Behaviors of Outstanding First Year Principals and Their Alignment with ISLLC Standards

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ABSTRACT

The leadership of the principal is directly tied to the success or demise of a school. Principals assume various leadership roles including those of educational leader, decision maker, visionary for change, supervisor of faculty and staff, and communicator with various stakeholders. This study investigates the alignment between the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards and the successful strategies of outstanding first year principals as well as the behaviors and skills various stakeholders identify as crucial to the first year principal's success. The topic of outstanding first year principals is important for two reasons. First, strong leadership results in effective schools. Second, understanding the elements of outstanding leadership can have implications regarding the preparation of first year principals in educational leadership programs.

This qualitative case study examined five award-winning principals during the period from 2006 to 2010. The primary sources of data included interviews with each principal, interviews with a select focus group, and a content analysis of the nominating packet contents. The results indicate that the principals had a command of the ISLLC standards, were especially skilled with relationships, removed the need for self- recognition and possessed the trait of withitness. The results of this study provide school districts, school leadership teams, and administrative programs the opportunity to engage in an active dialogue around those areas which can be challenging and more difficult to teach (relationship building, withitness, and

removal of self). The study results suggest that principal preparation programs and administrative programs need to include a more active dialogue about these three elements because of the crucial part they play in establishing strong and effective leaders. Attention to these areas will result in more well-rounded principals who can meet the demands and needs of all stakeholders, stimulate student achievement, and promote school success.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all family, friends, and colleagues who helped me through the ups and downs and kept reminding me that I could do it.

To Jeannette Langford who re-arranged her life to help me out with mine so I could finish.

To my mother Ernestine Butler whose support was unwavering throughout the entire process. Thank you for being there for me.

To my husband Earnest Hogan no amount of words will ever be enough. You are my best friend and my biggest cheerleader. Your love, support, and encouragement helped me every step of the way.

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I would also like to thank all my friends, family, and colleagues who continually pushed me along through a process that I thought I would never see to the end.

I would also like to thank the five principals in this study who gave of their time to talk honestly and openly as they faced their job as a first year principal. Their answers continue to give me much to think about as I see leadership evolve and change in our nation's schools.

To my family whose love of knowledge and expectation for academic success were the foundation of my educational career.

I would also like to thank my father, Benjamin W. Butler M.D. whose words continuously rang in my head night after night: "whatever you begin you will finish."

A final thank you to Earnest, EJ, and Ethan who always kept a smile on my face.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The leadership of a principal can be tied to the success or demise of a school. Principals assume various leadership roles including those of the educational leader, final decision maker, visionary, supervisor of faculty and staff, and communicator with the community and various stakeholders. As a first year principal, this task can prove to be more challenging. "Principals can use their positions to focus attention and energy on those school level challenges that determine the school's ability to fulfill its purposes" (Donaldson 2009, 82). This research investigates the alignment between the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards and the successful strategies of outstanding first- year principals.

Background of the Problem

The principal is the educational leader of a school. Through a specific selection process a person is designated as the best fit and match for a particular school. The decision to select an individual to become a principal draws on the applicant's background, experience, and knowledge. This research focuses on what happens after individuals, who have never been principals, are chosen and begin working in schools and how their performance during the first year is evaluated. The first year principal has additional challenges that a more seasoned administrator may have more skill to handle. They may inherit a faculty that they are not familiar with, the vision of the school may be unclear to those stakeholders in the school community and the overall climate of the school is one that the first year principal did not create.

The ISLLC standards have been accepted and used in over 35 states as principal/administrative preparation standards (e-Lead). They are designed to provide guidance

for state policy makers and other professional organizations that set standards for pre K-12

curriculum. The six standards describe the performance of an effective school leader. The six

standards are:

1. Articulation and stewardship of vision.

2. Nurturing and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to
   student learning.

3. Safe, efficient and effective learning environment.

4. Collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse
   community interests and needs.

5. Promotes success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness and in an ethical
   manner.

6. Understanding and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal and
   cultural context (CCSSO, 2008).

Applying the standards at the local level is the challenge for school districts. This research

addresses the relationship between the strategies/approaches used by effective first-year

principals and the ISLLC Standards.

<div align="center">**Research Questions**</div>

This study addresses the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What behaviors and skills did award winning first-year principals
identify as crucial to their success?

Research Question 2: What behaviors and skills did various stakeholders see as crucial
to their first-year principal's success?

Research Question 3: To what extent do these strategies and skills of the award-winning
first-year principals reflect the ISLLC Standards?

Methodology

The methodology used to conduct this study consists of a qualitative, limited case study using interviews and document analysis. The most recent winners of the outstanding leadership award from years 2006-2010 were selected for participation. The principals were interviewed along with the one nominating parent, teacher, or staff members who submitted the written materials and at least one more stakeholder from each principal's school and/or community. All information was content analyzed to identify common themes related to leadership and the ISLLC leadership standards. The goal was to see what relationship there is between a first-year principal's actions and the ISLLC standards.

Limitations and Assumptions

In conducting research, the information gathered can sometimes be affected by limitations and assumptions. One limitation that may affect the study is the sample size. The sample for this study is small—five principals—and the limited amount of participants may lead to difficulty in generalizing the information. Another limitation is the specific school district that was selected. The school district is a large district in the Mid-Atlantic region with significant financial support and a large human resource pool. Because of this large pool of candidates, the school district is able to select and choose who they consider to be the best of the best. Therefore, the leadership at the school level and at the district level is highly qualified and educated. This may not be representative of smaller school districts with fewer resources. Because first-year principals from only one district participated, the results may not be generalized to other districts in the area, the state, or the country. Another limitation results because only two to five people familiar with the principal were interviewed. These individuals

may not fully represent the views of the entire school community. Another limitation is the lack of teacher representation in the focus groups.

Limitations related to time also exist. One limitation was the time available to conduct the study. The researcher and participants are regulated by the school calendar and time for conducting interviews was limited. Also the researcher was limited by time for meeting with those stakeholders not directly employed by the school district (parents, students, etc**.).** Finally, these interviews occurred in 2011, and for some of the principals recalling information from their career over five years ago proved to be difficult.

<div align="center">**Significance of the Study**</div>

As mentioned earlier, the principal is the educational leader of a school. What the principal chooses to do, or not to do, will have immediate and long lasting effects for student achievement. "The leadership of the principal…mobilizes members to think, believe, and behave in a manner that satisfies emerging organizational needs" (Donaldson 2009, 5). What this study has attempted to do is to document notable and recognizable behaviors and strategies that are deemed successful for ensuring and supporting success for all students. Even though limitations and assumptions are inherent in every study, it is expected that information on the principals' actions and the nominators' descriptions will be useful in furthering an understanding of leadership qualities. Because of the size of this school district there are numerous effective first year principals who do an outstanding job every day. Their behaviors, beliefs, and practices may help contribute to discussion of leadership planning for graduate and preparation programs.

Another benefit of this study is the effect that one person could have on the leadership capacity of a school or entire school district. For such a first year principal, her leadership can lend itself to reflective practice which makes one "think about your own practice and enables

others to think about theirs" (Lambert 2003, 7). This principal's voice can be one that fellow colleagues could listen to and emulate. The award winning first year principal highlights what are the best practices that any first year principal could implement.

In this study, the strategies, skills, and knowledge of outstanding first year principals were compared to the 2011 ISLLC standards. The ISLLC standards have undergone a major revision from their first publication in 1996 to the present day 2011 standards. The standards changed from a theoretical approach to a more action-oriented approach. This is a move from conventional wisdom to research-based practice.

Definitions

The following terms and acronyms are used in this document.

CCSSO: The Council of Chief State School Officers is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense, and five U.S. extra state jurisdictions (http://ccsso.org)

ISLLC Standards: The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers in collaboration with the National Policy Board on Educational Administration.

NCLB: No Child Left Behind consists of legislation passed by the U.S. Congress in 2001 that is concerned with the education of children in public schools.

NPBEA: The National Policy Board for Education Administration is a national consortium of major stakeholders in educational leadership and policy.

Overview of the Dissertation

The dissertation will include the following five chapters:

- Chapter 1 introduces the study by including the statement of the problem and a brief background to the problem. It introduces the research questions and briefly describes the methodology. A statement of the significance of the study as well as a brief description of limitations is also included. The chapter ends with definition of terms.

- Chapter 2 includes a thorough and in-depth discussion of literature surrounding the topic. Some areas that are covered include: the leadership needed in a school, leadership traits of a first-year principal, the ISLLC standards, and relevance of the standards to the research question/problem.

- Chapter 3 describes the methods used in conducting the study. The research questions and how they were addressed are included in this chapter. The rationale for selecting qualitative methodology to answer the research questions is included. The proposed setting and study participants are described. Also, a discussion is included of how data will be collected, stored, and analyzed.

- Chapter 4 presents all information gathered from the principal interviews and focus group interviews. Each principal's behaviors and characteristics are discussed in alignment with the relevant ISLLC standard.

- Chapter 5 presents a summary of the data and its relation to the literature and the six standards. Emergent themes, implications for further study, and suggestions for further research are also presented.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The role of the principal in any school setting is a demanding, visible, and challenging position. The challenge of being a principal is to be not only an effective manager of all that occurs in the school, but also an effective leader of all those working in the school. This literature review focuses on the leadership role of the school principal, current trends and challenges for today's principal, professional standards regarding school leadership, and effective leadership for the first-year principal.

Overview of the Role of Today's Principal

In his study of secondary principals in Tennessee, Williams (2000) sought to determine teachers' views of an effective principal in regard to educational leadership, organizational development, and instructional leadership. He surveyed teachers at 14 nominated secondary schools and 12 randomly selected schools. A total of 690 surveys were distributed and 410 were returned. Regarding the leadership of the principal, Williams concluded:

> It is his leadership that sets the tone of the school, the climate for learning, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers…he is the main link between the school and the community and the way he performs…determines the attitudes of students and parents about the school. (2000, pp. 265-266)

Williams clearly acknowledges that building effective schools that emphasize student achievement requires principals who are able to lead and transform. A strong principal must be able to handle mistrust and skepticism of the general public. In her article on school improvement, Protheroe (2011) states that "principal leadership tops the list of enabling conditions for schools to improve" (p. 3).

Principals' roles have changed over time in part due to demands of a changing society. Principals are the instructional leaders and operational managers of schools, but the added pressure of accountability—No Child Left Behind (NCLB), data driven decision making, and student success—add more weight to the job. In addition to the managerial requirements of the job, principals have to inspire and motivate their teachers. "As an administrator, the principal has a unique opportunity to lead. Several distinct groups of people depend on him for leadership and direction...members of the general public see school administrators as community leaders" (Williams, 2000, p. 266). It is vital to equip today's principals with the skills they need to transform today's schools into places of academic achievement. "Teachers and administrators believe that all students can learn and feel responsible for seeing that they do. Teachers and administrators believe in their own ability to influence student learning" (Sergiovanni, 2001, p.168).

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards

Colleges and universities are examining their administrator preparation programs. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) has developed standards for school leaders which are increasingly accepted by graduate schools and school divisions across the country as guidelines for preparing school principals for their leadership role. These standards help define expected outcomes and activities for today's leaders (Pitre & Smith, 2004).

According to e-Lead:

The ISLLC standards are the only common set of standards developed by a national body of state departments of education (originally 23 states) and national leadership organization—originally 12, including all of the members of National Policy Board for

Educational Administration (NPBEA) that were designed for all school leaders pre K-12. (2010, p. 1)

The ISLLC standards are very detailed and thorough in what they ask of a school leader. Although there are only six standards, there are several functions that fall under each standard and delineate in detail what the principal needs to accomplish. The standards were updated in 2008 and are now referred to as the Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008.

The ISLLC standards are the framework used to help examine the effects/results of award winning first-year principals in Stonepoint County Public Schools (SCPS). It is important to understand these standards, where they came from, and why they are important to the study of effective leadership.

The ISLLC standards are the results of the efforts of the NPBEA. The NPBEA is a national consortium of nine major stakeholders in educational leadership and policy. The NPBEA's purpose is to "provide a forum for collaborative actions by organizations interested in the advancement of school and school system leadership" (http://www.npbea.org). One of the major goals of the consortium is to define and articulate what makes effective leadership in schools and school systems. By defining effective leadership, universities, school systems, and graduate programs are able to tailor their learning and teaching for what future leaders will need. The organization's members include:

- American Association of School Administrators,

- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development,

- Council of Chief State School Officers,

- National Association of Elementary School Principals,

- National Association of Secondary School Principals,

- National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education,

- National Council of Professors of Educational Administration,

- National School Boards Association, and

- University Council for Educational Administration.

The ISLLC standards were first established in 1996, but the updated 2008 standards are written for new purposes and audiences. "These standards reflect the new information and lessons learned about education leadership (CCSSO, 2008). Why are these standards so relevant and important to educational leadership in today's schools?

These standards are high-level policy standards intended to provide guidance to state policy makers and other professional organizations that set standards for pre K-12 curriculum (Papa, 2011). The 1996 standards had to be updated to include more research based practice. What is important about the new ISLCC standards is the potential they have to be accepted universally:

> The ISLLC standards are the only common set of standards developed by a national body
> of state departments of education and national leadership organizations that were
> designed for all school leaders pre-K through 12 and are being universally accepted and
> recognized. (e-Lead, 2010, p.1)

ISLLC standards also emphasize a high level of performance for leaders with respect to students and staff. According to the CCSSO 2008 Educational Leadership Policy Standards, it is necessary to make these standards work. They cannot simply be written without being followed and/or implemented. The goals for the ISLLC standards are to: "set common expectations (common language), provide guidance for leadership academy activities, improve professional

development, strengthen state systems and maximize returns for student results" (CCSSO/ISLLC 2008, pp. 16-17).

