td>5.3 years</td>
<td>20% Yes</td>
<td>100% White</td>
<td>72% Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA/M.Ed 70%</td>
<td>27.1 years</td>
<td>6.2 years</td>
<td>80% No</td>
<td>100% White</td>
<td>28% Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

another building in the district, where she also completed her student teaching assignment. She has a Masters degree in Educational Leadership.

Third Elementary Interview Findings

The focus group for Third Elementary included three classroom teachers, representing first, second, and fourth grades. The elementary team at Third Elementary continues to move towards higher student achievement in reading as evidenced from the MEAP scores collected and analyzed from previous years. The team implemented a MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Support) model within the past four years to assist students with proficiency in reading and mathematics. The literacy model provides time for students to master the skills necessary to be effective readers, with a goal that by third grade, students will be reading at grade level proficiency. This model for reading instruction and intervention is a partnership, involving all building staff members, including the building principal.

At Third Elementary students receive a 90-minute block of reading, followed by a 60-minute intervention time, based upon their current level of academic progress and need. The building faculty does not use a selected basal reading series for core instruction; they use professional judgment, using a series of leveled trade books to teach
CCSS for reading. The reading intervention time is for all students, providing instruction at Tier I, Tier II, or Tier III, based upon data collected. Tiers are determined based on student data collection and previous history with interventions. Much of the literacy program involves district initiatives such as, leveled texts, trade books, SRI (Scholastic Reading Indicator), Four Blocks Model of instruction, Zoophonics, and the Gradual Release Model of instruction), but individual buildings are responsible for tailoring district goals to meet their individual school needs, developing their school improvement plan. Participant 1 explains, “The district initiatives are there, but then the principal, each principal has say in shaping the school plan, and our principal has chosen to do reading intervention groups, specifically using Lindamood-Bell.” The decisions to integrate this chosen intervention were a partnership between administration and teaching faculty, following a dialogue around practices to benefit the students at Third Elementary.

The partnership begins with open communication throughout grade levels and across grade levels, at the building and district level. Following the initial benchmark of student achievement in the fall, the building academic team will meet to review data. The academic team includes members of the teaching faculty and the building administrator. Participant 3, “We really look at individual kids during our meetings, our principal helps with the data wall and the planning of our groups. She asks, “What else do we need to help this student? Do we need more time or changes in the schedule?”

The active participation of the principal in the data collection and review is well-received, Participant 3 shares, “She is open to taking feedback on the interventions used and how they are going to be implemented. She is on top of the data.” This open communication between the academic leadership team, and true understanding of student data and
achievement, helps the principal with the formation of the building schedule to foster the additional intervention time for each grade level.

“Our schedule with the interventions is a nonnegotiable that we have to put into place,” explained the principal. The building prioritizes their schedule following receipt of the district schedule that involves sharing specials teachers (art, PE, and music) with other district schools. The focus is to provide lower elementary teachers with reading and intervention time in the morning, followed by upper elementary teachers and students with reading and interventions in the afternoon. The principal shares, “the priority is to provide our youngest kiddos with the more intensive time to get their reading up to standard.” The implementation of the MTSS model at Third Elementary has shown fewer interventions on the Tier II and Tier III for upper elementary students, due to their building focus of early intervention in reading.

Establishing priorities is the framework for Third Elementary. Weekly communication from the building principal includes lesson look-fors in reading instruction for the week. The principal states, “The goal is to get to every teacher, every week. I give them specifics, what I’m looking for but generally they know it will be based on school improvement pieces or district goals, such as the gradual release model,” and teachers comment on the weekly communication and observations, participant 1 explains “I appreciate the information she collects during the walkthroughs, often it’s something that I am working on or need more support.” Teachers meet following the walkthrough with the administrator to have an open dialogue regarding the observations in the classroom. “I’ll ask the teachers, what they thought went well and how I can help them in this area I observed,” explains the principal, and teachers take the time to
participate and reflect on the conversations. Participant 2 states, “These communications have created a community. She (our principal) remembers what it’s like to be a teacher, she hasn’t forgotten that and she wants to help and support us.” These conversations carry over into weekly staff meetings, weekly grade level teams, and district teams. The information is used to provide professional development for teachers throughout the school year, including REACH days, scheduled in the district calendar four times per year. REACH days are times for district or building professional development.

Professional development opportunities are an area where the principal at Third Elementary continues to support, manage, and grow the reading program. During REACH days, the district will provide optional professional development, but building administrators are allowed to schedule and devise professional development needed at their respective sites. The principal explains, “During the year our collaborative study groups with district coaches will work with individual teachers or buildings. They are very knowledgeable. They will model lessons in reading and provide time for teachers to ask questions and reflect on the lesson.”

The work of the collaborative teams will report to the principal on options for professional development during REACH days and the programs will then be tailored to meet the needs of the building. Some recent REACH day professional development opportunities included guided reading instruction, student feedback, Lindamood-Bell, and iReady technology for reading. Professional development opportunities for teachers exist outside of REACH days.

Teachers are also afforded the opportunity to observe other teachers in the building and in the district. The principal states, “I feel we learn vastly, by observing
other teachers. We have a lot of strong teachers in the district. Why not keep our
teachers in-house observing exactly what we want them to be doing?” Teachers echoed
this sentiment when reflecting on reading instruction. Participant 2, “She (our principal)
has communicated her willingness and openness too, if there’s someone in the district
that you’ve heard is really making strides in guided reading or comfortable talk, she
wants to know and she arranges coverage for your classroom, and then time for you to
follow up with that teacher,” participants with in-house observation and professional
development are also encouraged to share with their grade team and the greater school
team during monthly staff meetings. The reporting out to the staff provides a check and
balance system for the management of literacy instruction presented to students at Third
Elementary.

Managing the literacy program and the implementation of interventions comes in
various forms. The building has a reading leadership team that meets weekly. The team
includes teachers and the building principal. The time is set aside to review student
progress monitoring and to allow fluidity among students who may move to new
interventions based upon their achievement. Participant 1 says “We watch the success of
our students and following weekly meetings they may move to another intervention.
Often they are in an intervention for four to six weeks, before a move, but they may be
there longer.” Meeting weekly allows the team, to review the implementation of
programs and evaluate their success. The principal notes, “The expectations and the
partnership in literacy and the interventions we use create a need for us to sit down and
review the data. We monitor it weekly and sit down for formal reviews quarterly, the
data tells us what we need to do differently.” These meetings are a focus for evaluation of the literacy program.

Further evaluation and management of the literacy instruction and programming exists through walkthroughs and observations. Teachers set goals at the beginning of the year and one of the goals is focused on literacy. Participant 3 explains, “She checks with us a lot throughout the year on our goals, asking for updates, she always asks how’s it going, what else I need.” According to the teaching faculty, “she is always asking what resources we need, how she can support our teaching, our intervention groups, and she is willing to sit down and review them with us, or to revise the schedule, she encourages us.” Prior to formal observations, the principal relays that several walkthroughs have occurred and that one of the two formal observations must be in reading.

