Perceptions of Middle School Principals in Facilitating Student Success:

A Descriptive Case Study

by

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Grow up and turn out to be
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ABSTRACT

In today's high accountability educational environment, the principals' leadership holds one of the many keys to student success as they create environments conducive to student learning. Although students' test scores traditionally drop during the middle school years, over half of Texas' accountability assessments occur during the middle school years, placing unique pressures on middle school principals. Additionally, middle school is a time of increasing maturity for children, causing the middle school to be a unique place of transition. To ensure student success, middle school principals must meet the academic needs of students as well as their developmental needs.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the multiple ways in which middle school principals perceive they utilize holistic leadership to create environments that facilitate student success and meet state accountability expectations. This study explored how five middle school principals perceive they facilitate student success in the middle school setting. Data collection included interviews, observations, and documents over three months.

Results showed that middle school principals agreed that successful middle schools develop students academically and personally. To develop students academically, principals used assessment data and teacher professional development opportunities to enhance instructional programs. To develop students personally, the principals' focus was on providing students multiple opportunities to grow and learn attributes associated with a good work ethic and responsibility. This academic and personal development was supported in a culture of fun and trust. The principals in my study crafted this culture

through the use of humor and relationships. Furthermore, middle school principals negotiated their role as holistic leaders to meet accountability expectations of the state by ensuring each student was held to high academic expectations. As ethical leaders, they clarified this role for the school. As instructional leaders, they supported teachers' professional development towards this goal. As managerial leaders, they analyzed data and developed opportunities within the school to increase students' academic knowledge. It was believed by the principals in this study that by providing students with challenging and appropriate learning opportunities, schools would meet state accountability expectations.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."

John Quincy Adams

Since the 1957 launch of the Russian satellite Sputnik, the American education system has undergone many changes aimed at preparing American students to be world leaders. Although many of these changes are initiated through federal and state legislation, the true work of initiating change in the educational system lies in the leadership at the campus level.

Leadership at the campus level resides primarily in the principal, a title that carries many roles and responsibilities. Principals are often called role models, disciplinarians, curriculum and instructional leaders, staff developers, and morale builders—roles that principals readily embrace. This point is supported by Fullan (2014) whose research reports 90% of principals feel they hold ultimate responsibility for the success or lack thereof of a campus. This indicates that most principals do not shy away from the holistic leadership now associated with the role of the principal.

The link between educational expectations for students and leadership expectations for principals has become highly relational. Bush (2009), Hallinger and Murphy (2013), and others (Mackey, Pitcher, & Decman, 2006; Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Wilhelm, 2010) continually verify that a school's improvement shows a positive correlation to the quality of leadership of principals and teachers. Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins (2006) echo the legitimacy of the principals' influence on

school success with their often quoted message, "School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning" (p. 3). Researchers (Bush, 2009; Hallinger & Murphy, 2013; Leithwood et al., 2006; Mackey et al., 2006; Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Wilhelm, 2010) continually report that the principals' holistic leadership holds one of the many keys to student success.

Background to the Study

Modern reform efforts have adjusted the definition of student success, expanding the roles and responsibilities of the principal. The principals' role has changed frequently, always lacking a distinctive formal definition of the responsibilities inherent in the position (Lashway, 2003). Emphasizing these changing definitions, Hallinger (1992) explains through a review of literature on the evolution of the principalship in the United States that the role of the principal has changed not only in its responsibilities, but also in its focus. Bush (2009) explains that two main sources caused the shift in the role and focus of the principalship: accountability pressures and expanding responsibilities. He asserts that as accountability pressures to show student success grow, governmental bodies, parents, students, and community members expect the principal to lead the school in meeting higher expectations. Claims that increased accountability will improve student academic performance highlight the true goal of accountability: student success (Bush, 2009; Jennings, 2010; Wilhelm, 2010). As accountability shifts to the school level the principals' focus shifts to include aspects of the instructional environment as well as managing the school, thus increasing the principals' responsibilities (Bush, 2009). This

shift to school-level accountability changes the principals' role from that of a manager to that of a holistic leader.

Historically, administrators focused on the management duties of the school, but as accountability for student academic success increases in schools, principals' roles and responsibilities evolve to include assisting in instructional teaching and learning responsibilities as well (e.g., Ediger, 2009: Goddard, Neumerski, Goddard, Salloum, & Berebitsky, 2010; Mackey et al., 2006). From the 1920s to the 1960s, the principals' main function was to serve as the administrative manager of the school. Due to the Russian launch of Sputnik, the 1950s brought talk of educational reform in the United States, the first step in changing the role of the principal (Fullan, 2007).

The reformation talk of the 1950s led to one of the most notable policies effecting the evolution of the principals' role: the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. ESEA was the first piece of legislation to tie measurable student outcomes to federal funding. To receive federal funding the law required local education agencies demonstrate procedures that objectively measured students' educational achievements, a practice that fell to principals to oversee (ESEA, 1965, p. 49). The evaluation requirements suggested by ESEA set the stage for future accountability measures and increased the federal government's role in education (Groen, 2012).

The federal government's role in education continued to grow with ESEA. During this growth, the Department of Education was created in 1979. The department's mission of promoting student achievement and preparing for global competitiveness provided a theoretical backdrop for the landmark report *A Nation at Risk* (Kessinger, 2011). *A*

Nation at Risk (1983) called for action: creating a national system of standardized testing and holding educators accountable for providing the leadership necessary to increase the expectations and quality of education (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The recommendations of *A Nation at Risk* increased the expectations of principals' roles in providing the instructional leadership necessary to increase quality education.

Faced with the questions of how to increase expectations and the quality of education, the mid-1980s saw a shift in principals' roles and responsibilities. While in previous decades the general role of principal involved managerial practices of running a building, the 1980s began see the principals' focus shift to emphasize instructional leadership to meet accountability pressures (Fullan, 2014). However, Hallinger (1992) claims the instructional focus of the time failed to change the true role of the principal. "While instructional leadership demanded a new focus and set of work activities from the principal, the role conceived for the principal was still inherently managerial in nature" (p. 38). Claiming the reforms of the 1980s tried to standardize and control effective teaching practices, Hallinger (1992) notes these reforms continued to have the principal serve as a manager.

According to Hallinger (1992), the movement for educational leaders in the 1990s had the first influence on truly adapting the principals' role away from manager and into a holistic leader. When *Goals 2000: Education America Act* passed in 1994, it focused on several overarching goals for education. These goals included creating educational environments that would be safe, disciplined and alcohol- and drug free; ensuring school readiness for children; increasing high school completion; emphasizing student

achievement and citizenship; and placing an emphasis on math and science. It also suggested increasing adult literacy and lifelong learning; parental participation in schools, and teacher education and professional development (Goals 2000, 1994). This was the first time the government would accept a comprehensive approach to helping all students succeed (Kessinger, 2011). Principals would now be expected to oversee not only managerial and instructional aspects of the school, but also help meet ethical expectations of completion, citizenship, safety, and community within the school.

The reauthorization of the ESEA also occurred in 1994 with the *Improving America's Schools Act* (IASA). In order to receive grants, IASA required states to develop school-improvement plans including setting educational standards and administering assessments aligned with the standards. Unlike previous legislation, IASA required states to describe what would constitute adequate yearly progress (AYP) and develop professional development strategies to increase capacity in staff (IASA, 1994). The accountability within IASA brought an urgency to the principals' role while increasing the responsibilities of the principal to include building staff capacity and increasing parental participation in the education process.

Extending the accountability from IASA, the next large federal educational reform legislation passed was the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), which also greatly impacted the roles and responsibilities of a school principal. Under NCLB, accountability standards increased greatly, as did consequences for failing to meet accountability standards. Schools and districts failing to make AYP would be subject to administrative sanctions including replacement of the principal (No Child Left Behind

[NCLB], 2002). This legislation adjusted the principals' role from instructional leader to the holistic leader of the school, balancing the learning needs of a variety of students and adults to meet growing accountability measures.

Texas Accountability

As the federal government passed legislation influencing public education, states were obligated to comply with each new law (Kessinger, 2011). States' obligations trickled down to schools, and thus to principals. The state of Texas was no exception.

Texas has a long-standing history of accountability in education. The first educational reform to effect academic accountability in Texas was the 1979 Senate Bill 350. This legislation required criterion-referenced tests to assess students' skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. This mandate resulted in the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS) in 1980 (Jerald, 2001; Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2004). To delineate the criterion for these tests Texas created its first state curriculum: the Essential Elements (TEA, 2004). With the Essential Elements and TABS, Texas principals were responsible for leading schools' instructional programs in the teaching of a specific, tested curriculum.

While TABS did not have an official accountability component, it opened the door for schools, educators, and students to be held accountable for test performance. In 1985, the more rigorous Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) replaced TABS (Jerald, 2001; TEA, 2004). After two years of TEAMS, Texas introduced the public education information management system (PEIMS), a data collection program (TEA, 2004). The data collected through PEIMS helped Texas became one of

the first states to require students show competency on the exit level exam to graduate (Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Jerald, 2001; TEA, 2004). Fullan (2014) recognizes it was the accountability piece that adapted the principals' role from managerial to include that of an instructional leader.

The change for principals from managers to instructional leaders continued as the more rigorous Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) was implemented in 1990, replacing TEAMS (TEA, 2004). In 1993 Texas passed Senate Bill 7, creating an accountability system that included the entire school district's TAAS performance, attendance, and dropout rates (Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Jerald, 2001; TEA, 2004). Principals' roles as instructional leaders increased to include ethical responsibilities as accountability shifted from academic performance alone to include school attendance and completion.

The principals' role as manager, instructional leader, and ethical leader increased again in 1997 when Texas developed a new set of curriculum standards, the more rigorous Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Accountability for middle schools further increased in 1999 when House Bill 4 introduced the Student Success Initiative (SSI). SSI required students to pass fifth and eighth grade tests to advance to the next grade (Jerald, 2001; TEA, 2004). Additionally, achievement pressures for principals increased in 1999 when Texas accountability ratings began including performance of students served by special education programs and performance of some Limited English Proficient (LEP) students' (Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Jerald, 2001). As stakes were raised for student performance in the middle grades and more students were

included in accountability ratings, principals' instructional and ethical focus expanded to manage and encourage change within schools.

The fast-pace of educational change in Texas continued in the early 2000s as test passing standards were raised and the number and rigor of tests increased (Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008). Aligning testing to the recently incorporated TEKS, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) replaced the TAAS in 2003. While increasing the rigor of the test, the TAKS kept the SSI and exit exam requirements of the previous accountability system (TEA, 2004). By 2004, the Texas accountability system included 25 test measures and 10 dropout or completion measures (TEA, 2014a). Principals juggled school management, instructional leadership, and ethical leadership as the state increased accountability expectations throughout the 2000s.

The most recent change principals lead in Texas schools is the implementation of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) linked to a new accountability system. In 2009, House Bill 3 authorized the creation of a new testing and accountability system to focus on postsecondary readiness. In response to this legislation, the STAAR replaced TAKS in 2012 (TEA, 2014a). These more rigorous assessments try to test more than academic knowledge. It takes a more holistic view of educational success including thinking skills and processes (Guthrie, 2011). In 2013 House Bill 5 (HB5) amended House Bill 3, creating an accountability system that focuses on more than a snapshot of student performance. The current accountability system includes four academic measures, or indexes: student achievement, student progress, closing achievement gaps, and postsecondary readiness. The academic accountability system in

Texas requires principals to increase their holistic leadership in schools, meeting multiple measures of student success and being accountable for each subgroup of students individually.

Background to the Problem

The current testing and accountability system in Texas requires holistic leadership. Principals create environments conducive to student learning, lead instructional programs that are rigorous and diverse, and ensure teachers have the knowledge and capacity to build lessons that are engaging, culturally responsive, and meet the needs of each student.

Within the multitude of pressures associated with facilitating student success through holistic leadership, middle school principals have unique pressures. Academic accountability pressures are high for middle schools. Many middle schools offer high school credits, meaning middle schools must meet the challenges of both the STAAR and STAAR End Of Course exams (Guthrie, 2011). Additionally, although Texas middle schools are held to the same performance standards as elementary and high schools (TEA, 2014b), test scores for middle school students traditionally drop in core subjects.

Middle school students are also tested more frequently than other levels of students. Not including STAAR End Of Course, currently Texas assessments include seventeen STAAR between the third and eighth grades. Over half of these assessments fall in sixth through eighth grades, the middle school grades. Eighth grade is the only grade to test in all four core areas.

Middle schools have the double responsibility of ensuring student success at their own level while preparing students for the rigors of high school (Williams et al, 2010). This preparation is evident in Texas' requirements that middle schools create personal graduation plans for each student who does not perform satisfactorily on state tests or who will likely not graduate in four years. Furthermore, all students entering ninth grade must have indicated in writing the endorsement they have selected for graduation (TEA, 2014c). This responsibility falls to middle schools, as middle schools generally end in eighth grade. With the unique position of the middle school amid accountability, middle school principals in Texas must use holistic leadership to ensure their campuses are environments prepared to facilitate student success.

Statement of the Problem

Legislation in the past 50 years has changed the expectation of schools significantly, requiring principals to lead schools to continually facilitate student success. While current accountability standards in Texas try to encompass a more holistic view of student success, this increase in accountability measures has significantly changed the principals' role in schools. Middle school principals are uniquely effected by these changes. Within their evolving role to be holistic leaders, principals need to know how to focus their work to make the most impact on student success in schools (Fullan, 2014). Both current and aspiring middle school principals need a clear view of the role and responsibilities of the principal, as well as knowledge on better ways to meet these roles and responsibilities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the multiple ways in which middle school principals perceive they utilize holistic leadership to create environments that facilitate student success. Many studies note the hectic, task-oriented environment of a principals' day-to-day experience (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013). This study explored how principals perceive their tasks of the job - instructional, managerial, and ethical - work together to holistically facilitate student success in the middle school setting.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do middle school principals perceive they use holistic leadership to create educational environments that facilitate student success?
2. How do middle school principals negotiate their role as holistic leaders to meet accountability expectations of the state?

Significance of the Study

This study provides insight into the middle school principals' role and responsibilities in the creation of school environments that facilitate student success. Current and aspiring principals can use the insight gained in this research to expand their understanding of the roles and responsibilities expected of the principal. The insight gained from the research results can help district level administrators hire principals that have the identified qualities and abilities of good leadership. Organizations providing professional development to middle school campus administrators can utilize this research to prepare trainings to support the holistic leadership qualities and activities

identified in this research. Additionally, universities can benefit from the results of this study by offering educational leadership courses that develop the leadership qualities and actions identified. Bush (2009) explains, "Given the importance of educational leadership, the development of effective leaders should not be left to chance. It should be a deliberate process designed to produce the best possible leadership for schools and colleges" (p. 386). This study will supplement the literature noting the developmental needs of educational leaders.

Limitations

Researcher Bias

As with any qualitative study, there is a possibility of researcher bias within this study. Having been a teacher and a curriculum coach in public middle schools for over ten years, I had expectations of what principals should do and how their actions affect the school. Furthermore, I love the middle school concept and prefer this over the junior high concept. As such, I looked for more holistic expectations of student success rather than simply academic expectations. Although complete objectivity is impossible in any qualitative research, I utilized a reflexive journal to remain cognizant of my bias and opinions and how this might have affected the interpretation of data.

Short Duration of Study

This study included one in-depth interview, three observations, and follow-up conversational interviews with each participant. This short time did not allow for me to see all of the actions and decisions principals must make. A longer period of time, more

observations, or further interviews may give more detail about the roles and responsibilities the principal takes in the middle school.

Limited Context

Although this study intended to gather information from principals serving in a variety of middle school settings, none of the participants served in schools that reflect the growing number of English Language Learners in Texas schools. While the state of Texas reports 17.5% of students are identified as English Language Learners (TEA, 2014b), the schools in this study reported student populations ranging from less than 1% to 7% English Language Learners.

Additionally, this study only reported information gathered in schools that had met State Accountability measures in the past year. Principals serving in middle schools with more English Language Learners or in those schools that did not meet state accountability measures may help paint a more comprehensive picture of the roles and responsibilities of middle school principals across varying contexts.

Definition of Terms

The following terms, used in this study, are defined below:

Holistic leadership: a combination of instructional, managerial, and ethical leadership actions into one model focused on creating conditions for an effective learning environment, fulfilling the expectations of the stated and implied curriculum in schools, utilizing appropriate strategies to adapt to the changing world, and supporting the learning needs of both students and adults (Council of Chief State

School Officers [CCSSO], 2014; Hallinger & Murphy, 2013; Sun & Leithwood, 2012)

Middle school: An institute of learning specifically geared to 10- to 15- year old students (National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2010). In Texas, the average student begins fifth grade at age 10, and leaves ninth grade at age 15. For these reasons, I defined 'middle schools' as schools containing seventh and eighth grades; excluding schools that also serve students in fourth grade or below, as well as those schools serving tenth grade and above.

Student achievement: academic competence, as generally measured by scores on state-mandated standardized tests (Villares, Lemberger, Brigman, & Webb, 2011).

Student success: holistic view of developing students by increasing cognitive, attitudinal, self-management, behavioral, and social skills needed to become life-long learners and achieve personal goals (Villares et al., 2011).

Summary

As expectations within schools change, the role of the principal also changes and grows. Individual administrators, districts, professional development providers, and universities need a clear view of the principals' role and responsibilities in order to adequately provide training and support for individuals in this role. Given the middle schools' high accountability requirements and role in preparing students for high school, this need is truly evident for middle school principals in particular. This case study explored the multitude of ways that principals in middle schools utilize holistic leadership to create environments that facilitate student success.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The middle school concept is a philosophy with a special spirit and deep theoretical roots - a set of beliefs about kids, education, and the human experience. Those who adhere to it are passionate and determined advocates.

Lounsbury, 2009, p. 32

The primary focus of this study was to explore middle school principals' perceptions of their use of holistic leadership in facilitating student success. Student success is measured in various ways based on federal, state, and local expectations of schools. Many studies note the importance of school leadership in facilitating student success, but few articulate the day-to-day practices associated with this responsibility. In order to build an understanding of the impact of principals' day-to-day holistic leadership practices on middle school students' success, I reviewed literature regarding today's educational environment, the philosophy of the middle school model, the influence of the principal, and popular school leadership styles.

Today's Educational Environment

The current standards-based educational reform movement in the United States began with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 (Waldow, 2015). *A Nation at Risk* calls for "more rigorous and measurable standards, and higher expectations, for academic performance and student conduct" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 35). From that time to the present, the federal government has "pursued three basic principles: (1) achieving basic skills, (2) employing standardized tests to measure the extent to which skills were acquired, and (3) holding schools accountable for student achievement" (O-Brien & Roberson, 2012, p. 363).

While *A Nation at Risk* started the standards-based reform movement, it was the 2002 passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that institutionalized the policies of standards-based education (Cuban, 2007; Groen, 2012; Waldow, 2015). NCLB extends standardized testing by stipulating that "every state introduce standards plus comprehensive systems of testing and accountability" (Waldow, 2015, p. 56). Under NCLB, states publish lists of schools that meet accountability standards and those that do not (NCLB, 2002). With the stakes high for schools to achieve acceptable ratings of student success, NCLB altered pedagogy, curriculum, and teacher and principal evaluation (Groen, 2012).

Title One of NCLB also includes provisions to increase equitability of education for all students (Waldow, 2015). The act states that the purpose of its Title One is "to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments" (NCLB, 2002, 115 Stat. 1439, Sec. 1001). Furthermore, unlike previous provisions, NCLB called for disaggregating student data into subgroups such as income, race, and English language ability. In order for schools to demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), all groups must progress academically (NCLB, 2002).

All states are required to follow the accountability requirements of NCLB, and Texas is no exception (Kissinger, 2011).

Texas' Accountability System

Texas has a long-standing history of standards-based education and accountability (Jerald, 2001; Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2004). Jerald (2001) recognizes:

> While Texas hasn't yet achieved an education 'miracle,' the state has taken several steps forward and achieved some real successes. And those successes are not just 'myths.' The Texas reforms have made a positive difference for students overall, and particularly for low-income and minority children. (p. 1)

The implication garnered from Jerald is that while standards-based tests are not perfect, they have served to improve Texas education.

To improve Texas education and meet the mandates of NCLB, the current Texas educational accountability system was created under HB5. Schools receive performance ratings based on the measurement of student learning as determined by students' State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) scores. These assessments focus on skills essential for the current year's curriculum and preparation for the next year's curriculum as outlined in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The assessments test processes with content, use questions with higher complexity, emphasize critical thinking, and include more open-ended questions in math and science (Guthrie, 2011). These more rigorous tests hold higher expectations for students, assessing more than content knowledge.

Texas' current educational accountability system utilizes students' STAAR results to assess if schools are meeting higher expectations in four academic measures, or indexes:

- Index 1: Student Achievement provides a snapshot of performance across subjects.
- Index 2: Student Progress measures year-to-year student progress by subject and student group.
- Index 3: Closing Performance Gaps tracks advanced academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students and the lowest performing racial/ethnic student groups.
- Index 4: Postsecondary Readiness emphasizes the importance of earning a high school diploma that provides students with the foundation necessary for success in college, the workforce, job training programs, or the military. (TEA, 2014a, p. 5)

Based on these four indexes, Texas schools are no longer ranked, but rather labeled 'met standard' or 'improvement required'. To meet standard, schools must meet the standard in all four indexes (TEA, 2014a).

While Texas is still held to the standards of Title One in NCLB, the state accountability system is different. In the Texas accountability system, schools can meet standard even if not every individual student subgroup meets expectations for each index. Safeguards built into the system disaggregate performance data in 11 sub-groups to "ensure that poor performance in one area or one student group is not masked in the performance index" (TEA, 2014a, p. 77). These safeguards in the Texas accountability system strive to ensure the equitable education of all students. If a school fails to meet a safeguard, the school must identify and implement interventions to address the failing

area and ensure opportunities for all students' rights to learn. TEA (2014a) explains, "intervention activities reflect an emphasis on increased student performance, focused improvement planning, data analysis, and data integrity" (p. 79).

Middle school educators carry a heavy burden in meeting Texas accountability standards. Middle school students in Texas are tested more frequently than elementary or high school students. Texas currently measures student success on 17 STAAR between the third and eighth grades. Over half of these assessments fall between the sixth and eighth grades, the middle school grades. Eighth grade is the only grade in which students are tested in all four core areas.

Through accountability measures and system safeguards, middle schools in Texas are positioned to provide a challenging and equitable education to all students. The theories of standards-based education and accountability, however, have not been well received by everyone.

Movements Against Standards-Based Education

O'Brien and Roberson (2012) note "some have argued that the testing requirements of NCLB have severely compromised genuine learning because of the time spent on tests and test preparation leaves less time for teaching and learning" (p. 365). Stitzlein (2015) reports growing numbers of parents are unhappy with public schools for reasons including the growing role of standardized tests. Parents are forming groups across America to address this concern. One way these groups are opposing standardized tests is to have their children 'opt-out' of participating in these tests (Stitzlein, 2015).

The Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) recognizes that in Texas "many parents, and even many educators are dismayed by the frequency and emphasis on standardized tests in public schools" (TASB, 2014, p. 1). They warn, however, that Texans have no right to opt-out of standardized tests. To support their point, the TASB emphasizes the Texas Education Code section 26.010, which states parents are not authorized to take actions to remove a child from a school activity to avoid a test (TASB, 2014, p. 2). They further warn that refusing to take a standardized test in Texas can have such detrimental effects as retaining students in the current grade-level or failing to meet graduation requirements (TASB, 2014).

Although there is growing concern over standards-based accountability systems, Groen (2012) points out that "there appears to be no political will to substantially alter the current law" (p. 4). Standards-based reforms were even strengthened in 2009 through the Race to the Top grant program, which rewards states for creating plans to reform standards, assessments, and systems to measure student growth and success (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). For now, NCLB will remain the educational policy that guides schools' academic accountability policies. It is within this environment of academic accountability that middle school principals must negotiate their role as leaders of schools serving young adolescents.

The Development of the Middle School

The period of childhood development known as young adolescence has long been recognized as an influential time in building student success. The discussion of the proper school alignment for young adolescents began in 1895 with the Committee of Ten's

recommendation to begin secondary education two years earlier. It was not until 1905, however, that the first school specifically focusing on young adolescents opened (Alexander, 1987; Lounsbury, 2009). Since that time, there has been considerable agreement on the purpose of a middle level school serving young adolescents. Alexander (1987) says the goals that are generally identified for the purpose of a middle level school are to serve as a transition between the elementary and high school years by focusing on the needs of young adolescents and to provide a more flexible program that allows student exploration.