According to Eller (2010), effective principal preparation programs are usually organized around standards:

> The ISLLC standards are one type of standard used by such programs. The 2008 revision of these standards does provide more insight into the implementation of the standards and the "human element" needed for success. New principals need to know the how as well as the what of leadership. (p. 957)

What the principal learns in an administration program, hopefully, will be put in place to effect student achievement. The performance then speaks loudly about the principal's knowledge:

> If having agreed upon standards is the first step, then putting them to use in schools is the next. While ISLLC itself has delineated performances for school administrators…other sources… describe how to put standards into action. (e-Lead 2010, p.1)

These standards can influence actions of school leaders. "By painting a portrait of effective education leadership (i.e., the traits and objectives that all education leaders should share), the standards enable state policymakers to guide improvements" (CCSSO, 2008, p.16). A close examination of standards can help influence stronger leaders at every level of school. The CCSSO Handbook states, "Research now shows that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that influence student outcomes" (2008, p.9). This close relationship between leadership and student outcomes is a key concept that provides a focus for both this literature review and the study.

What are the ISLLC 2008 standards and what do they entail? The following is a listing of the six standards:

1. An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.

2. An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

3. An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

4. An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

5. An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, with fairness, and in an ethical manner.

6. An education leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context (ISLLC, 2008).

One change in the ISLLC 2008 standards is a greater focus on technology. According to Papa (2011), "Embedded within three of the standards are three functions explicitly tied to the important role of technology and its relationship to educational leadership" (p. 27). This focus on technology in the 2008 standards reflects the additional roles educational leaders assume in today's schools. The leadership skills that the ISLLC 2008 standards emphasize are now at the forefront for effective school administrators.

According to CCSSO (2008), "Studies show that leadership is second only to classroom instruction in influencing student outcomes" (p. 9). Papa states: "The educational leader should

serve as the facilitator and motivator for formative change. Educational leaders lead in the hopes of being inspiring" (pp. 37-38). With this information and the expanded attitude toward leadership and learning, the ISLLC standards emphasize what is needed to meet today's demands.

According to Papa (2011), what is also important about the new ISLLC standards is that they are "research based and not just craft knowledge based" (p. 26). These updated standards are based on evidence from quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method research. In contrast, the 1996 standards were based on craft knowledge of abilities, awareness, and classroom experience.

Do the Standards Make a Difference?

The ISLLC standards were first developed in 1996 and then refined in 2008. Researchers and school leaders have questioned whether the standards are appropriate for measuring the effectiveness of principals. According to Kaplan and others, "Although traditionally principals' focus was managerial and administrative, the ISLLC framework redefines school leadership to reflect principals' leadership roles that center on enhancing teaching and learning and creating powerful learning environments" (Kaplan et al., 2005, p. 31).

Kaplan et al. (2005) observed principal behaviors related to the six ISLLC standards and assessed the behaviors using a rubric and a four part scale. The study involved 160 schools: 44 high school, 5 primary schools, 61 elementary schools, and 50 middle schools. The survey asked superintendents to rate only principals who had been at the same school for at least 5 years. The interrater reliability for each ISLLC standard was significant, but generally low. The results suggest that global assessments of principal quality in relation to the ISLLC standards may not accurately discriminate among principals (Kaplan et al., 2005). The study also examines the development of principal quality and how this quality will affect student achievement. The

authors maintain that "school systems need clear operational standards for what principals should be able to do in order to foster high levels of academic achievement for all students" (p. 42).

Despite the generally positive attitude toward the standards, there are some who are critical and view them negatively. According to English (2000), "the standards are ambiguous and not without internal contradiction" (p.159). "How does one know that what is set forth in the standards is actually true? The answer is that the standards were established via professional consensus" (English, 2000, p.160). The 2008 update came from those who felt the standards needed to be more empirically based, taking into account what they charge principals to do. According to English, some have also taken offense that the principal is the only person in the school who is charged with leading those in the building in a moral and ethical sense. "The ISLLC standards advance the notion that the school administrator…acts as a 'moral agent' in the field…the agent who is empowered to define relationships and assigns those in it to their places" (English, 2000, pp.162-163). Is it fair to say that the principal is the one leading the moral way in the school? Because the ISLLC standards are now used to evaluate principals and to establish administrator preparation programs, they were revised with more attention focused on leadership for student learning.

Murphy (2005) addresses the academic community's concerns about the standards in his article, "Unpacking the Foundations of ISLLC Standards and Addressing Concerns in the Academic Community." In this article, he indicates that, according to the ISLLC Consortium, "the organizing animus for school administrators should be student learning and…the professional spotlight should shine on outcomes in this area" (p. 161). The core principles and standards emphasize student learning and how effective principals make learning happen. Indeed, the standards "provide the means to shift the metric of school administration from

management to educational leadership and from administration to learning while linking management and behavioral science knowledge to the larger goal of student learning" (Murphy, 2005, p.166). Murphy maintains that the standards are empirically-based on data from principals who have demonstrated a clear emphasis on learning. "The Standards rest heavily on productive schools and districts of women and men who lead schools where all children are well educated" (Murphy, 2005, p.169). Murphy challenges those critics who say that the standards are based on non empirical ideals and should be accepted on faith rather than practice. "At their core, the Standards are empirically anchored and values grounded" (p. 171).

Leadership of the Principal

The ability of a principal to lead is paramount to a school's success. Strong vision is also paramount to the success of any person in a leadership role. Discussions of the principal's role typically focus on leadership versus management and how a leader must be able to do both. According to Day (2000), "Leadership is essentially building and maintaining a sense of vision, culture and interpersonal relationships, whereas management is coordinating, supporting and monitoring organizational activities" (p.57). Reeves (2006) compares a principal to an architect:

> In schools led by architectural leaders, everything is connected, and there is no such thing as a 'nonacademic' class or experience. The faculty is not divided…every certified and noncertified staff member supports a common focus on improving teaching and learning" (p.30).

The principal should be recognized as the educational leader of the school and immediate community. Staff and community expectations place a heavy burden on the principal's shoulder. According to Hunter-Boykin and Evans (1995), the school principal is the person who

establishes the ground rules for a school's operation and environment, and is the person who is directly responsible for developing and maintaining high teacher morale.

Williams (2000) indicates that the research on effective schools points to the strong leadership of the principal. The impact of one individual on different facets of a school has never been more important than now. A principal's leadership is called for when a school is succeeding but would like to improve as well as when a school is failing and needs help to succeed. As Hallinger and Heck (1998) indicate through their study of the principal's contribution to school effectiveness, "Despite differences in how the principal's leadership role is conceptualized, both frameworks [a successful school wanting to improve and a failing school needing to improve] do emphasize the importance of vision and goal cohesion within the school" (p. 173).

During the last 20 years, words and phrases associated earlier with the principal (such as transformative, instructional leader, servant leader, mentor, and inspirational) no longer have a prominent place in education. The principal's role is now one of knowing, doing, and changing. This change in attitude and thinking reflects the present challenges of the principal. It is the principal's vision, dedication, and determination that provide the mobilizing force behind any reform effort (DiMartino & Miles, 2006).

Benefits of Strong Leadership

Leadership is essential for any organization to meet its goals, and move ahead. For those who have witnessed effective leadership, it is easy to describe what constitutes a good leader. According to Kouzes and Posner (2002), leadership is not about personality; it is about behavior. It is the actions of the leader that separate him from all others. The actions and behaviors of good leaders are as evident today as they were 25-50 years ago. If one were asked what

traits/skills or characteristic define a good leader, the answers would be quite clear and numerous. Yet, if one were asked to identify someone who demonstrates these skills on a daily basis, the list would be more difficult to compile. Reeves (2002) makes this even more obvious in his discussion on the *Daily Disciplines of Leadership*: "Excellent leadership is an acquired skill, not a talent endowed at birth or a matter of luck" (p. 4). In order for effective leadership to be felt and, more importantly, to be maintained, a good leader has to put behavior into practice each and every day.

In their book, *The Leadership Challenge*, Kouzes and Posner (2002) examined thousands of experiences of leaders at various organizations both in the United States and abroad. They used case analyses and administered questionnaires to employees and to company leaders to reveal what they found to be the top five practices of exemplary leadership. They maintain, "The Five Practices are available to anyone who accepts the leadership challenge and have stood the test of time" (p. 13). What is essential about these five practices is that they are action oriented and allow those around the leader to be better as well. Their top five practices of exemplary leadership include:

- Model the way

- Inspire a shared vision

- Challenge the process

- Enable others to act

- Encourage the heart.

These practices show a strong commitment to leadership that can transcend any organization, school system, or company. What is also worth noting is that leadership can be shown by any person at any time in any organization. "Leadership is an identifiable set of skills

and abilities that are available to all of us" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 13). So rather than thinking that one great person is "allowed" to be a leader at one time, the invitation to leadership is available to all who are willing to take a risk and support the practice.

Lambert (2003) in *Leadership Capacity for Lasting School Improvement* asks the question, "What is leadership?" Even though her focus is primarily on education, the answer proves true for any organization, company, or group environment. She maintains, "Leadership is about learning together toward a shared purpose or aim. Learning and leading are deeply intertwined, and we need to regard each other as worthy of attention, caring and involvement if we are to learn together" (Lambert, p.2). This definition of leadership echoes Kouzes and Posner (2002) who speak of leadership involving a relationship. Leaders have to lead people and in doing so relationships have to be established. The success of leaders has much to do with the relationships they have with others including those they are to lead.

In *The Daily Disciplines of Leadership,* Reeves (2002) attempts to define effective leadership by questioning some of the world's leading experts on the subject. The range of answers is quite varied; but there is agreement on what constitutes an effective leader. A leader makes the vision happen and takes the vision and turns it into a reality. Good leaders bring about substantive change in entire systems and people. Also, leaders have the ability to produce consent among all those they are leading (2002). Reeves believes leaders are the architects of improved individual and organizational performance.

What all of these definitions help illustrate is that leaders cause people to act. Effective leaders recognize the talent and skill of those they are leading and use those talents to move the organization forward. Leaders have the ability to move and motivate those around them.

Collins (2001), author of *Good to Great,* discusses leadership and why some companies make the leap to greatness while others do not. One element of a great company is what Collins terms the Level 5 leader. "Level 5 leaders channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. They are incredibly ambitious but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves" (p. 21). Collins discusses how leaders move progressively through five stages in a hierarchy of executive skills and capabilities. Those who are the most effective in moving a company from good to great master all five levels:

Level 1: Highly Capable Individual—Makes productive contributions through talent, knowledge, skills and good work habits.

Level 2: Contributing Team Member—Contributes individual capabilities to the achievement of group objectives and works effectively with others.

Level 3: Competent Manager—Organizes people and resources toward the effective and efficient pursuit of predetermined objectives.

Level 4: Effective Leader—Catalyzes commitment to and vigorous pursuit of a clear and compelling vision, stimulating higher performance standards.

Level 5: Executive—Builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will (Collins, 2001, p. 20).

These level-five leaders display a duality that is not found in all who are termed leaders. They can be both "humble and fearless." They are not afraid of what their company/organization needs and can be fearless in seeking out the solution. These leaders don't seek solutions in order to gain recognition or importance for themselves. "The good to great leaders never wanted to become larger than life heroes. They were seemingly ordinary people quietly producing extraordinary results" (Collins, 2001, p.28). Leadership can be challenging to define at times, but it is evident when a company, organization, or school has a good leader.

Current Trends and Challenges for Today's Principal

Current expectations call for the principal to be many things to many different people: instructional leader, change initiator, crisis manager, conflict mediator, supervisor of accountability, and visionary who is able to meet professional standards. According to Alvy and Robbins (1998), what is ironic is that although the principal interacts with hundreds of individuals on a weekly basis, the principal can feel isolated and lonely because no one else has the responsibility of the whole school on his or her shoulders. In addition, according to Hunter-Boykin and Evans (1995), the faculty and staff of a school believe their principal should maintain and improve the morale of the faculty in the building.

Not only is the morale important and setting the tone within a building a necessary skill, but the principal also has to move the school forward. According to McCray, Wright, and Beachum (2004), it is the school principal who sets the tone of the school culture and provides the proper vision and direction of the institution. According to Waters and Kingston (2005), "the current and upcoming leadership challenges are daunting. Now more than ever, education systems and the communities they serve need leaders with the vision, courage, will, and energy to lead them into the future" (p.5).

Instructional Leader

Hess and Kelly (2000) argue that the skill and knowledge of a principal matter now more than ever. According to King (2002), today's principals work differently than their predecessors. Some of the areas that today's principals must cover include:

- Leading regular professional learning experiences to improve teaching and learning,
- Focusing on teaching and learning and strong instructional practices
- Developing leadership capacity throughout the entire school,
- Making data informed decision making, and

- Using resources creatively to support school improvement.

Fullan (2002) writes about principals who learn and use their learning to help implement change in their school. He states, "learning in context occurs when principals are members of a district's visitation study team for which they examine real problems and the solutions they have devised in their own systems" (p. 19). Dufour continues this discussion of learning but takes it a step further to delve deeper into the role of principal as a learning leader. Dufour (2000) notes:

> When all the school's educators examined the efforts and initiatives of the school through the lens of their impact on learning, the structure and culture of the school begin to change in substantive ways. Teachers and students benefit when principals function as learning leaders rather than instructional leaders" (p.13).