The observation is a collaborative effort between teachers and the building principal. The principal states, “I see their observation as my observation, wondering how else I can help with their instruction, what else they might need from me, this helps us sit down and have an open conversation around instruction.” During this open conversation the principal and the teacher discuss the lesson, but also what the data or assessment shows from that lesson and what next steps might be instructionally. The principal shares, “I see myself as a teaching partner in the classroom with each and every teacher. It’s about everybody, everybody working together for every child.” Third Elementary principal views teachers as leaders with instruction and allows and encourages the flexibility and creativity in teaching reading, walking with them side by side.
The principal also notes that teachers have the freedom in the classroom to make instructional choices and decisions. She highlights that she wants teachers who are willing to take risks in teaching. “I was a teacher too. I’ve been there done that, it’s going to be ugly, but unless you try it and take risks, you’re not going to be pushing forward and get to the level we need to be”.

Third Elementary Leadership Findings

Overwhelmingly, literacy instruction at Third Elementary School is a partnership among teaching faculty, students, parents, and the building principal. The vision and design for literacy instruction at Third Elementary School is designed through a consensus model. Feedback from all sources is used to put together the needs of the literacy program and to bring them to fruition.

The building schedule is formed with input from all stakeholders, with priorities for early intervention first, specifically students in grades kindergarten, first and second. The schedule is flexible, with the principal relying on open communication from staff members to advocate for their students and literacy program. The intervention (MTSS) model is coupled with the core reading instruction and the principal takes an active role in working with teachers on research-based instruction, providing time, resources, and personnel. Using all necessary resources available the building academic and reading team can review and process all student reading data on an individual level, with the principal facilitating the conversation, directing attention to student needs in reading, exemplifying the school wide commitment to reading, solidifying the partnership at Third Elementary School.
The teachers take the lead with classroom instruction, making accommodations and differentiating instruction for students with limited direction from the building principal. Teachers feel valued, trusted, and are seen as leaders in instruction and consummate professionals. Establishing goals early in the year, specifically for reading instruction, teachers have a direction for improving and tailoring their craft in literacy, and the building principal provides periodic checkpoints for success and assistance.

In summary, the profile of the principal at Third Elementary breaks down as follows across the four sub-units of analysis related to leadership of the literacy program in the school:

1. Communication from the principal to instructional faculty at Third Elementary is an open process. Teachers and the building principal communicate daily, regarding interventions, student progress, instructional walkthroughs, and observations. Through monthly staff meetings, data meetings, and quarterly REACH days, the team at Third Elementary shares and processes what is working with literacy instruction and how they can continue their professional learning to enhance the instruction of literacy across classrooms and grade levels. The principal is open to discuss reading instruction and works collaboratively with all building professionals to improve practice. Focusing on what works for students. The principal at Third Elementary, participates in all data review meetings, and shares her professional knowledge and experience with the building faculty.

2. Support comes in many forms at Third Elementary. The building principal crafts a schedule to promote reading instruction, focusing on early intervention for grades K-2. The building schedule is flexible and the additional supports for materials and
personnel, come through discussions with all building faculty. The principal utilizes this information to design a schedule to accommodate blocks of reading instruction, interventions for each grade, and the placement of support staff. The principal is supportive of the MTSS model, where all students receive intervention based upon their current level of progress.

Additionally the principal supports the professional development of all teachers, by providing time for each to observe “master” teachers in the building or in the district. The principal will arrange coverage for teachers to conduct these observations and then will allow additional time for them to reflect and conference with one another.

3. Management of reading instruction at Third Elementary is a collaborative approach. The principal works to establish parameters and protocols for instruction, with the reading school improvement team. The materials, procedures, and instruction are managed through the collection of student achievement data, both at benchmark and progress monitoring periods. This data collection drives the building schedule and the allocation of funding for additional materials such as, leveled readers, technology software, personnel, and professional development.

Weekly walkthroughs from the building administrator with a “focus” area for literacy instruction provide guidance and framework for classroom teachers to integrate into their instructional design. Communication following these walkthroughs provides the reflection time for teachers to critique their own instruction in the classroom and the principal uses these conversations and walkthrough observations to tailor the next week’s focus.
4. Evaluation is collaborative. The team, including the building principal, reviews the data collected and the effectiveness of interventions on student progress. The building collects data and students receiving a Tier II or III intervention are visually captured on the Third Elementary data wall. The data wall is housed in the principal’s office, where intervention meetings take place. The data wall allows the principal to monitor students and interventions occurring in the building.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Third Elementary</th>
<th>Focus Group Interview</th>
<th>Principal Interview</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Leadership</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-to-Peer Professional Development</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Use</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Reading</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The use of walkthroughs and teacher observations serve as an additional evaluation of literacy practices. The focus areas established weekly, and assist teachers in providing a framework for expectations and implementation of research based approaches to teaching reading. Some focus areas for the year included; feedback, student engagement, guided reading instruction, language experience stories, and questioning in literacy. The building school improvement team uses the information
collected from student achievement data, teacher feedback, professional development, interventions, and the building principal to craft the school improvement goals, objectives, strategies, and activities in reading for the following school year.

Summary of Findings

Analysis of the interview data, coupled with observations and artifacts provided, four dominant themes that emerged from each of the cases. These themes emerged through participant conversations and examples, through principal observation and interview, literacy observations, and appeared as significant behaviors and characteristics of principal leadership in literacy. Of the three focus groups, with 14 participants involved, each focus group member highlighted the behaviors of their principals.

Cross-Case Analysis

The themes emerging from the individual case studies demonstrated principal behaviors and characteristics as they related to (1) Trust in Professional Practice, (2) Encouragement for Growth, (3) Shared Leadership in Literacy Instruction, and (4) Collaborative Data Review for Student Success. These themes carried through interviews, observations, and artifacts collected. Table 12 demonstrates the collected themes emerging following cross case analysis from the three elementary schools included in this study.
Leadership Theme One: Trust in Professional Practice

Throughout each case study teachers commented on the trust put into their classroom instruction from the building administrator.

One thing I really appreciate is the flexibility and the freedom I have in my literacy instruction. I’m not tied to one specific curriculum approach or material. I’m trusted, as a teacher to do what I think is best for my students, and can vary this from year to year, depending on my students and their needs. Our principal believes in us and she is present when we need her, she’s always available.

This sense of trust emanated from all participants across cases. The principal at each respective site commented on their belief in their teaching faculty and building teams to make the instructional decisions to best meet the needs of the students. At Second Elementary, the principal noted, “The teachers are the experts, I am no longer the expert, and that is alright with me,” she further discusses that instructional decisions are left to the teachers, as the group they will meet and review student achievement data, but she is always pleased at the results, and together they can celebrate and learn from one another.
“I am no longer the voice and take a backseat at times, when we meet to discuss the literacy achievement of our students, I know I have the right people making the decisions—sometimes I wonder how I turned into just the note taker?” This learning from each other is a powerful tool.

Learning from one another reflects another area of trust in colleagues, emerging as powerful principal leadership behaviors. In all cases, professional development for literacy instruction was delivered in house. First Elementary principal reports, “We learn from one another. When anyone wants to observe someone else, we make that a priority. We have experts in-house and we need to take advantage of their expertise.” The trust in the professional practice of colleagues, facilitating the opportunities for teachers to work and learn from one another demonstrates the trust these principals have in their teaching teams. Participants from Second Elementary stated, “She learns and works right beside us, learning from us in the classroom; that is huge for culture.” The principals at these schools demonstrate the confidence in their faculty and in turn, this confidence is passed down onto students.