The Original Junior High Plan

In his explanation of the purpose in opening two junior high schools to serve young adolescents in 1915, Superintendent P.W. Horn exemplifies the conclusion that middle level schools formed as a transition between the elementary and high school years. Similar to the qualities listed by Alexander (1987), Horn (1915) claims the purpose of the schools, called junior high schools at the time, was to meet the needs of early adolescents in transitioning from elementary to high school through:

- instruction that was more mature than elementary schools, but less mature than university lecture style;
- appropriate discipline and control practices for young adolescents;
- more male teachers to serve as role models for boys;
- greater choice and freedom of choice in electives;
- individual pacing such as allowing bright students to start high school courses early; and

- bringing the high school curriculum geographically closer to students' neighborhoods.

Horn (1915) believes that these characteristics of the junior high work together to keep students in school longer, helping lower the drop-out rate. Horn (1915) warns:

> One of the first things which our experience showed is that you cannot establish a junior high school by merely cutting off one year of the elementary school and two years of the high school, putting these grades under one building and calling them a junior high school. (p. 92)

By the 1940s, most American school systems had adopted a three-level system including an elementary, junior, and high school (Lounsbury, 2009). Most of these systems, however, did not heed Horn's (1915) advice. The original junior high plan calls for schools that are developmentally responsive to the needs of young adolescents, but many schools failed to accomplish this goal (Lounsbury, 2009). By the 1960s, the junior high was seen as a junior version of the high school (Eichhorn, 1968; Lounsbury, 2009). Eichhorn (1968) explains:

> While the junior high school was created as a bridge between the childhood years of the elementary school and the adolescent years of the high school, there is ample evidence that this has not been an effective transition. Throughout the history of the junior high school, the ninth grade has maintained its philosophical and practical ties with the high school, and the seventh and eighth grades have been closely allied with the elementary format. (p. 111)

In keeping with the practices of both the high school and elementary school, the original junior high plan failed to serve as a transitional school that met the needs of young adolescents, but it served to pave the way for middle level schools.

The Call for the Middle School Model

Dissatisfaction of the junior high plan in the 1960s coincided with many social and political changes. These changes, along with the baby-boom, led to overcrowding in elementary schools. Desegregation also led to consolidation and closing of many schools. These issues combined to make the 1960s a time ripe for change in the education system as well (Smith & McEwin, 2011). Hoping to address some of the problems within the junior high model, Dr. William M. Alexander calls for change in a speech at the 1963 Tenth Annual Conference for School Administrators. In his speech, Alexander calls for a new school to meet the needs of young adolescents - the middle school. This speech is believed to be the catalyst that started the middle school movement (National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2010; Lounsbury, 2009; Smith & McEwin, 2011).

Alexander (1963) suggests that the junior high was meant to be a bridge between elementary and high schools but as students in lower grades started to be educated by multiple teachers, each specializing in a particular subject area, the distinction between the elementary and high school blurred. He argues that the junior high only bridged to the high school, without regard to the transition of students from the elementary to the junior high. To address these issues, Alexander calls for creating middle schools that continue to have some characteristics of the junior high school, but also add more programs to address the needs of preadolescent and early adolescent students (Alexander, 1963).

In his famous speech, Alexander (1963) acknowledges that 'good' junior high schools did meet the needs of preadolescent students, and this tradition should be continued in the middle school. Acknowledging the work of junior high schools, Alexander (1963) says:

> In good junior high schools, boys and girls have had more of the freedom of movement they need, more appropriate health and physical education, more chances to participate in planning and managing their own activities, more resources for help on their problems growing up, and more opportunities to explore new interests and to develop new aspirations. All of these features we would definitely continue in the middle school of the future. (p. 5)

Education researchers such as Brown and Anfara (2002) and Eichhorn (1968) echo the importance of incorporating this type of holistic middle school curriculum to meet the needs of young adolescents. They voice the need for the middle school model to include traditional courses in a logical sequence, personal development courses in both social and emotional aspects, and individualization to encourage self-expression. Eichhorn (1968) claims, "A successful curriculum model must be all inclusive if the needs of transescents are to be met" (p. 112). Currently, the NMSA (2010) encourages a holistic curriculum for middle schools. In the fourth edition of their report, *What We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents,* they call for successful middle schools to be developmentally responsive, challenging, empowering, and equitable. These characteristics define the current middle school model.

Since the first school focused on young adolescents opened in 1905, educators have struggled to find a way to create an effective learning environment for preadolescents and young adolescents. Lounsbury (2009) asserts that programs for young adolescents should be developmentally responsive to the needs of adolescents, but this has proved a challenging reality. However, educators must continue to work towards this goal. Williams et al. (2010) state that "As expectations for a more highly educated American citizenry arise, what happens in the middle grades matters more now than ever" (p. 2). They claim the middle school is the last opportunity for educators to get students on the right tract to be successful in high school. The NMSA (2010) emphasizes, "The importance of middle level education can never be overestimated. The future of individuals and, indeed, that of society is largely determined by the nature of the educational experiences of young adolescents during these formative years" (p. 43).

In an environment of academic accountability, middle school principals must create environments that facilitate student success through positive educational experiences. This goal is possible through incorporating the characteristics of the middle school model.

The Middle School Model

As previously mentioned, the current middle school model calls for middle school principals to develop educational environments that are developmentally responsive, challenging, empowering, and equitable (NMSA, 2010). This middle school model can thrive within the current academic accountability environment. As Lounsbury (2009) points out, the current middle school model, set in the nature and needs of young

adolescents and common principles of learning theory, can meet the current challenges of today's schools. He cites the 2009 "Schools to Watch" list as an example of the middle school model working to meet these challenges. He says the 190 schools on the list are recognized as high-achieving in developmental responsiveness, academic excellence, and social equity through organizational structures and processes rooted in the middle school model (Lounsbury, 2009). To gain a deeper understanding of the middle school model, the attributes of the model warrant further exploration.

Developmentally Responsive

According to the NMSA (2010) the middle school model is developmentally responsive, relying on "the distinctive nature of young adolescents as the foundation upon which all decisions about school organization, policies, curriculum, instruction, and assessment are made" (p. 13). They further assert that "Continuing research and practice since Alexander's initial call for a 'middle school' have shown the importance of implementing schools that openly address both the academic and personal development of every young adolescent" (p. 4). Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss (2010) verify the principal's role in the school is to make decisions based on the needs of the students. They say, "The main task of leaders is to constantly monitor the status of the internal conditions in the school that influence student learning and improve the status of those conditions that are most in need of improvement and most likely to improve student learning" (p. 256). Brown and Anfara (2002) agree that middle school leadership must firmly ground all decisions in response to the developmental needs of students. In order

to make decisions that influence student learning, the principal must understand the nature and needs of young adolescents.

The distinctive nature of preadolescent and early adolescent students stems from the changes associated with this specific time of childhood development. Eichhorn (1968) coined the term 'transescent' to describe this gradual change from childhood to adulthood. This is a very influential time in students' lives as transescents go through many physiological, emotional, mental, and social changes. These changes cause students to turn from family to peers as the main influence on defining their values, attitudes, and interests (Brown & Anfara, 2002; Eichhorn, 1968; Griffin & Galassi, 2010; Lounsbury, 2009; NMSA, 2010). Many of these changes stem from the brain "pruning itself" by destroying "more than 20 percent of all previously built connections" (Vawter, 2009, p. 1). This time of pruning and regrowing leads to students' inability to utilize their entire brain during adolescents, causing them to act both as children and with more maturity (Vawter, 2009). Brown and Anfara (2002) contend, "It is precisely the uniqueness of the 'in-between' years that led many educators to favor the creation of a middle school" (p. 32).

It is also this uniqueness that causes the middle school to be the most appropriate place to guide and influence students' personal and social development (Brown & Anfara, 2002; Lounsbury, 2009). The greatest opportunity to shape adolescents' brains comes during the middle school years (Vawter, 2009). Alexander (1963) explains elementary students have few conflicts of value while high school students are inundated by conflicts of values, thus the middle years give the best opportunity to "provide leadership in fixing

values which will survive the perils ahead" (p. 9). Leadership decisions at the middle school must be responsive to the development of personal and social values of transescents.

The personal, social, and value changes transescents undergo in middle school can create emotional stress, resulting in disengagement in school and lowered academic performance (Griffin & Galassi, 2010). To address these challenges, and increase engagement in school, middle school students need the opportunity to develop cognitive, attitudinal, self-management, behavioral, and social skills. Cognitive skills include memory and learning strategies; attitudinal skills include self-efficacy; self-management skills include managing attention, anxiety, motivation and anger; behavioral skills include goal setting and progress monitoring; and social skills include caring, support, and encouragement. This holistic view of the skills students need was developed based on factors identified in three separate reviews of research on student success spanning over fifty years (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Lemberger, Brigman, Webb, & Moore, 2012; Villares, Lemberger, Brigman, & Webb, 2011). Furthermore, these skills align with the American School Counseling Association's categories of academic, personal/social, and career success (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Lemberger et al. 2012). These holistic skills, Vawter (2009) argues, can be taught in middle school through differentiating instruction and providing consistency. Villares et al. (2011) explain:

> The underlying premise is that all students must have a core set of learning, social, and self-management skills and that these skills can be taught. If students can learn and practice these skills in a caring, supportive, and encouraging

> environment where mistakes are part of the process and even small improvements are recognized, their confidence in their abilities will increase. (p. 45)

Villares et al. (2011) believe that for students to develop the skills they need to be successful, middle schools must focus on more than academics.

Growing bodies of literature, however, recognize competency in the holistic student success skills correlate to improvement in academic areas (Lemberger et al., 2012). Furthermore, these skills influence areas other than academics in students' lives: violence, drug abuse, and teen pregnancy prevention; developing character; and increased school completion (Villares et al., 2011). These skills lead students to become productive, life-long learners (Lemberger et al., 2012).

In the middle school model, principals are developmentally responsive. They base their professional decisions on the developmental nature and needs of transescents. These decisions address the changing physiological, emotional, mental, and social nature of transescents. This educational process involves nurturing students' cognitive, attitudinal, self-management, behavioral, and social skills (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Lemberger et al., 2012; Villares et al., 2011) and leads to the development of students' values, attitudes, and interests.

Providing a Challenging Curriculum

In addition to being developmentally responsive, the middle school model challenges students, "ensuring that every student learns and every member of the learning community is held to high expectations" (NMSA, 2010, p. 13). Waldow (2015) contends that current standards-based educational expectations create educational systems that

focus on ensuring every student learns and is held to high expectations. He explains a main element of standards-based education is a focus on ensuring "desired outcomes", and that to hold the learning community to high expectations, the students' attainment of these outcomes are "evaluated in a more or less standardized way" (p. 50).

While standardized content is one element of a challenging curriculum, the NMSA (2010) warns that the content presented by the standards does not automatically meet challenging curriculum expectations. The association clarifies, "An effective middle school curriculum is distinguished by learning experiences that address societal expectations while appealing to young adolescents and offering them opportunities to pose and answer questions that are important to them" (p. 17). Alexander (1963) supports this type of curriculum, saying the middle school curriculum should focus on the learning process rather than the learning of academic content. The NMSA (2010) further asserts that successful middle school educators blend planned curriculum standards and unplanned 'hidden' curriculum. The hidden curriculum includes social interactions, structures for learning, and the learning process (NMSA, 2010).

To create a challenging curriculum that interweaves standards and hidden curriculum, Ediger (2009) suggests teachers and principals work together to "develop the best curriculum possible for students" (p. 574). He recommends principals help teachers develop lessons that align content standards and learning experiences to create a challenging, yet attainable, curriculum for students. These learning experiences should include lessons that use scaffolding to aid students in the learning process and varied

activities to peak students' interests, address multiple learning styles, and provide students with choice in their learning methods (Ediger, 2009).

Although ensuring learning of content is a component of the middle school model, it is commonly accepted that this is not the only goal of the school (Hoerr, 2008). Brown and Anfara (2002) call for middle school principals to focus on the whole child, not just academic achievement. In addition to challenging students to increase their academic success, schools must empower students to develop their full potential.

Empowering Middle School Students

Schools employing the middle school model empower "all students with the knowledge and skills they need to take responsibility for their lives, to address life's challenges, to function successfully at all levels of society, and to be creators of knowledge" (NMSA, 2010, p. 13). Bowman (2013) suggests that these goals are consistent with the goals of leadership. To meet these goals, middle school students need to be supported in their development as leaders.

Bowman (2013) explains that to develop leadership in middle school students, educators must create environments that lead students to see their actions and words are influential. He goes on explain that middle school students recognize leadership as "being 'in influence' as opposed to being 'in control'" (p. 60). Students build interpersonal relationships that influence others in "circles of trust through caring, transparent, and honest behavior" (p. 63). Building relationships and influencing others develops personal leadership qualities in middle school students. These leadership qualities empower young

adolescents to become life-long learners that can successfully address their present and future challenges.

Lounsbury (2009) claims maximizing students' potential to become life-long learners that are "ethical, responsible, self-reliant, and clear-thinking" (p. 35) is the most important responsibility of middle schools. Brown and Anfara (2002) explain this development is important during middle school because "It is during this critical stage of adolescent development that middle schoolers negotiate their way toward healthy living" (p. 32). Ultimately, supporting the holistic success of students empowers students with the skills they need to navigate the difficult time of learning to be healthy, independent, life-long learners. In an interview with Smith and McEwin (2011), Lounsbury explained the importance of teaching more than academic skills in schools. He said:

> We ought to be in the business of improving the behavior of our students, not just improving their ability to take tests and to remember and regurgitate, and I'm afraid we've forgotten that. We're really spending all our time and efforts on the thing that has the least enduring importance and forgetting the things that have the most enduring importance. (Lounsbury in Smith & McEwin, 2011, p. 37)

Educators must spend time developing characteristics of enduring importance if students are to become "moral citizens who can responsibly participate in a democratic society" as Smith and McEwin (2011, p. 52) recommend. As Hoerr (2008) reminds educators, "When we talk about excellence in education we must remember that our job is to prepare students for an excellent *life*, not just an excellent upcoming school year" (p. 83).

Teaching middle school students these skills will empower them to be leaders and to "take responsibility for their lives, to address life's challenges, to function successfully at all levels of society, and to be creators of knowledge" (NMSA, 2010, p. 13). These skills must be made available to every student, ensuring an equitable education to all students.

Ensuring an Equitable Education to All Students

Today's middle school model seeks to ensure schools provide an equitable education to all students, "advocating for and ensuring every student's right to learn and providing appropriately challenging and relevant learning opportunities for every student" (NMSA, 2010, p. 13).The importance of providing each child with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in life's challenges is explained by Lemberger et al. (2012). They conclude individual middle school student's potential emerges "when students are encouraged to develop holistically in a supportive and nurturing educational environment" (p. 96).

The NMSA claims a successful middle school "is an inviting, supportive, and safe place" where "human relationships are paramount" (p. 33). Middle school educators agree that human relationships are essential to ensuring each child receives an appropriate education. Ellerbrock, Kiefer, & Alley (2014) explain that in middle schools, young adolescents need "at least one relationship with a nonfamilial adult who understands their developmental needs and enjoys working with them" (p. 3). They further describe these relationships as characterized by "trust, care, and respect for one another" and "support the emotional and cognitive development of their students" (Ellerbrock et al., 2014, p. 3).

The NMSA (2010) further supports adult-student relationships in middle schools, noting "Each student must have one adult in the school who assumes special responsibility for supporting that student's academic and personal development" (p. 35). These relationships help ensure the educational needs of each student are met.

Villares et al. (2011) recognize a supportive and nurturing educational environment focusing on the development of each middle school student includes "intervention strategies specifically designed to maximize the human potential of young learners" (p. 43). Hallinger and Murphy (2013) add "The enterprise of education is centrally concerned with the development of human capacity" (p. 16). This equitable development, Ediger (2009) explains can be achieved through "a good school climate that emphasizes providing for individual differences" (p. 576). These researchers agree that to provide an equitable education for each middle school student, educators must ensure each child has at least one adult advocate in the school. These advocates create equitable educational opportunities for all students by designing intervention strategies that provide for individual student differences.

Summary of the Middle School Model

Middle level schools thrive when they employ the characteristics of the middle school model (Lounsbury, 2009). This model suggests middle schools are developmentally responsive, challenging, empowering, and equitable (NMSA, 2010). In today's society, however, the middle school model must exist within an academic accountability environment. The responsibility of working within an environment of educational accountability, yet creating an educational environment inclusive of the

characteristics of the middle school model, often falls primarily to the leader of the school, the principal.

Principals' Influence in Schools

It is noted that the true work of initiating change in the educational system lies in the leadership at the campus level (ten Bruggencate, Luyten, Scheerens, Sleegers, 2012); leadership that resides primarily in the role of the principal. Hallinger and Murphy (2013) explain, "A central factor mediating the success of federal and state policy efforts at educational reform lies in the leadership capacity of the nation's school principals and teachers" (p. 5-6). Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) further echo the importance of effective leadership in schools, acknowledging a growing body of literature which suggests the successful implementation of policies aimed at improving schools lies with the leadership at the campus level. Looking closely at the world of the middle level principal, Brown and Anfara (2002) came to the same conclusion. They assert principals in middle schools play a central role in the transformation of the school. This view of the principals' influence on educational reform aimed at improving student success is well warranted.

Numerous works identify the principal as a key influence on school improvement leading to student success. Fullan (2002) recognizes that "school improvement depends on principals" (p. 20). Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins (2006) summarized their key findings about successful school leadership in a review of literature. Among their seven claims, the authors assert "school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning" (p. 3). Put another way, Bush

(2009) asserts that in schools, "where there is failure, inadequate leadership is often a major contributory factor" (p. 386).

In comparing four models of effects in a four-year longitudinal study of 198 United States primary schools, Hallinger and Heck (2010) found that school improvement showed a positive correlation to improvement of leadership. They say, "These findings provide empirical support for the premise that schools can improve learning outcomes . . . by changing key organisational processes such as leadership and school improvement capacity" (p. 104). Bush (2009) agrees with this statement, calling high-quality leadership "vital for school improvement and student outcomes" (p. 375). Furthermore, utilizing 20 selected case studies of headteachers in highly effective and improved schools in England to identify key features of leadership and leadership practices, Day, Leithwood, and Sammons (2008) found both qualitative and quantitative evidence that schools' staffs perceived the school leader as the driving force of school improvement and sustained effectiveness. Although the principal is recognized as a key force in organizational performance (Leech & Ray, 2008), many also note this effect is not always direct (ten Bruggencate et al., 2012).

Principal's Indirect Influence

School leadership is recognized as a multi-faceted and holistic, having both direct and indirect influences on student success. Larsen and Rieckhoff (2014) explain the principals' direct influences include instructional leadership practices such as, "immediate interactions of principals with teachers and others regarding the classroom, teaching, student performance, and curricula" (p. 306). They explain principals' indirect influence

includes managerial and ethical leadership practices that "deal with the school's internal and external environment, the physical and cultural context surrounding the classroom and teaching" (p. 306).

To indirectly influence student success, principals shape the school context and culture. Principals use their leadership to create conditions within the school for effective teaching and learning, and to build capacity for professional learning and change (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Tschannen-Moran (2004) says, "The principal sets the tone for a school. The principal's behavior has a significant influence on the culture of the school" (p. 42). Similarly, Brooks and Miles (2010) report leaders influence organizational culture such as the values, assumptions, expectations, and goals of the organization. The organizational culture influences student performance, causing the principal to indirectly influence student success. Leithwood et al. (2006) summarize: "School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions" (p. 3). In testing the effects of school leadership by utilizing data from a four year evaluation of England's National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) further recognize the principals' indirect influence on student success. Their quantitative research found school leaders affect motivation and work setting directly while motivation affects capacity that corresponds to student success.

Leithwood et al. (2010) explain the influence of the principal: "The evidence shows that highly effective schools are not an accidental by-product of the system; rather, they are carefully created and constructed by the school leader" (p. 261). However,

Lashway (2003) cautions indirect influences of the principal may be overlooked "because school reform is a complex multilayered process, singling out the principal's contributions is no simple process" (p. 6). Lashway (2003) seems to be concerned that the principal's indirect influence on school improvement may be missed when looking for a simple relationship between the principal's role and school improvement. Through the use of holistic leadership including instructional, managerial, and ethical leadership practices, the principal carefully plans and constructs cultures conducive to learning, indirectly influencing student success.

Challenges to Principal's Influence

While principals are called to create cultures conducive to student success, this work is not always easy. Principals face challenges in creating educational environments that facilitate student success. Larsen and Rieckhoff (2014) explain:

> Current school reform efforts have placed principals at the forefront of the work required for schools to improve. Increased pressures to meet school improvement goals, provide individualized and effective programmes, and produce evidence of student learning make the job of the school leader more complex than ever before. (p. 304)

In spite of being at the forefront of school improvement, principals have expressed various limitations that prevent them from fully influencing student success. According to Hallinger and Murphy (2013) and Wilhelm (2010), several factors make the job of the principal more complex and prevent principals from feeling they can effectively lead schools. These factors include unclear responsibilities, unexpected

distractions and disruptions that challenge foci, and administrative activities such as discipline, scheduling, and meetings.

Lashway (2003) notes that one of the factors that make a principal's job difficult is the ambiguity of the expectations. He argues that principals feel torn between instructional priorities and daily management of the school, adding that principals have always "struggled to define a distinctive role for the position" (p. 3). In a study of elementary principals, Mitchell and Castle (2005) found the principals did not fully understand their responsibilities as leaders. They discovered some principals believed their role in the school was to create a positive learning environment while others preferred to foster collaboration. Mackey, Pitcher, and Decman (2006) found principals must utilize multiple skills, combining vision, background knowledge, and application of instructional leadership to improve schools. Ediger (2009) and Wilhelm (2010), however, call for principals to utilize hands-on approaches to lead instruction, by demonstrating instructional methods, creating objectives, guiding alignment of lessons, and choosing learning activities. Boris-Schacter and Langer (2006) add that while principals in their study wanted to focus on pedagogy, they felt they must focus on managerial tasks such as paperwork and meetings. These authors highlighted the confusion and frustration of the principal's role. Compounding the confusion, constant daily concerns requiring the principal's immediate attention often disrupt the principal's intentions for the day (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013). Principals are pulled in many directions, and many do not know which direction to follow.

Even when principals feel they can overcome the factors limiting their influence on student success, they do not always feel they have the knowledge to facilitate student success. Mitchell and Castle (2005) report principals felt they did not have adequate curriculum knowledge to lead instruction and preferred creating learning environments rather than leading curricular decisions. As Hallinger and Murphy (2013) point out, rather than curricular knowledge, sometimes it is content knowledge that the principals lack. They add that it would be impossible for any one person to truly know all the content that is taught in a school and give an example of a middle school principal who "flunked" the popular television show *Are You Smarter than a 5th Grader?* because he did not know the author of *Gulliver's Travels.* Leithwood et al. (2006) recognize that as the leader the principal does not have to be a curriculum expert in order to provide support and motivation for teachers. Thus, needing adequate curriculum knowledge to lead instruction is a perceived limitation held by principals, not a real one.

Principals cannot allow limitations, perceived or real, to interfere with influencing and leading schools. Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) emphasize this point: "The potency of leadership for increasing student learning hinges on the specific practices which leaders stimulate, encourage, and promote" (p. 223). A principal's leadership actions demonstrate the values and goals of the school, thus the level of success within the school (Mackey et al., 2006).

Principals' Leadership Activities

The success or failure of an organization is often attributed to the style of leadership utilized in initiating change and creating organizational culture (Peters, 2010).

Principals must be careful when instigating reform in the school. Fullan (2007) explains the dilemma some principals face in leading change in schools:

> The main dilemmas in large-scale reform are all a variation of what I call the too-tight/too-loose problem. Top-down change doesn't work because it fails to garner ownership, commitment, or even clarity about the nature of reforms. Bottom-up change - so called let a thousand flowers bloom - does not produce success on any scale. A thousand flowers do not bloom, and those that do are not perennial! The strategies that are needed have a 'bias for action' and pursue this by reconciling and combining top-down and bottom-up forces for change. In our work, we call this strategy *capacity building with a focus on results.* (p. 11)

In leading school reform, Fullan (2007) calls for principals to seek a balance of multiple leadership activities including providing focus and vision within the school while building capacity within others to reach this focus. To achieve this balance, Fullan (2014) recommends leadership within a "Framework for Professional Capital." This framework suggests leaders build human capital, social capital, and decisional capital in order to create professional capital. This model urges leaders to make decisions on the goals to be achieved within the organization based on building and utilizing the quality of the teachers and the relationships within the school (Fullan, 2014).