Schools will continue to change and evolve demographically, racially, and economically. Therefore, principals have to learn and grow in order to meet the demands of the students with whom they work. Tirozzi (2001) writes about this learning and development on the part of the principal: "The principal ensures that curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessment of student progress are coherent components in the teaching and learning process…the principal engages herself or himself as an instructional leader" (p. 435).

Crisis Manager

Due to the visibility and overall scope of the principal's role, the ability to handle a crisis is something that can highlight the skill and command of the principal. Alvy and Robbins (1998) describe the ways principals handle the range of emergencies from a student being hurt at school to having to learn about simple routine procedures. "The success that it can take to handle an emergency is a function of several things: a speedy response and communication skills" (Alvy & Robbins, 1998, p.12). In a situation that calls for quick thinking, a principal also has to

respect those who can help. Donaldson, Marnik, Mackenzie, and Ackerman (2009) acknowledge this when they state it's not just what you know, but also how you interact with others that shape your influence. This knowledge can take what seemed like a crisis a few minutes earlier and turn it into a workable solution.

Relationship Builder

Fullan (2002) explains that successful change is dependent on successful relationships. The principal is the person who has the responsibility to talk about and create meaningful relationships, not only with students but more importantly with adults. "Leaders build relationships with diverse people and groups—especially with people who think differently" (Fullan, p.18). Gray and Streshly (2008) also reiterate the importance of building meaningful relationships and state it quite simply: "When relationships improve, schools get better. If relationships remain the same or get worse, schools regress" (p.15). A principal who has the ability to make an interaction meaningful and genuine when talking with those involved in the school, helps keep important relationships vital. If the person on the other side doesn't see the relationship and discussion as a positive interaction, then the value of communication is lost. Donaldson et al. (2009) agree that the most effective principals operate from a value system that places a high priority on people and relationships and states, "This orientation communicates itself both subtly and powerfully to staff, students, and the public, sending the message that everyone's voice counts and everyone's feelings are important" (p.13). This helps the principal to build consensus among the faculty and staff to ensure success for all students in the school.

Supervisor of Accountability

As the principal's job continues to evolve and change with new challenges, the demand of student accountability is becoming more and more important. Not only is student

accountability a goal of today's principals, the prospect of losing or retaining a job is something else of concern to principals. Ylimaki (2007) writes that today's principals face unprecedented pressures to improve student performance in their schools. Unlike principals of the past, contemporary principals can actually lose their jobs if students perform poorly on standardized tests over a series of years. Ylimaki (2007) conducted four case studies focused on principals assigned to improve failing schools. What made these case studies so remarkable was that the schools were considered "challenging" based on economics, race, demographics, etc. According to these principals, the main reason they were able to turn the schools around and make notable strides in student accountability and achievement was that they knew what their students and schools needed to improve. One principal initiated a Teachers College Project, which focused on authentic literacy for her children coming from poverty; another principal recognized that the demographic change of her population would require more student-centered, differentiated instruction (Ylimaki, 2007). A principal who is able to recognize what his/her school population needs is a principal who will work smarter and more efficiently in improving student achievement.

Lyons and Algozzine (2006) conducted another study that looked at the accountability standards and a state-wide accountability program in North Carolina. The study looked at the ABC program (Strong **A**ccountability, Mastery of **B**asic Skills, Localized **C**ontrol) initiated during the 1996–1997 school year. The main idea behind the initiative "moved accountability from the district to the school level to more quickly identify students performing below grade level so that intervention strategies might be timely employed" (p.3). The authors surveyed a stratified random sampling of elementary, middle, and high school principals using a questionnaire. After the responses were gathered and analyzed, principals revealed that the ABC

program influenced principals regarding student accountability in the following ways: they monitored student achievement, aligned the curriculum to the testing program, provided remedial and or tutorial opportunities, assigned teachers to specific grade levels or subjects, and protected instructional time (Lyons & Algozzine, 2006).

The studies included in this section illustrate challenges the principal faces when it comes to being accountable for all students in the school so that they all can learn and achieve.

Professional Standards

Today's principal has to be seen as an instructional leader who is willing to model a learning behavior and attitude that the faculty and staff can see. As Tirozzi (2001) indicates, the concept of school leadership has evolved from a more managerial orientation to one that focuses on instructional leadership. The specific skill sets that principals must acquire to help them handle these issues are outlined in the standards of the ISLLC.

<p align="center">**Leading as a First-year Principal**</p>

Olson (2007) wrote about a competition funded by Eli Broad for in-depth principal preparation programs. The award winning programs all demonstrated a commitment to monitoring and evaluating student achievement as part of their design. When awarding the top three districts, Broad said," Principals are the front-line leaders who are critical to the success of a school" (as cited in Olson, 2007, p. 1). When it comes to academic success, it is recognized that the principal helps lead the efforts of faculty and staff. The success of the school is critical to measure the effectiveness of a principal, and it doesn't matter if the principal is new or a veteran on the job.

Earlier in this literature review, several qualities were used to describe award-winning principals: visionary, learning leader and relationship builder, etc. These traits are difficult to

gain and, for a first-year principal, the overwhelming sense of wanting and needing to succeed can be a challenge.

Visionary

Maguire (1975) presented "The Beginning Secondary Principal: Any Path Won't Do" during a session at a school convention. Even after 30 years, the message of having a strong vision is a central idea for a high school principal. "The obvious first step for all beginning principals is to determine where his school is going as an individual unit… one must get a fix on his present position prior to charting a future course" (p. 312). Fridell (2006) echoes this same idea and sees vision as necessary for survival. "For the principal, a well-planned vision for the school could be the basis for a survival strategy" (Fridell, 2006, p. 2). Without knowing where the school is headed and where it should be going, the principal and his ideas and knowledge will seem doomed for failure. Without a vision, all the effort and work a principal puts into the job will seem fruitless and without any reward. Anton (2005) speaks of having the vision and keeping one's work in line with the vision that's been created. "Visualize your ideal school culture and work toward it…keep your actions, modeling and reinforcing focused on moving your culture from where it is to where you want to be" (Anton, 2005, p.1). It takes time as a new principal to develop a coherent vision that will have a long lasting and wide reaching effect. According to Alvy and Robbins (1998), "it seems logical that new principals would concentrate their efforts on issues related to climate and vision once they believed they had learned the managerial aspects of their positions and that operations were running smoothly" (p. 48).

Learning Leader

As a leader, a principal needs to show that he/she is willing to observe and learn in order to determine the best decisions for the school community. The principal needs to be an

instructional leader and, at the same time, a learner. One of the best ways to learn is to simply observe. Fridell (2006) emphasizes this skill of observation as a mark of a skilled principal— new or veteran. "Each new principal is met by both excitement and apprehension…unless the school is in crisis mode and in need of immediate upheaval, should be one of observation and documentation"(p.2). By observing, the principal can see where the school is and where it needs to go. Alvy and Robbins (1998) reiterate the importance of learning and making important observations. "The immediate period following one's selection…is a perfect time in which to learn about the organizational culture of the new school by finding out about it history and the community it serves" (p. 74). Another important step in the principal's learning process is to analyze the data that represents a school and its student body. Anton (2005) suggests looking and living with the data of your school. "Gather, study and collaboratively review data…reading achievement, attendance, student behavior and school culture as well as budget matters" (p. 2). This attitude of learning has to continue to be felt in the choices made regarding learning and the curriculum.

The principal has to be well versed in learning and curriculum so that the best teachers are hired to work with students. The principal has to keep abreast of what areas and issues are affecting public education. Anton (2005) suggests that principals keep themselves up to date by reading current leadership journals and curriculum and association journals. Anton also suggests that principals remember they first had teaching experience in a particular area. He urges principals "don't lose it. Keep up in your field…attending conferences, reading journals and meeting with teachers" (pp.1-2). According to Maguire (1975), curriculum grows out of the statement of philosophy and objectives. The school that has developed a clear statement should not experience great difficulty in determining what its offerings should be. The principal should

be one person who has an awareness and knowledge of what the school is offering to its students and the best route for academic success for all students.

Relationship Builder

The school principal's job calls for daily interactions with a variety of people. As a new principal finds himself or herself in a new school and community, relationships seem even more important (Alvy & Robbins, 2008). It helps principals for their success and the success of the school to have meaningful relationships and interactions with different types of people. According to Gray and Streshly (2008), "leaders build relationships with diverse people and groups—especially with people who think differently…focusing on relationships is not a gimmick, but rather a means of laying the foundation for sustaining improvement over the long run" (p.15). If the relationship is based on the idea of long-term improvement for students and staff, then the principal will be in a much better place to implement any change that may be necessary. As Rooney (2000) states, "Principals learn that change comes slowly through strong relationships built with staff, parents and students" (p.77).

Listening is a skill necessary for any effective relationship, and it is something that a principal has to use wisely. Anton (2005) emphasizes, "Listen, listen, listen! Give your full attention to the questions, expectations and comments of all school stakeholders. Learn to be an active listener. Listening advances learning" (p. 1). This advice can be helpful for first-year principals as they learn about the climate of their school, about the decisions made by principals in the past, and about what will be helpful as they make decisions in the future. By listening to all stakeholders, principals show that they are willing to be humble and purposeful in making decisions. "Newcomers have to be very careful and not permit their egos…to take over to the point they are giving advice or directions about subjects they know little about"(Alvy &

Robbins, 1998). By employing the skill of listening and making and maintaining effective relationships, first-year principals will have powerful ammunition as they begin the job. Fridell (2006) emphasizes a need for effective relationships in today's schools and indicates that research on the importance of school-family relationships has been clear for years and that, in the end, schools operate best when a strong bond is developed.

Walker and Carr-Stewart (2006) conducted a study of first year or neophyte principals to determine what success they had during the first year of the job. In conducting their research, Walker and Carr-Stewart used a social constructionist perspective. They employed appreciative inquiry to look for the elements on which an organization should be built to make it vibrant and vital in order to create a positive vision of the organization's future. The responses gathered were from a variety of schools, ranging from large urban schools to rural combined schools. The principals were asked to "think back over your experiences during the last year; what activity, situation, circumstance or event depicts a real success story for you?" (p.24) The researchers received 198 responses and from these identified common themes. The specific stories of success were categorized under the following seven themes:

- Conflict Resolution

- Teambuilding

- Role Model

- Visioning

- Fostering a Successful Environment

- Exceptional Leadership

- Communication

These themes pointed to a certain way of leadership being successful ranging from the "big picture to ensuring details were carefully orchestrated" (Walker and Carr-Stewart, p.25). Particularly relevant for this study are the stories of vision. The first-year principals noted that:

> successful leaders not only set their own personal and school goals but also challenged staff and students to set goals, try new ideas and embrace change. This need to involve staff in the planning process was identified as an essential ingredient of leadership. (p. 29)

The study was especially useful because it helped principals establish a dialogue with other principals to reflect on different stories of success and how these helped foster a stronger positive image for a new principal.

Summary

This review has focused on leadership as it relates to the role of a school principal. It also addresses the literature related specifically to leadership for the first-year principal. Much literature exists on what makes strong leadership and how necessary it is to possess as a first-year principal. Table 1 provides a brief summary of the major studies included in this review. Today's schools are in need of leaders who are effective and willing to show the leadership traits that will transform their school and move it ahead.

Table 1

Summary of Major Studies

Authors and Date	Major Findings	Methodology	Weakness and Strengths	Significance of Findings	Implications for Practice or Further Research
Leech, D. & Fulton, C. (2008) *Faculty perceptions of shared decision making.*	Look at the practice of school principals creating empowering cultures within their schools.	All secondary schools (6-12) in a large urban setting serving 154 schools. Principals with two or more years experience. 1841 teachers surveys.	(+): Strongest relationship between leadership practice of challenging process and the level of shared decision making. (-): Little relationship between leadership behaviors of principal and decision making in schools.	Principal preparation institutions must be charged with developing programs that provide experiences which enhance potential leaders' skills to create learning organizations.	Investigate the relationship between shared decision making in schools and the level of student achievement.
Lyons, J. & Algozzine, B. (2006) *Perceptions of the impact of accountability on the role of principals.*	The state wide accountability program in North Carolina had great impact on how principals monitored student achievement, aligned the curriculum assigned teachers to grade levels and protected instructional time.	Principals from large urban, medium size and small districts. Represented the three regions of the state. Responses were received from 45 of 90 principals.	(-): no significant difference were found for any of the demographic Variable comparisons. (-): Differences in the acceptability and effects of the state's accountability program.	Principals said that the ABC program had the least influence dealing with student, teacher, and parent stress, evaluating teachers and obtaining needed resources.	"Efforts to prepare school leaders to lead and manage today's schools with increasing pressure to produce steady gains in student performance requires attention from personal preparation professionals."

Authors and Date	Major Findings	Methodology	Weakness and Strengths	Significance of Findings	Implications for Practice or Further Research
Walker & Carr-Stewart (2006) *Beginning principals: experiences and images of success*	Stories of administrative "success" used to identify themes of skills for expression of self-efficacy.	198 neophyte & aspiring administrators asked to recount specific occasions when they experienced or observed success	(+): Appreciative inquiry helped illustrate positive themes in the first year of being a principal	Stories illustrate understanding of primary role of principal. They form a basis of building successful leadership.	How can these themes be used or directed to situations that may not be viewed as ones not associated with success?
Williams, H (2000) *Teacher's perceptions of principal effectiveness in selected secondary schools in Tennessee.*	Nationally recognized principals vs. randomly selected principals and degree of principal effectiveness between the two.	12—randomly selected schools 14 nominated schools 690 teacher surveys and 410 returned with audit of principal effectiveness	(-): principals working in a "nominated" school trying to "earn" a better grade. (+): causal-comparative method enables researchers to investigate relationships between many variables in a single study	Development, organizational direction and procedure scores were higher for nominated principals.	Will these scores hold true for elementary principals? What about secondary schools outside of Tennessee? How effective or valid is the National Secondary School Recognition Program in Tenn?