Trusting in teachers, translates to believing in students. Each of these elementary schools designed in collaboration an intervention system to meet the literacy needs of all students. Orchestrating by a leadership team, all members have an active voice in the intervention system. Principals at these schools believe and trust that teachers will be accountable and responsible for students meeting benchmarks in reading, demonstrating that every student is our student. This trust builds a collective responsibility to providing a comprehensive system to teaching reading.

I think for me one of the things I that I really, strongly appreciate is the focus on learning from one another, so we can focus our teaching towards
our students. The fact that we have time to sit together, to generate ideas, shows that we really are a team, and that we believe in our students.

Leadership Theme Two: Encouragement for Growth

Building a program for literacy education encapsulates a variety of instructional practices and methodologies. Throughout the investigation and inquiry into these cases, the encouragement from building principals for teaching faculty to grow in their craft, emerged as a central theme, focusing instruction intentionally on student achievement and growth. “I appreciate the time she (the principal) provides us to learn from one another. I have always operated under the idea that two heads are better than one, and I know I don’t know how to do everything. I am encouraged to observe others, watch demo lessons, and I constantly bring things away.”

Learning from one another in-house, develops the sense of a learning community. “We’re willing to let each other into our classrooms to observe and see what’s working.” Each of these principals encouraged observing other teachers, master teachers, and provided time for these individuals to sit down together and reflect on what they could take away and use in their classrooms. “She supports us in getting the training we need or when training will be available to us.” They highlighted that proven practices and strategies, should be led and modeled by teachers.

In discussions with the focus groups, they shared the support the principal provided in growing professionally. “Leadership and support is a big part of learning how to do things better.” Through targeted walkthroughs and observations of instruction, the open dialogue between teachers and administrators, drives teacher professional development and self-reflection of literacy instruction. Each of the case studies discussed
the building and principal’s commitment to literacy instruction. The care and support of
the administrator has been instrumental in allowing individual teachers to work on
instruction, independently in their classrooms, across grade levels, and throughout the
building.

Leadership Theme Three: Shared Leadership in Literacy Instruction

Decisions for instruction are the heart of every school. Shared decision-making is
at the core of these schools. Across these case studies, decisions reflecting changes in
curriculum, lesson design, and intervention is a team effort, with all voices heard. “A
variety of methods: scaffolding, shaping, connecting to prior knowledge, constructing
meaning, motivating students, and providing opportunities to learn have been considered
among the key components of best literacy practices”(Gambrell, Morrow, Neuman, &
Pressley, 1999). These pieces of sound instructional practices are evident in these
individual case studies. Teachers are allowed the freedom and flexibility to teach literacy
in a means and modality best suited to meet the needs of their students. “We are using
the precious time in our classrooms, to plan, and instruct. We are using the gradual
release model throughout out the building; it is an art to teaching, an art with share with
one another.”

Each of these buildings implement a strong, school improvement plan, but all
decisions are shared, from instructional resources, to time, to interventions that are
research-based, and all members of the school community, have the opportunity to
explore and share with the greater group. “We have a very close staff and we don’t need
to pull a meeting together for teachers to share their instruction in reading, they do it independently, as needs arise.”

Some needs for changes in instruction come by way of the building schedule. Principals work to change and alter schedules to assist teachers in developing the instructional time necessary to teach reading, “I’m sort of the facilitator of the schedule, looking to make everything work for the teachers, we do it by priorities, and those priorities are determined by our team.” Principals listen to the needs of the teaching faculty, make modifications, and look for feedback to the success of these scheduling changes. “I rely on them to tell me what’s working and what isn’t with our schedule, we share the responsibility.”

In addition to shared leadership, the schools included in this case study have implemented high expectations for all learners in literacy. “There is no reason a child can’t be learning at grade level when they leave kindergarten, we have high expectations and I appreciate that our principal, doesn’t back down from these.” Each of the case studies, foster a consistent, articulated curriculum, where teachers have choice in resources, but an expectation for student mastery is present for every student. They take pride, that each student is their student, all students are their students. This is seen heavily in the intervention programs implemented. All students in the schools studied, receive interventions in literacy based upon their current level of academic performance and area of need. Teachers share the responsibility by grouping students across classes, to provide the best intervention to meet their need. As a collective group, teachers and principal, they sit down and review the information collected to make instructional changes as necessary.
Leadership Theme Four: Collaborative Data Review for Student Success

Finally, it should come as no surprise that data would be the final leadership characteristic discussed by all groups. When sharing how the administrator evaluated and managed the literacy program, time after time, the groups reiterated the story the data tells. All schools work cohesively to review data and the principal is a constant player at the table when reviewing the reading data, assisting by asking questions, such as “What else do we need? What do our students need? Are there materials or scheduling changes?”

Each building included in this study organized a series of reading interventions following data collection in the fall. Subsequent data collection dates occur quarterly, but students receiving Tier II or Tier III interventions are progress monitored closely. The principal’s role in the data review is one of facilitator. “I know all of the data, can talk the data, and know where students are performing. The instructional decisions come from the teachers, my role is to plan and support for scheduling changes, materials and resources, or additional personnel.” Teachers applaud this role of the principals and value their willingness to step back and allow for teachers to make the instructional changes, based on the data collected. “I appreciate the time to sit down and review student data, and that our discussions have purpose when planning for interventions.”

The discussions around data have opened the doors of every classroom to every colleague. “It has been built a lot of trust with teachers, that we are having data conversations, and it shows us on the paper work, what is working.” Having collaborative meetings, reflecting on success of students, allows teachers and principals
alike to observe classrooms that are successful in obtaining high reading achievement. This serves as a catalyst to provide in-house professional development and observation opportunities for teachers. Reviewing the data allows for principals to manage and evaluate the effectiveness of the programming in literacy, not individually, but as a school community.

Chapter Summary

Four major principal leadership themes emerged from this study and those themes begin to provide a clearer picture of how principals can work collectively with teaching faculty to produce results in student reading achievement. Focus group and principal participants provided on-the-ground specific examples of leadership behaviors and characteristics for reading achievement at the elementary level. The lived experiences of these individuals provide insight about how the role of the principal might continue to evolve in leading literacy initiatives, in even the most struggling schools.

The consistently changing political scene, involving teacher and administrator accountability, students reading by third grade legislation, and unparalleled discrepancies in school funding all play a role in the changing face of education, but learning from successful principals and schools Beating the Odds, can help foster conversations around teaching reading, teaching reading differently, and involving all stakeholders, specifically the principal. Of the themes discovered, one can take from the findings, the sense of togetherness, implementing interventions, finding ways to support professional development and personal growth, and sharing leadership in a collaborative, team approach, with the principal as one factor in the equation. The findings from this study
can open and inform professional practice of elementary principals, concerning the impact of their behaviors on reading achievement, which is presented in Chapter V.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study will be highlighted in this chapter, followed by an examination and review of the five research questions used in this study and how they relate to the results. Implications of findings, suggestions for practice, limitations, recommendations for further research and conclusions are also provided in this chapter.