Fullan (2014) is not alone in calling for leadership that balances multiple activities to provide a vision within the school and build capacity within others to reach this vision. Other researchers (see Leech & Ray, 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Peters, 2010) claim transformational leadership is the best approach to achieving this balance of vision

and capacity. Fullan (2014) does not agree. He calls transformational leadership a vague notion that lacks "specificity and clarity" (p. 38) and further explains "inspiring vision and instilling motivation in teachers to join the cause were not specific enough to produce actual results" (p. 38). However, Leithwood and Jantzi's (2006) transformational leadership model aligns closely with the framework proposed by Fullan (2014). This transformational leadership model calls for leaders to develop people (the human capital), redesign the organization through building relationships (the social capital), and set directions (decisional capital). Although the work of Fullan (2014) and the work of Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) present different models of leadership, these researchers agree that school leadership is a dynamic process that requires multiple leadership strategies. Skillful and effective principals employ multiple types of leadership activities to create environments of student success. In holistic leadership principals employ instructional, managerial, and ethical leadership actions to create environments of student success.

Instructional Leadership

One of the most noted forms of leadership within schools is instructional leadership. This type of leadership grew in popularity as the Texas accountability system, including high stakes testing, directed principals to lead instruction that would raise academic achievement and reduce achievement gaps between subgroups (Jerald, 2001). Ten Bruggencate et al. (2012) call for principals to serve as instructional leaders that give guidance and build knowledge and skills for teachers. Hallinger and Murphy (2013) offer some examples of the activities in which instructional leaders engage. These activities

include professional learning for themselves, going to classrooms to observe teaching and learning, offering feedback to teachers, coaching school leaders, and examining data with teachers. They further explain:

> The current state-of-the-art concludes that instructional leadership:
>
> - affects conditions that create positive learning environments for students
> - creates an academic press that mediates expectations embedded in curriculum standards, structures, and processes
> - employs improvement strategies that are matched to the changing state of the school over time
> - supports ongoing professional learning of staff, which, in turn, facilitates efforts of schools to undertake, implement, and sustain change. (p. 7-8)

These elements of instructional leadership are intertwined. Because teaching has been identified as the number one influence on student academic achievement (Leithwood et al., 2006), supporting the learning needs of staff will translate into effective practices in the classroom, in turn creating positive learning environments for students. With teachers having so much influence on student achievement, McCann, Jones, and Arnoff (2010) claim improvement in the teachers' instructional practices is the route to sustaining and increasing student academic performance in schools: "An improvement in instructional practices across a school or across an entire system allows schools to boost learning substantially and to sustain that improvement in an environment of high expectations and high performance" (p. 66).

Hallinger and Murphy's (2013) model of instructional leadership focuses on the learning needs of not just the students, but also of staff. Likewise, Leithwood et al. (2010) suggest instructional improvement requires professional development for teachers on the knowledge and skills students need to learn as well as on the conditions required to meet the learning needs of students. They report one of the keys to successful instructional leadership is remaining focused on the goals of teaching and learning. Fullan (2014) agrees that a focus on teaching and learning is important for principals. He recognizes the principal must also be willing to continue learning. In reviewing studies conducted over the last three decades on "the role of the principal as it affects student learning" (p. 55), Fullan (2014) concludes:

> Success at the school level is the function of the work of principals, themselves acting as lead learners, who ensure that the group focuses on a small number of key elements: specific goals for students; data that enable clear diagnosis of individual learning needs; instructional practices that address those learning needs; and teachers learning from each other, monitoring overall progress, and making adjustments accordingly. (p. 61)

Fullan's (2014) assessment of school success implies the principal must continue to act as the lead learner. The NMSA (2010) asserts, "Effective principals consistently update their knowledge and understanding of research and best practices" (p. 28). They conclude that receiving continued professional development helps middle school educators thrive. Wilhelm (2010) agrees, and explains that, "Like teachers, principals and other administrators need continued development" (p. 36).

Fullan (2014) also points out that principals must lead learning through utilizing data to direct opportunities to build teachers' capacity in reaching instructional goals. Williams et al. (2010) agree that principals need to use data to act as an instructional leader. They explain, "Facility with and frequent use of assessment data indicates a changing role for principals in higher achieving schools" (p.9). They explain the principal uses data to set student goals and strategies to reach these goals, examine teachers' capacity, and build professional development opportunities based on identified needs (Williams et al., 2010).

It is important for principals to utilize all available resources as professional development opportunities to meet needs identified through data analysis. These opportunities build capacity in teachers to help create environments conducive to student learning. Fullan (2014) reminds principals that while looking at resources within the school is good, it is important to be a 'systems player' and gain valuable feedback and ideas through networking and partnerships. He emphasizes, "The point is not for you as principal to pay less attention to intraschool matters but rather to engage outside *in order to increase learning within*" (Fullan, 2014, p. 98). Hallinger and Murphy (2013) add, "When we consider the expertise needed to lead learning, the normative pressures that draw principals away from classrooms, and the conflicting demands on principal time, it becomes clear that instructional leadership cannot be a solo performance" (p. 15). Principals need to network, create partnerships, and seek outside resources to help build capacity and lead instruction for improved student learning.

Although a focus on teaching and learning through instructional leadership is necessary, it is not enough. Leithwood et al. (2010) claim instructional leadership "ignores the powerful relationship between the emotional and organizational conditions" (p. 266). While Fullan (2002) calls for principals who lead instruction, he also recommends principals motivate teachers through building morale and improving work settings. Hallinger and Murphy (2013) assert instructional leadership alone is more difficult at the secondary level, recognizing "in secondary schools, the efforts of principals are diffused by the need to lead across several layers in the school's management structure" (p. 10). Secondary principals, including those at the middle school, cannot rely solely on instructional leadership to create environments that facilitate student success. It is important principals also support student success though managerial and ethical leadership.

Managerial Leader

Managerial leadership is another expectation of principals commonly found in the literature. Fullan (2014) explains that in addition to leading learning, effective leadership utilizes good organization and management to establish routines "essential for improvement goals to succeed" (p. 55). Lashway (2003) further develops this assertion by pointing out that "even the more mundane managerial aspects of the job can have an instructional impact" (p. 4).

The managerial leader, sometimes referred to as the organizational leader, utilizes management skills to guide all aspects of the organization to focus on student learning (Leithwood et al., 2010). Hallinger and Murphy (2013) note that most school systems,

and thus principals, have traditionally placed a high priority on managerial actions in the school. Leithwood et al. (2010) give examples such as building master schedules, overseeing instructional practices, and providing discipline as the managerial aspects necessary to "ensure the day-to-day functioning of the school conspires to focus everyone's efforts on desirable student learning" (p. 265). Fullan (2014) describes good leaders as those who "make sure the basics - budget, timetable, health, and safety - are addressed effectively" (p. 56). Each managerial decision a principal makes must maintain a focus on the goal of effective teaching and student learning.

Managerial leadership, however, is more than budgets, schedules, and discipline. Using managerial leadership, principals monitor and adjust conditions of the school that influence student learning in ways that increase student success (Lashway, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2010). The research by Day et al. (2008) exemplifies the importance of managerial leaders prioritizing activities that influence student learning. They conclude that it was the ability of headteachers to "identify the most important changes and ensure that these were made" (p. 87) that led to success in the schools they studied. The context of the school should determine how the principal manages the priority of activities within the school. Leithwood et al. (2010) state "much depends on the individual school . . . the most effective improvement efforts are always context specific and carefully targeted at individual school needs" (p. 257).

Morrison and Cooper (2008/2009) explain the importance of using a context specific, targeted approach in managing routines for school improvement:

> It is now recognised in the research literature that highly effective principals are aware that prevailing contextual factors determine organisational readiness to change and the pace at which change can occur. The diagnosis of current reality enables these principals to provide a context of security and challenge which encourages innovation, avoids blame, extends moral support for change agents, and acknowledges the human dimension. (p. 113)

Morrison and Cooper believe that management decisions of school leaders must be made with careful attention to the context of the school and the school's stakeholders. Hallinger and Heck (2010) further support the notion of prioritizing leadership activities based on context. They note leadership for school improvement must "be linked both to the school's profile of learning results and improvement capacity at any point in time" (p. 106). Principal's managerial decisions shape the educational environments of students.

School management styles are related to principal leadership styles. Wilhelm (2010) explains that principals use different leadership styles at different times based on context; sometimes principals are more directive and other times they act as a guide. Peters (2010) supports this belief by saying that principal's "leadership styles can vary based upon various factors such as context, resources, development levels of employees, and the amount of transaction the leader perceives he or she must engage in to be effective" (p. 39). Managerial leaders must use these understandings of the school's context, resources, capacity, and interactions to establish appropriate programs that lead to student success.

In addition to establishing programs for student success, the principal also must manage relationships within the larger context of the influence of the parents and the community in which the school operates. This larger community, Leithwood et al. (2010) assert, is the most powerful resource from which a principal can draw, accounting for as much as fifty percent of variation in student achievement. Principals responsive to the needs of middle school students create ways to welcome community support and understand how it aids the students' learning process. These community resources have been linked to increased scores on achievement tests, lowered dropout rates, increased attendance, improved behavior and grades, increased commitment to school work, and better attitudes towards schools (Brown & Anfara, 2002). Like the resources within the school, these exterior resources vary in desire and ability to support students' learning. Principals must work within these constraints to continually organize and manage opportunities for the community to support students' learning.

Although principal's managerial leadership will create programs and opportunities essential for school improvement goals to succeed (Fullan, 2014), it is not enough. Management practices have to include instructional leadership practices focusing on teaching and learning as well as ethical leadership practices.

Ethical Leadership

While many leadership styles take ethical leadership into account, researchers are now beginning to regard ethical leadership as a separate leadership style. Ethical leadership generally is believed to be associated with three related behaviors: fairness, power sharing, and role clarification. Fairness involves trustworthiness, honesty, and

responsibility. Power sharing involves empowering subordinates through shared decision making and collaboration. Role clarification involves respectful and transparent communication to clarify roles, responsibilities, and goals. Although these behaviors are recognized separately, in ethical leadership they are also seen as related and supportive of one another (Kalshoven, Den Hartog, & De Hoogh, 2011).

Mackey et al. (2006) describe the interrelated nature of these behaviors. They assert effective school leaders must use collaboration to foster trust in order to build capacity in others to reach the goals of the school. Further demonstrating the interrelated nature of the components of ethical leadership, Leithwood et al. (2010) claim guidance and support of those in the organization is critically important in moving forward and setting the expectation of reaching high performance. Furthermore, they conclude high performance in schools is reflective of the importance principals place on gaining and earning others' trust and empowering others.

Fostering a sense of trust in the organization allows principals to achieve other goals. Peters (2010) agrees and explains the importance of trust through the use of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: "The leader must meet basic needs of safety before being able to meet higher order needs of self-actualization" (p. 42). Tschannen-Moran (2004) adds, "If trust breaks down among any constituency, it can spread like a cancer by eroding academic performance and ultimately undermining the tenure of the instructional leader. In this day and age, no leaders can survive the demise of trust" (p. 40). Leithwood et al., (2010) explain school leaders can build trust through:

- Offering individualized support by showing respect for members of the staff, demonstrating concern about their personal feelings and needs, maintaining an open door policy, and valuing staff opinions
- Sponsoring meaningful professional development
- Providing appropriate models of both desired practices and appropriate values
- Encouraging teachers to network with others who are facing similar challenges in order to learn from their experiences
- Structuring the school to allow for collaborative work among staff. (p.262-263)

These leadership suggestions from Leithwood et al. (2010) take into account all three behaviors associated with ethical leadership, again reflecting the interrelated nature of these behaviors.

As principals build trust with their subordinates, the school is redesigned into a collaborative organization that fosters participation in school decisions (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2006). Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) assert the sum of the whole is more than the sum of the parts, suggesting a collaborative learning culture in which all members participate together accomplishes more than the individuals working separately. Brooks and Miles (2010) demonstrate the necessity of principals' attention to working collaboratively. They assert, "The issues that leaders pay attention to, measure, and control send a powerful message to other organizational members" (p. 13). Fullan (2014)

agrees and explains the importance of principals fostering a collaborative learning culture within the school:

> This body of research establishes that groups of teachers, working together in purposeful ways over periods of time, will produce greater learning in more students. Thus, if principals directly influence how teachers can learn together, they will maximize their impact on student learning...If principals merely enable teachers to work together and do not help forge the final link of actual learning, the process will fail. (p. 65)

To influence collaboration among teachers and school leaders, effective ethical leaders must understand interactions between the people, school needs, and leadership actions (Peters, 2010). Morrison and Cooper (2008/2009) note that the successful principals in their case study modified their actions based on the response of their staff. They concluded, "sensitivity to context and careful attention to the human dimension of change are essential" (p. 117). Brooks and Miles (2010) agree, stating leaders should "endeavor to comprehend that school decisions need to be made based on the notion that students, staff members, administrators, counselors, and teachers each have their own culture and that decisions must be sensitive to a plurality" (p. 21).

Principals that foster opportunities for others to work together and take part in the decision-making process increase their staff's motivation and commitment to shared goals. In schools, Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) found teacher's motivation is linked to increased self-efficacy, emotional buy-in through ownership in curriculum and teaching, and the supportive nature of the overall school climate. Low motivation, on the other

hand, results from a lack of time and low job satisfaction from lowered autonomy in classroom strategies. Effective leaders take individuals' needs and motivations into account when acting as ethical leaders. The research by Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) indicates that the more a teacher's voice is heard within the school, the more motivated the teacher will become.

Wilhelm (2010) discusses principals' balance of providing direction and sharing leadership "creates a high-functioning team of teacher leaders who, in turn, become increasingly effective leading their own teams of colleagues" (p. 24). Fullan (2014) explains that building capacity in others through distributed leadership increases productivity within the school "because there are many leaders with a common focus. . .as sustainable leadership for the future is cultivated" (p. 86).

This sustainable leadership, however, must have a common focus or goal. Even when sharing leadership, Wilhelm (2010) warns, "where leadership is appropriately shared, the 'buck stops here' with the principal, regardless of the issue or decision" (p. 23). It is the principals' responsibility to create the vision, or goal of the school. Fullan (2014) summarizes this function of the principals' ethical leadership role by stating the effective principal is one that participates in shaping the learning culture. The NMSA (2010) explains the importance of this role for the middle school principal. The association says:

> Research and exemplary practice over the past four decades have provided middle level educators with a strong sense of what is, indeed, possible in education of young adolescents. Idealistic and uplifting, the resulting vision reflects our best

> knowledge and lights the way toward achieving a truly successful middle level school for every young adolescent. It reveals how research and practice can work in harmony to create a school in which every student experiences success. While a school leader has a personal vision of what the school can become, it is important to build the school's vision collaboratively around a set of core beliefs that are understood, owned, and supported by the larger school community. (p. 27)

Mackey et al. (2006) add, "the role of the principal as one who can both articulate and implement the vision of an effective instructional environment for all students and teachers becomes an important factor in student success" (p. 39). Principals utilizing ethical leadership provide their schools with a vision of student success.

To create learning cultures that foster student success, principals act as ethical leaders who build relationships through trust, share power, and set the vision for the school, all while maintaining responsibility for outcomes. Ethical leadership alone, however, fails to maintain focus on the instructional components of teaching and learning or the managerial components of the programs and day-to-day operations of schools. Ethical leadership must be performed in conjunction with instructional and managerial leadership skills.

Holistic Leadership

Instructional, managerial, and ethical leadership activities in isolation cannot be utilized in improving schools. Effective schools have principals that blend these leadership activities into one holistic model that focuses on education (Sun & Leithwood, 2012). As previously illustrated, many of the qualities of each of these leadership

activities overlap and each of these leadership activities are evident in the roles principals are called to perform. Tschannen-Moran (2004) further illustrates this interrelated relationship, explaining the instructional leader's role as supervisor is intrinsically related to the ethical leader's role in building trust. She says, "Trust has been found to play a significant role in employee reactions to supervision" (p. 46). Additionally, when ethical leaders share power, they find their role as managerial leader less overwhelming. Ethical leadership supports instructional and managerial leadership (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

As early as 1963, Alexander suggested a blend of leadership activities for middle school principals, calling for "A principal whose major duties involve the coordination of basic instructional units and special instructional centers, and leadership in planning and evaluation activities" (Alexander, 1963, p. 12). Leithwood et al. (2010) agree there must be a blend of leadership activities, including attention to an interrelated set of conditions to improve student learning. These conditions include the rational (instructional), organizational (managerial), and emotional (ethical) conditions. They claim working on these conditions "can improve the quality of students' school and classroom experiences and can lead to more effective learning plus higher organizational performance" (p. 257). This dissertation study sought to explore how middle school principals blended instructional, managerial, and ethical leadership activities to holistically improve organizational performance, thus increasing student success.

The Role of the Principal Today

The common understanding of the role of the principal is changing. In a case study involving four elementary principals, Mackey et al. (2006) sought to explore the

principals' role. They found "the role of the principal is dynamic and changing" (p. 39). Mackey et al. (2006) suggest current and future principals must adapt their leadership roles in order to create educational environments that facilitate student success. The results of a study conducted by Williams et al. (2010) demonstrate the changing role of the principal. They conclude that schools need a principal "who drives student achievement gains by setting goals, aligning staff members and programs, maintaining a positive campus environment, supporting teacher effectiveness, and getting needed resources and support from the district" (p. 12). Morrison and Cooper (2008/2009) add that principals need to "possess enduring and genuine passion for the education of children" (p. 106). Current expectations of principals dictate a blend of instructional, managerial, and ethical leadership activities into one holistic model of leadership focused on student success.

In 2014, blending leadership activities, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) proposed a list of eleven standards for school leaders (CCSSO, 2014). The CCSSO (2014) states, "The primary purpose of these Standards is to articulate what effective leadership looks like in a transformed public education system" (p. 6). These Standards address instructional, managerial, and ethical expectations focused on supporting learning. They include:

- ensuring the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a child-centered vision of quality schooling
- enhancing instructional capacity

- promoting instruction that maximizes student learning
- promoting robust and meaningful curricula and assessment programs
- promoting development of an inclusive school climate
- promoting professionally normed communities for teachers and other professional staff
- promoting communities of engagement for families and other stakeholders
- ensuring effective and efficient management of the school or district to promote student social and academic learning
- adhering to ethical principles and professional norms
- ensuring development of an equitable and culturally responsive school
- ensuring development of a culture of continuous school improvement. (CCSSO, 2014, p. 16-21)

Compared to previously released Standards, the 2014 Standards prioritized "leadership for learning. This leadership for learning required school leaders to focus on supporting student and adult learning" (p. 6). The shift to focus on learning reflected the shift in the school leaders' roles as managers to holistic leaders supporting improved learning (CCSSO, 2014). As previous versions of ISLLC Standards have gained wide acceptance, being used as a guide in principal preparation programs in over 45 states (CCSSO, 2014), these standards are posed to transform the common understanding of the role of principal into a role of holistic leadership.

While many Texas principal preparation programs refer to the ISLLC standards, the state has also adopted guidelines for administrator standards. These guidelines, found

in the Texas Administrative Code (TAC), should be used "to align with the training, appraisal, and professional development of principals" (TAC, 2014, section a). The standards include:

- Standard 1 - Instructional leadership. The principal is responsible for ensuring every student receives high quality instruction.
- Standard 2 - Human Capital. The principal is responsible for ensuring there are high-quality teachers and staff in every classroom and throughout the school.
- Standard 3 - Executive Leadership. The principal is responsible for modeling a consistent focus on and commitment to improving student learning.
- Standard 4 - School Culture. The principal is responsible for establishing and implementing a shared vision and culture of high expectations for all staff and students.
- Standard 5 - Strategic Operations. The principal is responsible for implementing systems that align with the schools' vision and improve the quality of instruction. (TAC, 2014, section b)

These five standards outline the holistic role of today's principal. Standard one calls for principals to be instructional leaders. Standards two and five call for principals to be managerial leaders, implementing systems to ensure quality teachers and systems are in place on the campus to improve educational outcomes. This job is more difficult for middle school principals. As Alexander (1987) points out, "teacher education institutions have been slow to develop special programs for middle-level personnel" (p. 327).

Standards three and four call for principals to be ethical leaders, creating clear expectations and modeling a commitment to these expectations for staff and students.

Researchers including Lashway (2003), Leithwood et al. (2006), and others found that although leaders utilize the same leadership activities, they do so in very different ways (Larsen & Rieckhoff, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2010; Morrison & Cooper, 2008/2009; Peters, 2010). Different contexts require principals to fulfill their duties in different ways. As Fullan (2002) summarizes, "The principal of the future... must be attuned to the big picture, a sophisticated conceptual thinker who transforms the organization through people and teams" (p. 17). Holistic educational leadership blends instructional, managerial, and ethical leadership activities into a model that allows principals to lead the whole organization, attuned to the big picture. To create educational environments that facilitate student success and meet accountability measures of the state, principals need to develop and utilize a holistic leadership style. With the changes inherent in middle school students' lives (Brown & Anfara, 2002; Eichhorn, 1968; Griffin & Galassi, 2010; Lounsbury, 2009; NMSA, 2010), this holistic leadership is extremely important to middle school principals as they create educational environments that are responsive to the needs of middle school students (Brown & Anfara, 2002; NMSA, 2010).

Conclusion

The empirical and theoretical research explored in this review of literature helps build the context for understanding middle school principals' holistic role in facilitating student success. For over 100 years, educators have agreed that young adolescents need

their own place in the educational system. As young adolescents go through physiological, emotional, mental, and social changes that cause them to redefine their values, attitudes, and interests, they fit in neither the elementary nor high school. The middle school has been the answer to meeting the diverse needs of young adolescents, influencing students' personal and social development.

While school success is traditionally measured by state accountability systems, it is important to note that successful middle schools do more than prepare students for an academic test. Successful middle schools address students' development to create successful students. To meet the developmental needs of young adolescents, middle schools must focus on the whole child, including cognitive, attitudinal, self-management, behavioral, and social skills. These skills lead to improvement in academic areas; prevention of violence, drug abuse, and teen pregnancy; character education; and increased school completion (Villares et al., 2011). Collectively, this holistic education prepares middle school students to become life-long learners and contributing members of society. While developing these skills that define student success, middle schools must also meet accountability measures of the state.

As the leader of the school, it falls primarily to the principal to create educational environments that support this holistic development of students as well as accountability measures of the state. Leithwood et al. (2010) assert highly effective schools are "carefully created and constructed by the school leader" (p. 261). The style of leadership a principal chooses in creating the school environment leads to the success or failure of the school. Popular educational leadership styles include instructional leadership,

managerial leadership, and ethical leadership. Although many of the qualities of these leadership styles overlap, effective middle school principals blend these leadership styles into a model of holistic educational leadership. In this model, leaders create conditions for an effective learning environment, fulfill the expectations of the stated and implied curriculum in schools, utilize appropriate strategies to adapt to the changing world, and support the learning needs of both students and adults (CCSSO, 2014; Hallinger & Murphy, 2013; Sun & Leithwood, 2012). Through holistic educational leadership, principals support the creation of environments that facilitate both holistic student success and success in meeting accountability measures of the state.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

"The power of qualitative research is in its ability to enrich our understanding of a given phenomenon."

Glanz, 2003, p. 93

Rationale for the Study Design

My intention in this study was to provide insights into the middle school principalship. This insight required the use of thick description, a term Merriam (1998) describes as "the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated" (p. 30). Through thick description, readers determine if the research findings are applicable to their situation (Merriam, 1998). It is important to understand the decisions and actions of the middle school principal in terms of the principal's point of view, thus situating this research within the qualitative design. Qualitative research strives to “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.3). Utilizing a qualitative methodology in this study, I sought to interpret and describe principals' actions in a way that would benefit other school leaders who are facing similar challenges.

Within the qualitative research paradigm, case studies allow exploration within real-life contexts. Merriam (1998) explains exploratory case studies focus on a particular phenomenon, report using thick description, and help shed light on the understanding of the phenomenon studied. This focus requires a bounded system to gain "insight, discovery and interpretation" (Merriam, 1991, p. 10) to answer research questions. In this

study, cases were specifically chosen to represent middle level principals, creating a bounded system. I purposively selected five middle school principals for in-depth discovery of the meaning middle school principals bring to their work in facilitating student success. Utilizing case study research, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the middle school principalship.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which middle school principals support student success through holistic leadership. Many studies note the principal's hectic, task-oriented day-to-day experience (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013). This study explored how the principal's seemingly unrelated instructional, managerial, and ethical tasks work together to support student success in the middle school. The findings benefit current and aspiring middle school principals, as well as those hiring, training, and providing professional development to middle school principals.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do middle school principals perceive they use holistic leadership to create environments that facilitate student success?
2. How do middle school principals negotiate their role as holistic leaders to meet accountability expectations of the state?