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine behaviors displayed by nominated principals who were awarded a school district's outstanding first-year principal award. This chapter describes the methodology used to examine the principals' award-winning behaviors and their relationship to the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards. The topics addressed in this chapter include:

1. Research questions
2. Research design and rationale
3. Study setting
4. Participant selection procedures
5. Informed consent and confidentiality
6. Data collection procedures
7. Data analysis procedures
8. Validity and reliability
9. Final summary

Research Questions

The study was designed to address the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What leadership and management behaviors and skills do district award winning first year principals exhibit?

Research Question 1.1: What behaviors and skills do award winning first-year principals identify as crucial to their success?

Research Question 1.2: What behaviors and skills do various stakeholders see as crucial to their first-year principal's success?

Research Question 1.3: To what extent do these strategies and skills of the award-winning first-year principals reflect the ISLLC Standards?

Research Design and Rationale

Qualitative research design with a cross case study format was used to address the research questions. Qualitative research is the most appropriate method for this study because it allows the meaning of the social phenomenon to be understood and explained with the least amount of interruption possible (Merriam, 1998). The principals selected for this study all have distinctive characteristics recognized by their faculty, staff, and district leadership. By interviewing these principals and their nominating stakeholders, specific elements and traits of the principal's leadership emerged for the researcher to sort into themes and categories.

Qualitative research is an appropriate tool to use in order to make meaning out of the information gathered. By sorting and arranging the information into themes, patterns emerged regarding what the various principals and stakeholders saw as important and significant for the leadership of their school. Also through the interviews, the researcher elicited information that highlights the elements of leadership and personal experience that make each of them an award-winning principal. The context was different for each school. Highlighting these differences led to a greater understanding of why certain traits are called upon more than others.

The five principals in this study all work at various schools in the Stonepoint Public School District, a pseudonym given for the participating school district. Three of the selected principals for this study work at the high school level, one at the middle school level, and one at the elementary school level.

Components of Qualitative Research

According to Bogdan and Bilken (1998), the five features of qualitative research include:

- naturalistic,
- full of descriptive data,

- concerned with process,

- inductive and

- rich with meaning.

The researcher focused on collecting as much detailed and thorough data to identify what was noteworthy about these respective principals. Employing a case study method was beneficial since it allowed each principal and his or her characteristics to be duly noted. There may be an unusual level of success or outcomes and this can be documented using a case study method (Patton, 1987).

In conducting this study, content analysis of the interviews was undertaken with the nomination packets being a main source of information. According to Yin (1994), "Interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs" (p. 85). Qualitative research requires meaning to be extracted from the data and the researcher will analyze that data with as much richness and detail as possible. Through the interviews each of the five principals shared what he or she considered essential for effective leadership. "Interviews add an inner perspective to outward behaviors" (Patton, 1987, p. 109).

Each of the principals was interviewed using the same questions and each was able to see the questions ahead of time. The researcher used a coding system to analyze the content of the nomination packets to identify evidence of the six ISLLC standards. Qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with the outcomes or products (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998).

The cross-case study method was used in this study because it allows the researcher the ability to gather in-depth information in order to answer complex questions. The "what" these

principals did and "how" they did it were answered in-depth by collection of extensive data and making sense of it along with interviews.

These features of the qualitative methodology provide researchers with the tools needed to address the study's primary research question: What strategies do principals use in their first year that made them a candidate for the district's most outstanding principal award? It is expected that gaining a greater understanding of the skills and attitudes of these principals may ultimately lead to positive changes in the preparation of administrators to assume their role as outstanding leaders.

<div align="center">**Research Procedures**</div>

The Setting

This study was conducted in a large suburban school system in a mid-Atlantic state of the United States. In this particular district, the Stonepoint County Public School (SCPS), there were over 175,000 students enrolled in more than 200 schools. This school district was chosen for this study because each year it identifies a first-year principal to whom it awards an outstanding leadership award. The award is based on distinctive leadership, a written nomination packet compiled by various stakeholders, a leadership philosophy written by the nominated principal, and a final interview conducted by the leadership team of the selected school district. The award is an especially coveted one because it recognizes the efforts of a principal in a school district that has over 200 schools and could easily have between 10-15 new first year principals each year. According to the district's website, the award is given to honor the past accomplishments of an honored superintendent. "The Susan F. Solomon Outstanding First Year Principal Award recognizes exemplary performance during the first year of principalship" (Stonepoint District Web Site).

Participant Selection Process

Study participants were the five honorees from the years 2006-2010. To be selected for the award, candidates were required to meet the criteria outlined on the district's website which indicates that the candidate must:

- possess administrator certification;
- have begun his/her first assignment as principal on or after January 1 of that school year;
- have performed in an outstanding manner, based on SCPS standards, during the initial year of assignment;
- have served as a role model for other beginning principals.
- exhibit superior administrative skills;
- interact exceptionally well with teachers, staff, parents, and other community members; and
- demonstrate excellent communication skills.

The principals profiled in this study were the award winners for the past five school years—2006-2010. The five principals came from each level of the school system: three high school principals, one middle school principal and one elementary principal. Because only one principal is honored each year, interviews required some of the subjects to retrospectively think about and reflect upon events and decisions up to six years prior to the interviews.

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

In order to conduct the research study and interview the award-winning principals, the researcher submitted a proposal to gain approval from the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB approval letter is included as Appendix A. A research proposal was also submitted to the school district's Department of Educational Accountability (DEA). A copy of the letter approving research in the district is included as Appendix B.

Once permission was granted from both the university and the school district, each selected principal was sent an introductory letter and invited to participate in the study. The introductory letter to principals is included as Appendix C. The researcher contacted each principal by phone to set up a time for a private face-to-face meeting. During the meeting, the researcher described the study more fully and assured the principals that all identifying information would be kept confidential. Principals were informed that observations would be made at their schools and interviews or meetings would be recorded with their permission. A consent form describing the study was presented for the principal's signature. Once signed consent was received, study activities began.

Key stakeholders for each principal were identified either by the principal selecting a person who would be available for the scheduled interview or by the researcher contacting those stakeholders she knew personally. Each stakeholder signed a consent form agreeing to participate. See Appendix D for the teacher participant consent form and Appendix E for the parent participant consent form.

The researcher allowed each participant full access to his or her interviews. The technique of member checking was employed to verify information received. This involves "taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible" (Merriam, 1998, p. 204). This ensures the validity of the interview and the information gathered.

The researcher also guaranteed that information shared by participants would be kept confidential. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Each of the interviews was conducted in privacy for each participant. After an interview was completed, the information was secured in a locked file cabinet accessible only by the researcher. All subjects were

employees of the school system, and they were allowed to view transcriptions of their interviews. This process helped guarantee the accuracy of interviews and the final document.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection methods for this case study involved semi-structured interviews of the principals and a focus group comprised of parents, administrators and various staff members. The interview format was semi-structured with a set of open-ended questions. The researcher arranged interviews around the each participant's schedule and allowed as much time as needed for the interviewee to answer the interview questions. The interview questions are included as Appendix F. By having established questions, the variety of answers received from each principal helped illustrate his/her perspectives and/or strengths in relation to the answers. Principals were asked to reflect on their experiences during their first year as a principal. The researcher compared answers from the five participants using cross-case analysis. Interviewing was also used because it is necessary when past events are impossible to replicate (Merriam, 1998 p. 72).

The researcher conducted an in-depth interview with each principal and then conducted a second interview with two to five stakeholders selected from each principal's school community. The researcher used a digital recording device to help ensure accuracy of information gathered and for use in transcription and analysis. During the course of interviewing, the researcher recorded observations and insights in addition to the digital recording. The researcher kept an "audit trail" of work collected for a more reliable sense of the data collected. The interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription service for accuracy and speed in analyzing the responses.

Subjects were given a list of questions prior to the interview. This interview falls somewhere in the middle of the interview structure continuum, allowing the researcher to respond to the situation at hand and the respondent's worldview on the topic (Merriam, 1998).

Data Analysis Procedures

After gathering the information, the data were sorted into categories related to the six ISLLC standards. The researcher identified commonalities among the principals and informants. Additionally, differences related to school levels were also examined. Due to the variety of experiences, academic settings, and perspectives of the five participating principals, a case study method was the best approach for comparing all data from the interviews.

Coding of Interview Transcripts

The major categories used for coding transcripts fall under the following six ISLLC standards:

- Articulation and stewardship of vision
- Nurturing and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning.
- Safe, efficient and effective learning environment.
- Collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs.
- Promotes success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness and in an ethical manner.
- Understanding and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal and cultural context. (CCSSO, 2008)

Each interview with the principal or with the focus group members was transcribed and assigned a continuous line number for reference. The line number(s) for each quotation that is directly

cited, either from the principal or a focus group member, can be found in the transcriptions using that line number(s).

Analysis of Nomination Material and Other Relevant Information

In addition to analyzing data gathered through interviewing participants, the researcher analyzed material from the nomination packet submitted by each principal's stakeholder during the first-year principal award competition. What was contained in the document, who wrote it, and what information was highlighted about that particular principal was analyzed. The researcher took this written information and sorted it into themes aligned with the ISLLC standards.

Reliability and Validity

For qualitative research to be considered successful in education, the research should be deemed believable and able to influence educational practice. In order for this study to be termed valid some sense of checks or measures needed to be ascribed to the research question and procedures. The following measures were used to assure validity and reliability: participant feedback, peer review, and data triangulation. Participant feedback allows those that were involved in the study to actually see and review the data that was gathered. This enabled the researcher to clarify and validate the accuracy of the data.

The researcher checked that the entire interview was recorded accurately and completely and made notes to identify what may have been unclear or where more information may or may not be needed as recommended by Patton (1987). Within two weeks after each interview was conducted, the researcher made contact with the interviewees to show them the transcription of their interview. By allowing each participant the ability to see their interview and what was

recorded, accuracy of the interview was ensured. The interviewer also asked the interviewees if everything recorded was correct and if they would like to add any additional information.

Peer review involves the discussion with colleagues and review of the data collected. Therefore a knowledgeable colleague of each principal was identified to participate in debriefings and feedback regarding the data and findings. The fellow colleagues provided additional input and/or another point of view that the researcher had inadvertently overlooked.

Finally, for data triangulation, the researcher collected data from at least two other people at each principal's school. One of these people was the nominating stakeholder and the other was another stakeholder. During the analysis, the researcher sought to determine if the information from the nominated principal was the same as what the two separate stakeholders had said. The researcher believes that two stakeholders bring different points of view that may, in fact, strengthen the recognition and leadership of the award-winning principal.

Summary

The purpose of this research was to answer the question: What makes a principal an effective leader? And more specifically: What makes first-year principals effective? The over-arching question of what do award winning first-year principals do to make them stand out from the rest is important for issues of educational leadership and preparation for first-year principals. The decision to use qualitative methodologies was especially important after reviewing literature on the topic and examining the process that was used to select an award-winning first-year principal. The leadership of each school and each principal is unique. This research topic will be of special interest as the need for effective leadership continues to grow and change with our changing school systems. The researcher for this study works as an administrator in the selected

school district and sees the need for leadership to respond to the changing demographics and

move schools forward.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from the five case studies of individuals who received outstanding first principal awards. The findings are described so as to address the study research questions:

Research Question 1: What behaviors and skills did award winning first-year principals identify as crucial to their success?

Research Question 2: What behaviors and skills did various stakeholders see as crucial to their first-year principal's success?

Research Question 3: To what extent do these strategies and skills of the award-winning first-year principals reflect the ISLLC Standards?

The behaviors and skills identified by the principals and their stakeholders were analyzed within the context of the ISLLC Standards. Pseudonyms are used for the all principals and stakeholders interviewed as well as for the schools. A total of five first-year principals were interviewed along with 18 stakeholders. Table 2 lists the key stakeholders of each principal.

Table 2

Interviewees

First-year Principals	Focus Group Members	Focus Group Member Role
Mark Collins	Diana	Parent
	Jeanie	Assistant Principal
Nancy Kraft	Pam, Ellen, Mike and Karol	Assistant Principals
Bob Blake	Kelly, Ann, Leslie	Assistant Principals
	Caren	Parent
John King	Maureen, Susan,	Teachers
	Lisa	Counselor
Carla Kyle	Maddie	Assistant Principal
	Ted, Victor, Julie	Teachers
	Lucy	Administrative Assistant

Principal #1-Mark Collins

Mark Collins is a 25+ year veteran of the school system where he was named outstanding first-year principal. The words that describe Mark as a principal include proactive, good listener, and aware. His administrative career included varying leadership positions that helped prepare him for his principalship; he taught for ten years and was a department chair, an athletic trainer, a director of student activities, and an assistant principal. These experiences, along with his long history within the school district, helped prepare him for his eventual success as a first-year principal. Mark is the married father of two boys who, on his admission, "grew up" in the schools where he worked. But the most notable characteristic that Mark possessed as a first-year principal was his ability to identify the needs of his school and community and how he could satisfy those needs.

Standard 1

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.*

Mark credits much of his success to having been an assistant principal before becoming a principal. Thus, he knew all the stakeholders, and, he indicated, "I was able to continue with what I saw as positive (*l* 24-25)." According to stakeholders, Mark listened. He gathered input from his department chairs, his leadership team, and his parent teacher association (PTA) and used that input in formulating a vision the entire school could adopt and believe. Mark's PTA president at the time, Diana, complimented him on his selection as the principal of Westlake High School and the seamless transition he brought to the position. Jeanie, who was department chair at the time and is now an assistant principal, said that Mark kept the vision the same as the previous principal's, but he was able to adapt it to the changing needs of the school. His overall

vision stayed on student achievement but adapted with the changing demographics of his school. The vision embodies how each student and staff member is responsible for helping and teaching one another. According to Jeanie, "He was able to keep the momentum of a good school...but also handle the extreme change that a new school was having to face (l 68-70)."