This research studied how principal behaviors and the on-the-ground practices influenced literacy instructional practices in their respective elementary buildings designated as Michigan Reward Schools Beating the Odds. The overall goal was to catalogue these behaviors and examine specific themes that are prevalent in principal leadership, specifically the support, communication, management, and evaluation of literacy practices. An instrumental case study approach was implemented to gain an understanding of the phenomenon within each case. The research was conducted to learn and understand the experiences of teaching faculty and building principals, as they described how they observed the building principal and how the principal viewed their own roles and responsibilities in literacy instruction.

The schools used in this case study are a small representation of elementary schools in Western Michigan, who are outperforming their peer groups, Beating the Odds, in reading achievement based on their schools demographics. The schools included in this study range in size from 200 to 328 students.
In this study, a series of interviews, both focus groups and principals were conducted with the focus group participants selected by the building principal. Participants in the focus group represented a variety of teaching roles, and possessed a vast array of experiences, but all were involved in the development of their respective school improvement plan, specifically in the area of reading. Following the interviews, observations of literacy instruction occurred at each school setting, and a collection of documents were gathered to learn more of the literacy instructional programming, student achievement data, and principal communication, management, and evaluation of the schools’ literacy program.

A summary of the major findings will be presented in this chapter, as well as how these findings reinforce or extend the literature. Implications of these findings, as well as recommendations, will be provided before the final conclusion.

Four major themes emerged from the study:

1. Trust in Professional Judgment
2. Encouragement for Growth
3. Shared Leadership in Literacy Instruction
4. Collaborative Data Review for Student Success.

These four themes suggest a series of professional practices for elementary principals to utilize in demonstrating greater literacy achievement in their respective buildings. Within all three case studies (focus groups and principals) expressed a partnership in the education of all children, none of the participants believed classroom instruction and principal leadership operated in a vacuum, but rather worked simultaneously. All participants of the focus group highlighted the important role the principal plays in
creating an environment focused on student achievement in reading, collaboration, and shared leadership.

Review of the Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to provide a comprehensive insight into the specific strategies principals use to communicate, manage, support, and evaluate literacy practices in schools designated Michigan Beating the Odds schools for reading achievement. The research study examined the principal’s role and behaviors in designing an instructional model, facilitating interactions with faculty, providing and participating in professional development, and enhancing current building practices in literacy instruction to increase student reading achievement.

Specifically, this study mapped out the variety of on-the-ground strategies these principals employ in each of the specific categories of literacy leadership that have emerged over multiple previous studies. In this way, this study begins cataloguing some of the adaptive work principals are doing in each of the established categories of literacy leadership to provide a more in-depth understanding of the situational work principals do to provide just the right balance of literacy leadership each school needs.

The study examined how the principals employ various means of providing teacher support; creating and sustaining communication about the literacy initiative; managing the implementation process (procedures, resources, processes); and monitoring and evaluating both the process of implementation and the outcomes of implementation.
Research Question 1

The initial research question focused on the principal’s role in shaping the literacy plan for the school. Specifically, the intent was to see how teachers in each focus group described the principal’s involvement in establishing the school improvement plan with literacy, and how they go about massaging the direction of the reading initiatives in the school programming.

All of the focus group members who participated in this study shared the importance of the principal in leading the direction. Many of them spoke about the previous experiences of their principals in both the classroom and their service in the principal’s role. They highlighted the successes of their administrators, as well as their content knowledge in the area of literacy. All of the principals included in this study believe in the school literacy initiatives and time spent on task with reading. All focus group participants explained that although they do not have a mandated 90 or 120 minute block to teach reading, they work to teach reading every day, throughout every subject area, and that literacy education is an important part of the school improvement plan in all content areas and cannot be taught in isolation. “Reading is complex, and teaching children to read is equally complex. The fact that children must do a lot of reading to become good readers however, is simple and straightforward” (Cunningham & Allington, 2011). The principals in this study encouraged a trust amongst their staffs to implement effective practices that the school could learn from to enhance their current professional practice, understanding children need to be reading throughout the day. “The exemplary elementary teachers recognized this critical aspect of instructional planning. Their students did more guided reading, more independent reading, more social studies and
science reading than students in less-effective classrooms” (Allington & Johnston, 2001). This information carried over into the development of the school improvement plan and instructional model for literacy.

Focus group participants commented on the principal’s knowledge in reading interventions, the establishment of the building schedule to accommodate intervention practices at all grade levels, scheduling requested professional developments, strategically in-house professional development in classrooms, where previous reading achievement was documented as highly effective, and their support for teacher leadership as instrumental in developing the school plan for literacy.

Research Question 2

In review of the second research question, the focus was on how principals communicate to staff and others concerning literacy initiatives and practices in the elementary classroom. The data collected was used to gain an insight into principal communication practices, models, and how this communication impacted reading instruction and student achievement.

Teachers collectively described ongoing communication with the building principal. All of the school sites, noted through monthly staff meetings, weekly student support meetings, quarterly data reviews, biweekly progress monitoring meetings, grade team meetings, and professional development opportunities, the communication from the building principal is ongoing. Teachers involved in this study expressed that most communication came in verbal form, but was not delivered as directives, but a two-way form of communication, coaching them in their professional practice. Teachers
expressed that although the public sees the principal as the instructional leader, in all schools visited in this study, it was explained that together they are the instructional leaders, and this was communicated to them through conversations and interactions with the principal.

Additional conversations with teachers occurred following walkthroughs and observations. In all cases, the principal completed more than the required amount of walkthroughs, provided a direction for what would be observed (through weekly memos, predetermined rubrics, or teacher directed goals), and the conversation following was a two-way conversation, with the principal and teacher sharing what went well, and additional areas for improvement. The communication from the principal is seen as professional, honest, and a partnership. The use of the walkthroughs and observations assisted the principal in setting direction for professional development opportunities, assisting with teacher goal development, and the direction of the entire school literacy plan.

Research Question 3

The third question was created to investigate how teachers see principals supporting the literacy instruction in the classroom and how these supports ultimately play into student achievement in reading.

The findings from the data illustrated the importance of the building schedule being flexible throughout the year. Teachers spoke of priorities in determining the schedule with intervention blocks, and the principals also commented that the schedule often is “tweaked” to provide additional support to students in different grade levels.
based on needs following the review of student achievement data. The schedule also involves reassigning support personnel to classrooms to assist with small group guided reading instruction, or additional pullout for targeted interventions. Teachers spoke about feeling at ease to approach their respective principals when additional supports were needed in the schedule or with personnel.

The need for resources or instructional materials is another area the data collection pointed as a principal strength in supporting literacy. At times throughout the year additional funds are targeted for resources in the classrooms, such as new-leveled texts, both expository and narrative, listening centers, or manipulatives for word work. Teachers reiterated that often they have a need for materials and can approach, or create a proposal for the materials needed and principals will support these efforts if the funding is available.

Supporting resources also means supporting professional development. As previously mentioned, the buildings included in this study believe that the expertise in-house, or in-district is the best professional development for personal growth in literacy and all principals support this model. Principals will work to provide coverage of classroom teachers to observe other teachers and follow-up with additional time for these teachers to meet and discuss ways to implement practices into their classrooms.

Implementing new strategies in the classroom welcomes additional principal support, through walkthroughs and observations. When principals in these cases visit the classrooms, the visits are unannounced, frequent, and targeting specific topics or areas in literacy. The communication and conversation that follows is intentional and focused on the professional learning of the classroom teacher. “Throughout the observation process,
conversations occur, teachers see that we are talking more, and we are learning from one another, teachers feel valued and trusted, and that’s the point.”