Data Sources

This study focused on the holistic leadership inherent in the day-to-day activities of the typical middle school principal. I wanted to learn how these leadership activities

facilitate the creation of environments of student success and how principals utilize holistic leadership to meet state accountability expectations.

Participant Selection

I used purposive sampling to increase "the range of data exposed" and maximize the "ability to identify emerging themes that take adequate account of contextual conditions and cultural norms" (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen, 1993, p. 82). Because I wanted to study how the typical middle school principal utilizes and negotiates holistic leadership, I used maximum variation sampling in selecting school sites for principal participation. Guest, Namey, and Mitchell (2013) explain that maximum variation sampling is good for identifying "important common patterns that cut across variation" (p. 51). Maximum variation in school sites allowed for identification of patterns across variation.

School sites were chosen based on variation in multiple areas: academic performance, academic growth, percent of students identified as economically disadvantaged, and mean class size. To identify schools, I reviewed the 2014 Accountability Summaries for each middle school within the selected geographic region (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2014b).

After permission was obtained from the university's Protection of Human Rights Committee (see Appendix A), I emailed school district superintendents (see Appendix B) to gain permission to do research within the district. Upon receiving permission from the district, I emailed principals (see Appendix C) to ask for their voluntary participation in this project. An information sheet (see Appendix D) was attached to each email.

As requests were denied and other participants accepted, I continually referred to the Accountability Reports to ensure I contacted schools that differed from those that had agreed to participate. In this way, I assured maximum variation of my research sites.

Although I originally sought to include only four principals in my study, I decided to use five participants. As I started data collection, my research skills and confidence grew, making my data collection skills stronger. I reached out to my last participant when two other principals agreed to participate in the study. Both principals were serving in schools with strong, positive reputations. I felt both of these principals would be very strong cases to add to the study. Additionally, utilizing the stronger data collection skills would strengthen and support the overall study (Reflexive Journal, January 29, 2015). Shank (2002) asserts that within a qualitative case study, "Each new case is deliberately added to make the overall picture richer, deeper, and more complex" (p. 56). Adding a fifth participant strengthened this case study, adding depth, complexity, and validity to the research.

Utilizing multiple participants as well as multiple forms of data allowed triangulation of sources within the research. Shank (2002) suggests that combining interviews and observations helps to understand a person in depth. Utilizing interviews and observations in conjunction with support from documents and the reflexive journal allowed me to understand participants' motivations and decisions on a deeper level, bringing meaning to their actions. It also allowed for triangulation to ensure corroboration of the themes drawn from the data.

Interviews

Gubrium and Holstein (2003) define interviews as special conversations used to generate data by having people talk about themselves. Seidman (1998) argues the necessity of interviews in qualitative research: "If the researcher's goal, however, is to understand the meaning people involved in education make of their experience, then interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry" (p. 4-5). As this study sought to understand the meaning principals assign to their actions, interviewing was an appropriate data collection tool. Interviews gave special insight to unseen aspects of the campus, leading to a better understanding of the situation.

Observations

This study utilized observations because, as Seidman (1998) acknowledges, interviews may not be a completely sufficient method of data collection. Merriam (2009) notes that observations take place in the natural setting of the phenomenon and are the best method of allowing researchers to gain a firsthand account of the topic of interest. Through observation of principals on campuses, I gained firsthand accounts of principals' actions and a better understanding of the context that influences their actions.

Documents

Erlandson et al. (1993) define documents as “the broad range of written and symbolic records, as well as any available materials and data” (p. 99). Documents contribute a stable resource for understanding the context of the data collected through interviews and observations (Erlandson et al., 1993). Analyzing documents such as professional development agendas and feedback to teachers helped explain principals'

actions and decisions and developed a deeper understanding of each principal's context and reasoning for his/her leadership choices. These documents provided concrete evidence and explanations of the data collected through the interviews and observations.

Reflexive Journal

Erlandson et al. (1993) claim a reflexive journal serves as a tool to provide "information about the researcher's schedule and logistics, insights, and reasons for methodological decisions" (p. 143). Documenting this information forces the researcher to "come to terms not only with our choice of research problem and with those with whom we engage in the research process, but with ourselves and with the multiple identities that represent the fluid self in the research setting" (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011, p. 124). I utilized the reflexive journal to record the process of data collection, as well as my insights, questions, frustrations, and successes throughout the process.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study began immediately after approval from the university's Protection of Human Rights Committee in December 2014 and continued until March 2015. Data included interviews, observations, and document collection from five middle school principals currently serving in Texas. The participants were purposively selected based on typical sampling and maximum variation in their work settings. This study explored principals' use of holistic leadership in promoting student success on middle school campuses.

Interviews

Each principal participated in one semi-structured interview with questions used as a guide to focus the interview but remaining open and flexible in wording and timing (Erlandson et al., 1993). This interview style encouraged principals to explain their beliefs and experiences in detail and led to greater understanding of the principals' perceptions.

Seidman (1998) suggests a three interview process, warning that a single meeting with a participant causes a researcher to "tread on thin contextual ice" (p. 11). Although I chose to utilize only one interview, the "contextual ice" in this research was supported through observations that included further conversational interviews. Seidman's interview process recommends focusing each interview on one of three elements: the participant's history, experience, and reflections. Using this model, my interview questions started by exploring each participants' road to becoming a principal. Next, interview questions guided the participants to describe their experience as a principal and the conscious decisions made in this role. The interview concluded with asking the participants how they make sense of their position and utilize this understanding in serving as a principal. Conversational interviews during observations further explored and clarified these elements as they arose in the context of the principal's work.

Interviews were scheduled at a time and location convenient to the participant. Each principal chose to participate in the interview process in their office, during the school day. The interviews took place between December 16, 2014 and February 12, 2015. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. All interviews were audio

recorded with the permission of the principal, and field notes were taken during the interview process. See Appendix E for the interview question protocol.

Observations

In order to gain more understanding of the principal's campus culture and insight into his/her daily activities, I observed each participant on his/her campus three times. Merriam (2009) explained, "As an outsider an observer will notice things that have become routine to the participants themselves, things that may lead to understanding the contexts" (p. 119). Through observing principals, I noted actions the principal may not acknowledge because they are routine and I had the opportunity to discuss these actions with the principal for a more thorough understanding of the action.

The observations focused on activities exemplifying the leadership style suggested by Leithwood and Jantzi (2006). One observation focused on the principal's interactions with staff and students, one observation focused on building capacity, and one observation focused on the distribution of leadership. During the preliminary interview process, observations were scheduled at the convenience of the participant.

Because observations were scheduled to be convenient to the principal they varied in length. The majority of observations were one hour, however some lasted only 30 minutes and others were an entire school day. Each consisted of shadowing principals on campus. The observations took place between January 14, 2015 and March 2, 2015. Using scripting, all observations were recorded using field notes.

Documents

Through the information sheets and subsequent interviews and discussions, participants were asked for documents that gave detail to the actions they took in supporting student success. Documents provided stable reflections of the leadership principals provided on campus (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Examples of documents provided by principals included campus handbooks, teacher intervention plans, meeting agendas, and documents written by the principals previously. I also utilized the public TEA website to access the Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR) and school report cards for each campus.

Reflexive journal

A reflexive journal was maintained throughout the study to aid in the process of recording my insights, questions, frustrations, and successes during the research process. This process aided in maintaining subjectivity when identifying emerging themes within the data (Lincoln et al., 2011). As part of the audit trail, the reflexive journal also helped ensure trustworthiness (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Data Analysis

Data analysis, according to Glanz (2003), "is the process of bringing structure and meaning to the mass of data collected" (p. 186). Within qualitative research, data collection and analysis is simultaneous. As data was collected from interviews, observations, documents, and the reflexive journal, I used the constant comparison method to informally analyze data and identify emerging categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Glanz (2003) explains, "Themes emerge as a consequence of collecting data" (p.

187). Through reflection and informal analysis, the data revealed areas on which to focus continued data collection, strengthening this study.

Throughout the data collection process, I created an audit trail by transcribing all audio recordings of interviews and observation field notes, utilizing continuous line numbers. An audit trail table (see Appendix F) is included to trace all data in the dissertation back to original documents.

All of the transcriptions from observations and interviews were printed. This printed data, as well as clean copies of documents collected, were read through multiple times coding the data by making notes and highlighting pertinent units of data. “Coding is nothing more than assigning some sort of short-hand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data” (Merriam, 1998, p. 164).

Once data collection was completed and formal data analysis began, I started reduction of the data. Reduction simply means shrinking the large amounts of data into themes and categories based on the previous coding (Glanz, 2003).

In reducing the data, I reviewed the reflexive journal to identify emergent categories. After identifying initial categories, I printed each data source on colored paper. Referring back to the coding from informal data analysis, the color coded data was cut into units of data and the units of data were placed in piles by category. The color coding helped identify the source of the data, as well as visually ensured triangulation of data. From these smaller, more manageable piles of data, I continued to sort and categorize the data until satisfied with the final themes.

By utilizing data from various participants, interviews, observations, and the reflexive journal in analysis, I achieved triangulation. Erlandson et al. (1993) explain that triangulation helps ensure the themes are generally supported and "enhances the meaning through multiple sources and provides for thick description of relevant information" (p. 115). Triangulation of the data helped ensure the categories used to answer the research questions were supported by multiple sources.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is supported in this study based on the four areas suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to credibility as the researcher's ability to accurately represent the data as it would be constructed by the original realities. Credibility is the accuracy of the interpretation of the collected data. In this study, credibility was established through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation of materials, peer debriefing, and member checking. Multiple observations provided sufficient time to learn the culture and build trust on the campus (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This research project employed data collection in the form of interviews, observations, documents, and a reflexive journal to ensure triangulation (Glanz, 2003). Peer debriefing provided feedback to the researcher to "refine and . . . redirect the inquiry process" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 31). I engaged in the peer debriefing process with two students in my doctoral cohort program. Throughout the dissertation process, we examined each other's methodology, biases, and overall body of work. I also had people outside the field of education read this study to check for clarity and understanding.

Member checking by participants helped ensure the accuracy of the realities constructed though research (Erlandson et al., 1993). Member checking was accomplished during the data collection processes to clarify and ensure accuracy of the data collected. Completed transcripts of data were also emailed to participants to allow them an opportunity to review the collected data. One principal returned the transcripts, with no edits or comments. Two principals asked for small, grammatical edits. One principal requested an additional meeting to clarify some information and ensure confidentiality. One principal did not return the transcripts.

Transferability describes the information given those who access the data to determine if they can apply the results to their situation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The burden of the researcher is to provide enough information to the reader to allow the reader to determine whether the context is similar and can be transferred to his/her own context. Transferability was achieved in this study through purposive sampling and thick description. Purposive sampling narrows the context in which application should occur and thick description provides the needed details to help the reader determine if application of this study is appropriate to the reader's context.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained dependability is the qualitative equivalent to reliability in quantitative research. Although in quantitative studies reliability depends on replication, qualitative research cannot be replicated exactly because the research occurs in a natural setting. Dependability, therefore, is achieved through providing details about the step-by-step process of data collection and analysis so the process may be traced and the thinking verified (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this research, dependability was

achieved through an audit trail utilizing the interview transcripts, observation transcripts, documents, field notes, and the reflexive. Appendix F provides access to a logical, traceable, documented audit trail that allows all data within this dissertation can be traced back to original documents.

Confirmability refers to the findings of the research to represent an accurate reflection of the conclusions others would find; it addresses bias. Credibility was established in this research through triangulation of data sources, use of the reflexive journal, and an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). "Observations are also conducted to triangulate emerging findings; that is, they are used in conjunction with interviewing and document analysis to substantiate the findings" (Merriam, 2009, p. 119). Triangulation through various participants and sources ensured that multiple sources provided the basis for conclusions. The reflexive journal added detail to the audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Context of the Researcher

Throughout my educational leadership and curriculum coursework, I realized curriculum and leadership cannot be separated. Through this revelation, I began to understand the importance and urgency of the principal's job and I wondered if I was capable of fulfilling the responsibilities. How could I take responsibility for such a huge thing? How could anyone? Yet, the principalship still whispers to me. So, this dissertation is as much a personal endeavor as it is a professional one.

I wanted to learn as much about being a principal as I could. I wanted to know, not in theory, but in reality, what a principal does. How do people negotiate this role? As

I listened to teachers talk about leaving the classroom to be an administrator because it "will be easier" and "I will not have to deal with all the paperwork anymore," I panic! I know the job of an administrator is not an "easy out." Because of the misconceptions I hear, I know that others need a better understanding of the principal's role.

But why a middle school principal? For no other reason than I love the middle school students. Middle school students are in an amazing time in their lives - they are old enough to know that they do not need you to survive (unlike elementary age students). They are young enough to know that they have not figured everything out yet and it is okay to still be a child (unlike high school students). Middle school students are trying to figure out who they really are, and they are learning to have the courage to be that person.

I chose to use a positive lens in this dissertation. So many times I read what is wrong with public schooling today, but I wanted to report what is *right*! There are so many people that are giving all they have to make sure students grow up to feel loved, important, and smart. I wanted to advertise what these people are doing - in hopes that others will find the courage to continue this endeavor.

I served as a middle school teacher and curriculum specialist for over ten years and I hold a Texas principal's certification. As such, I recognize I hold assumptions and bias related to the popular leadership styles principals use and the principals' influence on supporting middle school students. In recognizing these thoughts, I remained committed to keeping an open mind throughout the research process. Additionally, I used a reflexive journal to note and reveal my biases, reducing their filtration into the study.

Context of the Study

Legislation in the past 50 years has changed the expectation of schools significantly, requiring principals to serve holistically as instructional, managerial, and ethical leaders. Due to the influences of both elementary and high schools, middle school principals are uniquely affected by these changes. As previously mentioned, the purpose of this study was to understand the typical experience of a middle school principal through the common patterns that cut across the variations in schools. While principals across the country have a unique story that could add to this dialogue, due to purposeful and convenience sampling, all five participants served within the same region of Texas.

Each middle school was in a different town in Texas, but the towns were within a 20 mile radius. Each school was the only middle school within their respective school district and all of the schools met state accountability standards in the previous year. All principals, schools, and school districts were given pseudonyms.

East Middle School

East Middle School served approximately 375 students in seventh and eighth grades. In 2014, 49% of students in East Middle School were identified as being economically disadvantaged and 7% of students were identified as English Language Learners. The school met 2014 accountability standards and earned two distinctions: Advanced Achievement in Social Studies and Top 25 Percent Student Progress.

East Independent School District was located in a town of approximately 9,500 residents. It served approximately 2,300 students in two elementary schools, one primary school, one middle school, and one high school.

West Middle School

West Middle School served approximately 250 students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. In 2014, 62% of students in West Middle School were identified as being economically disadvantaged and less than 1% of students were identified as English Language Learners. The school met 2014 accountability standards and earned one distinction: Advanced Achievement in Reading/ELA.

West Independent School District was located in a town of approximately 2,500 residents. It served approximately 1,000 students in one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school.

North Middle School

North Middle School served approximately 475 students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. In 2014, 73% of students in North Middle School were identified as being economically disadvantaged and 2% of students were identified as English Language Learners. The school met 2014 accountability standards and earned two distinctions: Advanced Achievement in Mathematics and Top 25 Percent Student Progress.

North Independent School District was located in a town of approximately 5,700 residents. It served approximately 2,200 students in two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school.

South Middle School

South Middle School served approximately 950 students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. In 2014, 39% of students in South Middle School were identified as being

economically disadvantaged and 2% of students were identified as English Language Learners. The school met 2014 accountability standards but did not earn any distinctions.

South Independent School Dstrict was located in a recognized neighborhood of approximately 11,500 residents within a town of approximately 320,000 residents. It served approximately 4,000 students in two elementary schools, one intermediate school, one middle school, and one high school.

Central Middle School

Central Middle School served approximately 725 students in seventh and eighth grades. In 2014, 40% of students in Central Middle School were identified as being economically disadvantaged and 2% of students were identified as English Language Learners. The school met 2014 accountability standards and earned one distinction: Advanced Achievement in Science.

Central Independent School District was located in a town of approximately 15,700 residents. It served approximately 4,500 students in four elementary schools, one intermediate school, one middle school, and one high school.

Context of Participants

Principal 1: Ms. Norris

Ms. Norris has served as the principal of East Middle School for four years. Previously, she served as the assistant principal at East Middle School and taught at the elementary level. This was Ms. Norris' 13th year in education.

Principal 2: Mr. Wilson

Mr. Wilson has served as the principal of West Middle School for three years. Previously, he served as the West Elementary principal, an assistant principal, and a high school councilor. This was Mr. Wilson's 41st year in education.

Principal 3: Ms. Wills

Ms. Wills has served as the principal of North Middle School for four years. Previously, she served as a Special Education Director, summer school principal, and Special Education and regular education teacher in another state. This was Ms. Wills' 16th year in education.

Principal 4: Mr. Contreras

Mr. Contreras has served as the principal of South Middle School for four and a half years. Previously, he served as an assistant principal at South Middle School, an assistant principal at South High School, a coach, and a health, math, and science teacher. This was Mr. Contreras' 16th year in education.

Principal 5: Mr. Baker

Mr. Baker has served as the principal of Central Middle School for eight years. Previously, he held multiple administrative and teaching positions in Central Independent School District. These positions included junior high counselor, assistant principal, director of special programs, and elementary principal. This was Mr. Baker's 47th year in education.

Summary

This qualitative, exploratory case study sought to explore how principals use holistic leadership to create environments that facilitate student success. As an educator, I believe it is the purpose of every school to achieve this goal. For this reason, I used purposive sampling to identify variations in school settings from which five middle school principals were selected as participants. Each of the five principals shared their insights into the principalship through one semi-structured interview, three observations with conversational interviews, and documents they thought would enrich the understanding of their creation of environments of student success.

As the principals welcomed me on their campuses and shared their successes, challenges, and aspirations, I continually analyzed the data to help guide my observations and questions. To share the principals' insights, I reduced the rich data into emergent themes and categories. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were addressed to ensure trustworthiness in the study.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

"I get my motivation from the kids. I like to see their success and being as successful as they can be. Even the small victories give me motivation. I know they can do it."
Mr. Contreras (1)

Recognized as the leader of the school, the principal is expected to continually facilitate student success and school improvement. This expectation is well warranted, as Bush (2009), Hallinger and Murphy (2013), and others (Mackey, Pitcher, & Decman, 2006; Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Wilhelm, 2010) continually verify that a school's improvement shows a positive correlation to the quality of leadership of principals and teachers.

Although the principals' role is recognized as one that leads the school, the responsibilities inherent in this role are unclear. As Lashway (2003) reports, the principals' role has changed frequently, always lacking a distinctive formal definition of the responsibilities inherent in the position. This study explored how principals perceive their tasks of the job - instructional, managerial, and ethical - work together to holistically facilitate student success in the middle school setting.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do middle school principals perceive they use holistic leadership to create educational environments that facilitate student success?
2. How do middle school principals negotiate their role as holistic leaders to meet accountability expectations of the state?

The participants in this study provided insight into how middle school principals make sense of their roles and responsibilities in the creation of school environments that facilitate student success and meet accountability expectations of the state. This chapter presents key findings obtained from a total of five semi-structured interviews, fifteen observations including conversational interviews, and multiple documents and records.

Insights into the role of the principal were gleaned from middle school principals serving on five different middle school campuses. Although their campuses varied in demographics, size, and grade configuration, the information gathered from these principals' insights identified "important common patterns that cut across variation" (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013, p. 51). The principals' insights led to the identification of eight themes relating to the middle school principals' role in facilitating student success. The findings are presented through the eight themes: principals' guiding factors, (a)typical days are the norm, developing character in the middle school, facilitating academic success in the middle school, middle school students are young adolescents, providing leadership in campus responsibilities, supporting teachers, and seeking improvement for self and campus.

An audit trail chart (Appendix F) is presented to ensure the dependability and confirmability of these findings. Within the discussion of the findings the number in parenthesis after each unit of data corresponds to the number on the audit trail chart. For example, the first unit of data is noted by a one in parenthesis. The audit trail chart indicates that this data, identified with the number one, can be traced back to lines 34-36 on the transcription of Mr. Contreras' second observation.

Presentation of Themes

Principals' Guiding Factors

The first theme that emerged from the data was that of the principals' guiding factors. All of the principals said, and demonstrated, their belief that the role of the principal is ultimately responsible for ensuring that education revolves around students and student needs. Morrison and Cooper (2008/2009) report similar findings. They recognize, "Passion for learning and the educative mission . . . permeates the thoughts, words and actions of highly effective principals" (p. 106). The factors that guided the principals' work are explained through two sub-themes: the principals' motivation and a focus on what is best for students.

Principals' motivation. The principals in this study indicated their motivation for becoming school leaders stemmed from wanting to make a difference for students. The belief that principals can make a difference is well warranted. Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) recognize that the quality of leadership at the school level has "significant effects . . . on school conditions and students' learning" (p. 203). Ms. Wills explained:

> As I gained expertise in education, I realized there were things that I wanted to do that were different from what others were used to doing, or what the norm was. And I wanted to get myself in a position where I could make some changes and hold some folks accountable and put students first. (2)

Mr. Contreras commented:

> I finally realized that the reason that I wanted to get into administration was because I was able to affect more students. And I found out that instead of just

> affecting those athletes and my students, I could get deeper with those students that really had those needs - those at-risk needs. . . . I could affect the whole school. (3)

When discussing Mr. Baker's diverse educational career, he indicated he would rather be on a campus with the students than in an administrative position off campus. He preferred the campus "because that's where, *that's* where education is. It is with the kids" (4).

Each principal agreed that their administrative goal was to work with students, making a difference in the lives of students. In order to make a difference, they believed their leadership decisions have to be focused on what is best for students.

A focus on what is best for students. Consistent with the call for the nature of students to be "the foundation upon which all decisions about school. . . are made" (National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2010, p. 13), the principals in this study believed every decision a principal makes in a school should focus on what is best for students. Ms. Wills charged:

> Put the kids first at the beginning of every discussion you have, and every conversation you have, and every decision you make. If you can say at night when you put your head down on your pillow that you did the best you could for the day . . . and you put the kids first with every decision you make and every conversation you had, then it was a successful day. (5)

She reiterated, "Every decision we make as a campus, and the assistant principal and I make as campus leaders, has to be around student learning and safety for students" (6).

Mr. Wilson's focus on what was best for students was apparent in his faculty meeting where all conversations were focused on student achievement. He began the meeting by identifying student needs in math and ensuring tutorials were started to meet these needs. He ended the meeting with a discussion of how the teachers expect the students will perform on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and how he can help teachers ensure student success on STAAR (7).

Mr. Baker summarized the importance of making decisions based on what was best for the students. He believed:

> The pinnacle of the pyramid is student success. Everything we do goes toward student success. The tier underneath that is to have an environment where teachers can teach and students can learn. And the last tier, that is everything else. Everything needs to lead to student success. If what you are doing doesn't lead to student success, then you are not doing what you are supposed to be doing. (8)

The principals in this study claimed their leadership was student centered, always striving for the pinnacle of student success. The principals drew their inspiration from helping students and making decisions based on what was best for students. These factors guided principals in fulfilling their roles on middle school campuses.

(A)typical Days are the Norm

The second theme that emerged from the data was that every day is atypical for a middle school principal. Referring to the multitude of responsibilities a principal faces daily, Day, Leithwood, and Sammons (2008) conclude, "Images of the headteacher [principal] as 'juggling' among priorities do not provide a sufficiently accurate

description" (p. 87). When asked to describe a 'typical' day on campus, none of the principals in this study could give a definitive answer. Mr. Baker answered, "No, I can't tell you what a day looks like" (9). Mr. Contreras conveyed, "I rarely have downtime. There is always something - it is hard to explain. Just the whole management of the people and the facilities and the different relationships going on, and the kids" (10). Mr. Baker summarized the principal's typical agenda:

> It's a combination of a "Do List" and fly balls. Because that is basically what you do. There are requirements - you have a budget to prepare, you have observations to make, course descriptions to prepare, a student handbook to prepare, appointments to attend to. You have all these things you have to do. And in between, you have all these things that come up that you have to address and deal with, so you do it. (11)

All of the principals indicated that their role included both regular "Do Lists" and random unplanned actions that must be addressed. They felt it was their job to attend to both sets of activities.