Standard 2

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.*

Mark credits his time at Westlake High School as an assistant principal (AP) as vital to his later success as a building principal. From the time he was named principal, he was able to observe and know what needed improvement. "I kind of knew what they expected and what they wanted so it was much easier. I saw our weakness in terms of staff development and I knew where we could be growing (l 88-89)." The PTA president saw Mark's ability to create a small school feel within the context of a large suburban high school. He instituted the creation of sub schools and this approach invited students to feel a greater part of the school. The sub-school concept promoted student success. A sub school was a smaller part of the entire school broken down by alphabet so each student reported directly to one assistant principal and two counselors. In a school as large as Westlake High School—approximately 3,000 students—a sub school of 500 to 550 students was more manageable for each assistant principal as well as for the students.

Jeanie says that Mark gave equal attention to all aspects of the school whether it was arts, athletics, or academics. He didn't want to favor one area over another. "Mark showed a balance....He showed equal opportunity to the staff and stakeholders of all departments because he wanted a well rounded school which included well rounded students (l 92-94)."

Standard 3

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring*
> *management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient and*
> *effective learning environment.*

Mark describes himself as a diplomatic, rather than an autocratic, leader. He credits having a strong security team as part of his success as a principal. Among the assistant principals, Mark emphasized the need for consistency regarding disciplinary issues so that students could see that they were being dealt with equitably. He instituted a Monday morning meeting with assistant principals during which all discipline issues that occurred in both the school and the larger Westlake community were shared and discussed by administrators and security. He knew how community crime could impact his school community.

As his school became larger, Mark lobbied for and received additional security staff. The PTA president, Diana, remembered that he encouraged all members of the school (counselors, teachers, etc.) to keep eyes and ears always open to what was going on around them. She remembered him asking students to come to see him or any of the assistant principals if they saw problems or issues in the school. Under Mark's leadership, students did not fear repercussions for their honesty. In this way, he cultivated a climate of trust between staff and students.

Jeanie spoke of Mark's ability to "assess all that was asked of him...and then respond to those different situations appropriately." She complimented his work ethic as being an integral part of his safe and secure environment. "He was one of the principals who would roll up his sleeves and do whatever it was to get the job done with a genuine concern and a genuine interest (l 150-151)" He also tried to reduce the suspension rate of his school; to this end, he instituted a Saturday school for students. Saturday school fell on the progressive discipline spectrum; it

reduced students' chances of being suspended and missing school, but still gave them consequences for their behavior.

Standard 4

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.*

When Westlake High School first opened, there was not much diversity among the student body. As the school grew and as demographics changed, Mark started a minority parents association. He would come to the monthly meetings and discuss various academic issues. He remembered distinctly asking the parents what they were looking for from the Westlake High School administration and staff. Parents stated that they simply craved high expectations. "The more and more we researched it with more and more best practices we saw that when students were held to higher expectations, they met those expectations (l 172-175)." Diana complimented him on his involvement and attendance at PTA meetings. He was honest in the information he shared—good and bad. "He was a great communicator, proactive in trying to prevent bad things from happening; he welcomed all input from the parents and the community at large (l 87-89)."

Jeanie also compliments Mark communication skills:

In order to run such a large school, sometimes he had to delegate, but at the same time he was involved in all of that. He stayed connected through communicating through his CGN-(Computer-generated newsletter), attending as many meetings as he could….He was out and seen (l 179-182).

He also attended monthly meetings in the community at the local police station. In Jeanie's words "his collaboration with the community was evident whether at an IC [Instructional Council] meeting, staff meeting, the police district....He was a great communicator (l 209-211)."

Mark consistently kept all stakeholders apprised of what was happening at Westlake High School.

Standard 5

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness and in an ethical manner.*

Mark stated his motto very clearly when it is a question of treating students and staff with integrity and fairness: you model what you expect your teachers and staff to do. Don't ask any more of them than you would expect from yourself. He sees himself as a role model, but he also talks and meets with his teachers and staff. "You have to give them the expectations; you have to tell them what you expect from them." While he was at Westlake, he had a motto that things were done right, "done the Westlake Way."

Jeanie reiterates the importance of Mark setting expectations. She says that he:

…set those expectations clearly and then set the example of meeting them. He was one of those leaders who led with integrity and if he had an expectation it was already an expectation that he was modeling himself. He wouldn't set expectations or ask anything of the students, the parents, community, the teachers of something he wouldn't already do himself. (l 216-222)"

Diana says the same thing that:

by his own words and actions….That's the person he is. He is an ethical person, he's a fair person and I think everyone recognized that. By doing his best it was something that people could see; he was a transparent leader (l 119-121).

Standard 6

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by understanding responding to and influencing the political, social, economic, legal and cultural context.*

Mark said communication is the key to getting the message out about his school to everyone who would hear and he did so in order to promote a positive school image and environment. He said the message had to get out to the community in a variety of ways so that all who have access to the school will be able to hear it:

> As many times as you use a student's name, the more you talk about the good things they do, the more they are going to react in a positive manner. Over 50% of the parents in our boundary don't have students at the school, but what they read in the paper is what they see (l 231-233).

He also kept up to date with an e-mail message he sent out titled, *Know What's Happening*. "It's a form of emergency communication, where if something happened during the school day, I can share and communicate with parents from my desk. I use it as a positive communication tool on a weekly basis (l 291-294)."

Jeanie saw Mark as a great promoter of the balance needed in high school. "It may be a hard balance in a high school when you may be known for your football team; but there's a heck of a lot else going on in the classroom." She saw his knowledge at work when he helped to set up an SOL (Standards of Learning) remediation program. All stakeholders collaborated and came up with a plan and a workable system to address the needs of these students. Jeanie remembered that Mark set up a tutoring program that met (and still meets) on Saturdays where community members and local business partners were able to help tutor students at Westlake High School.

Principal #2-Nancy Kraft

The second principal in this study, Nancy Kraft, is a 15+ year veteran of the school district where she works. What makes her story especially noteworthy is the unique path she took to become principal. Nancy is a 40 something married mother of two children. Her marriage to a member of the military has required that she live in various areas of the country. When Nancy first moved to the school district, she had a bachelor's degree and found employment as a support staff member—an instructional assistant in an elementary school library. She then took on a second position as a finance officer/principal's secretary in an elementary school. As her children grew, her time and involvement with them grew. She eventually transferred to a high school where she worked as a classroom teacher for five years. This change of context allowed Nancy to be in the same school where her children would eventually attend. During this time she began to pursue a master's degree in special education. After she received this master's degree, she continued her professional growth by completing a master's degree in educational leadership. While finishing her second master's degree, she applied to and was accepted into the school district's specialized leadership program. This program allowed her to "learn by doing" what a high school assistant principal does on a daily basis. After that one year internship, Nancy applied for and was offered a high school assistant principal position which she held for three years. After those three years, her building principal retired. Since the position of high school principal appealed to her, she applied for the position and was offered it—a position she has held for the past five years.

Mountain Lake High School is small (1,600 students) compared to the several other high schools in her district. Like Mark, Nancy succeeded in creating a smaller, more personal feel. During her tenure at Mountain Lake High School, she assumed the various responsibilities of

finance officer, teacher, student government sponsor, athletic assistant with ticketing and sales, assistant principal, and, ultimately, building principal. All of these roles helped reinforce Nancy's investment in the school-wide community and her willingness to help where she was most needed.

When speaking with Nancy, it is easy to notice her passion about her school and what she believes regarding school and principal leadership. One of her strongest personality traits she mentioned is that, by nature, she is a "rule follower." She mentioned her father and his military background and that, if there is a rule written or stated somewhere, she was going to follow it. She brings with her this same sense of following the rules when it comes to her school. One of her areas of strength is that she is a strong disciplinarian. This ingrained quality may be the explanation of why she is so successful as a principal—especially at her school. Because her school has such a wide variety of students including students from varying economic backgrounds, she feels rules help to even out the playing field. She said:

> Every student should feel that they have an equal chance to succeed when they are at
> Mountain Lake High School. Those who live and attend school in the community have
> come to expect that from me and I won't change that (l 244/260).

When interviewing Nancy and some members of her staff, it was quickly apparent that her passion for her school and her high expectations for students and staff made her stand out from the other nominees the year she won.

Standard 1

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stake holders.*

Nancy's predecessor began to discuss a collaborative vision for the school. Nancy was able to embrace that idea and make it her own when she was selected as principal. She wasted no time in July to put her stamp on the first initiative that would mark her tenure as principal. She instituted a program known as "Mountain Lake Time" to allow for more individualized instruction for all students in the school. As an assistant principal for three years, Nancy was able to observe how things were run from the inside, or base, level:

> Our school was on a course in building a collaborative vision started by the immediate previous principal….I already had in mind where I wanted to see the school go. I had the advantage of not having to wait a year to look and see where Mountain Lake needed to go (l 23-24).

Part of Nancy's vision was the belief that more time needed to be spent on establishing and maintaining relationships with students because so many students were falling through the cracks. Those students were not the high-achieving student nor were they the ones that were overly involved in discipline and class disruptions. Nancy recognized that the students falling through the cracks were those who came to school, went to their classes, were quiet, and were not a bother; teachers did not reach out to them because they didn't appear to need the contact. Nancy's ability to see the invisible student and that student's strong need for a mentor had an enormous potential to effect school-wide change.

Nancy described a situation where she shadowed a male student throughout one school day and noted his interactions. "He was failing all his classes, but had good attendance and not a

lot of discipline. He was a disengaged student, but he wasn't a misbehaving student. So he wasn't engaged in the learning process at all (l 394-399)." As a result of that day of observing this particular student, Nancy implemented *Mountain Lake Time*:

> When we implemented this program, this new bell schedule, there had to be a component of building relationships with students so that non-academically, every student in this school would have an adult that would be their advocate when they're failing (l 409-412).

Nancy maintained that establishing relationships with students would help those students who were not achieving to their full potential. "Not everybody has an advocate in the building, but in Mountain Lake Time it is the expectation that you advocate for the fifteen to eighteen kids that you have (l 416-418)."

A case study conducted by RAND Education noted a trait that Nancy used effectively to her advantage to help institute and maintain Mountain Lake Time at her school. "A principal's effectiveness as a manager of human capital is an important contributor to the success of a principal's efforts to improve a school's achievement" (www.rand.org).

When it comes to vision, one of Nancy's assistant principals, Mike, mentioned that Nancy's vision was something that involved all members of the community and their collaboration:

> Input was gathered from all of us…all the department chairs and that was coming from the teachers. So it was a school wide effort. We just made it more concise as an admin team and picked out the pieces we felt …made a lot of sense for our school. The vision…we need to make it a real part of our school, and not just words on paper. (l 109-118)

A female assistant principal, Pam, stated that, because Nancy is very involved in all levels of shared leadership, she is very involved in knowing if the vision is worth believing and practicing:

> I feel that she's the glue for the implementation of the vision as well….That's the way her personality is….She has a passion for believing in something, that is the common thread that keeps us going on and implementing the vision—tailoring the vision to meet the needs of both the students and the staff (l 144-146).

Karol, the staff member who nominated Nancy, was a department chair at the time. She has now changed roles and serves as an assistant principal on the administrative team. Karol described what Nancy feels is essential about the vision for the school:

> What is important as far as the development and implementation of the vision is Nancy's experience and history with the school….Working as a teacher, intern, assistant principal and working her way up through the school she walks the walk that is so important to have buy in from the people around her. She is a visionary who wants the ultimate success for Mountain Lake School and she encourages their [students and staff] participation in creating our Culture of Excellence (l 153-159).

Standard 2

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.*

By her own admission, Nancy simply states that she does what is best for the students at her school to be successful. As a teacher, Nancy attended a training focusing on the work of Rick and Karen DuFour's Professional Learning Communities where she admittedly, "bought into the whole idea of having a professional learning community where staff was given time

within the school day to collaborate, develop common assessments and use data to make instructional decisions" (l 55-58). Nancy noted that she institutes staff development for her teachers and she does as much as she can in-house:

> For the first couple of years, the staff developments were pretty much run by the administrative staff; the last two years, they've been run by a committee of teachers. If we don't have a lot of money to send teachers to conferences, we bring what we learn to our school monthly (l 64-68).

Another one of Nancy's assistant principals, Ellen, stated that, with the advent of Mountain Lake Time, the focus was for students to get assistance during the day. Karol has noted that this intervention time "allows teachers more time for planning and collaborative time for core subjects as well as electives, and they felt they were a part of the instructional team like everybody else (l 290-293)." Nancy also took administrative tasks, such as attendance, cafeteria duty, and duties around the building, away from teachers so they could focus on instruction." Having worked with Nancy, Mike noted that Nancy's expectations for attendance, behavior, and academics were incredible…very high. He stated, "Since I've been here, when I started as an AP [assistant principal] where we were achievement-wise and where we're going it's just growing every year." Ellen even noticed that, as assistant principals, "we are in the classrooms more. We've had times when we were really focused on that…looking at how instruction was being provided by the teachers and giving the teachers specific feedback so that they could improve (l 326-330)."