Research Question 4

The fourth question in this instrumental case study, examined how the principal manages and monitors literacy practices in the classroom. The data collected through interviews and observations, demonstrates that the management of the literacy program is not solely managed by the principal, but by the entire teaching faculty.

Beginning with the school improvement plan, the school community designs the activities and strategies they will use to teach reading during the upcoming school year. These activities are chosen following end of the year data collections, to determine the next steps in the development of the literacy model. From these activities, individual teachers establish goals for reading instruction and student achievement in partnership with the building principal. “Every year, prior to the start of the year, I ask, what are some things you would like to work on and what are areas we should work on as a school building.” The collaborative approach to managing instruction, allows for the development of consistency in instructional strategies, content vocabulary, and implementation of interventions based upon the data collected.

In all schools, data are collected quarterly and reviewed by the principal with a group of teachers and with individual teachers. Principals manage the success of the program by understanding and knowing the present level of reading for all students in the building. Being able to interact with students and teachers and talk about reading is a powerful tool; “students feel the importance when the principal can talk to them about the
book they are reading, or their AR goal.” Managing the literacy program also means teaching students to monitor their reading and setting goals for them. When students reach their goals, all schools in this study participate in literacy celebrations, often chosen by the literacy leadership team at each building. “Students will begin to ask, if we have a reading celebration coming. They will ask if they are meeting their goals and sometimes they will check in at the office to find out.” Principals play a vital role in encouraging the youngest learners to read and actively work with the learning community to manage, monitor, and celebrate reading success.

Another area of management is through targeted walkthroughs during literacy instruction. In all cases, principals provide an area to be observed. The walkthroughs ranged from 10 to 20 minutes depending on the school setting, but with a focus for observation, the feedback is targeted and immediate. Following the walkthroughs, conversations between principals and teachers occur to process the findings, the wonderings, and the principal extends and provides areas for improvement, and offers avenues of support.

Research Question 5

The final research question for this case study involved the evaluation of the literacy program, determining success based on collected data and next steps in the literacy planning process. The evaluation of the literacy program is rooted in data collection, principal observations and walkthroughs, conversation with building faculty and student achievement of reading goals in literacy.
In all school sites included in this instrumental case study, data collection and review occurred quarterly with progress monitoring of student achievement every week or every two weeks. “Each collected data points gives us another moment in time, to see where the student is and what we have that is working.”

The principal plays a role in meeting with teachers and discussing student achievement from the data collected. Principals are knowledgeable about the data and can clearly articulate the results and what the data is telling the school team. “Our principal plays a big part in analyzing the reading scores based on data and helps to form the groups, determining the building needs, and looking at our current resources.” The resources the principal takes into account include time, leveled readers, intervention programs, schedules, and personnel. The importance of personnel and the evaluation of all personals working directly with reading is another method for evaluation.

Principals in all schools worked diligently to complete more than the required amount of walkthroughs and observations, targeted reading several times throughout the year. “When I visit and observe I’m looking for our non-negotiables in reading. I’m there looking at engagement, the discussion, the time on task, I’m there in that moment as an observer.” Observing teachers in the classroom provides the greatest evaluation of the practices the building has chosen to work towards in literacy development. “By the time I’m completing a formal observation, they’re used to me walking around, stopping in to do a walkthrough, and we have already had discussions about what’s working and what needs to be different.” The observations and walkthroughs, coupled with strategic conversations about reading, evaluate the successful implementation and understanding of reading practices by all teaching professionals.
Success does not come overnight, but is grown through professional learning, discourse, and application. The teachers and principals work towards instructional mastery in the teaching of reading together. “I’m looking for teachers to ask questions, getting them to dive deeper into their own thinking and their reasoning.”

Comparison of Study Findings with Previous Research

The data collected in this study parallel and support previous literature surrounding principal leadership. The concept of principal leadership has been discussed in recent decades and remains an ardent topic. “Schools depend on leadership throughout the organization to shape productive futures through a process of self-renewal (Senge et al. 1999, 2000). To demonstrate the renewal process in literacy education, specifically for schools designated as Beating the Odds, the building principal must believe in and support the instructional faculty in their respective buildings to promote change and increase student achievement. This was highly evident in this research study. Using transformational and instructional leadership, the principal serves as the catalyst for direction, developing a shared leadership model for instruction. “Shared instructional leadership involves the active collaboration of principals and teachers on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The principal is not the sole instructional leader but the ‘leaders of instructional leaders’” (Glickman, 1989, p. 6). This study will provide a deeper investigation into the related literature regarding how principals communicate, support, manage, and evaluate literacy practices, and how it can influence future practice.

Developing trust in professional judgment is paramount should principals envision moving the organization forward. According to the U.S Department of
Education’s Comprehensive School Reform Program (CSR), the relationship established between teachers and principals serves as an indicator for a school’s readiness for reform and the ability to sustain it. “Such foundations are characterized by trust among school members, collegial relationships, and widespread support and buy-in” (Hale, 2000; Kierstead, 1999). As this study unfolded, the data showed that teachers and principals alike, perceived the level of trust in professional practice as a strong contributor to the school’s success and student achievement in literacy. According to Hoy & Tschann-Moran (2003), “Trust relationships involve risk, reliability, vulnerability, and expectation” (p. xx). In this instrumental case study, teachers were encouraged to take risks in their literacy instruction, determining the best course of action to meet the needs of individual students across cases. The principal and the school reading team provided the expectations for literacy instruction and student growth measures. Teachers rely on other teachers for proven best practices and establish the “vulnerability” by allowing others to observe their instruction in the classroom. “Good teaching, exemplary teaching should not be so hard to accomplish. Schools and school districts must assume more responsibility in crafting instructional and curricular support so that exemplary teaching becomes more common and requires far less effort. Good teaching should not have to work against the organizational grain” (Allington, 2001).

Encouraging continued growth among building faculty, is a core value of the principals included in this study. In-house, peer-to-peer professional development is key to the building success. Current research states, “Learning communities are strengthened when participants see peer observation as an opportunity to learn from each other” (King, 2002, p. 63). Learning from each other is a practice that is supported across cases in this
study. Teachers have the opportunity to observe their colleagues, teaching reading, and the time is supported by the building principal. Teachers grow professionally, reflect personally, and implement new learning effectively. “If the desired outcome is improving instruction, faculty members who observe their peers on a routine and consistent basis will have the opportunity to improve their own teaching” (Richardson, 2005, p.18). Sharing in learning of colleagues, promotes the shared leadership of the building, and ultimately the ownership by all teaching faculty.

Shared leadership in literacy instruction is highly prevalent at the elementary buildings included in this study. Through interaction, communication, and support, the principal and instructional faculty work to align instructional practices in reading. There are no distinct roles. Collaboration comes from collegiality and a common purpose. This finding is shared in the current research. “Shared instructional leadership is not dependent on role or position. Its currency lies in the personal resources of participants and is deployed through interaction” (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). Implementing the peer-to-peer professional development model, teachers are sharing and learning from one another. They come together with consensus on best practices to be used in their instructional model for reading, report out, and communicate with colleagues. The principal works in conjunction with building faculty to monitor, manage, and evaluate these practices in the classroom. This occurs through the review of quarterly data reviews to gauge student progress and successful implementation of teacher instructional practices in literacy.