Do lists. There were certain tasks that the principals had to complete on a regular basis - the items that went on their "do lists". Mr. Wilson joked, "I always kid that we have like *Groundhog Day* [referring to the movie]. There are certain things you have to do every week, no matter what" (12). Lashway (2003) notes that these regular tasks sometimes create conflict. He explains "principals feel torn between the instructional leadership that almost everyone agrees should be the top priority and the daily management chores that are almost impossible to ignore" (p. 3). The principals in this

study likewise felt torn between daily management chores and instructional leadership. They felt their daily "do lists" included management chores such as paperwork, emails, and meetings. Their daily instructional leadership, however, involved classroom observations.

Paperwork and emails. The first type of activity principals had on their "do lists" was to complete paperwork and respond to emails. Like the principals in Boris-Schacter and Langer's (2006) study, the principals in this study recognized paperwork as a necessity, but were not motivated by this aspect of the role of principal. The data in this study showed that the principals referred to meetings and classroom observations more than paperwork or emails. The principals completed paperwork and responded to emails as they found time in their day-to-day activities.

Mr. Contreras spent approximately 15 minutes in his office completing paperwork and checking emails. He described each document as he dealt with it: approval for a teacher that left early, a student residency questionnaire, a travel expense form, approving National Junior Honor Society induction dates. Next, he checked his emails, of which he gets between 75 and 100 daily (13).

Mr. Baker noted that on a quiet day he had the opportunity to catch up on some paperwork. Throughout the afternoon, he completed a budget amendment, checked certificates for teachers completing mandatory trainings, had a teacher sign a paper, completed University Interscholastic League (UIL) stipend forms, reviewed 'Teacher of the Year' votes, and responded to multiple emails (14).

Ms. Norris clarified that the type of paperwork with which she deals "just depends on the time of the year. I might be working on reports that have to be turned into my boss, or I might be doing data on the teachers. Or we have to submit articles to the local newspaper" (15). Ms. Norris shared examples of some of the paperwork she had been working on that week. She had been rating herself on the principal evaluation instrument that was due at the end of the month (16). She also showed me a notebook containing copies of the letters she sent to every parent that had a child that failed something in the first semester. The letters in the notebook served as her way to document the communication (17).

Although the principals did not focus on completing paperwork or responding to emails during their interviews, the observations showed these activities were embedded in principals' daily activities. These managerial tasks allowed the principals another way to support student success.

Meetings. The second type of activity principals had on their "do lists" was attending meetings. Boris-Schacter and Langer (2006) report that the time principals "devoted to paperwork was surpassed only by the hours required for meetings" (p. 8). The principals in this study seemed to agree. Ms. Wills declared, "A lot of our days are in meetings" (18). Ms. Norris claimed, "I have a meeting of some sort almost every day it seems like" (19). These claims were substantiated by the observations. Every principal asked me to attend at least one meeting.

Ms. Wills was in attendance at the monthly department chair and grade level head meeting (20). She reviewed the North Middle School Department PLC Meeting &

Planning Schedule (21) that verified there were four core department meetings as well as 12 core grade level meetings each week on campus. She then presented information she received when attending the districts' monthly leadership meeting (22). After the meeting, Ms. Wills went to her office to work until time for her to attend the school board meeting later that evening (23). Ms. Wills and I also attended two scheduled meetings with members of the special education faculty: a special education file review meeting and an Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) meeting (24).

At West Middle School, Mr. Wilson demonstrated the constancy of attendance at meetings as a principal. He had an ARD scheduled immediately after a faculty meeting. He had decided that due to after school tutorials, he would hold multiple mini-faculty meetings during teachers' conference times throughout the day which takes a great deal of his time, though only involved the teachers during their scheduled conference time (25).

Meetings were prevalent in the data. Interviews, observations, and documents highlighted the frequency of meetings that principals attended during their daily activities.

Visiting classrooms. The third type of activity principals had on their "do lists" included visiting classrooms. Like Hallinger and Murphy (2013), these principals recognized visiting classrooms allowed them to observe teaching and learning in order to provide effective feedback to teachers. They also acknowledged that while observations were beneficial, they were also mandatory for documentation purposes. Mr. Contreras explained he was required to document five walkthrough observations each week (26). Mr. Wilson added:

> Walkthroughs are a necessity. I would much rather sit in a classroom and watch the kids than have to script and think 'Are you doing this? Are you doing that?' Things like that. So I guess walkthroughs are my least favorite but I like going in classrooms, so it is kind of a catch 22. You need to be in the classroom if you are a principal. (27)

Mr. Contreras claimed that he is in classrooms as much as possible. He insisted, "If I wasn't here [in the interview], I would be in the classroom. I just came from an observation. Whenever I have downtime, that's where I go" (28). Visiting his campus attested to this claim, as Mr. Contreras visited classrooms while I was present for observations. When I checked into the office at South Middle School one afternoon, the ladies in the office were telling a parent that all of the administrators were in classroom observations and would not be available until class was over (29). Another morning, I joined Mr. Contreras on two classroom walkthrough evaluations and eight classroom visits (30). A third morning, Mr. Contreras and I visited an ELA class, two science classes, and a math class (31).

The staff handbook prepared by Ms. Norris told teachers that campus and district administrators "will be in classrooms as much as possible in order to ensure visibility with our students and to support you as well" (32). Ms. Norris acknowledged that although she tried to be in classrooms each day, that did not always happen (33). Sometimes she went to classrooms for observations (34) while other times she went in and out of classrooms to be visual in the school (35). During our second observation, Ms. Norris visited every classroom in the school (36).

Ms. Wills sighed, "I need to be in classrooms more. I think I can never be in classrooms enough" (37). She viewed class visits as "just a quick check with what's going on in the classroom. Checking for bell-to-bell, checking for appropriate assessments, everything based on TEKS [the state curriculum] and individualized for the kids" (38). During my third visit to this campus, Ms. Wills spent the entire day going in and out of classrooms with an educational consultant (39). Throughout the day, it became apparent she was frequently in classrooms as she detailed her teachers' teaching styles and needs very well. For example, when we debriefed after one observation noting the teacher seemed nervous, Ms. Wills told us this teacher gets nervous when she is observed and pulls out every 'teacher trick'. Ms. Wills mentioned that this does not bother her because if a teacher puts on a dog-and-pony show, it means they can do it. If they do it enough, it becomes a habit (40).

Every principal indicated being in classrooms was an important part of their job and should be prioritized. Ms. Wills summarized the interrelated nature of the paperwork, emails, meetings, and classroom visits. She stated:

> There is so much that happens, that goes through my office and goes over our desks. And it's very easy, honestly, I think, to get bogged down with the little stuff. So, to set a priority to get in the classrooms and go to those meetings. (41)

The principals in this study acknowledged the role of the principal required activities on a daily "do list." Common activities on the "do list" included paperwork and emails, meetings, and classroom observations.

Fly balls. While managing the regular "do lists" principals also voiced the need to attend to random interruptions, or "fly balls". Disrupting the focused plans for each day, principals must attend to "an unrelenting series of requests, crises, and meetings initiated by others" (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013, p. 10). Mr. Baker asserted, "This particular position has nothing to do with time management it has to do with interruption management and how you deal with interruptions" (42). The principals agreed that they had to constantly be ready for interruptions. Mr. Wilson declared, "I thought maybe becoming a principal or something like that, I would have a little bit more control - I was wrong!" (43). He maintained that rather than being in control, a principal should be prepared: "Be ready! Open for anything and everything. . . .You just have to be ready for just about anything. Good, bad, and indifferent" (44). Random "fly balls" require principals to be prepared for both simple interruptions and special circumstances.

Simple interruptions. Some of the "fly balls" principals attended to were simple interruptions, handled quickly. Hallinger and Murphy (2013) explain principals "often find themselves waylaid by students, teachers, staff, and parents with urgent problems to be solved" (p. 10). These interruptions were witnessed frequently when visiting the campuses.

Enrolling new students in the school should be a simple matter, but sometimes this simple matter leads to a "fly ball." This happened to Ms. Norris on the day we were to interview. That morning, a family came to the school to enroll their child. Ms. Norris illustrated, "I have a new student from Mexico, speaking no English. So [we are] trying to figure out residency, what grade the child is in. They came with no grades, no shots"

(45). Throughout the 35 minute interview, Ms. Norris was interrupted twice by an office staff member composing an email to ask the school in Mexico for the student's records. Both times, Ms. Norris politely responded to the staff member and quickly resumed the interview (46). By the end of the interview, Ms. Norris noted she has received the information needed from the school in Mexico (47).

Simple interruptions were apparent throughout a morning on Mr. Contreras' campus as well. Before school Mr. Contreras was informed of two teachers missing school unexpectedly and he made arrangements to have their duties covered (48). While attending a training meeting, a teacher pulled Mr. Contreras aside and away from the training to speak with him (49). As Mr. Contreras watched students go to class, he quickly dealt with dress-code violations by having students fix the violation or call their parents to bring different clothes (50).

After a few classroom observations, Mr. Contreras headed back to his office to charge his phone and complete some paperwork. The school police officer came in to ask Mr. Contreras about a situation with a student's phone, and Mr. Contreras went to speak with the officer and the student (51).

Back in the halls for passing period, Mr. Contreras saw two students kissing and called them both to the office. He talked to each separately and as they left, a teacher entered his office and asked for a private meeting (52). After the private meeting, Mr. Contreras announced his theatre teacher wanted to talk with him, so we headed to the theatre room where they discussed rehearsals, transportation, and professional

development plans (53). None of these items were on Mr. Contreras' agenda for the day, but he attended to each situation as it occurred.

Mr. Baker had a similar experience with simple interruptions. Simple interruptions were apparent as he completed paperwork in his office on what he called a "slow day" (54). A coach stopped by looking for a child skipping class and proceeded to discuss another student that was making bad choices (55). While monitoring the halls during passing period, Mr. Baker stopped to speak with a teacher. He explained the process for letting a child out of the gifted and talented program and directed her to the appropriate forms (56).

Still in the halls, Mr. Baker stopped the technology specialist and they discussed an issue with a SMARTBoard in the building (57). As he made it back to his office, he received a telephone call regarding an incident that happened in the next town. He told the caller that since the incident happened in the next town, outside of school, he could not imagine the school would need any information about the incident, but he appreciated them extending the offer (58).

As school dismissed for the day, Mr. Baker rushed out of his office to get outside and monitor students when he was stopped by a student. The student was upset that he lost his phone and thought it was in a teacher's room. Mr. Baker patiently walked the student upstairs and let him look for his phone. When it was not found, Mr. Baker convinced the student that maybe the phone was lost elsewhere, or maybe the teacher saw it and put it away so no one else would take it (59). Throughout these simple interruptions, I noted Mr. Baker was very patient (60).

In addition to the simple interruptions of daily activities, the principals dealt with special circumstances.

Special circumstances. Some of the "fly balls" principals attended to were special circumstances that sidetracked the principals' agendas (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013). Some of these special circumstances were expected, and some were not. During data collection, Ms. Norris was attending to an unexpected special circumstance. She was trying to determine how to prepare her staff to accept a transgender child. She said:

> Right now I have a call into the [child's] therapist and our school attorney. I tried to pull up some policies. We have some policies, but nothing really. It has never been dealt with in this district or with any of our administrators. It's going to be new for all of us. (61)

While Mr. Baker's special circumstances were not unexpected, they were unusual for his campus. He disclosed his campus was seeking to hire three individuals in the middle of the school year. This year, two individuals retired and another relocated (62).

Ms. Wills described a special circumstance she expected to deal with on her campus every year. Because her campus was near a treed area, there were lots of animals around - opossums, snakes, foxes. These animals come onto the campus grounds. As the animals started to come out in spring, Ms. Wills knew she would have to send a reminder to people not to leave food in classes and to stay clear of the animals (63).

Although special circumstances were both expected and unexpected, principals were required to handle them. Principals also handled simple interruptions each day while ensuring they attended to their regular, expected duties.

Developing Character in Middle School

The third theme that emerged from the data was developing character in middle school. In the current middle school model, the NMSA (2010) recognizes that middle school principals should work to develop the personal side of students. The vision statement of East Independent School District demonstrated a focus on developing character, claiming all schools in their district promote characteristics such as integrity, dedication, and resourcefulness (64). Three sub-themes became apparent that illustrated developing character in the middle school: middle school students are impressionable, developing character correlates with success, and providing structures to build character in middle school students.

Middle school students are impressionable. Middle school students are at an impressionable age, thus making middle school an important time for character development. Many researchers (Brown & Anfara, 2002; Eichhorn, 1968; Griffin & Galassi, 2010; Lounsbury, 2009; NMSA, 2010) note that it is the physiological, emotional, mental, and social changes that middle school students undergo that cause young adolescents to be impressionable. Mr. Baker compared the middle school to the elementary and the high school to highlight the middle school's special responsibility to students. He clarified:

> At the high school, you try to get them credits and get them graduated. At the elementary school, you are trying to get them the academic fundamentals that they need. Learning how to be social with each other - share their toys, play nicely in the sandbox, all those kinds of things. And here, it's the in-between.

> They are too little to be big; they are too big to be little. So it's a transitional place. (65)

The transitional place Mr. Baker referred to was seen as the best place to make an impression on students. Ms. Wills explained, "Middle school is just sort of a niche. . . . They're old enough to know what they *should* do, but they're impressionable enough that you can still persuade them" (66). She continued, "To watch them grow from sixth to eighth grade is just phenomenal. The physical changes, the mental changes, the maturity, the level of compassion that they eventually get as they progress through middle school" (67).

This impressionable time in students' lives, full of physical and mental changes leading to maturity, makes young adolescence a time of changing influences. Mr. Contreras suggested:

> The thing we need to understand as middle school educators is this: When they get to sixth, and especially seventh grade, their influences start to change. From home and church to friends. And we need to make a strong enough impact as a middle school, because at that time we are not their primary influence. Even if they have their primary influence as a negative influence, we need to make that school influence the best it can be. Even if we aren't their primary influence during middle school, we can leave a lasting impression. (68)

Even the students in the middle school started to realize they had the ability to be an influence on others. During a mentoring class Mr. Contreras led, a boy in the class shared an example of when he realized he could influence his friends. He told Mr.

Contreras he did not say anything to prevent his friends from doing something they should not do. After his friends were put in the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) for their actions, one of the friends asked why the boy did not say anything to stop them from making a poor choice. The boy replied he did not think his friends would listen to him. The friend responded they would have listened (69).

The principals understood that as middle school students' primary influences changed, the school needed to ensure they provided a positive influence. This positive character influence also correlated with academic achievement.

Developing character correlates with success. The principals in this study believed there was a positive correlation between students' character and happiness and students' success. Villares, Lemberger, Brigman, and Webb (2011) support this belief. They report that in their studies, interventions to build foundational learning skills and attitudes that are needed for success have a strong impact on increasing students' academic performance. Ms. Wills emphasized:

> I want to see them grow academically, but I also want to see them grow as a person. I think our goal at the middle school is to get them the academic foundation that they are going to need in high school, but also to teach them those work ethic behaviors that they are going to need to be successful in high school. Coming to school on time. Putting focus on academics, not meeting someone in the hallway [to visit during class]. I think it's a good, even focus. The good school behaviors and then the academics. (70)

She concluded, "If those things are in place, the learning is going to happen" (71).

A teacher at South Middle School pointed out a young man that served as one of her student leaders on campus. She explained the young man had been in DAEP and was labeled at-risk. The school used a mentoring program to develop good characteristics in the boy and he earned recognition as a positive leader for the school (72).

Mr. Contreras vocalized the interrelated nature of character, success, and academic achievement:

> Student success is measured in many different ways; state assessment is one of them. We understand that these tests do not measure the strength of heart, character, or attitude and we believe these are also very important components of student success. (73)

The principals in this study believed that developing character in middle school students correlated to success for middle school students. They indicated they purposely provided structures to develop character in their students.

Providing structures to build character in the middle school. Developing good character in the middle school student requires specific structures dedicated to this task. The NMSA (2010) states that the ways schools are organized has a significant impact on the students' learning environment. The principals in this case study tried to assure there were appropriate structures in place to create learning environments that built character in their students. In South Middle School, Mr. Contreras believed repetition was important in developing character. He asserted, "What we are constantly telling them [the students] is that you need to be a SMS leader, which is respectful, responsible, hard working, and

trustworthy" (74). His campus constantly reminded students of these characteristics with banners in the halls and cafeteria reminding students of the SMS leadership qualities (75).

Ms. Wills also recognized the need to put in place structures to focus on developing students' character. This year, North Middle School focused on five behaviors: language, work ethic, dress code, public displays of affection, and attendance. Teachers responded to students consistently in these areas to help build appropriate behaviors (76).

Mr. Baker displayed his school's focus on character education by explaining:

> The only two things we try to teach are work ethic and responsibility. . . . What we use to teach those two things, we teach math, science, social studies, electives, and the list goes on. Because . . . we believe we are doing our students a great disservice if they walk out of our school not being responsible and not having a degree of work ethic. (77)

South Middle School had an ambassador program to build student leaders in their school. Each week, eighth grade student leaders met with small groups of sixth graders for thirty minutes to teach a character lesson through hands-on activities. Mr. Contreras explained the eighth graders "are in the classes and they are doing the character lessons. And it is student led" (78). The teacher facilitating this program explained the purpose of the program was not to help students that already had leadership qualities, but rather to build leadership in those that had not displayed the qualities yet (79). This student leadership was evident as I watched several groups of students engage in a web-building activity to demonstrate the need for teamwork. Teachers sat at their desks working while

students passed around a ball of yarn and discussed how much easier it was to accomplish their task when everyone did their part (80).

Character education was noted as important in middle school. Based on the belief that middle school students are impressionable and character development correlated with academic achievement, principals provided structures to build character in middle school students.

Facilitating Academic Success in the Middle School

The fourth theme that emerged from the data was facilitating academic success in the middle school. Principals' responsibility for student learning was well documented in literature, often citing the work of Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins (2006). They report, "School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning" (p. 3). When asked his definition of student success, Mr. Wilson answered, "Well, the most obvious answer is that they do well on their academics - the things they get judged on. Did they do well on their STAAR? Did they do well on the assessment" (81)? The principals in this study agreed this 'obvious' focus on academics led them to facilitate academic success in the middle school. Facilitating academic success was supported by three sub-themes: academic growth, using data to drive academic decisions, and providing academic interventions.

Academic growth. Through the Race to the Top Grant (U.S. Department of Education, 2014) and Texas' accountability system (TEA, 2014a), educational systems give consideration to students' academic growth. Likewise, the participants in this study recognized that acknowledging students' academic growth was one way to measure

students' overall success. Ms. Norris articulated that recognizing student's academic growth was an important part of student success. She believed success was "not necessarily that they have surpassed everything and made the honor roll, but that they have shown growth from one year to another" (82). She continued to explain that on her campus, the students were rewarded for their growth:

> I just gave out 80 certificates for students who, they might not have passed their writing benchmark. . . but they showed growth from the previous one. So some kids went from a 20 to a 50-something. But I told them I was proud of them because we showed improvement. (83)

Ms. Norris detailed the importance of growth for kids. "If Johnny is in the lowest quintile, he may not be able to pass, but we can get him into the next quintile - showing gains. So we tell Johnny that this is his goal" (84). Her English Language Arts (ELA) teachers had a die-cut horse for each child in their classes. As the students' scores moved from one quintile to another, the students moved their horse to recognize their growth visually (85).

Both Central Middle School and South Middle School incorporated an intervention program known as Grand Central Station (GCS) that focused on growth as well (86; 87). The teacher that oversaw this program at South Middle School explained, "The philosophy is focus on the primary greatness - small victories, growth, and character - the secondary, big victories will follow. Focus on today" (88).

In his essay for a professional award, Mr. Contreras defined the influence academic success had on student confidence. He wrote:

> [I]f we can build student confidence with success in the area of assessment, I believe that this confidence will be the key ingredient for student success in the future and will inspire creativity and innovation that will lead to a better life for them. (89)

The principals in this study believed student success included building students' confidence and academic growth. They met these challenges through programs that were developed based on the use of academic data.

Using data to drive academic decisions. Consistent with the findings of Williams et al. (2010), the principals in this study believed it was important to use assessment data to drive academic decisions. On Mr. Contreras' campus, the data team took two days each quarter to review student assessment data and assign students to specific interventions (90). During a faculty meeting, Mr. Wilson reviewed student assessment data with a math teacher. Referring to a poster with the students divided into quintiles, Mr. Wilson highlighted that at a 70% passing standard, 55% of students failed the assessment and this was "unacceptable." He proceeded to discuss interventions for these students with a math teacher (91).

Ms. Norris provided her staff with forms to divide students into quintiles during a faculty meeting. The forms had already been filled out for the first benchmark, but she told her teachers they needed to look at the data to fill them out for the second benchmark scores (92). She later explained that this was a way she tried to ensure her teachers were looking at student assessment data (93).

Student assessments were used as formative measures to help guide the education of the students. Principals frequently used assessment data to identify areas on which to focus academic interventions for students.

Providing academic interventions. Interventions were provided in middle schools to meet all students' academic needs, a practice supported by the NMSA. The NMSA (2010) concludes, "successful middle grades schools use cooperative learning groups, independent study, enrichment programs, and other practices to respond to the variety of students competencies, interests, and abilities and meet the needs of advanced learners" (p. 33). To support the academic needs of his students, Mr. Contreras shared that his campus offered "morning tutorials, mandatory tutorials during that time where we coach them up, after school tutorials, we also have GCS" (94). Ms. Norris' campus hosted science nights where they fed students and taught science through games to prepare students for academic success on the Science STAAR (95).

After school interventions, however, were not enough. Ms. Wills' campus included in-school interventions because students' obligations and programs for enriching students' educational experiences were already scheduled after school:

> We cannot capture our kids after school in tutorials. They are involved in too many things - athletics, Robotics, Future Problem Solvers. There are just too many things, we aren't going to capture them. And a lot of our middle school kids are old enough to take care of siblings at home, so they ride the bus and they take care of siblings at home. So we try to capture them here, during the day. (96)

To meet the needs of these students, Ms. Wills implemented classes to give students extra help. She contended, "It's basically during the day help. Absolutely not a study hall, but very much a TEKS-based intervention course. It is a regular period during the day" (97).

Similarly, Mr. Contreras' campus had an enrichment or tutorial period each day. Students were scheduled for a tutorial class if they needed extra help, but an enrichment class if they did not need extra help. He reported:

> I was getting a lot of complaints about these PreAP students and GT students that were involved in so many different activities after school that they never had a chance to just get caught up. So we made it [enrichment class] into a study hall. And that has *worked*. It is easier to schedule and it benefits those students. And at that time, those students that need to be in tutorials based off our data, we put in there. (98)

The principals believed that implementing intervention strategies such as tutorials and enrichment classes helped facilitate student academic success in middle schools.

Principals felt they must facilitate students' academic success. They did this by recognizing the importance of academic growth, using data to drive academic decisions, and providing academic interventions.

Middle School Students are Young Adolescents

The fifth theme that emerged from the data was that it was important to remember that middle school students are young adolescents. Their brains and bodies are not fully developed and they should be expected, and allowed, to act like children at times (Vawter, 2009). During observations of lunches at both North Middle School and Central

Middle School, the principals put words to this idea. They both said lunch was very loud because this was the time that the students could just be kids (99; 100). Keeping in mind that middle school students are young adolescents, the principals voiced their opinions that it was important to remember the attributes of this age of student. These attributes guide the emergence of three sub-themes: providing consistency, building relationships with students, and having fun.

Providing consistency. Consistency is important for young adolescents (Vawter, 2009). As Mr. Baker reasoned, "They [middle school students] are creatures of habit. It helps show that this age of kid likes structure" (101).

Students' habits were evident as the students at North Middle School filed into the cafeteria. Ms. Wills pointed out that although there were two identical food lines that the students could choose from, the students picked one line and went to the same one every day. They also sat in the same seats every day (102). Mr. Baker saw a similar pattern at Central Middle School, noting that because the students sit in the same seats, it was easy for administrators to learn students' names and notice when they were not at school (103).