In the nominating packet submitted about Nancy, it noted that she "shares and discusses results of data with the staff and community, explaining the data and stating why the results may have occurred and what needs to be accomplished to positively impact student achievement." So

not only does she present the data, but she also presents solutions and possible ways that the data can improve. She also uses these specific data "to determine the types of staff development to offer, which materials to purchase, and the allotment of staffing."

Standard 3

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient and effective learning environment.*

Nancy, by her own admission, is a "rule follower" and admits that was one of her strongest areas as an assistant principal. When asked why this is so important to her and for the students in her school, Nancy said:

> If it [a rule] is in writing, everyone will follow it. Every student in my building should feel they have an equal chance at success. It isn't fair that kids feel a certain way or are treated in a certain way because they live in a particular neighborhood. (l 244-245)"

Her message and clear views on discipline are presented to all who are a part of her Mountain Lake community. At the beginning of the year, students learn of her expectations as well as the county expectations through a review done by assistant principals. Nancy has a "Get to know Mountain Lake" meeting with parents at the beginning of the year so that "they understand up-front the expectations of their students when it comes to their behavior." Standard 3 is also in effect for her teaching faculty and staff. Nancy stated:

> We expect our students to behave, to come to school to learn; and we expect our teachers to apply our rules equally and consistently in their classrooms. If there are teachers who are having difficulty with classroom management, we either send them to training or offer them training in-house (l 98-103)."

In addition to expectations for individual classroom, Nancy has implemented PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention Support) throughout the school. PBIS is run by the teacher and student. The members of her administration team pride themselves on the efficiency and consistency in how they address student behavior. In the words of Mike, this has "had a direct bearing on academic achievement." Nancy stated that, when and if administrators have to make contact with a parent regarding the behavior of their student at school, there should be no surprises. The message has gotten out early and repeatedly to all members of the school community and the expectations for overall behavior are known and consequences are implemented.

Standard 4

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.*

Nancy has demonstrated, by her words and actions, that what she does every day at Mountain Lake High School is to make the school better for each and every one of her students. She recognizes that this is an undertaking in which all members of the school community need to invest. When nominating Nancy for the outstanding first-year principal award, a parent wrote:

> When she took on the position, she was prepared to build on Mountain Lake's strengths and initiate improvements where needed. It was evident that the relationships that Nancy had established in her years as a teacher and sub-school principal with the staff and faculty had earned her widespread support.

This support helps Nancy tread into waters that some may feel uncomfortable or hesitant about. She recognized the large number of African American and Latino students who were not succeeding at her school. In her first year, she developed a committee called the BSAC (Black

Student Achievement Committee) with the goal to engage more African American parents in the community and in the school. She also partnered with the neighboring Latino Catholic Church and asked to attend and speak at a Sunday mass. Nancy said that by attending one church service conducted in Spanish she could understand what some of her parents felt like when they entered her school. With her dynamic personality, Nancy attended a mass, spoke from the pulpit, and formed a Latino parent group that began meeting at the church. After five months, she moved the meetings to her school. In her own words, "without garnering trust and relationships with a community, I probably would not have been able to reach out to them (l 218-219)."

Standard 5

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with*
> *integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.*

Nancy states clearly and explicitly:

I think it's very, very important to me that every student in this school feels like they have equal chance for success in this school. And so I express to teachers, staff, and administrators that we are going to treat our kids fairly; the only way to do that is to understand the policies and procedure that they must follow in this school (l 244-248).

Assistant Principal Smith notes that at the "All About Mountain Lake" program, the expectations and philosophies were clearly laid out for all members of the community to see. The program is for families to come in and hear about every aspect of the school: from academic programs to discipline, attendance, and dress code. This program is separate from the county-mandated Back to School Night which all schools hold once in the fall semester. When it comes to what Nancy asks of the faculty and staff, she models that same behavior herself. She expects the staff to dress and act a certain way; she is the model of that dress code. When she asks staff

to stay current on trends and best practices in education, she is taking classes and working on her doctorate in education. She listens to her staff; she may not agree with a given idea or suggestion but explains why she disagrees and does what is in the best interest of the student.

Interestingly, the teacher (now administrator) who nominated Nancy talked about having a personal relationship with Nancy and how sometimes that can be a detriment rather than an advantage:

I was a teacher with Nancy…as she moved up and I remained a teacher; we remained friends. As the principal, she's clearly my boss but I can tell you, if the expectations aren't the same, they're greater for the people who she shares a friendship with. There's no problem drawing that line between professional expectations and we may get tighter, but professional expectations are just that and there are no exceptions. I think that's critically important in this building. There is no nepotism within this building because that can undermine staff morale quickly (l 658-662).

Standard 6

An education leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal and cultural context.

Nancy stated that she has come a long way from her first year as principal when it comes to navigating and understanding the political demands of her job:

I always said that I'm not a political person; I'm not running for office. But I understand …that sometimes you have to learn how to be politically savvy to get what is needed for your school. (l 321-325)

When asked to elaborate more, Nancy talked about the large size of a district she works in and what role politics play in educational decisions:

By working with our superintendent and our school board you are bringing people who are not educators who are making decisions about education. Our superintendent has to know how to politically win over the trust of many school board members to accomplish things that need to be accomplished (l 338-341).

Due to her experience and success leading her school, Nancy has been asked to speak at several school board meetings and various community events and to serve on committees organized by her school district's leadership team. In the nomination packet written about her, it states that "her calendar is full of nightly commitments where she represents Mountain Lake High School to the community. She can be seen with students raking leaves or washing cars." She is a well-respected and ubiquitous presence in her Mountain Lake community.

Principal #3-Bob Blake

The third principal in the study is a 30+ year veteran and a high school principal. Bob Blake served as a special education teacher, a science teacher, an assistant principal and a building principal. What is noteworthy about Bob is his quiet, if not understated, demeanor. He is a tall slim man (which may be helpful in the halls of his high school), wears glasses, and has a voice that is quiet, but sometimes rambling. What sets Bob apart from the previous two high school principals is the perspective he has on ideas and initiatives that he implemented in North River High School. Bob is a married father of two children and his transformation of North River High School is remarkable. At the time of his nomination, he worked with an administrative team of four assistant principals; since his nomination and winning the award, three of those four assistant principals have all been promoted to the ranks of a building principal.

Standard 1

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.*

Bob's appointment as principal of North River High School took effect in July. Within two to three weeks, Bob set up a "Meet Mr. Blake Night." According to him, this was an opportunity to work with his PTSA (Parent Teacher Student Association) and ask questions of his community: What do you like about the North River community? What do you not like? What do you feel works? What doesn't work? "This was an opportunity to define a vision, define where we needed to go." Bob strategically chose two other members of his administrative team to attend: his assistant principal in charge of all special education and his director of student services who could answer specific questions regarding counseling, scheduling, classes, and testing. Bob said the turnout was quite large and the meeting ran for about three hours. He had a PTSA parent and his assistant principal write everything down so nothing would be missed. Even though individual parents wanted to discuss their own child, Bob refused to do so. This was a meeting that would cover all students at North River High School. Bob said that, from the three hour meeting and from comments shared by parents and staff, the following three main ideas or tenets emerged which he has determinedly incorporated into his vision and repeatedly included in opening meetings with faculty and staff:

- How do we communicate and is it consistent throughout the North River Community?

- How reflective is our instructional program?

- How can we support and improve our school environment to make it positive and constructive?

Bob said that:

Everything that sort of was talked about fit into those three categories. I felt that I had

worked hard enough to have enough respect from the faculty, whether we agreed on

everything; we didn't always. We needed to be really honest about what we were doing

well and be really honest about what we weren't doing well (l 72-77)

Other members of the focus group echoed these sentiments. Kelly, an assistant principal,

said that "everything we've done here at North River has always fallen under those three

principles. They have received a lot of input from people." Ann, another assistant principal at

the time who is now a middle school principal, said "those three tenets kind of were the common

thread through all conversation of all decisions that we made. Are these going to fall under this

vision?" Another assistant principal, Leslie, said it best:

So there was a masterful combination of preserving, developing and adopting new things

while hanging on to old so that people jumped on board. It wasn't this drastic change

that everything's terrible and here's what we're going to fix. Bob continued with these

three ideas and built on them every year and brought them back to the faculty and staff

every August; they were our promises to the community (l 115-119).

Standard 2

An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating,
nurturing and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to
student learning and staff professional growth.

Bob mentioned that he knew several members of the faculty and staff "weren't happy

with the general tone of the building; we weren't unhappy but we weren't happy; we were fair to

middling about the academic ambiance (l 172-175)." Bob knew that a change had to come. He

assembled a group of staff who were concerned and asked what could be done to change it.

What also helped push this effort along was that Bob felt with students from so many varying cultures and backgrounds, the expectations for school and school attitudes were so different. One of his assistant principals had previous experience with a system called Positive Behavior Support (PBS). The program is a research-based program that conveys, teaches and reinforces positive behavior. According to the district's website, "PBS offers an effective, efficient, and relevant school wide approach to discipline, with the end result reducing challenging student behavior through a proactive, positive, and consistent manner across all school settings and improving academic achievement and social competence." After members of his staff were sent to the training to understand the benefits, it was implemented in the building. It quickly set a more respectful tone towards one another and resulted in an academic tone focused on learning. The attitude that Bob has towards learning and problem solving in his building is that "when an idea came forward I asked people to be a part of the solution." It wasn't enough for a teacher or staff member to bring a problem or concern to Bob; it was important for them to see themselves as a part of the solution. Another assistant principal, Leslie, mentioned that a mentoring program was also added to the school to help change the school culture. With over 95 countries represented among the student body in one building, Bob saw the need for a clear expectation of the school culture and attitude towards learning.

Standard 3

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient and effective learning environment.*

When asked about these aspects of the job, Bob said these are the fundamental routines that are in place and must be managed. "In this job there's so many things that go on, you can't do them all….I keep an eye on everything…not that I'm looking over their shoulder, but just so I

don't have any surprises (l 277-280)." As the principal of a school of over 2,000 students, Bob

had an idea of what was going on at all times, but didn't have to be bogged down with the

specific details. Bob talked about the importance of including all those involved in a specific

decision, but also respecting the person in charge of the particular decision. He saw each

member on his administrative team as having the potential to be a principal someday and so he

allowed them to be as involved in decision-making processes ranging from the school's master

schedule to safety and security. At the time that Bob was awarded the outstanding first-year

principal award, he had an administrative staff of five assistant principals (one assistant principal

in charge of special education), a director of student services, and a director of student activities.

Since his award until his retirement five years later, four of the assistant principals have been

promoted to building-level principals in the school district. According to Bob, "I want us all to

make them [decisions], because they'll be doing this job some day or in another leadership job."

Bob also challenges his teachers to stretch their teaching ability and skills by teaching all levels

of a designated subject area. He says that if teachers see themselves only working with one type

of student or one level of the curriculum, it creates a feeling of self-centeredness within the

school. Bob not only puts the onus of responsibility on the teachers in the building, but also on

the students. According to Ann, a former assistant principal:

> this is a place where an educational program is a serious pursuit and Bob would
>
> emphasize that over and over again with students as he talked with them. He stressed
>
> that message with respect towards all students and with humility as the principal (l 169-
>
> 172)"

Caren, a parent in the focus group, stressed the safety and overall attention to discipline

that Bob gave to the school. She mentioned that students weren't afraid to come to the school

anymore as had been the case in the past. "Having the teachers at the door made a huge difference to the students and the kids saw the hallways as safe again." Assistant Principal Kelly said that, by outlining his expectations of students and persuading teachers of the importance of effective and consistent monitoring, Bob defined and implemented a program conducive for student learning. The non negotiable rules that were put into place to ensure student safety and accountability included limiting a student to only three bathroom passes a quarter to cut down on hallway traffic and having teachers stand at their door to usher students to class and to observe hallway behavior. According to Ann:

> He wasn't afraid to state up front where our weaknesses were and here's where we need to do better. He put some staff development in place so there was a teacher angle for promoting student learning and setting high expectations (l 197-201).

Standard 4

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.*

Bob noted that, because North River High School has grown from a population of 1,500 students to over 2000, he has to be creative and diligent in how he gets his message out to all members of his community. "Some of us reach out….Some you have to invite in." Bob recognizes the diversity in his school and that not all parents will be able to access his message by only one method. He states:

> So some you know…second language folks because of where they're from, what goes on in school isn't what they're used to. I send out a KWH (Know what's happening) electronically and also I hit the PTSA. As the weather gets warmer, the numbers attending events drop (l 376-379).

A specific example of North River High School reaching out to the community occurred when the district looked at changing the boundaries and sending neighboring students to North River High School. Caren (a North River parent) noted that, if a parent and student mentioned that they did NOT want to attend North River High School, Bob would personally invite the family in to sign the transfer paperwork—but they had to come in and tell him why they wished to transfer their son or daughter. According to Caren, Bob would want to hear any complaints and concerns about why a family would want to leave and then he would let them know "you can hold me accountable….Yes, you're right that does happen but it is changing and I will change it more (l 361-362)." After these individual meetings many of the parents became very active supporters of the school.

Bob received compliments for his consistent message, being aware of the audience he addressed and speaking a language that was meaningful to families and community members. The message was not that "we are the school" and "you are the home", but rather a more holistic one: we're all together in this educational endeavor. Bob would also invite local businesses into the building so that the skills and programs of the school could be showcased in some way. Another assistant principal, Ann, complimented Bob on his visibility:

> I know how many invitations he gets as a principal and it's rare that he said no. If it worked, it went into his calendar. That's been a model for all of us too….When we're asked to participate in something we're there (l 396-399)."