Finally the collaborative inquiry into data review and the collection process, serves as a fundamental theme emerging from cross themes. Studies find that principal
leadership with data collection is instrumental in today’s schools. “Principal behaviors include setting clear goals and expectations, creating structured time for faculty to examine data, and fostering a collaborative environment” (Supovitz & Klein, 2003; Wayman & Stringfield, 2006; Young, 2006). Principals at each elementary included in this study provided biweekly progress review meetings, monthly data review meetings, and quarterly intervention meetings. The purpose of these meetings was to determine successful implementation and student progress in literacy. The open communication around data discussion in this study provided a focus for teachers across grade levels and added a “focus” for improvement in literacy. “Literature has shown that clear communication can foster more effective data use. By clearly communicating their expectations for data use . . . this communication helps data use become non-threatening to teachers” (Datnow et. al., 2007; Wayman & Stringfield, 2006).

The participants included in this study verified that trust, encouragement for growth, shared leadership, and the use of data are essential in the success of their respective buildings, and these themes crossed all cases in this study.

Conclusions

The opportunity to gain greater insight into the leadership practices of principals will continue to play an important role in the personal and professional development of teachers and administrators. Mandates for local, state, and federal legislation will continue to impact public education for years to come. Student learning and achievement in reading and all core areas will always be in the forefront of educators alike. Throughout the course of this study the visualization of the initial conceptual framework
evolved following interviews, observations, and artifact reviews. Originally, the framework designed for this study focused on the leadership of the literacy principal and the methods of communication, support, and management the principal uses as components that shape school improvement processes and influence teachers’ instructional practices, and classroom applications. The researcher did not foresee the role teachers would play, in a discovery-driven shared leadership model, where principals and teachers worked collaboratively to learn, design, test, and solidify effective instructional practices in literacy. The original conceptual framework also did not project the significant role that teachers in the cases examined in this research would play in supporting the learning environment for all students. Specifically, in focusing so specifically on how the principal influences the emergence of a strong school-wide literacy process, the original conceptual framework focused on how principals build open communication, mutual support and management, and processes for evaluating the effectiveness of instruction through data collection and review. The surprise in the findings from the three studies examined in this study was that, by virtue of inviting teachers to share the lead on all aspects of communicating, supporting, and evaluating the school’s literacy work, the principal did not have to be as independently influential on those processes. Rather, the principal’s role in these three cases was more accomplished through inviting, then validating and affirming teachers’ initiatives in each of these areas.

Throughout interviews and observations the trust, value, and confidence conveyed in the teaching team was highly evident in the success of each individual site, demonstrating a partnership between principals and teachers, promoting effective literacy
instruction. Figure 8 demonstrates the revised conceptual framework for this study based on the findings.

The redesign of the conceptual framework demonstrates the processes and procedures utilized by teachers and principals in this study to promote an increase in student achievement in literacy. The systems and processes relied upon leadership from both teachers and administrators to drive the process. The literacy instructional framework was not orchestrated by the leadership of the principal, but through leadership from both parties (teachers and principals), through active communication, administrative and teacher-to-teacher support, collaborative evaluation of student achievement data, and mutual management of materials, time, and implementation. Sometimes, the principal

![Figure 8. Revised Conceptual Framework](image-url)
used initiating behaviors; sometimes teachers used initiating behaviors; and sometimes
the open exchange of conversation, data analysis, and reflection created initiating ideas.
Often as ideas emerged, the principals in this study gave the lead to teachers on how they
would pursue and develop those ideas while remaining in the conversation to hear where
and how he or she needed to offer support or align resources or eliminate barriers. In this
fashion, the principal both developed teacher capacity and utilized that capacity to
enhance the literacy work of the school.

The effective literacy practices observed in these respective sites included the
open, ongoing communication to determine best practices. This was highly evident in the
collaborative data review meetings, integration of new instructional strategies and
interventions, and the focus often provided by the administrator when observing literacy
instruction. The changes in literacy practices were designed as a team to promote an
increase in student performance, instructional effectiveness, and building efficiency.

Teachers were provided ample opportunities to observe “master” teachers in-
house to build upon their strategies for literacy instruction, and administrators encouraged
and supported this process. The peer-to-peer professional development model was a
process supported and managed by principals and teachers in the three cases studied. The
professional learning model used in these schools in not prescribed or mandated; rather it
is emergent, responsive to teacher need and initiative and conducive to teachers
approaching one another to learn from each other.

If we are to learn from successful practitioners in the field, we must be open to
talking, sharing, and exploring what works, and how it can apply to the leadership role of
principals. Engaging and immersing into the professional practice of school principals
can benefit and enhance principal preparation and teacher leadership programs alike. We need to continue to look for ways to change principal professional practice, if we are to increase student achievement. With collaboration and dedication, we can realize the impact the principal plays in our schools today. This study sheds some light on the importance of developing principals who can both recognize the capacity in their teachers to, at least, share in taking the lead to improve student success. This study also points up the value of principals building relationships with teachers based on mutual respect, trust, and reciprocal learning. Finally, this study illustrates how principals who recognize, utilize, and honor the contributions teachers can make to developing a strong school-wide literacy process also develop more teacher capacity through peer-to-peer learning, collaborative problem solving, and elimination of rigid or arbitrary processes in order to increase innovation.

Implications for Practice

The following is a closer look at the findings against the overarching purpose for the study; i.e., understanding principal leadership behaviors and their impact with student reading achievement.

Principals lead their respective buildings through their lived experiences as classroom teachers, learning from their principal preparation programs, and their understanding of human relations. The impact principals play in increasing student achievement is critical in improving instruction. The formulation of strong instructional and shared leadership practices from building administrators permeates the school building, and the receptive nature of classroom teachers seek to embrace leadership, when that leadership is positive, trusting, and shared. The findings from this study
suggest, that principals must convey a confidence in all teaching faculty. This confidence can foster the implementation of stronger instructional practices in literacy, but one must caution that confidence must come following systematic observations of teacher’s instructional practices. Principals must observe and find master teachers to lead the instruction, then create collaborative reciprocal learning and problem solving processes to bring all faculty on board with sound practices in reading instruction.

Teachers can be used as leaders in professional development, data informed decision-making, setting a culture for learning, and building a system of trust, but the initial stages for implementation lie at the hands of the building principal. As principals, we must continue to seek out leaders in-house, and provide the opportunities for these “master” teachers to lead the development of the instructional programming, with carefully crafted guidance, support, and communication from the principal. The perceptions that teachers have regarding principal leadership in literacy can be instrumental in learning about and restructuring principal leadership practices. How principals learn and work with their respective faculties, and begin to see them as partners and innovators in the instructional climate, could strengthen principal leadership at the elementary and secondary levels.

Suggestions for Future Research

There are several suggestions for further research that can be generated from the results of this study. Similar projects could seek to identify teacher leadership characteristics in teaching reading, following the progress of those specific teachers and schools over the course of several years, and the impact the relationship with the building
administrator played in their growth as professionals. It would allow for a deeper reflection, examining both teachers and principals in literacy education occurring in successful schools. During the course of this qualitative study, attention to interview protocols was used, with extending questions used to gather a greater understanding and to delve deeper into the responses. All participants received questions in advance and member checking was used, but the data could be improved by following the literacy practices and leadership behaviors of principals over the course of a year, or subsequent years.