Because students are creatures of habit, Mr. Baker provided consistent expectations for them. For example, as we moved into the cafeteria to begin lunch duty, Mr. Baker explained that the students would come in and sit down at tables. Then he would release them by table to stand in a line to enter the serving lines. He would release them a few at a time to go into the serving lines. A few minutes later, as students entered the cafeteria, they followed the exact procedures he had laid out (104). The second and third lunches followed this procedure as well (105).

Ms. Wills also believed consistency was important when working with middle school students. Faculty and staff on her campus joined together to decide how to manage discipline for the year. She indicated their plan worked because it had been consistent (106). Ms. Wills clarified:

> When we see kids holding hands, we've decided as a campus that we want to say 'We don't do that here. We fist bump.' That's it. It sounds corny, but that's what we say, it's what we do. It works. We don't have kids doing it anymore. If a kid cusses, we say 'Rephrase that.' Every staff member says that, every kid hears it, and we're done. It got to the point that the kids were telling each other that - 'Hey, no. Rephrase that.' So I think just consistency across the board. Everybody on staff- from the cafeteria people, to the maintenance people, to the paraprofessionals, to every teacher on campus, and the office staff - every person on campus - we all say, and do, and react the same way. So the kids know what the reaction is going to be. . . They know what the answer is going to be. (107)

Ms. Norris believed consistency was a strong leadership trait for principals, especially in discipline. She tried to be consistent in her discipline and stressed:

> I want it to be as unison as possible. I mean, I know every situation is unique in its own. But for the most part, if your kid got in a fight and this kid got in a fight, it should be the same consequence. (108)

Providing consistency at school was important to these principals when working with young adolescents. Another aspect identified as important when working with middle school students was building relationships with the students.

Building relationships with students. Ellerbrock, Kiefer, & Alley (2014), as well as the NMSA (2010), emphasize that middle school students need at least one adult-student relationship in the school. The middle school principals in this study knew this to be true, as they all voiced the importance of knowing the students they served. Ms. Norris said, "Just knowing the kids is so important. . . . That's something I take pride in and feel is important. That I know who each individual kid is the best I can" (109).

Mr. Wilson added that knowing the students helped make a difference for individual students. He recalled a student that was helped because of the relationship he had built with the student:

> I have an eighth grader who is a really, really good kid. And this is the first time in the two and a half years he has been here that he has been eligible to play sports. And there are only three basketball games left and four track meets, but he got his mom to take him to get his physical. And that made me feel really, really good because I've talked to him. I've always encouraged him to do stuff like that, but he actually did it. He was extremely happy and his teachers were too. (110)

Mr. Contreras built relationships through leading a mentoring program at his school. He recognized a need for students that were at-risk and started a mentoring program that was similar to programs that coaches have with athletes (111). Mr. Contreras led this mentoring class with nine boys each Friday. During one class, he asked the boys what they thought of the program, and they answered they were "glad to be here" and "If I wasn't here I'd be in DAEP" (112).

Ms. Wills began each day in the cafeteria, eating breakfast with the students. This helped her build relationships by keeping a pulse on how the students were feeling that day. She explained:

> We eat breakfast with them [the students]; we talk to them. Set the tone for the day - kind of get a feel of what the student body feels like that day. Who's having a rough day? Who's not going to have a rough day? Who's reset from yesterday's rough day? Motivate the kids - everyday is a clean slate day, so motivate the kids to have a clean slate day. (113)

The relationships principals had with students were shown in the subtleties of their actions. For example, as we left a classroom observation a student whispered 'Bye, Ms. Wills' and Ms. Wills smiled and winked at the student before leaving the room (114). In another room, as the students left, Ms. Wills told one that she was proud of his behavior that day (115). As Mr. Baker directed the lunch lines, he shook the students' hands and asked their names. He would ask if two students knew each other and if they did not, he introduced the students to each other and had them shake hands (116).

Building relationships with middle school students was important to these principals when working with young adolescents. One advantage to building these relationships was that it allowed the principals to have fun with the students, and let the students have fun at school.

Having fun. The principals stressed the importance of having fun with the students. Having fun helps principals create positive learning environments (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013; Wilhelm, 2010), while reducing the stress students experience as

transescents (Griffin & Galassi, 2010). Ms. Norris created this positive environment through the use of her sense of humor. She said, "I try to have a sense of humor. I think there is a time to be serious and there is still a time to joke around. I do try to balance that" (117). Mr. Wilson implied that he used humor and fun to make sure students enjoy school. He claimed:

> I'll come in and sit in a class and I'll participate. If they are talking about something, I'll bring in something about old music. 'Cause I've been around a long time and they are like 'Who?' . . . I'll ring the bell early and say early dismissal. . . .I'll take all the kids to the gym and let them play basketball or something like that instead of going to the enrichment period. (118)

Mr. Baker frequently joked with the students. As he was doing lunch duty, he picked up a student's banana and pretended to talk on it like it was a phone. This got a laugh from the group of boys at the table and they continued to 'talk' on the banana as Mr. Baker handed it back and meandered away (119). After school at bus duty in the cafeteria, Mr. Baker asked a girl to come in and shut the door "so the Boogey-man won't get in." The girl laughed and teased him about believing in the Boogey-man and he played along. She happily complied with his request to shut the door (120).

When working with middle school students, these principals felt it was important to use humor and fun, build relationships with the students, and provide consistency within the school. These were all elements that highlighted the need for principals to remember the characteristics of middle school students.

Providing Leadership in Campus Responsibilities

The sixth theme that emerged from the data was that principals provide leadership in campus responsibilities. Like the principals in Fullan's (2014) research, these middle school principals believed the principal was ultimately responsible for the campus. Mr. Baker voiced this belief by asserting:

> The bottom line is someone needs to be responsible. And the principalship is that role of responsibility. You don't pass the blame, you don't say it wasn't my fault. No. If you are the principal, you are responsible for everything that happens on that campus. You are it. . . . You are responsible. The reason it didn't get done is because you didn't provide the leadership that was needed to get it acquired. (121)

Principals explained that they provide leadership in campus responsibilities through four sub-themes: taking ownership on campus, giving clear expectations, providing directives, and making personnel decisions.

Taking ownership on campus. The principals in this study indicated they take ownership in responsibility for their campuses. Mr. Wilson detailed the principals' overall responsibility to the campus by saying, "You have to be in charge of your school. You have to be the curriculum person on your campus, and you have to be the observer, and the appraiser" (121). This responsibility is expected, as the standards for principals in Texas all begin with "the principal is responsible" (Texas Administrative Code [TAC], 2014, section b). Mr. Contreras felt he fulfilled his responsibility by doing everything possible to ensure student success on his campus. He summarized:

> The attitude we have is 'let's do whatever it takes' - exhaust all efforts. And people say they [the students] have a responsibility too, to learn as well. Yeah, I understand that, but we need to do our part. I wouldn't be able to sleep at night if we didn't. (123)

Ms. Wills also recognized her role as being responsible for the campus. When discussing an area in which her campus did not meet accountability safeguards, Ms. Wills exclaimed:

> It should never happen two years in a row. Last year was the first year it counted as a sub-pop[ulation], so I think as a district, and especially as a campus - and I take ownership in that - I didn't foresee that. (124)

When taking ownership for the campus, principals understood they must provide clear expectations to their teachers.

Giving clear expectations. Principals agreed that as the leader they should give clear directions and expectations to staff members. Fullan (2014) and Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss (2010) refer to these actions as providing the vision for the school, a key to school leadership. Ms. Norris laid her expectations out at the beginning of the school year. She specified, "At the beginning of the school year, we have tons and tons of trainings, so I pretty much lay my expectations out there. And we have a staff handbook that I relate back to a lot" (125). Reviewing the East Middle School staff handbook, there were clear directions for multiple situations including the teacher dress code, expectations for faculty meetings, and what to do if a teacher needed a substitute (126).

Ms. Wills also used her campus handbook to give clear expectations, but she also added an addendum each year to clarify specific expectations for the year. This year, as the campus focused on reading and writing across all content areas, the addendum clarified that all teachers were to "accept only complete sentences on all work, give grammar feedback and corrections on work, and use the writing formula and the writing correction symbols" (127).

Mr. Wilson continued to give clear expectations throughout the year, as evident through his meeting agenda. Mr. Wilson's agenda was very specific, including items such as, "Tutorials - make sure you have a sign in sheet with students' name on it each day of your tutorials. Turn this in to [the principal's secretary]. Friday morning" (128).

In his faculty meeting, Mr. Baker checked for clarity in his expectations by calling for questions after each agenda item. He kept a light-hearted feel when he gave the faculty and staff time to ask questions by ending each agenda item discussion in auctioneer style, asking if anyone had questions or anything to add and then calling out "Going once, twice, gone" (129)!

Although the principals tried to be clear in their expectations, sometimes this information was not used by teachers, and principals had to be more assertive by giving directives.

Providing directives. Although none of the principals liked to give directives, they believed that when the situation warranted it, the leadership must provide directives. Wilhelm (2010) agrees, saying that principals balance the "act of 'stepping-up' (being

more directive as needed), and 'stepping back' (acting more in a guiding role as appropriate)" (p. 24). Mr. Baker explained:

> Hierarchical style in my mind is, 'I'm the boss and you are the subordinate. I tell you what to do and this is how we are going to do it.' No, I do not subscribe to that style. However, when the situation dictates that, I do that. Say, alright this didn't work, this didn't work, this didn't work. Now I need to tell you. That's where I become direct. (130)

Similarly, Ms. Norris verified, "I micromanage when I have given you every opportunity to do it yourself and you have failed. And then I step in and say, 'Until you can prove otherwise, you are going to do it this way.' So I give directives" (131).

One way principals can give directives is through the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS) Intervention Plan for a Teacher in Need of Assistance (TINA). This plan includes identifying:

1. Domain(s) in which the teacher is in need of assistance.
2. Professional-improvement activities and dates for completion.
3. Evidence that will be used to determine that professional-improvement activities have been completed.
4. Directives for changes in teacher behavior and time lines.
5. Evidence that will be used to determine if teacher behavior has changed (Region 13 Education Service Center, 2015).

Ms. Norris provided an example of an intervention plan for one of her teachers. This plan included identifying the teacher needed assistance in "Domain 4) Management of Student Discipline, Instructional Strategies, Time, and Materials." It listed five activities for the teacher to complete, with specific dates for completion. For example, the teacher was to attend "Making ISS Really the Last Resort" on April 29, 2014 and submit a summary of this training by May 30, 2014. The evidence of completion of this activity included implementation of "a minimum of two ideas from 'Making ISS Really the Last Resort'" (132).

Although the campus handbook noted teachers should be on duty everyday (133), Ms. Wills had to direct her teachers that everyone was to be on both morning and afternoon duty from 7:45 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. each day. She explained that as the weather was getting warmer, students were getting restless and there had been rumors of fights and weapons on campus. The teachers must be on duty monitoring students during these times (134).

Principals provided directives when the situations required this type of leadership. Through providing directives, principals hoped to avoid having to make difficult personnel decisions, but understood that these decisions were sometimes necessary.

Making personnel decisions. Providing leadership in campus responsibilities required making personnel decisions. The Texas Education Code charges principals with "ensuring there are high-quality teachers and staff in every classroom and throughout the school" (TAC, 2014, section b). A task many principals felt was the most difficult part of their position. Ms. Wills expressed, "Personnel is harder to deal with than any book will

ever tell you! . . . Dealing with adults and staff and personnel is tough" (135). Some of the examples of tough personnel issues she was surprised by included teachers using inappropriate language with students, giving quizzes over material not yet covered, and gossiping about school personnel (136).

Mr. Wilson agreed personnel issues were difficult. He lamented, "I really find it hard when I have to sit down with somebody and say you just aren't doing the job - I find it hard. I do it. But it is something that I don't like to do" (137). Mr. Contreras asserted difficult personnel decisions were always based on what was best for students:

> I expect people to be professional at all times and do their job. And it is hard for me to see when they don't. And it is tough for me to correct them. . . . I have no problem doing my job in that area - especially when it effects kids. . . . I've fired people, I've not renewed contracts - based off what is best for the kids. They are what drive my decision making. And that is what has helped me a lot. Knowing that I am making decisions based on what is best for our students." (138)

Making personnel decisions was an essential part of the principal's role in leading the school. Before making a final personnel decision, principals tried to correct personnel issues by providing clear directives.

To provide leadership in campus responsibilities, principals felt it was important to take ownership for campus outcomes. They acted on this ownership through giving clear directions, providing directives, and making personnel decisions.

Supporting Teachers

The seventh theme that emerged from the data was that an important part of the principal’s job was supporting teachers. Supporting teachers, Hallinger and Heck (2010) argue, helps create conditions within the school for effective teaching and learning. Mr. Wilson described the importance of making sure teachers knew the principal supported them: "They [the teachers] will work for you. If they know that you are really on their side. They will, they'll work" (139). Mr. Baker theorized, "The role of the principal, in my mind, is to help and support and answer questions" (140).

The ways principals supported teachers are explained in four sub-themes: acknowledging teachers' work, providing for teachers' professional improvement, working collaboratively with teachers, and distributing leadership to teachers.

Acknowledging teachers' work. The principals expressed support for their teachers by acknowledging the teachers were professionals and by praising their work, activities Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) recognize as increasing teachers' motivation. Mr. Wilson explained, "I consider my staff professionals. And because of that, I try to let them be professionals" (141). A teacher at Central Middle School claimed Mr. Baker was the best principal because he "encourages us but leaves us alone to do our job. . . . He just expects us to do our job; he doesn't micromanage" (142).

As Mr. Contreras talked about various teachers on his campus, he frequently praised them. In conversation, he consistently made comments such as "She was amazing" (143) and he believed he was very lucky and blessed because "Every teacher here works for a purpose" (144). Mr. Wilson also made positive comments as he talked

about his teachers. He told me, "My teachers do an excellent job" (145) and called a teacher we observed "an amazing teacher" (146). While visiting classes, Ms. Wills walked by a teacher's desk and left a note that said "Doing a great job! Thank you!" (147). Mr. Baker recognized the teachers in a faculty meeting, telling them "all of you made this [winning an award] possible with your lesson plans and support" (148). Ms. Wills acknowledged her paraprofessionals as well as her teachers, explaining her paraprofessionals were some of the best resources she had because they helped everywhere and saw different classes. They could share what worked in one class with other teachers (149).

Ms. Norris rewarded her teachers by allowing teachers to wear blue jeans as a way to thank them for their work and to motivate others to work as well (150). In both Mr. Baker's and Ms. Wills' districts, the principals helped recognize teachers through a peer-elected 'Teacher of the Year' award (151; 152).

The principals thought supporting teachers through acknowledging the professionalism and accomplishments of their teachers was an important aspect of the principals' leadership role.

Providing for teachers' professional improvement. The principals supported their teachers by providing opportunities for teachers to improve their practice. Improvement of instructional practices, it is believed, will increase student achievement (McCann, Jones, & Arnoff, 2010). Opportunities to improve instructional practice included professional development, resources, and sheltered time for collaboration and planning. On his campus, Mr. Baker was responsible for providing professional

development to help meet the classroom needs of teachers. His school's Campus Improvement Plan directed him, as principal, to "provide staff-development in data-driven decision making to improve instruction and student performance" (153).

Ms. Wills explained the teacher mentoring program North Independent School District had to support new teachers. The principal teamed each first and second year teacher up with a veteran teacher in the same content area, but who had a different conference time. This allowed the veteran teacher to observe the new teacher and the new teacher to observe the veteran teacher. Novice teachers also did one 15-minute walkthrough of another class each week (154).

Ms. Norris provided her teachers a resource to help them disaggregate data. She gave each teacher a "Kid List" to complete with each child's name, score on the first and second benchmark tests, semester grade, if the child was expected to pass the STAAR, and if the parent had been contacted (155). She put this structure in place to guide her teachers in looking at data, identifying the students in danger of failing, and recognizing the parents who needed contacted (156).

Both North Middle School and South Middle School adapted their master schedules to include collaboration time for teachers (157; 158). Mr. Contreras established that during this time "we look at data . . . we also use it for instructional strategies" (159). These claims were substantiated through observations. During collaboration time, some teachers learned high-yield strategies by participating in the strategies as professional development. Teachers sat in the library discussing the 'best wrong answer' and justifying this choice in a strategy called "Slap Down" (160). Some ELA teachers reviewed data

from a recent benchmark during this time, noting that while the scores were not good, they had identified strong and weak skills and were directing their lessons to address these skills (161). In another room, science teachers reviewed printed PowerPoints, a foldable, and multiple STAAR materials to identify academic vocabulary for review (162).

The principals provided professional development opportunities, resources, and time to help their teachers improve their teaching practices. Improving the teachers' teaching practices is believed to improve the academic achievement of students.

Working collaboratively with teachers. The principals supported their teachers by working collaboratively with their staff. Wilhelm (2010) contrasts the effectiveness of principals who work along-side their staff and those who do not. He asserts that when principals do not collaborate with teachers, "their absence proclaims the negligible degree to which the strategies or practices will actually be implemented, monitored, and supported" (p. 23). Mr. Baker emphasized the importance of working together collaboratively as he compared his preferred leadership style to the Olympic sport of rowing. He described:

> We use our oars to row in the same direction at the same time. . . . We all need to row in the same direction. I do not consider my position any more important than that of people in food service, transportation, custodial, or any other position. Because every position is important to getting where we need to be, and where we need to be is student success. . . . Also from a standpoint of teamwork, asking

people questions and gathering information first, including people in decision-making, things of that nature. (163)

Ms. Norris and Ms. Wills both said they did not ask their teachers to do anything they were not willing to do themselves (164; 165). Ms. Wills emphasized, "I think they appreciate that. I can get my pencil out and get down and dirty just like they are expected to do with data. So we do that in PLCs [Professional Learning Communities]; we do it as a whole faculty" (166). In her department head and grade-level head meeting, Ms. Wills did work with her teachers to review semester benchmark data (167;168) and intervention data (169; 170).

Mr. Baker worked with his faculty to determine what to do on STAAR testing day with students who were not testing (171). Similarly, Ms. Norris sat with her science teachers and together they planned the extended day program for science tutorials (172). During a faculty meeting, Mr. Wilson also worked collaboratively with his teachers to plan tutorials (173).

Instead of dictating these decisions to their staff, these principals supported their teachers by working collaboratively to determine the best course of action for all those involved. Their collaborative actions demonstrated their support of the teachers' role as well as their commitment to the strategies and practices implemented.

Distributing leadership to teachers. The principals supported their teachers by distributing leadership to the teachers. Mr. Contreras believed distributing leadership built capacity in teachers (174). The relationship between teacher leadership and building capacity was also observed by Fullan (2014). He concludes, "Developing professional

capital develops leadership across the school. This means that more gets done in the short run - because there are many leaders with a common focus - as sustainable leadership for the future is cultivated" (p. 86). During an observation of the ambassador program at South Middle School, a teacher exemplified this idea. She affirmed:

> One of the things that I love about working at South Middle School is that the principal and central administration support us. They open the door to try new things and run with them. I'm not a color-in-the-lines person and I've been allowed to grow [programs]. They support us all the way up. We aren't afraid to try new things - and sometimes they don't work. That's okay, we go on. (175)

Throughout this observation, I watched this teacher manage the ambassador program in which eighth grade students taught character lessons to sixth grade students. The teacher managed the curriculum, students, and classroom organization while Mr. Contreras acted as a mentor in another part of the building. He had distributed leadership to her and allowed her to grow this program (176). He told me that when the program became so popular that not all of the students who applied were accepted as leaders, people criticized him for not knowing the criteria for being selected as a leader in the program. He said, "I want to be sure I know about it, but I'm letting her [the teacher] be a leader in that area. That is totally teacher driven" (177).

Mr. Baker distributed leadership by getting other people to lead staff development activities. He told me he had the technology facilitator, the department heads, the diagnostician, the nurse, the librarian, the assistant principals, the custodians, and the school resource officer all lead staff development activities (178). In his faculty meeting,

the agenda designated a time for the councilors and a time for the assistant principal to present, and they did (179, 180).

Mr. Wilson explained that in their district, leadership had been distributed through a grant that allowed the district to have curriculum specialists in the four core subjects. Where in the past, the principals collected and reviewed testing data, now the specialists did this job (181). Specifically on his campus, Mr. Wilson distributed leadership by having teachers lead organizations. He said:

> I have a teacher that does UIL, and all that I ever do is just drive her to the meets. . . . I have a Student Council person, and the only time I ever talk to them [about Student Council] is when they ask, 'Can I do this?' I just trust them immensely. I have a National Junior Honor Society person - the same way. They will come and ask 'Can we do this?' Yeah. Other than the fact that I know about it, they are totally in charge of it. . . I give them a lot of responsibility. (182)

The principals believed that by distributing leadership to their teachers, they were also supporting the teachers capacity to continue to grow as professionals. Supporting the teachers in multiple ways was important to the principals. They supported their teachers by acknowledging and praising teachers' work as professionals, providing opportunities for teachers' professional improvement, working collaboratively with teachers, and distributing leadership to teachers.

Seeking Improvement for Self and Campus

The eighth and final theme that emerged from the data was the need for each principal to seek improvement in the jobs they did as well as improvement for their

campuses. Monitoring the conditions of the school and improving those conditions, Leithwood et al. (2010) argue, is the "main task" of school leaders (p. 256). Mr. Baker detailed the importance of seeking improvement:

> We want to know where we are. We want to know what are we doing well. What are we not doing well. What do we need to change for improvement? Again, the pinnacle of all of this is student success. And if students are not being successful, we are not doing what we need to do. Because if they are not successful, these are our future teachers, school board members, doctors, lawyers, business people, and whatnot. We are going to have an awful society if we allow students to get out of our doors without the tools that they need. (183)

Principals recognized opportunities and resources to seek improvement for leading student success through two sub-themes: improving professional practice and improving their campuses.

Improving professional practice. The principals recognized opportunities and resources to improve their professional practices in fulfilling their role as principal. Principals' need for continuous professional improvement is noted by Wilhelm (2010). One way the principals reported improving their professional practices was through networking. Mr. Wilson said, "If I have a concern, I call another principal and vice versa. So I think that is the best thing about principals - networking" (184). Ms. Wills also utilized the advice of other principals in her town. She revealed, "I gain a lot of knowledge from them. . . . I've picked up the phone and asked - tell me about, or tell me when, or do you have any experience with? It helps" (185).

The principals also mentioned being a part of professional organizations can offer opportunities to improve the practice of educational leaders. Mr. Wilson said these organizations allowed principals to go to workshops and network to improve their practices (186). Mr. Contreras took these opportunities, reporting he participated in conferences and professional development opportunities through the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals (187).

Ms. Norris said she has used You Tube videos as a source of motivation and improvement. She explained:

> I use a lot of stuff from Steve Gilliand, a motivational speaker. He is phenomenal. He's the 'don't get your goat.' . . . That's something that, because my personality is so strong, I'd say my first five years, I let everyone get my goat. And they knew when I was [upset]. Now, they don't quite know. (188)

Ms. Wills found a resource she thought would be helpful to her professional development through a conversation with her district's Director of Federal and Special Programs. The director told us about two books she had bought: *Fair is Not Always Equal*, a book about differentiation, and *Meet Me in the Middle*, a book about successful middle school teaching. Ms. Wills expressed an interest in these topics and asked the director if she could borrow these books so that she too could read them. (189).

Principals valued and looked for opportunities and resources that led to their professional growth and improvement as well as the improvement of their campuses. These actions allowed the principal to act as the lead learner on campus.

Improving the campus. Throughout their daily activities, principals recognized opportunities and resources for improving their campuses, a trait Williams et al. (2010) list as "important to making gains in middle grades student outcomes" (p. 12). The principals discussed networking with other districts to improve their campus instruction. In Texas, 23 districts, including some in this study, formed a coalition to create a common, aligned curriculum and to improve instructional practices (190; 191; 192). Mr. Contreras admitted his campus joined the curriculum coalition and were "working very closely with them" (193). Their small group consisted of three area schools "collaborating to bring the best of the best together and allow for 'teachers' to have a say in educator proven classroom practices" (194).

Opportunities to improve the campus were also recognized by the principals. During a PLC, Mr. Contreras told some teachers that since the curriculum design should be completed next year, the teachers should not need to miss classes to work with the curriculum coalition. He suggested the teachers use the time that had already been set aside to meet with the districts' elementary campuses to ensure vertical alignment of instruction (195). When a coach stopped in Mr. Baker's office to discuss a student, Mr. Baker took the opportunity to question her about her student teacher. This student teacher was getting certified in ELA. Mr. Baker needed an ELA teacher for the following year and he recognized this student teacher may be able to fill this need (196).