Standard 5

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.*

Bob's philosophy is simple in how he deals with faculty and students in his building. "If something that's in process isn't making any sense, you have to be willing to hold the adults

accountable at a higher level than you hold kids because we simply should be." Bob shared that, as a first-year principal as well as continuing as a fifth year principal, he has to follow through, listen, and be willing to change. What Bob learned by spending time in schools and in his role as a principal, what he says, and that to which he gives his attention is "helping people understand how their actions impact others." Bob emphasizes with his administrative staff that the most important thing that he does is to hire good people to do a good job with students. And Bob knows that relationships are key to acting in a fair and ethical manner. "I try to get to know as many kids as I can because I find if you have a good relationship with the student, you kind of automatically have a good relationship with the parents (l 538-541)."

Bob's assistant principal, Leslie, spoke of a personal story about witnessing Bob mediate an altercation involving two students. She witnessed Bob actively listening to both students (even though she felt there was a clear victim and a clear perpetrator) and having a meaningful discussion with each student regarding the altercation. By the end of the conversation, both students knew why what they did was wrong and how their behavior negatively impacted the school. Bob's actions underscored his belief in the fair treatment of both. Leslie also said that this ethical dimension of his decision-making is part of his core. "He could do it (talk) ten times in a row and it's with the same gusto the tenth as it is the first." Kelly, another assistant principal, noted that Bob takes a lot of time before he has to make a tough decision. What she remembers most is that "we didn't have different roles for who lives in what neighborhood….He modeled a lot of that (fairness/equity) in his decisions (l 448-450)." Ann remembered being an assistant principal with Bob and bringing an appeal from a parent regarding a suspension decision. Even though the parent was against the suspension, Bob upheld it because of the fairness and integrity of the offense and situation. "It very much validates what you have done

as his assistant principal….We're going to stand on the integrity of the case and the issue that we have is right there…whether or not people are happy about it." Ann stated plainly:

> There's not a Bob that you don't know. Whether he is on the side of a basketball game, in a suspension appeal, or in doing collaborative walkthroughs of classes, you can almost know what you're getting and could answer the question, what would Bob say? (l 478-479)"

Such transparency of character enables students and staff alike to approach him with ease.

Standard 6

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by understanding responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal and cultural context.*

Bob talked about formal and informal recognition of the successes of his students. There are several programs and "official" methods of recognition involving names being read on the intercom, having a reception or program in the cafeteria or auditorium or speaking at a PTSA function. But there are also the informal ways that Bob recognizes kids in the cafeteria or when he sees them in the hallways or at lunch. Any method of recognition is recognition and, according to Bob, specific praise goes a long way. Bob says he talked to his guidance director and asked the question of "how do we reinforce the academic mission? We have ways to praise our sports teams, but we should do something to recognize the academics; so we have the academic lettering night." Bob also mentioned how his presence at any meeting or ceremony can go a long way:

> I try to show up whenever we have a Spanish Honor Society or German Honor Society induction. I know its Friday and we're going to have a quick get together for the kids

going to the regional science fair…just to tell them Good Luck. Some are just a quick

hitter…but it just reinforces it…that we notice and it matters (l 607/614).

Bob stated that the recognition has to be consistent, specific, and authentic. Students know

otherwise.

One of Bob's assistant principals mentioned that he has a transparency that is healthy and

disarming because all who work with Bob know where he stands and what he would do in a

particular situation. By working in a consistent fashion, the administration team "opened

up…opened ourselves to other people's feedback and the admin staff could see if they were

meeting the needs of all students." Andrea mentioned that this transparency helped solidify a

stronger sense of team. "There is no job too small for a principal…and there's no job that we're

not going to help each other with. And Bob attracts people with that same attitude to work with

him."

Principal #4 John King

The fourth principal participating in this study is an elementary school principal named

John King. He is in his fourth year as principal at Patriot Elementary School. His previous years

in education included teaching elementary school (third, fourth, and sixth grades) and being an

assistant principal for four years. John says that working at two very different schools before he

became principal at Patriot Elementary School helped prepare him for the dynamic challenges of

leadership. When you meet John and talk with him, you hear the passion he has for his school,

for leadership, and for connecting with his school and community. John is a married father with

two children and someone who would describe himself as an intrinsically motivated achiever and

somewhat self critical. "I know that it's hard for me to not work really hard and do what I think

is a good job at work. It's really not enough for my boss to tell me this is good…the fire is

inside." The story of John begins ~~when~~ he found out he had been awarded the new principalship of Patriot Elementary.

Standard 1

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.*

What is quite unusual for John's story is how early he found out he was going to be the new principal and the time it afforded him to become familiar with his community and stakeholders. John's appointment as a principal came in April and he officially started his contracted position in July. He was introduced on the school's morning announcements before the end of the school year so the staff and students could know who their new principal would be. He was able to meet with the previous principal and hear some of her opinions/ideas on issues as she was ending her principal ship. John also scheduled 10-minute interviews so he could hear directly from each staff member what their ideas were regarding Patriot Elementary School. These interviews occurred over three days but John said they were essential in getting a feel for what was happening with the staff and for the overall direction of the school. John called it his listening tour and he asked the following three questions:

- Tell me a little bit about yourself and your job at Patriot.

- What do you expect from your administrators?

- What are your hopes and dreams for Patriot Elementary School?

From the interviews and from the information the staff previously gave the assistant superintendent, John said he was able to see patterns and trends of what was needed at the school. John began to articulate a vision, "but I couldn't have a firm vision until we really had some time together, so I settled on some simple things that were what I saw as being in my

core…but also what I think I heard from people." John said he settled on simple things that all could agree on. "Who are we? We are a Title I school…We're a bunch of learners and we're hard workers (l 72-74)." John knew that a Title I school has different needs and challenges than non Title I schools and he also knew what laying the groundwork would mean for the Title I population. Since John has been on the job as principal for several years, the vision has "solidified into things that were a little more sophisticated."

Standard 2

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.*

> According to John:

> You do the things you're supposed to do and number one is study the data. You're supposed to do that. The hard part but I think the most important one is taking all that in and working with people to narrow it down to a plan that is simple that everyone can articulate (l 122-124).

John felt that whatever was done in the hopes of improving student achievement could be done with "fidelity and done school-wide." John also expressed the need for consistency with what he and his administrative team do. One of the teachers, Maureen, echoed this sentiment of consistency when she spoke about a particular program, called the Responsive Classroom that Patriot Elementary School adopted. She noted that the appropriate professional development was offered so that we "were all educated the same; so we all knew how to run the school the best. He's very consistent and it was very data-focused (l 105-107)." Another teacher, Susan, stated that the professional development offered to the staff is not something that is done just one time and quickly forgotten. "It was built upon. It was and it's actually still happening from

anything we've learned since he's been here." Teachers know he listens to their opinion and he values it. "He incorporated what we had told him and we worked together."

Standard 3

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.*

According to John, ensuring a safe learning environment is the area where assistant principals get the most experience at the building level. As the building principal, John respects those who are in a given position of expertise to help in a high-level crisis situation:

> You just got to be ready to connect with anyone who is going to advise you properly and follow the protocols they set up….That's basically just consistent follow through and trusting them and trying to do what they tell you (l 159-161)."

John was fortunate in that he had an assistant principal who was "great in all the discipline stuff." John focused more of his attention on the research-based responsive classroom model and how it would benefit his school.

Before his arrival, some grade levels received training on the responsive classroom model, but it wasn't done school-wide. When John looked at the responses received from his three-question interviews he found a theme with several of the responses. John asked the question, what are your hopes and dreams for Patriot Elementary School, without realizing those words were the language of the responsive classroom model. One of John's teachers echoed the results of the responsive classroom indicating that not only had the staff responded but so had the students. One of the most important tenets of the model is that everyone should feel safe and there should be a safe learning environment throughout the school.

Teachers mentioned how John is out and about in the school and this visibility itself lends to a safer environment. Another key component John uses is that he capitalizes on the strengths of his staff members. Because he has taken the time to get to know his staff, he can have specific people working in areas that suit them so the work doesn't feel like a chore.

Standard 4

An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interest and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

John said that the first few weeks, during the summer when he became the principal, were quiet. "It was just me in the building….Parents were coming to see me, but they were trying to get me to put their kids in certain classes with certain teachers." As a way to introduce himself to the community and the parents, he held four meetings called RAPs—Read Aloud and the Popsicle. John would read a few select stories to the students who came and then he would end the evening with popsicles. By the end of the fourth RAP meeting, John had met 75 to 80 families.

John was also brave enough after his first completed year to end a long standing tradition at Patriot Elementary School that he felt wasn't a good one. At the summer Back to School open house in August, student schedules were posted on the window around 5 p.m. on a particular day and parents could see who their child's teacher would be. John was warned that if he parked in his "principal" spot that day, parents would know he was there and would come to see him and try to have their child's class assignment changed. What John chose to do the first time this tradition was held, was to simply go out and shake hands with the parents who were there. By simply saying "hello" and welcoming parents and students, he was able to divert some of the

attention from parents trying to switch their child's schedule. Yes, they did try, John said, but he was in a much better position to tell parents why he wouldn't change the schedule.

John also uses technology to reach out to his community. "I started the principals' blog three years ago where each week it is linked to the school website." John chooses to write about something that happens each week: it could be a big story, like an entire grade's Native American Day or something funny that he heard a student say. According to John, "it allowed me to use a tone in my writing that could be more informal than you do in the newsletter. It was a better get-to-know-you thing (l 254-256)."

Standard 5

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.*

John noted specific details about the responsive classroom, continued school-wide implementation of the program, and continued staff development as all ways to help Patriot Elementary School. There are certain elements embedded in the school schedule including: "a morning meeting every week…a structure for teaching social skills and valued character, and giving kids good honest feedback." John noted that for the responsive classroom to really work, it's not a unique or one-time thing, but it needs to become so routine so that it's "a matter of fact." John said that all staff, including guidance counselors, work with whole classes on the importance of the responsive classroom and this helps shape the entire school climate as well as the children's perception of the way they should treat each other. Several teachers from his school mentioned that John leads by example in the way he treats students and staff. "He's very respectful to everyone….He also tells you the way it is. There's nothing hidden so if he doesn't like something or doesn't approve of something you know it right away." One comment that stems from his truthful direct approach is what Susan said, "at the end of the year staff meeting

he very firmly and respectfully says this is what I expect of you and if you can't take it…this is not the place for you to be." Susan said that, because of his careful delivery of the message, one feels it is possible to fit in at another school, if Patriot Elementary School and its ideals are not for you.

Another goal of John's is to be visible with the community and with his staff. His goal of "having an administrator in every class, every week without question…even if it is a 10 second drive- by.…I get through 41 classrooms plus specialists." As principal, John came in with some clear rules that he knew he couldn't live without; one was a dress code of no flip flops and no cleavage. The year before he became principal and visited Patriot Elementary School, he saw many examples of inappropriate dress to the point where he was thinking "from the perspective of the parent…that's not okay for my kid. I then thought, as a principal, how do I defend that? I can't." John states what he believes in at the beginning of the year and in the staff newsletter. He does get some push back and grumbling from people, but he also receives a large amount of affirmation and appreciation that those small things are priorities. As principal, when dealing with difficult issues or difficult people, he had uncomfortable conversations his first year, but "they were really important and they were tough. But there are times where people get out of line and staff can test you and some project things on to you that aren't fair." John respects the difficulty of the conversations and says "it was kind of like saying I've got to address this…no one else should know about it."

Standard 6

> *An educational leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to and influencing the political, social, economic, legal and cultural context.*

In the role of principal, John communicates a two pronged message. First, the skills we acquire in instruction are going to have a pay-off in student achievement. That's the whole reason we learn skills and that's how we pick our staff development. Second, complementing that is the idea that teacher behavior doesn't necessarily always translate to student achievement. Teachers can't have this identity of "I'm the good teacher…just because my lesson looks this way."

John sees the necessity of data and collaborative learning teams that include everyone sharing data. As part of the administrative team, one uncovers and presents data so everyone sees everyone else's work. "There are people who are getting the respect that has been long overdue…because these people don't self-promote or they're shy." One of the counselors from Patriot Elementary School said "we have always looked at data but there was not really any organized method to it. Now we have student smart goals, we have collaborative team meetings, and he [John] has high expectations for all students (l 287-289)"

Patriot Elementary School is a Title 1 school which requires and supports a variety of programs and resource teachers. John uses those resource teachers to their full benefit so that they can help as many students as possible. "These teachers were good to begin with, but they're even better." Overall, John's formula for ensuring the success of every student is "…leveraging human resources, building a schedule that supports the leveraging of resources on top of the skills." John believes in recognizing the teams and teachers for incremental improvement, "….None of it is magic, but to celebrate the small successes is important." According to Maria:

to work at this school I feel you have to be a hard worker….You have to like to work hard because there's a lot to do…and he's working hard so I feel like that's kind of the way it is (l 305-308).

The teachers and principal at Patriot Elementary School recognized a change needed to occur. John became a visible principal who was there to capitalize on the strengths and skills of his teachers. According to staff, he leads by example and knows the amount of work required at a Title 1 school. The school had a large amount of turnover and the morale wasn't good. "John made it a happier place to work." His message was subtle, his method of leadership was not overbearing, and he made small consistent changes. His method of leadership made staff feel valued and important.

Principal #5 Carla Kyle

The fifth principal studied is a 20+ year veteran of the school district—Carla Kyle. She is a middle school principal who has a vast background of administrative positions including assistant principal and director of student services. At first meeting, Carla conjures images of a Diane Sawyer—always smiling, hair never out of place, and the consummate professional. She doesn't appear to be frazzled and, according to one member of her front office staff, "it is just really nice to watch her work…she's like grace under pressure." Carla is in her fourth year as principal of Lincoln Middle School, a high achieving academic middle school that had the same principal for over 20+ years. Carla's story is one of consistency, transparent leadership, and doing what is best for each and every child in her school.