In addition, further research on leadership practices and content knowledge for literacy instruction, at the secondary level could also be conducted to examine literacy practices at the secondary level for all students. A consistent theme throughout this research focused on the principal’s participation and knowledge of literacy. As students move into secondary education, often the transition to teaching content exists, but further research on meeting the literacy needs of secondary students and the principal involvement would be of benefit to future researchers.

Additionally, a quantitative study could be conducted on the leadership practices of principals in schools, across the state or the nation, in regards to literacy leadership practices of elementary school principals, determining the existence of behaviors and characteristics of principals in schools noted to improving or high performance in literacy. Researchers could examine the striations of behaviors to evaluate the consistency and presence of the specific characteristics noted in this study.
Finally, an additional study could be done to examine relationships between teachers and principals at the elementary level and what behaviors and or practices contribute to student academic and behavioral success.
REFERENCES


170


Appendix A

Requesting Participation Letters: Teacher and Principal
Dear Teacher,

My name is Jason Surian and I am the principal of Godfrey Elementary School in Wyoming, Michigan. I am writing to ask if you are interested in learning more about participating in a qualitative research study on leadership-influenced practices (support, communication, management, and evaluation) that impact classroom instruction related to literacy. In addition to my administrative duties, I am also a doctoral student at Western Michigan University. This is part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership.

Participating in this study will include:

A focus group interview conversation that should last approximately 45-60 minutes and that will be conducted before or after school hours in a private location in your school building with 6-14 colleagues. Prior to this conversation, I will submit the interview questions to you for your review. This conversation will be recorded and I will also be taking written notes. A follow up meeting will occur which will allow me to check for the accuracy of my notes and to ask any follow up questions I had after reviewing the transcripts of our first focus group meeting.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and there is no penalty for not participating or for withdrawing from the study. If you agree to participate in this study, your identity will be kept strictly confidential. Your name and school will not appear in the study. Your stories will be referenced by a pseudo name. All transcripts will be kept on file in a secured office in the researcher’s home.

If you are interested in learning more about participating, please contact me by replying by email to jsurian@godfrey-lee.org or by mail to 6452 Stoney Creek Ct., Hudsonville, MI 49426. Or you may feel free to contact me by phone at (616) 520-7659.

Sincerely,

Jason Michael Surian
Dear Principal,

My name is Jason Surian and I am the principal of Godfrey Elementary School in Wyoming, Michigan. I am writing to ask if you are interested in learning more about participating in a qualitative research study on leadership-influenced practices (support, communication, management, and evaluation) that impact classroom instruction related to literacy. Your participation is being requested as your elementary building is a Michigan Reward School designated as *Beating the Odds*. In addition to my administrative duties, I am also a doctoral student at Western Michigan University. This is part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership.

Participating in this study will include:

A personal interview conversation that should last approximately 45-60 minutes and that will be conducted before or after school hours in a private location in your school building. Prior to this conversation, I will submit the interview questions to you for your review. This conversation will be recorded by audio device, and I will also be taking written notes. A follow up meeting will occur which will allow me to check for the accuracy of my notes and to ask any follow up questions I had after reviewing the transcripts of our first focus group meeting.

Additionally, I would like to observe literacy instruction in your building. All observations will be recorded through note taking, photos (not to include students or faculty), and personal experience.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and there is no penalty for not participating or for withdrawing from the study. If you agree to participate in this study, your identity will be kept strictly confidential. Your name and school will not appear in the study. Your stories will be referenced by a pseudo name. All transcripts will be kept on file in a secured office in the researcher’s home.

If you are interested in learning more about participating, please contact me by replying by email to jsurian@godfrey-lee.org or by mail to 6452 Stoney Creek Ct., Hudsonville, MI 49426. Or you may feel free to contact me by phone at (616) 520-7659.

Sincerely,

Jason Michael Surian
Appendix B

Consent Document
You are invited to participate in a study examining “Principal Leadership: Communication, Support, Management, and Evaluation in Literacy Education in Michigan Elementary Reward Schools Beating the Odds”. This study is being conducted by Jason Surian, Principal of Godfrey Elementary School, and a doctoral student in the Education Leadership doctoral program at Western Michigan University, under the supervision of Dr. Patricia Reeves, his dissertation committee chair.

The following information is being provided for you to determine if you wish to participate in this study. In addition, you are free to decide not to participate in this research or to withdraw at anytime without affecting your relationship with the researchers or Western Michigan University.

The purpose of this study is to examine the leadership-influenced practices and behaviors that impact classroom instruction related to literacy education. If you decide to participate you will be asked to participate in a teacher focus group or personal interview, for administrators, lasting between 45-60 minutes with a possible follow-up interview if needed for clarification. *To help in your preparation, you will be given interview questions for you to reflect upon prior to the interview.* This focus group will be audio recorded to ensure the accuracy of the collected information and all interviews will be transcribed into transcripts that you will be able to review and edit. You would be able to ask the interviewer to turn off the audio recording equipment at anytime during the interview.

Please do not hesitate to ask questions about the study before participating or while the research is taking place. I will be happy to share the results with you at the completion of the study. *Ensuring the confidentiality of data is the norm in research. Your name or school name will not be used in the dissertation dissemination process; rather it will only be known to the researcher. Pseudonyms will be used for participants and locations (i.e. Teacher 1, Teacher 2, and so on; Principal 1, Principal 2, etc.) and general terms will be used in reporting results (i.e. “Five of the teachers commented…” “Two teachers reported that…” etc.).*

Written transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the office of the researcher upon each completion and for one year following the completion of the study. The transcripts will be transported directly by the researcher and stored on the campus of Western Michigan University for at least three years.
The audio transcripts will be destroyed once the transcription process has been completed and a written record is produced and you are confident that the written transcript accurately reflects your comments during the interview. There are no other known risks/discomforts associated with participating in this study.

There are several expected benefits from participating in this study. Results of this study can serve to further the understanding of district superintendents, building principals, and leaders and teachers at the school and provide a clear indication of the leadership practices and classroom instruction upon which to focus your attention in order to further literacy instruction. It will also provide leaders and teachers in similar facilities some insight into the leadership practices, behaviors, and classroom instruction they may wish to investigate for the purposes of redesigning their respective school improvement plans or building instruction, to promote student success. Furthermore, because some of the leadership practices and classroom instruction is relevant to all subjects, leaders, teachers and policy makers throughout the field will gain insight into potential practices they may wish to consider when addressing successful instruction in other subjects.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Jason Surian, the student investigator at (616) 243-0533 (office) or (616) 520-7659 (cell) or via email at jsurian@godfrey-lee.org. You may also contact the Chair, The Western Michigan University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (269) 387-8293 or via email at hsrp@wmich.edu, or the Vice President for Research (269) 387-8298 if any questions or issues arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use by the researcher for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in the study if the stamped date is older than one year.

A signed copy of this consent form will be given to you for your records.