Mr. Baker told me he used campus observations to "outline the things we need to address in staff development" (197). Ms. Wills also used observations to make improvements for the upcoming year. Together, we watched a sixth grade social studies

teacher take his class outside. He explained that the class had been discussing Mongolian nomads and how these nomads had to carry everything on their backs. Because the students did not seem to understand the concept, the teacher loaded a backpack with 30 pounds of gear. He then had the kids take turns running in the grassy area outside while carrying the backpack. The students then wrote a journal entry based on their experience (198). Later, we watched an eighth grade social studies class where students were passively asked to read quietly. Ms. Wills planned to have these two teachers trade places the following year. She recognized the importance of teachers using experiences to teach students and explained that because eighth grade social studies is a tested subject, they need the sixth grade teachers' strength there (199).

Ms. Norris gave examples of literary resources she used to seek improvement on her campus. She pulled out her tabbed copy of *The First Days of School* by Harry Wong and informed me that she uses the book "with veteran teachers and new teachers." She continued, "And another book I use a lot is *If You Don't Feed the Teachers, They Eat the Students*" (200). Recognizing available opportunities and resources helped principals improve their campuses.

Principals sought improvement in their professional practices and improvements for their campuses through networking with other principals and school districts and recognizing available opportunities and resources. In this way, the principals demonstrated life-long learning as the lead-learner on campus.

Summary

The role of the middle school principal is important in facilitating sustained school improvement that leads to students' success (Leithwood et al., 2006). This chapter presents key findings into how middle school principals make sense of their roles and responsibilities in the creation of school environments that facilitate student success and meet accountability expectations of the state. These findings, gleaned from five middle school principals, help shed light on the role of the middle school principal.

The participants in this case study served as the principals on five different middle school campuses, allowing for identification of common themes that cut across different contexts. The findings are presented through eight themes: principals' guiding factors, (a)typical days are the norm, developing character in the middle school, facilitating academic success in the middle school, middle school students are young adolescents, providing leadership in campus responsibilities, supporting teachers, and seeking improvement for self and campus.

The principals' guiding factors included their motivation for serving as a principal and a focus on what is best for students. The belief that the role of the principal allows individuals to affect students in a positive way motivated principals to accept and continue in this role. A focus on what is best for students was identified as the guiding factor for all campus decisions.

Principals described their days as atypical, a mixture of 'do lists' and 'fly balls.' Do lists included completing paperwork and responding to emails, attending meetings, and visiting classrooms. As principals attended to their required activities, they were prepared

to address 'fly balls' in the form of simple interruptions and special circumstances. Simple interruptions included activities such as quick conversations with teachers and addressing student behaviors. Special circumstances required more time than simple interruptions.

Developing character in the middle school was identified as an important part of the principals' roles. The principals explained that as students enter young adolescents, they become impressionable and their influences changed. The middle school environment needed to be a positive influence. Furthermore, the principals believed that developing character in the middle school correlated with student success by giving students the skills they needed to be successful. In order to meet the needs of impressionable young adolescents and nurture behaviors that improve academics, the principals focused on structures such as clearly and repeatedly reminding students of the expected behaviors and creating classes to help teach the characteristics expected.

To facilitate academic success in the middle school, the principals indicated they focused on academic growth, used data to drive academic decisions, and provided academic interventions. These principals recognized that although students may not meet a passing standard, recognizing and rewarding the students' growth toward the standard was important. In identifying students' growth, as well as their academic needs, the principals relied on assessment data and frequently referred to this data to make campus decisions. Once data had been used to identify students' needs, principals implemented interventions such as tutorials and enrichment classes to help students grow academically.

The principals also said they must remember that middle school students are young adolescents and must be given time to "be kids." The principals referred to

students' habitual nature to infer that middle school students need and prefer structure in their lives. Principals provided consistent structures for students. Furthermore, the principals recognized the importance of forming relationships with, and knowing, their students. Knowing their students helped principals make decisions based on what was best for their students, better meeting the needs of their campus. As adults who chose to work with young adolescents, the principals acknowledged that having fun was an important part of working with middle school students.

Principals indicated they provided leadership in campus responsibilities. As the leader, the principal took ownership in campus outcomes. In taking ownership and responsibility, principals gave clear directions to teachers, provided directives as needed, and made personnel decisions.

One of the principals' primary roles was to support teachers. To support teachers, principals acknowledged teachers' work, treated teachers as professionals and praised them for accomplishments. When principals identified a teacher's professional need, they provided opportunities for the teachers' professional improvement. Principals worked collaboratively with teachers towards the goal of student success. Principals also recognized that distributing leadership builds capacity in teachers. Principals distributed leadership by allowing teachers to take leadership positions in various ways in the school.

Finally, principals recognized the need to seek improvement in their professional practice and improvements for their campuses in order to increase student achievement. Principals networked with other principals and districts. They also recognized the opportunities and resources they had available to them on campus. Principals used these

relationships, opportunities, and resources to make improvements that led to greater student success on their campuses.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

When we talk about excellence in education, we must remember that our job is to prepare students for an excellent life, not just an excellent upcoming school year.
Hoerr, 2008, p. 83

As early as 1895, educators have been concerned with discovering the best way to facilitate young adolescents' success (Alexander, 1987; Lounsbury, 2009). Early middle school advocates such as Alexander (1963) and Eichhorn (1968) espouse the need for educational experiences that are developmentally responsive to the needs of young adolescents. The National Middle School Association (NMSA) continues to advocate for developmentally responsive middle schools that are challenging, empowering, and equitable for students (NMSA, 2010). Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss (2010) argue that these school cultures "are carefully created and constructed by the school leader" (p. 261). The school leaders in this study recognized the need to carefully construct learning environments that focused on students' needs rather than assessments.

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to explore how middle school principals, as school leaders, create and construct effective educational environments. The principal is recognized as a key influence in the success or failure of the school (Bush, 2009; Fullan, 2002; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006). For this reason, it is important to explore how principals negotiate their influential role. This study used the perceptions of five middle school principals, Mr. Baker, Ms. Wills, Mr. Contreras, Ms. Norris, and Mr. Wilson, to gain insight into how middle school principals use holistic leadership to influence student success in their schools. I used

interviews, observations, documents, and a reflexive journal to examine the principals' perceptions of how they employ holistic leadership to create educational environments that facilitate student success.

Interpretation of Findings

Cutting across the variation in schools, this study found that these five principals were each passionate and determined advocates for middle school students (Lounsbury, 2009). Like the principals in Fullan's (2014) study, the principals in this study believed they were ultimately responsible for the success of the campus. In fulfilling this position of responsibility, eight themes were identified in the data: principals' guiding factors, (a)typical days are the norm, developing character in the middle school, facilitating academic success in the middle school, middle school students are young adolescents, providing leadership in campus responsibilities, supporting teachers, and seeking improvement for self and campus. The conclusions drawn from these themes are discussed below.

Principals' Guiding Factors

According to the middle school model, middle school personnel should make decisions based on the nature of young adolescents (NMSA, 2010). The principals in this study noted that each decision they made, including the one to become middle school principals, revolved around the students' needs. Each principal had experience as a teacher and had influenced students' lives in the classroom, but they recognized that the role of the principal could affect more students in a positive manner. The principals wanted the ability to make changes that would help themselves and others put students

first. With an attitude of service to students, the principals voiced their belief that a successful day was one in which every decision they made, as well as every conversation they had, put students as their first priority.

(A)typical Days are the Norm

The five middle school principals participating in this study noted the hectic schedule they each faced on a daily basis. While their agendas included aspects of instructional leadership, such as observing classrooms and providing teachers with feedback and training, they also engaged in managerial leadership through completing paperwork, responding to emails, and attending meetings. These tasks on the principals' to-do lists were often interrupted by simple and complex circumstances. While some of these interruptions were dealt with quickly, such as a student out of dress code being asked to change, some interruptions were more time-consuming. The principals calmly attended to each of the circumstances as they happened, even at the expense of their own planned agendas, a theme Hallinger and Murphy (2013) also note in their research. One participant even joked that rather than being good at time management, middle school principals must be good at interruption management.

Developing Character in the Middle School

In line with the NMSA's (2010) call for middle schools to address both academic and personal development of students, the principals in this study believed they needed to help develop character in middle school students. As leaders that were responsive to the needs of middle school students, they believed it would be a disservice to students to ignore this aspect of child development. Specifically, all five principals discussed the

need to help middle school students develop characteristics of work ethic and responsibility. These characteristics, principals believed, would positively influence students' future academic and career paths. Lemberger, Brigman, Webb, and Moore (2012) indicate that the principals were correct and that increasing competency in students' personal skills correlates to improvement in their academics as well. The development of these characteristics would also be a positive influence for students. The principals recognized that in middle school, students' influences begin to change and students need these positive influences (Brown & Anfara, 2002; Eichhorn, 1968; Griffin & Galassi, 2010; Lounsbury, 2009; NMSA, 2010). To meet these needs, principals created ways for the school to continually promote these positive behaviors and characteristics on their middle school campuses.

Facilitating Academic Success in the Middle School

With a bit of resignation, each principal admitted that standardized testing, specifically STAAR in Texas, was the aspect that most people look to when judging student success. As such, academic success as measured by the STAAR influenced the leadership decisions of middle school principals. The principals noted that their leadership in academics was driven by the data they gathered from local and state tests, a practice Fullan (2014) and Hallinger and Murphy (2013) advocate. Analyzing this data helped the principals recognize where students needed additional academic support. The principals were then able to create specific interventions such as enrichment classes and tutorials to meet these academic needs of students (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013). However, within this academic accountability environment, the principals also

emphasized that recognizing students' academic growth was important. They felt that when students saw they were making academic gains and achieving small goals, the students felt more successful overall. Villares, Lemberger, Brigman, and Webb (2011) support this notion that when "small improvements are recognized, their [students'] confidence in their abilities will increase" (p. 45).

Middle School Students are Young Adolescents

When working with middle school students, the principals in this study emphasized that it was important to remember that the students had not yet reached full maturity. Pointing to students' habitual behavior as an example, the principals drew the conclusion that middle school students found comfort in consistency. The principals were consistent in establishing and enforcing rules and expectations to create cultures that they believed middle school students would recognize as safe and fair, reducing emotional stress common to middle school students (Griffin & Galassi, 2010). Ellerbrock, Kiefer, and Alley (2014) report that middle school students need relationships in the school that are characterized by "trust, care, and respect" (p. 3). The principals in this study recognized these needs in their students as well and reiterated the importance of building trusting relationships with students. Relationships built on trust, care, and respect helped principals identify and meet the needs of individual students and the student body as a whole. The principals built these relationships through interacting with the students as frequently as possible. The principals enjoyed using humor to create relationships with students, as well as to enjoy their time as the principal.

Providing Leadership in Campus Responsibilities

The principals assured me that the principal was the one ultimately responsible for all aspects of the campus (Fullan, 2014). The principals noted that their least favorite, and most difficult task, was dealing with personnel. Specifically, they found it difficult, although necessary, to deal with personnel who were not performing up to expectations. They performed this task because they understood its importance to student success and because it is required by the state of Texas (Texas Administrative Code [TAC], 2014, section b). The principals noted that they made every effort to communicate their expectations to staff, but they also took ownership when their directions were unclear or not followed. As Mr. Baker succinctly pointed out, when expectations are not upheld, it "is because you [the principal] didn't provide the leadership that was needed to get it acquired" (201). When the principals noticed that their expectations were not being followed, they first tried to clarify expectations. Then, when the situation warranted it, they gave directives. If improvement was not noted after giving directives, the principals each said that they had to make difficult personnel decisions, including the decision to not retain a teacher. While these decisions were difficult, the principals found solace in the belief that even these difficult decisions were made to benefit student success.

Supporting Teachers

Supporting teachers' professional development was also noted as an important aspect of the principal's role. Hallinger and Murphy (2013) called principals to support "ongoing professional learning of staff" (p. 8) in order to improve schools. Like McCann, Jones, and Arnoff (2010), the principals each recognized that their teachers were the ones

with the most direct contact with students, thus supporting teachers indirectly supported student success. To support teachers, the principals noted that they treated their teachers as professionals and publicly, frequently, and sincerely acknowledged their work. Praising the work of their teachers was like second nature to the principals involved in this study. The principals also supported teachers' professional development by working collaboratively with teachers, creating opportunities for teachers to learn from one another, and distributing leadership to teachers. The more support teachers received, the principals believed, the better teachers they would be for the students. Unlike Fullan (2014), however, these principals did not mention using student assessment data to identify areas in which teachers needed instructional support.

Seeking Improvement for Self and Campus

The final theme that emerged from the data dealt with the principals acting as lead learners and showing a desire to act as life-long learners. Acting as the lead learner through continued development has been recognized as an important part of the principals' role (Fullan, 2014; NMSA, 2010; Wilhelm, 2010). The principals consistently sought and took advantage of opportunities to grow as professionals and to improve their campuses. As professionals, principals used networking, professional organizations, and media resources to continually learn and improve their practice to benefit their campuses. They also consistently sought opportunities to directly improve their campuses through available time and resources.

Summary of Conclusions

Middle school principals hold a heavy burden as the one primarily responsible for the campus. As middle school principals focus on students as their first priority, they build learning environments that are conducive to student success. The principals pay attention to the academic and personal development of students; provide professional development for teachers, themselves, and their campus; and create enjoyable learning environments for students. These environments facilitate middle school students' success.

Answering the Research Questions

In their goal to create effective middle schools, the principals in this study confirmed that they combined managerial, instructional, and ethical leadership activities into a holistic leadership style. This holistic leadership allowed principals to facilitate student success and meet accountability expectations of the state. These leadership duties and responsibilities always focused on improving the students' educational experience (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2014). The principals emphasized that it was not the *activities* that were the focus, but rather the *purpose* of each activity that was important for increasing student success in all areas.

Two main questions guided this study: 1) How do middle school principals perceive they use holistic leadership to create educational environments that facilitate student success? and 2) How do middle school principals negotiate their role as holistic leaders to meet accountability expectations of the state?

Question 1: How do middle school principals perceive they use holistic leadership to create educational environments that facilitate student success?

The middle school principals participating in this study did not define their leadership style with any particular label. They set goals for their campuses and then focused every resource, every decision, and every action on achieving these goals. While the individual actions the principals took aligned with various leadership styles, the principals led holistically without making a distinction between instructional, managerial, or ethical activities. In the words of Mr. Contreras, "The attitude we have is 'let's do whatever it takes' - exhaust all efforts" (202).

The principals' constant focus on students and student success is vital to the success of middle schools (CCSSO, 2014). Without this focus, the principal would not create an environment in which students reached their full potential. The principals in this study held common ideas about student success. Like the NMSA (2010), these principals believed middle schools should address students' academic and personal development. They also recognized this development was only possible in a supportive culture.

Academic development. Students' academic development was most commonly measured by standardized tests. Local standardized tests served as formative assessments, providing data to drive instruction. The STAAR was recognized more often as a summative assessment for the material learned in a year, but also providing data to drive instruction the following year.

Teaching has been identified as the number one influence on student academic achievement (Leithwood et al., 2006). The principals in this study recognized that

supporting the learning needs of staff translated into effective practices in the classroom, thus creating positive learning environments for students. To support the academic development of students, principals reviewed assessment data with their teachers and created interventions to address students' academic needs identified by the data. The principals also observed classes to ensure appropriate teaching strategies were being utilized and the content was aligned with the state curriculum. The principals provided professional development to teachers needing help in these areas.

The principals noted, however, that a focus on academic development of their students was only part of the environment of student success. Students' personal development in a supportive culture was important in the creation of educational environments that facilitate student success.

Personal development. In addition to academic development, the principals in this study also recognized the importance of developing good character in their students. Brown and Anfara (2002) and Lounsbury (2009) note that the middle school is the most appropriate time to influence students' personal development. Specifically, all of the principals felt it was the school's duty to help develop students' work ethic and responsibility. Some principals also noted the importance of developing students' leadership skills, trustworthy behaviors, and respect. Developing these skills, the principals said, would benefit students in their future academics as well as in their careers.

In an attempt to develop characteristics of a positive work ethic and responsibility, principals created a culture in their schools that advertised, encouraged,

and rewarded these behaviors. Students received verbal and visual reminders that these were the expected behaviors in the school. While South Middle School developed special classes to address these behaviors specifically, the other principals expected their teachers to incorporate the development of these personal skills into their classes.

Developing students' personal skills and academic skills were goals identified by the middle school principals, but they also recognized that these goals could only be reached within a supportive culture.

Supportive culture. Griffin and Galassi (2010) report that the changes middle school students undergo create emotional stress and result in disengagement in school. The principals in this study recognized that to facilitate student success, they must address this emotional stress and help students remain engaged in school.

To reduce emotional stress, Ellerbrock et al. (2014) claim middle school students need to have relationships with adults that are characterized by "trust, care, and respect for one another" with support for students' "emotional and cognitive development" (p. 3). The principals in this study recognized this need for students to have a trusting relationship with adults at school, and thus tried to create these relationships with students. The principals each made a concerted effort to spend time with their students and really get to know them. They ate breakfast and lunch with the students, were visible in the halls during passing periods, and visited classrooms where students were learning. When appropriate, the principals engaged in conversations with the students and used humor to help the students relax. These efforts to know and respect students helped the

principals create environments in which students felt they were safe and supported by the adults, which ultimately helped reduce some of the emotional stress of students.

Summary of the first question. Middle school principals agree that educational environments that facilitate student success develop students academically and personally. To develop students academically, the principals use assessment data and teacher professional development opportunities to enhance their instructional programs. To develop students personally, the principals focus on providing students multiple opportunities to grow and learn attributes associated with a good work ethic and responsibility. This academic and personal development is supported in a culture of fun and trust. Principals craft this culture through the use of humor and relationships. It is through this developmentally responsive culture and focus on students' academic and personal development that principals create environments that facilitate student success.

Question 2: How do middle school principals negotiate their role as holistic leaders to meet accountability expectations of the state?

The principals in this study all sighed with resignation when they discussed accountability expectations of the state. They admitted that the accountability element influenced their schools and seemed to be the most frequent measure of student success analyzed by outside entities. The principals themselves, however, did not consider state accountability as a measure of student success to be prioritized over any other measure of success.

Use of performance data. Like the NMSA (2010), the principals agreed that they were responsible for "ensuring that every student learns and every member of the learning community is held to high expectations" (p. 13). The principals used this

standard to negotiate their role in meeting accountability expectations of the state. Focusing on ensuring that every student learns and is held to high expectations, the principals utilized performance data from local and state tests to identify individual students' learning needs and strengths. The principals then used this information to develop interventions to meet the students' identified learning needs. To meet accountability expectations, Texas recommends this practice, calling for schools to provide academic interventions that "reflect an emphasis on increased student performance, focused improvement planning, data analysis, and data integrity" (TEA, 2014a, p. 79).

Use of classroom observations. To further support the academic learning needs of students, participants in this study also observed classrooms to identify where teachers needed support in aligning the academic standards provided by the state to their instructional practice based on student needs. The principals used observational data to provide professional development opportunities to teachers, a practice supported by Fullan (2014) and Wilhelm (2010). The principals also provided teachers with collaboration time with their peers to learn from one another's practice. Larsen and Reickhoff (2014) note these instructional leadership practices directly influence student academic success.

Focus on academic growth. Rather than focusing on the large picture of the state accountability measures, principals focused on the small victories of student academic success. The principals felt it was important to celebrate student growth along with student achievement. They believed that focusing on small, attainable academic goals

would help grow students' confidence. This confidence and steady academic growth would eventually lead to meeting state expectations.

Summary of the second question. The middle school principals in this study negotiated their role as holistic leaders to meet accountability expectations of the state by ensuring each student was held to high academic expectations. As ethical leaders, they clarified this role for the school. As instructional leaders, they supported teachers' professional development towards this goal. As managerial leaders, they analyzed data and developed opportunities within the school to increase students' academic knowledge. The principals believed that by providing students with challenging and appropriate learning opportunities, their schools would meet state accountability expectations.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings garnered from principals' perspectives on how they use holistic leadership on middle school campuses provide a foundation for the training and support of current and aspiring principals. As Bush (2009) contends, "The case for specific preparation for school leaders is linked to the evidence that high-quality leadership is vital for school improvement and student outcomes" (p. 375). Implications for the training and support of middle school principals can be made from the findings of this study. Implications are presented for four groups: current and aspiring principals, district level administrators, organizations providing professional development to principals, and university Educational Leadership programs.

Implications for Current and Aspiring Principals

As accountability shifts to the school level, principals' focus shifts to include aspects of the instructional environment as well as managing the school (Bush, 2009). This expanded role must take place in a culture that is responsive to the needs of both students and adults (CCSSO, 2014; NMSA, 2010; TAC, 2014), a culture that the principal is responsible for creating (Leithwood et al., 2010). However, many principals, and aspiring principals, are uncertain on how to accomplish this task (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013; Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Wilhelm, 2010).

Fullan (2014) and the principals in this study recognize that networking is one way that principals can improve schools because it allows principals to learn from one another. This case study gives current and aspiring principals an avenue to learn from other principals as well. Furthermore, it cuts across multiple contexts and draws out common middle school leadership practices. Leaders often utilize the same leadership practices (Larsen & Rieckhoff, 2014; Lashway, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2006; Leithwood et al., 2010; Morrison & Cooper, 2009; Peters, 2010). Through the findings in this study current and aspiring principals can learn about the leadership experiences of other middle school principals and apply these lessons to their own campuses. For example, principals needing to build leadership in students can use the model of South Middle School to create an ambassador program. Principals needing to provide collaboration time can rearrange their master schedule to allow two conference periods for each teacher, as Ms. Wills did on her campus. Most importantly, principals can recognize the need to put students first in every decision they make on campus. With this focus, principals should

ensure that they are utilizing ethical leadership in creating trusting relationships as the basis for all leadership actions. These relationships will help middle school principals direct and manage the instructional programs that lead to overall student success and success in meeting state accountability measures.

Implications for District Level Administrators

District level administrators recognize that the hiring of the principal is an important responsibility. Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) emphasize the principal's influence in the school by noting that "the potency of leadership for increasing student learning hinges on the specific practices which leaders stimulate, encourage, and promote" (p. 223). Peters (2010) also claims the success or failure of a school can be attributed to the leadership of the school. With the principal's role having so much influence, it is imperative district level administrators carefully select the principals who will lead their schools.

The research findings indicate that middle school principals must holistically blend instructional, managerial, and ethical leadership styles. District level administrators will do well to hire individuals that have skills and competence in these areas.

District level administrators need to search for principal candidates that show qualities of instructional leadership. Principals who practice instructional leadership raise academic achievement and reduce achievement gaps between subgroups (Jerald, 2001). According to the research findings, principals lead instructional endeavors by identifying and providing intervention for the professional development needs of teachers. By providing for the professional needs of the staff, middle school principals facilitate

"efforts of schools to undertake, implement, and sustain change" (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013, p. 8).

Principal candidates that demonstrate competence in managerial leadership as well as instructional leadership should be sought out. Using managerial leadership, principals monitor and adjust conditions of the school that influence student learning in ways that increase student success (Lashway, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2010). These individuals will help maintain the day-to-day operations of the campus, but will also be able to balance intervention and enrichment programs for students. These programs create environments of student success.

Furthermore, district level administrators should seek ethical leaders in their search for middle school principals. Ethical leadership in the middle school means middle school principals understand and are empathetic to middle school students' development. As middle school students go though many personal changes (Brown & Anfara, 2002; Eichhorn, 1968; Griffin & Galassi, 2010; Lounsbury, 2009; NMSA, 2010) they need principals that are open and willing to accept the challenges this time brings. Middle school principals must be willing to make relationships with students to understand their personal needs. They should be willing to have fun with students, sometimes acting a bit silly themselves, in order to build trust with the students. District level administrators will do well to hire individuals that have these characteristics.

Finally, the research findings indicate that in their search for middle school principals, district level administrators should ensure they find individuals that make decisions based on what is best for students. Leithwood et al. (2010) and Brown and

Anfara (2002) support this assertion by reminding educators that the principal's main task is to make all decisions in response to student needs and to improve the conditions in the school that influence student learning.

Implications for Organizations Providing Professional Development to Principals

The findings in this research indicate that organizations providing professional development to principals should recognize that principals need to be supported in their growth as instructional, managerial, and ethical leaders. This growth can be supported through traditional professional development learning opportunities as well as through mentoring and coaching principals in these areas.