__________________________________________  ____________________________
Participant                                           Date

Consent obtained by: ______________________________
Interviewer/Student Investigator

__________________________________
Date

182
Appendix C

School, Principal, and Teacher Profile
Data Collection Protocols
School District and Building Demographic Survey

1. What is your district enrollment?
   A. 0-500
   B. 501-1000
   C. 1001-2000
   D. 2001 – 3000
   E. Greater than 3001

   Fall Count 2014: __________

2. What is your building enrollment?
   A. 0-99
   B. 100-200
   C. 201-300
   D. 301-400
   E. Greater than 400

   Fall Count 2014: __________

3. What is the number of certified teachers in your district?
   A. 0-50
   B. 51-100
   C. 101-200
   D. 201-300
   E. Greater than 300 Specific: ________

4. What is the number of certified faculty in your building?
   A. 0-10
   B. 11-20
   C. 21-30
   D. 31-40
   E. Greater than 40 Specific: ________

5. What is the district percent of free/reduced lunch?
   A. Less than 10%
   B. 10-25%
   C. 26-40%
   D. 41-60%
   E. 61-80%
   F. Greater than 81%
6. What is the building percent of free/reduced lunch?
   
   A. Less than 10%
   B. 10-25%
   C. 26-40%
   D. 41-60%
   E. 61-80%
   F. Greater than 81%

7. What are the student demographics of your district? Please list percentages.

   Caucasian: _________ Black: _________ Hispanic: _________ Native American: _________
   Pacific Islander: _______ Asian: _________ Two or More Races: _________

8. What are the student demographics of your building? Please list percentages.

   Caucasian: _________ Black: _________ Hispanic: _________ Native American: _________
   Pacific Islander: _______ Asian: _________ Two or More Races: _________

9. What is the enrollment trend of your district?
   
   A. Increasing
   B. Decreasing
   C. Stable

10. What do you attribute to the enrollment trend your district is experiencing?

11. What is the enrollment trend of your building?

   A. Increasing
   B. Decreasing
   C. Stable

12. What do you attribute to the enrollment trend your building is experiencing?

   How many years has your building been designated as a Reward School? ________
Principal Specific Questionnaire:

Please select highest level of education:

A. BA/BS/BBA  
B. MA/MS/MBA  
C. EdS  
D. PhD/EdD  
E. Specifically: _____________________________ (List degrees and emphasis)

Undergraduate Major: _________________________

Awards/Accolades/Acknowledgements:
__________________________________________

How many years have you worked in education (classroom teaching and administration)?
________________

How many years were you a classroom teacher? ______________

Were you a classroom teacher in this district included in the study? ______________

Were you an administrator at another building in this district? ______________

How many years have you been a building administrator? ______________

What grades are included in your building?

A. Preschool  
B. Young Fives/Prekindergarten/Kindergarten  
C. First  
D. Second  
E. Third  
F. Fourth  
G. Fifth  
H. Sixth

Does the building have a reading specialist? __________

Does the building have a reading/literacy leadership team? __________

How many years have you been the administrator at this building included in the study?  
_______________

Gender: _______ Male ________ Female

Teacher Specific Questionnaire:
Please select highest level of education:

A. BA/BS/BBA  
B. MA/MS/MBA  
C. EdS  
D. PhD/EdD  
E. Specifically: ____________________________ (List degrees and emphasis)

Undergraduate Major: ____________________________

Awards/Accolades/Acknowledgements:

_______________________________________

How many years have you worked in education (classroom teaching and administration)?

________________

How many years have you been a classroom teacher? _______________

Were you a classroom teacher at another school building in this district included in this study? ___________  At another school district? ______________

Have you served as a building administrator or lead teacher (Assistant Principal, Principal, Central office, reading specialist, grade team chair, etc.)? ______________

How many years have you been the teacher at this building included in the study? ___________

What grade do you teach?

A. Preschool  
B. Young Fives/Prekindergarten/Kindergarten  
C. First  
D. Second  
E. Third  
F. Fourth  
G. Fifth  
H. Sixth  
I. Multi-age  
J. Special Education  
K. Specials (music, art, physical education, Spanish, technology)  
L. Content Specialist (reading, math, behavior)  
M. Other: ____________________________

Gender: _______ Male _________ Female
Appendix D

Interview Protocols
Project: *Principal Leadership: Communication, Support, Management, and Evaluation in Literacy Education in Michigan Elementary Reward Schools Beating the Odds*

**Time of interview:** ____________________________

**Date of interview:** ____________________________

**Location:** ____________________________

**Interviewer:** ____________________________

**Interviewees:** ____________________________

Thank you for consenting to participate in this study. I would like to record the interview so the study can be as accurate as possible. You may request that the recording device be turned off at any point of the interview.

Within your school that has experienced significant increases in its students’ reading scores (including at-risk student subpopulations), to what extent and how do you believe leadership-influenced practices impacted those results?

| 1. What role did/does the principal play in shaping the literacy plan for the school? |  |
| 1. What was/is the principal’s communication to staff and others concerning literacy initiatives and practices in the elementary classroom? |  |
2. What specific strategies did/does the principal use to support classroom teachers and improve student achievement progress in literacy?  

3. How did/does the principal manage and monitor literacy practices in the instructional classroom?  

4. How did/does the principal monitor, evaluate, and adjust the implementation of the literacy program?
Principal Interview Protocol

Project: Principal Leadership: Communication, Support, Management, and Evaluation in Literacy Education in Michigan Elementary Reward Schools Beating the Odds

Time of interview: ________________________________

Date of interview: ________________________________

Location: ________________________________

Interviewer: ________________________________

Interviewee: ________________________________

Thank you for consenting to participate in this study. I would like to record the interview so the study can be as accurate as possible. You may request that the recording device be turned off at any point of the interview.

As the principal, within your elementary school that has been designated as a Reward School, Beating the Odds, can you explain your involvement and role in the literacy practices of your school that has experienced significant increases in its students’ reading scores (including at-risk student subpopulations).

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>What role do you the principal play in shaping the literacy plan for the school? How has your position/role evolved in the literacy practices of your school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>In what ways do you communicate to staff and others concerning literacy initiatives and practices in the elementary classroom? What forms or methods do you use to communicate with all stakeholders?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. What specific strategies do you use to support classroom teachers and improve student achievement progress in literacy? Can you explain in greater detail your building strategies?  

4. How do you manage and monitor literacy practices in the instructional classroom? How does teacher evaluation play a role in your management of literacy practices? What do you intentionally look for during your observations with literacy?  

5. How do you monitor, evaluate, and adjust the implementation of the literacy program? What forms of data are collected and what is the process for review of this data?  

Is there anything else you would like to add that tells the literacy story of your school program and your involvement in the plan/process?
Appendix E

HSIRB Approval Not Needed
Date: January 12, 2015

To: Patricia Reeves, Principal Investigator
Jason Michael Surian, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: Approval not needed for HSIRB Project Number 15-01-07

This letter will serve as confirmation that your project titled “Principal Leadership: Communication, Support, Management, and Evaluation in Literacy Education in Michigan Elementary Reward Schools Beating the Odds” has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB). Based on that review, the HSIRB has determined that approval is not required for you to conduct this project because you are analyzing leadership practices and not collecting personal identifiable (private) information about an individual.

Thank you for your concerns about protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects.

A copy of your protocol and a copy of this letter will be maintained in the HSIRB files.