As instructional leaders, the principal is expected to give individual guidance and build "the knowledge and skills of teachers and other personnel to achieve school objectives" (ten Bruggencate, et al., 2012, p. 704). In order to accomplish this goal, principals need ongoing professional development in quality instructional strategies to stay abreast of instructional developments and build their repertoire of the knowledge and skills their teachers will need. Hallinger and Murphy's (2013) research supports this assertion. Their research "affirmed the importance of expertise in teaching and learning as an underpinning for principals who seek to enact this [instructional leadership] role" (p. 9). The findings in this research study indicate that because the principals serve as observers and appraisers, they need to continue to be experts in teaching and learning strategies that they should be looking for in classrooms. Furthermore, as principals provide professional development to their staff, they need to be continually trained in instructional practices that will be beneficial to student learning.

As managerial leaders, principals need training in data analysis and disaggregation in order to manage their academic programs. The findings in this study indicate that the principals use data in different ways, and sometimes have failed to recognize campus needs based on their data analysis methods. This lack of recognition may have been caused by the principals using data to only look for student needs rather than teacher needs. Principals need to recognize that rather than interventions for the students, the data may reveal that it is the instructional strategies of the teachers that require intervention. In the era of high-stakes accountability with disaggregated student data (NCLB, 2002), principals need to understand how to utilize data to make campus decisions and implement appropriate interventions for both students and instructional staff. Fullan (2014) refers to the use of data to diagnose learning needs of students and adults as one of the main functions of principals in ensuring success at the school level.

As ethical leaders, principals need support in building relationships with adults and handling situations with adults. Fullan (2014), Hallinger and Murphy (2013), and Leithwood et al. (2010) all recognize the importance of principals building trusting relationships with teachers in order to create successful work environments. The principals in this study noted that dealing with their staff was the most difficult aspect of their job. Professional development and coaching in creating trusting relationships with adults, working collaboratively with adults, and distributing leadership to others would benefit principals.

Furthermore, organizations providing professional development to principals should offer principals opportunities to network with one another and with other districts.

Fullan (2014) explains the benefits of networking. He says, "You can use that network to improve your own school by accessing new ideas, and by participating in networks, you create another source of pressure accompanied by ideas for you and your staff to take action" (p. 98). The findings of this study indicate principals learn a great deal from networking with other practitioners. Through networking with others, principals can also learn strategies from each other to support the development of their instructional, managerial, and ethical leadership skills.

Implications for University Educational Leadership Programs

Educational Leadership programs that prepare principals can use the findings in this study to develop courses for aspiring principals. As Bush (2009) asserts, "the development of effective leaders should not be left to chance. It should be a deliberate process designed to produce the best possible leadership for schools and colleges" (p. 386). To develop the best possible leaders for middle schools, universities, like the organizations that provide professional development to principals, should train new principals in methods of instructional, managerial, and ethical leadership with a focus on blending these activities. Williams et al. (2010) conclude that schools now need principals who use instructional leadership to support teacher effectiveness, managerial leadership to align structures that maintain a positive campus environment, and ethical leadership to set and drive specific student achievement goals. Currently, some universities focus on these activities and behaviors separately, such as having a class on instructional leadership, a different class for managing human resources, and a different class for managing the school budget. Principals need a class that will demonstrate how

these aspects are interrelated and how to manage all three activities concurrently. The principals in this study attest to the need to blend these leadership activities on a daily basis.

Furthermore, the principals in this study placed great importance on making decisions based on the needs of students and being developmentally responsive to the needs of middle school students. This importance is echoed in the characteristics of the middle school model (NMSA, 2010). Although most universities do not train principals for a specific level of education (such as elementary, middle, or high school), middle school principals do need an understanding of the changes young adolescents undergo. Because 'young adolescence' is such a fluid time, beginning around fourth grade and ending around ninth grade, even principals that do not serve in a middle school will most likely serve students during this time and will benefit from knowledge of the nature and needs of young adolescents. As such, universities should ensure aspiring principals are given opportunities to grow their understandings of the nature and needs of young adolescents and are prepared to be developmentally responsive to the needs of these students.

Recommendations for Future Research

Findings from this study suggest that future research recommendations should focus on how principals adapt their leadership roles as educational and social conditions change. Already we are seeing society push against high stakes testing and accountability (O'Brien & Roberson, 2012; Stitzlein, 2015), indicating yet another change in the role for schools and principals. How will the principal negotiate this change while maintaining a

focus on what is best for students? How will principals' definition of what is best for students change as society's expectations of educational institutions change? I recommend a longitudinal qualitative study exploring the effects of educational and social changes on the principals' role.

While the principal is recognized as the leader of the school, it is recognized that the leader does not work in isolation (Fullan, 2014). This case study explored the perceptions of middle school principals and their work in facilitating student success, from the viewpoint of the principal. I suggest conducting future case studies with the addition of the voices from multiple stakeholders - teachers, students, parents, and community members - to understand the impact of the principals' leadership.

In order to strengthen the understanding of the principal's role, I would also suggest that future case studies include more time shadowing principals. This time should include both longevity of the study and extended observations. I recommend conducting the study over an entire school year in order to learn more about the way principals adjust their role throughout the year. Most of the observations in this study were one hour in length, allowing me to view a snippet of the principal's day during each observation. I recommend future researchers spend an entire day shadowing the principal during each observation. More formal and frequent interviews throughout the study would also benefit future research. While this study utilized only one formal, semistructured interview and multiple conversational interviews, I would recommend future researchers conduct a pre-interview and post-interview with the principals for each observation. These interviews will allow the researcher to understand the principals' perceptions of

their motivations for their actions as well as the principals' reactions to the actions taken during the observation.

Finally, all of the principals in this study were located in one specific region of Texas. I would recommend future research be conducted in larger, more diverse areas to identify principal actions that truly cut across context. Additionally, principals that serve in schools that did not meet standards should be included in future studies.

Final Thoughts

As I was welcomed into the lives and schools of each principal who agreed to participate in this research, my heart was overjoyed with the work I witnessed. While sometimes it seems the media is filled with stories of school failure, inept teachers, and the demise of public education, I saw a different story. I saw teachers and principals work together using student assessment data, content standards, knowledge of best instructional practices, and child development theories to create lessons that were engaging, appropriate, and challenging. I witnessed students smiling and enjoying learning from these lessons. I listened as principals agonized over the struggles of their students and staff. I heard principals gain confidence as they grounded their decisions and actions in what was best for students. And I considered myself lucky for having had this opportunity.

As the main leaders on the campuses, the principals I had the privilege of observing worked tirelessly. Principals in this case study provided the vision of student success and built school cultures that supported this vision. They acted as instructional leaders by building capacity in staff through professional development, collaboration, and

simply allowing their teachers to be professionals and to grow as professionals. They acted as managerial leaders as they went about the day-to-day business of a school, attending meetings, working on budget items, and responding to emails and phone calls. Principals acted as ethical leaders as they responded to the needs of their staff and students in a trustworthy and consistent manner. These actions combined and sometimes blurred together to create educational environments that facilitated students' success on multiple levels, including success on high-stakes tests used for state accountability measures.

Throughout this study, one theme was constant: Put the students as the first priority. Even in an era of accountability, these principals did not focus on state assessments or ensuring students memorized content. Rather, these principals ensured they knew each of their students personally and academically, and then created educational environments that facilitated the success of these individuals. The principals created supportive educational environments that taught young adolescents work ethic and responsibility. They supported teachers who wished to use engaging activities to teach content and life lessons. They modeled a love and passion for learning. Focusing on the students, rather than the tests, these principals each led their schools to meet state accountability measures.

Bush claims, "Where there is failure, inadequate leadership is often a major contributory factor" (p. 386). If this is true, it can also be inferred that where there is success, strong leadership is often a major contributory factor. Middle school principals hold the power to contribute to the creation of successful middle schools.

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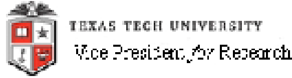
APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL



December 8, 2014

Dr. Margaret Price
Curriculum & Instruction
Mail Stop: 1071

Regarding: 504822 Perceptions of Middle School Principals in Supporting Student Success: A Descriptive Case Study

Dr. Margaret Price:

The Texas Tech University Protection of Human Subjects Committee approved your claim for an exemption for the protocol referenced above on December 8, 2014.

Exempt research is not subject to continuing review. However, any modifications that (a) change the research in a substantial way, (b) might change the basis for exemption, or (c) might introduce any additional risk to subjects must be reported to the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) before they are implemented.

To report such changes, you must send a new claim for exemption or a proposal for expedited or full board review to the HRPP. Extension of exempt status for exempt protocols that have not changed is automatic.

The HRPP staff will send annual reminders that ask you to update the status of your research protocol. Once you have completed your research, you must inform the HRPP office by responding to the annual reminder so that the protocol file can be closed.

Sincerely,

Rosemary Cogan

Rosemary Cogan, Ph.D., ABPP
Protection of Human Subjects Committee

Box 41075 | Lubbock, Texas 79409-1075 | T 806.742.3905 | F 806.742.3947 | www.vpr.ttu.edu
An EEO/Affirmative Action Institution

APPENDIX B

EMAIL TO SUPERINTENDENTS

Dear Dr./Mr./Ms. ____________,

My name is Marsha Sowell and I am a doctoral candidate at Texas Tech University. I am conducting a research project through Texas Tech as part of my dissertation process. My research explores the ways in which middle school principals perceive they support student success through transformational leadership and I would like to conduct research in __________ Middle School in your school district. In particular I wish to work with ______________, the middle school principal, on a volunteer basis.

If you agree to allow this research in your school district, I will contact (the middle school principal) to request his/her voluntary participation in this research.

The participants will be asked to participate in one (1) 60-minute interview. I would also like to observe the campuses in which these participants work. These observations will take place during the spring semester of 2015. No identifying information will be recorded regarding individual students. The focus of these observations will specifically be the participants working in a regular campus environment. I have attached the principal's information sheet to this email for your reference.

Thank you for your consideration of your district's participation in this study. If you allow me to conduct my research in a school in your district, please indicate by replying to this email.

Sincerely,

Marsha Sowell

APPENDIX C

EMAIL TO PRINCIPALS

Dear Dr./Mr./Ms. ____________,

My name is Marsha Sowell and I am a doctoral candidate at Texas Tech University. For my dissertation study, I am conducting a research project with Dr. Margaret A. Price, a professor at Texas Tech University. This research project studies how middle school principals support student success on campus. I would like to interview you and observe you on campus to learn your perspective on this role. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour. I will shadow you for observations, so they will not require additional time to be set aside.

For your convenience, I have attached an information sheet to this email so you may have more information about the project.

Will you please let me know if you are willing to participate in this study? Your time and expertise will be greatly appreciated!

Thank you for your consideration,
Marsha Sowell

APPENDIX D

INFORMATION SHEET

Perceptions of Middle School Principals in Supporting Student Success

What is this project studying?
We hope to learn how middle school principals perceive they use their leadership to support student success.

What would I do if I participate?
Participation includes one interview and three observations. The interview will take about 30-60 minutes and will include audio recording. I will shadow you for the observations. One observation will look at how you interact with staff and students. One observation will look at training you provide teachers. One observation will look at how you share responsibility in the school. During the observations, I will ask questions to help clarify information from the interview or the observations. I will also ask you to give me copies of documents that help explain your role. For confidentiality, please remove all names from documents before giving them to me.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this research is your choice. Dr. Price and the Institutional Review Board at Texas Tech University have looked at the interview questions and think you can answer them comfortably. You can skip questions you do not feel comfortable answering. You can stop participating at any time. You can ask me not to use any data that you wish. Participation is your choice.

How long will participation take?
The interview will take about 30-60 minutes of your time for the interview. You choose the length of the observations. I will shadow you for observations, so they should not take any extra time.

How are you protecting privacy?
I will use pseudonyms to analyze and publish the research. All of the information collected will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. The computer I use for this research is password-protected.

How will I benefit from participating?
This study is not expected to be of any direct benefit to you.

If I have questions about this study, who can I ask?
- This study is being run by Dr. Margaret A. Price, a professor of education at Texas Tech University. If you have any questions, you can call Dr. Price at xxx-xxx-xxxx.
- TTU also has a Board that protects the rights of people who participate in research. You can ask them questions at 806-742-2064. You can also mail your questions to the Human Research Protection Program, Office of the Vice President for Research, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409 or email them to hrpp@ttu.edu.
- I will also answer questions you have about the study. You may call me at xxx-xxx-xxxx or email me at Marsha.Sowell@ttu.edu.

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Obtain verbal permission for interview and voice recording.
Remind participant they can stop participating or choose not to answer at any time.

1. Will you please state your position within the school?
2. How long have you held this position?
3. Will you please briefly describe your professional experiences leading to this position, including how you decided to become a principal?
4. Please tell me about the situation you entered as a principal on this campus.

   -How long was the previous principal here?

   -Were your management styles the same? (elaborate - how same/different)

   -What is your leadership style?
5. Please describe your typical day on campus.

Now that I have a little background information, let's talk about you as an administrator.

6. Please explain what you feel is your strength as an administrator.
7. Please explain what you feel is your weakness as an administrator.
8. What is your favorite part of being a middle school principal?
9. What is your least favorite part of being a middle school principal?
10. Is there anything that you wish someone had told you about being a middle school principal, before you accepted the job?
11. How would you explain the job of middle school principal to someone interested in this position?
12. How do you think the middle school principalship is different from other levels? (high school or elementary)
13. How do you define student success in the middle school?

And now we are going to talk more about specifics for you on this campus.

14. You've said the middle school principals' job is to...........Can you give me some examples of the ways you believe you fulfill these responsibilities on your campus?

15. What are some things you do, consciously, to ensure student success on your campus?

16. What challenges do you face in fulfilling your expectations of yourself as a middle school principal?

17. What is your vision/goal for your school?

18. How did you determine this vision?

19. How do you communicate this vision with your students and staff?

20. What steps do you take, consciously, to help the staff work towards this vision?

21. Do your students share this vision? Tell me how you get them "on board."

22. Describe how you facilitate building capacity in staff. For example, how do you determine the professional development needed?

23. How do you facilitate that learning?

24. How do you help build collaboration within the school?

25. Is there anything else you think I would be helpful to know about your leadership style, your campus or being a middle school principal in general?

*Schedule observation times/dates

Thank participant for their time and ensure they still have access to my contact information.

APPENDIX F

AUDIT TRAIL TABLE

Number	Participant	Source	Unit
Chapter Four			
1	Mr. Contreras	Observation 2	34-36
Principals' Guiding Factors			
2	Ms. Wills	Interview	60-64
3	Mr. Contreras	Interview	22-25, 29
4	Mr. Baker	Interview	117
5	Ms. Wills	Interview	275-279
6	Ms. Wills	Interview	420-421
7	Mr. Wilson	Observation 1	35-50, 90-94
8	Mr. Baker	Interview	261-266
(A)typical Days are the Norm			
9	Mr. Baker	Interview	192
10	Mr. Contreras	Interview	109-111
11	Mr. Baker	Interview	179-184
12	Mr. Wilson	Interview	41-43
13	Mr. Contreras	Observation 2	232-236
14	Mr. Baker	Observation 3	12-14, 33, 65-66, 118-120
15	Ms. Norris	Interview	47-49
16	Ms. Norris	Document	Evaluation Instrument
17	Ms. Norris	Observation 3	112-127
18	Ms. Wills	Interview	89-90
19	Ms. Norris	Interview	42
20	Ms. Wills	Observation 1	3-4, 19
21	Ms. Wills	Document	Department PLC Meeting & Planning Schedule
22	Ms. Wills	Observation 1	95-96
23	Ms. Wills	Observation 1	249-251
24	Ms. Wills	Observation 3	51, 73-74
25	Mr. Wilson	Observation 2	29-38
26	Mr. Contreras	Interview	107
27	Mr. Wilson	Interview	119-122
28	Mr. Contreras	Interview	109
29	Mr. Contreras	Observation 1	20-22
30	Mr. Contreras	Observation 2	222-223, 298-325
31	Mr. Contreras	Observation 3	133-138
32	Ms. Norris	Document	Staff Handbook p. 1
33	Ms. Norris	Interview	276-277
34	Ms. Norris	Interview	45
35	Ms. Norris	Interview	273-274
36	Ms. Norris	Observation 2	All

37	Ms. Wills	Interview	190
38	Ms. Wills	Interview	320-322
39	Ms. Wills	Observation 2	All
40	Ms. Wills	Observation 2	342-344, 357-358
41	Ms. Wills	Interview	191-193
42	Mr. Baker	Interview	184-186
43	Mr. Wilson	Interview	34-36
44	Mr. Wilson	Interview	126-129
45	Ms. Norris	Interview	43-45
46	Ms. Norris	Interview	34-35, 56-57
47	Ms. Norris	Interview	13-15
48	Mr. Contreras	Observation 2	58-77
49	Mr. Contreras	Observation 2	106-107
50	Mr. Contreras	Observation 2	202-207
51	Mr. Contreras	Observation 2	236-238
52	Mr. Contreras	Observation 2	327-339
53	Mr. Contreras	Observation 2	348-355
54	Mr. Baker	Observation 3	9
55	Mr. Baker	Observation 3	39-47
56	Mr. Baker	Observation 3	83-89
57	Mr. Baker	Observation 3	97-98
58	Mr. Baker	Observation 3	100-103
59	Mr. Baker	Observation 3	171-175
60	Mr. Baker	Observation 3	177
61	Ms. Norris	Interview	248-251
62	Mr. Baker	Observation 3	191-194
63	Ms. Wills	Observation 2	154-161
Developing Character in Middle School			
64	Ms. Norris	Document	EISD Vision Statement
65	Mr. Baker	Interview	293-297
66	Ms. Wills	Interview	217-220
67	Ms. Wills	Interview	285-287
68	Mr. Contreras	Interview	168-173
69	Mr. Contreras	Observation 3	236-239
70	Ms. Wills	Interview	341-346
71	Ms. Wills	Interview	337
72	Mr. Contreras	Observation 3	93-95
73	Mr. Contreras	Document	4/17/14 Essay, p. 1
74	Mr. Contreras	Interview	163-164
75	Mr. Contreras	Observation 2	38-44
76	Ms. Wills	Interview; Document	330-336; Addendum to NMS Staff handbook
77	Mr. Baker	Interview	268-273
78	Mr. Contreras	Interview	386
79	Mr. Contreras	Observation 3	92-93

80	Mr. Contreras	Observation 3	179-195
Facilitating Academic Success in the Middle School			
81	Mr. Wilson	Interview	135-137
82	Ms. Norris	Interview	170-171
83	Ms. Norris	Interview	174-177
84	Ms. Norris	Observation 3	83-85
85	Ms. Norris	Observation 3	86-88
86	Mr. Baker	Observation 2	53-64
87	Mr. Contreras	Interview	209
88	Mr. Contreras	Observation 3	83-85
89	Mr. Contreras	Document	4/17/14 Essay, p. 1
90	Mr. Contreras	Interview	203-240
91	Mr. Wilson	Observation 1	35-50
92	Ms. Norris	Observation 3	78-81
93	Ms. Norris	Observation 3	129-130
94	Mr. Contreras	Interview	208-210
95	Ms. Norris	Observation 1	110-115
96	Ms. Wills	Interview	126-130
97	Ms. Wills	Interview	114-116
98	Mr. Contreras	Interview	56-60
Middle School Students are Young Adolescents			
99	Ms. Wills	Observation 3	219-220
100	Mr. Baker	Observation 1	46-47
101	Mr. Baker	Observation 1	49-50
102	Ms. Wills	Observation 3	202-205
103	Mr. Baker	Observation 1	160-162
104	Mr. Baker	Observation 1	30-34
105	Mr. Baker	Observation 1	129-130; 176
106	Ms. Wills	Observation 2	243-246
107	Ms. Wills	Interview	356-366
108	Ms. Norris	Interview	95-97
109	Ms. Norris	Interview	283-240
110	Mr. Wilson	Interview	139-145
111	Mr. Contreras	Interview	66-73
112	Mr. Contreras	Observation 3	203-215
113	Ms. Wills	Interview	77-80
114	Ms. Wills	Observation 3	128-129
115	Ms. Wills	Observation 3	105
116	Mr. Baker	Observation 1	95-97
117	Ms. Norris	Interview	111-112
118	Mr. Wilson	Interview	154-159
119	Mr. Baker	Observation 1	107-110
120	Mr. Baker	Observation 3	182-185
Providing Leadership in Campus Responsibilities			
121	Mr. Baker	Interview	158-164
122	Mr. Wilson	Interview	126-128
123	Mr. Contreras	Interview	260-263

124	Ms. Wills	Interview	134-140
125	Ms. Norris	Interview	150-151
126	Ms. Norris	Document	EMS Staff Handbook
127	Ms. Wills	Document	Addendum to NMS Staff handbook
128	Mr. Wilson	Document	WMS Faculty Meeting Agenda 1/14/15
129	Mr. Baker	Observation 2	All
130	Mr. Baker	Interview	153-157
131	Ms. Norris	Interview	122-124
132	Ms. Norris	Document	Teacher's TINA
133	Ms. Wills	Document	NMS Handbook
134	Ms. Wills	Observation 1	199-204
135	Ms. Wills	Interview	253-254
136	Ms. Wills	Observation 2	361-371
137	Mr. Wilson	Interview	95-97
138	Mr. Contreras	Interview	122-128
139	Mr. Wilson	Interview	78-80
140	Mr. Baker	Interview	340-341
141	Mr. Wilson	Interview	199-200
142	Mr. Baker	Observation 1	139-142
143	Mr. Contreras	Interview	36
144	Mr. Contreras	Observation 2	198-199
145	Mr. Wilson	Interview	67
146	Mr. Wilson	Observation 3	47-48
147	Ms. Wills	Observation 2	77-80
148	Mr. Baker	Observation 2	58-59
149	Ms. Wills	Observation 2	96-110
150	Ms. Norris	Interview	313-319
151	Mr. Baker	Observation 3	119-121
152	Ms. Wills	Observation 3	123-126
153	Mr. Baker	Document	CMS Campus Improvement Plan
154	Ms. Wills	Observation 2	96-104
155	Ms. Norris	Observation 3	64-68
156	Ms. Norris	Observation 3	128-131
157	Ms. Wills	Document	NMS Master Schedule
158	Mr. Contreras	Document	SMS Master Schedule
159	Mr. Contreras	Interview	273-274
160	Mr. Contreras	Observation 2	86-126
161	Mr. Contreras	Observation 2	132-152
162	Mr. Contreras	Observation 2	176-180
163	Mr. Baker	Interview	143-151
164	Ms. Norris	Interview	324-325
165	Ms. Wills	Interview	302-305
166	Ms. Wills	Interview	303-306
167	Ms. Wills	Observation 1	116-118

168	Ms. Wills	Document	NMS 2015 Semester/Benchmark Data
169	Ms. Wills	Observation 1	136-147
170	Ms. Wills	Document	NMS Interventions by Quarter
171	Mr. Baker	Observation 2	91-107
172	Ms. Norris	Observation 3	38-53
173	Mr. Wilson	Observation 1	41-61
174	Mr. Contreras	Reflexive Journal	January 28, 2015
175	Mr. Contreras	Observation 3	127-131
176	Mr. Contreras	Observation 3	Throughout
177	Mr. Contreras	Interview	363-368
178	Mr. Baker	Interview	385-398
179	Mr. Baker	Document	CMS Faculty Meeting Agenda
180	Mr. Baker	Observation 2	89-91, 109-131
181	Mr. Wilson	Interview	211-217
182	Mr. Wilson	Interview	217-223
Seeking Improvement for Self and Campus			
183	Mr. Baker	Interview	254-259
184	Mr. Wilson	Interview	114-115
185	Ms. Wills	Interview	264-269
186	Mr. Wilson	Interview	111-113
187	Mr. Contreras	Document	Application for Award with NASSP
188	Ms. Norris	Interview	294-298
189	Ms. Wills	Observation 2	136-139
190	Mr. Contreras	Document	District Website
191	Mr. Wilson	Interview	49-50
192	Mr. Baker	Document	CMS Campus Improvement Plan
193	Mr. Contreras	Interview	244-247
194	Mr. Contreras	Document	Strategies At Work PowerPoint, Slide 3, bullet 2
195	Mr. Contreras	Observation 2	153-154
196	Mr. Baker	Observation 3	43-49
197	Mr. Baker	Interview	374-377
198	Ms. Wills	Observation 2	127-134
199	Ms. Wills	Observation 3	144-149
200	Ms. Norris	Interview	291-295
Chapter Five			
201	Mr. Baker	Interview	163-164
202	Mr. Contreras	Interview	260-261