Standard 1

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.*

Carla was named principal in May so she had a month or two while faculty and staff were still there to observe and see what needed to be done as she began her principalship. What she did was simple, yet powerful:

> All I did for the last month [of the school year] …was go in every single classroom, meet every teacher, give them a positive note about something positive I saw about their classroom. Whatever they were doing I wanted to establish the trust among the faculty because then when I went on to plan for the summer I had goals. (l 22-27)

Carla was able to observe and state that her goals were based on the classroom observations that she conducted. She noted the three goals: "One, a strong instructional focus; two, a positive learning environment; and three, a consistent method to provide communication to all our stakeholders." Carla also knew how important it was to have a collective leadership voice be a part of her mission and vision so she established a leadership council summit in the summer:

> We had it in August and I had all my leadership team, department chairs, and administrators attend. At that summit we spent a lot of time developing a mission and vision which we then gave to our team leaders and then it was given to the entire faculty and then finally to the parents (l 37-40).

Standard 2

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating,*
> *nurturing and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to*
> *student learning and staff professional growth.*

Carla is a principal of a high functioning and high performing middle school, but she is always looking for staff development and professional growth opportunities. She took the initiative to bring an advanced academic specialist from her county to conduct a session on higher-level thinking skills. Carla's philosophy and mission is helping every child reach his or her maximum potential. "No matter what…they (both teachers and students) need to learn to do critical thinking and analytical skills." Carla takes ideas from the professional development and shares them with her administrative and leadership teams. She then shares those ideas at faculty meetings. Carla also highlights members of her faculty who demonstrate a specific teaching strategy and how it can be implemented in the classroom, for example, a fishbowl activity or Socratic seminar. Carla sees this direct and active example of teaching as a way for teachers in her building to learn from a colleague and as a way to encourage and publicly praise effective instruction in the classroom.

Carla also has an instructional coach whom she hired last year:

She goes to every team meeting…every department meeting….She is a resource to all. She can model a lesson and she gets materials for teachers if necessary. She is not an evaluator, but just someone that can be there as a resource to any classroom teacher in the building (l 151-154).

According to some of the teachers on Carol's staff, the biggest compliment that can be given is that, "she knows what goes on in the classroom….She's been in my classroom and when she speaks with parents who have concerns she knows what's going on in the building."

Another teacher, with over 30 years of teaching experience, said, "she tries to make it possible for us to do our best in the classroom by not overburdening us with bureaucratic stuff."

Standard 3

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation and resources for a safe, efficient and effective learning environment.*

Carla noted that she has a crisis team at her school which handles emergencies and issues related to safety and security. But she also mentioned the Positive Behavior Intervention (PBS) plan that started the year before she arrived as being a positive in her school. "I really wanted to see that PBS take root….We were trying to catch the students doing something well versus the discipline aspect of doing something that resulted in consequences (l 179-182)." Carla tracked the number of referrals for various infractions which ranged from gum chewing to more serious infractions. There were 275 referrals. The next fall, after the system had been in place for a year, the number dropped dramatically to 22 referrals. With the PBS system, positive behaviors were recognized and notes were put in the specifically marked box in the front office. Names of students were then drawn and prizes were awarded. "By really emphasizing that behavior was key to changing this whole culture with their discipline and the safety of the school, teachers were taking care of a lot more than their classrooms." As a direct result of implementing the PBS system at her school, Carla didn't have any expulsions for one year. Last school year (2010-2011) there was only one.

Carla also has her administrative team discuss duties and responsibilities at the administration retreat. "It's important to have that all figured out." The teachers reiterate the same thing about the Lancer code and know it and reinforce it: "Be respectful, be responsible and be safe." Every single student can recite that to you. They know the expectations.

As a specific example of Carla's skill with safety and security, one of her assistant principals discussed the renovation process that Lincoln Middle School underwent two year ago. This assistant principal remembered Carla's meeting with the construction crew, her clearing of pathways out to the temporary trailers, and her "grace under pressure" to make sure nothing was lost for the focus on instruction. According to one of the veteran teachers in the building, "she made sure things happened right and that it happened correctly with instruction."

Standard 4

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.*

Carla saw the need to reach out to her school community and did so with technology by starting her weekly *Know what's Happening (KWH)* message. "I start out always celebrating something or someone and then I tell different things that are going on in the building. I've done that every single Friday since I've been here (l 227-229)." Carla insists on going to every PTA meeting and this attitude carries over into how she feels about parents in the building. "We want parents in the building; they are welcome to volunteer….They've been in lunch duty." Carla also reaches out to a housing community that sends her the most at-risk students. She has gone to that elementary school and offered a program of "this is what Lincoln is all about." This program and outreach continues every year. Carla also reaches out to her community in conducting a spring principal's coffee where a variety of issues are covered. She also mentions that she makes phone calls for important issues that everyone in the community should hear about from the principal. "I think it's key to have a real awareness of who your community is and making sure that everyone feels included (l 270-272)."

Carla's assistant principal talked about the "climate check" she conducts four times a year during which she is available to faculty and staff to come in and simply chat. She follows up on any ideas or recommendations she has in her notes of the meetings. She also does one-on-one exit interviews each year with her staff. During the interviews, she encourages staff to be as honest as they would like with her before they leave for the summer. Her front office staff says it quite clear about Carla: "when parents come into the front office she is so friendly, so open, and just so willing to listen to them; it is just really nice to watch her work."

Standard 5

> *An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with*
> *integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.*

Carla sees the exit interview she established with all faculty and staff as instrumental in establishing trust with her staff. They take place toward the end of the school year and she asks three simple questions: First, what are some things about Lincoln Elementary School that you absolutely love and never want to be changed? Second, what changes could we make to improve our school? And third, what can I do for you? In the words of Carla, "I think one thing that people see is that you're always consistent with your message. You're not telling one group this thing and this group another." Carla also feels that way when she deals with kids and discipline. Her climate checks help her read what is going on in the building. Carla recently read the book *How Full Is Your Bucket?* She is trying to emphasize the positive and solution-focused mentality. She keeps this mind set when working with her faculty. The previous principal had been there for 22 years and told her of the negative faculty and staff that she would encounter. Several of those staff left and Carla sees her wanting Lincoln Elementary School to be a positive place where students thrive and a contributing factor that helped those negative staff members leave. "I feel like I'm as transparent as I can be; I'm going to be that way. I want the kids to feel

positive about being here. It's toxic if you have people going around every day being really negative." Carla's assistant principal, Maddie, paid her a special compliment when she said, "she models fairness and integrity….In the 38 years I've been in education, she by far is my favorite administrator. She's always up….She's always peppy….She's on target. She's got the pulse of the school (273-275)."

Standard 6

> *An educational leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal and cultural context.*

Carla's implementation of Lancer Time (an extra period of remediation built into the school day) was one of her greatest influences on the achievement of all students in her school. Carla recognizes that she has at-risk students in her school and she goes over the list of students who may be more at risk for failure with her counseling and administrative team over the summer. "We look at each—child by child—on an intervention call and ask what can we do to intervene for this child? What can we do to reach out to them?" Carla tries her best to reach out to students personally and this is done by student contracts and her monthly "pizza with the principal." "I think getting student input is important....I think you just need input all the time from your stakeholders, so everyone feels like they have a voice." Carla is a principal who sees the excellent performance at her school and continues to push students and teachers to strive for that continued excellence every day. She listens to all those in her building and maintains effective relationships built on trust and positive reinforcement.

<center>**Summary**</center>

This discussion of the outstanding first-year principals included a brief description of them and highlighted salient characteristics related to the 6 ISLLC standards. Table 3 summaries

the questions the principals asked of the community along with their identifying

traits/characteristics.

Table 3

Summary of the Principals' Traits

Name	Gender	Years of Experience	Questions Asked of Community	Elementary vs. Secondary	Identifying Trait/characteristic
Mark	Male	Over 25 years	What were parents looking for from our administrative staff?	Secondary (High School)	Made a large school feel "smaller" with sub-school model
Nancy	Female	14 years	What can we do to serve the student who may not be at the forefront?	Secondary (High School)	Rule Follower; Long history with the same school serving in various roles
Bob	Male	Over 30 years	What do you like of the school? What do you feel works and what doesn't?	Secondary (High School)	Transparency in leadership; led the community in adopting a new vision and attitude about school
John	Male	Over 15 years	What do you expect from the school? What are your hopes and dreams?	Elementary	Changed attitudes and beliefs about a school; made small but significant changes
Carla	Female	Over 20 years	What do you love about the school that can't be changed? What can I do (as principal) for you?	Secondary (Middle School)	Emphasize the positive with her staff; keep a solution focused mentality.

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to examine behaviors displayed by nominated principals awarded a school district's outstanding first year principal award. The behaviors and traits of the principals were examined in relation to the ISLLC standards. A qualitative research design with a cross case study format was used to address the three research questions:

1. What behaviors and skills did award winning first-year principals identify as crucial to their success?
2. What behaviors and skills did various stakeholders see as crucial to their first-year principal's success?
3. To what extent do these strategies and skills of the award-winning first-year principals reflect the ISLLC Standards?

The qualitative method was the most accessible and appropriate approach to use to examine the interview material to identify common themes regarding successful principalships.

Findings Related to Literature

As noted in the summary at the end of Chapter 4, all five principals demonstrated leadership skills and traits that, in essence, "got the job done" and showed measurable results for their schools. None was afraid to do what was needed for their school and students to thrive. Williams in his 2000 study echoes that same idea. "It is his [principal] leadership that sets the tone of the school, the climate for learning, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers…and the way he performs determines the attitudes of students and parents about the school" (pp. 265-266). There is an element of both bravery and risk-taking for these principals. There is also a bit of skepticism that the principal and the community had to overcome as each had to "read" the other in knowing that the principal was the best fit for the school and, in turn,

the school and community chose the best principal. The five principals all set the tone in their schools and their positive performance was felt by staff, students, and the community. The principals saw themselves as the architects of the school with their ultimate emphasis on student achievement.

According to Fenwick English (2000), the ISLLC standards help to "advance the notion that the school administrator…acts as a moral agent in the field…the agent who is empowered to define relationships and assigns those in their places" (pp. 162-163). All five principals in this study saw themselves as representatives of their school, and students and staff witnessed what each one did. The principals acted in a way that was fair and equitable. They treated students and staff with respect. They went out to the community and reached out to groups who had been ignored in the past.

Each principal also understood how to take a calculated risk with their school community and, in doing so, they gained some element of success.

- Nancy was brave enough to attend a church in the community where she knew many of her Spanish speaking parents attended. She felt what it was like to sit in a church ceremony where Spanish was the predominant language; she then knew how the parents felt when attending her school.

- Carla went out to the low income community in her school boundary where she knew most of her at-risk students lived. She wanted to know what it was like for these students to enter her building and know what their home life was like.

- Mark began a Minority Parents Association which met one time a month to focus on student issues and academic concerns.

These specific behaviors showed what DiMartino and Miles (2006) talk about: "it is the principal's vision, dedication, and determination that provide the mobilizing force behind any reform effort" (p. 47). These targeted acts also illustrate the change behind the ISLLC standards. "The 2008 revision…does provide more insight into the implementation of the standards and the human element needed for success. New principals need to know the how as well as the what of leadership" (Eller, p. 957).

These principals understood the role they had to play in determining student success. According to the The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) Handbook, "research now shows that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among school related factors that influence student outcomes" (p. 9). These principals understood what influence they had on students and took advantage of that for their community and student success.

A key element of leadership these principals exhibited, according to Kouzes and Posner (2002), was behavior. "Titles are granted, but it's your behavior that wins you respect. Exemplary leaders know that if they want to gain commitment and achieve the highest standards, they must be models of the behavior they expect of others" (p14). Reeves (2006) compares the principal to an architect: "in schools led by architectural leaders, everything is connected, and there is no such thing as a nonacademic class or experience"(p. 30). When principals take this belief to heart, they see the relevance and connection of all of their activities leading back to student success. Nancy stated it rather simply during her interview when she said that she does whatever is best for student achievement at her school. Bob asked his school community to be honest in asking themselves whether they were doing what was best for their school and their kids. If not, then why were they doing it?

The review of the principals' interviews and the analysis of the written nominating packets clarified the answers to the first two research questions. What were the skills and behaviors that these award winning first year principals identified as crucial to their success? Each of these principals practiced thoughtful and effective listening; they were active in their outreach to all segments of their school community; they continued to be active learners; they studied their data and hired good people. While this may not encompass all strategies encompassed by the first year principal, they are important and strategic. The stakeholders also voiced their opinions of what behaviors and skills were important: they were all effective listeners, they reached out to those who would help in making decisions and they truly listened to all opinions represented in their community. A distinguishing trait that each of the high school principals shared was that each was an assistant principal at the same school where they were eventually named principal. The time that the middle school and elementary school principal needed to learn and know their staff, was not a factor for the high school principals. This allowed the latter to move forward more quickly with ideas and initiatives.

<div align="center">**The Six Standards in Daily Practice**</div>

While principals at any level should be able to demonstrate what is required in a particular standard, they also have to be able to assess those standards in relation to their particular school. This is where the traits of effective listening, attention to relationships and situational awareness are especially important. When discussing the first ISLLC standard of vision, it is virtually impossible for a principal to have any semblance of a vision for their school if they are not able to listen and get to know their staff and school community. This is where Bob took the risk to have a "get to know the principal" meeting in the summer prior to his first

school year where anyone from his school community could come and say hello. This allowed people an opportunity to share what they thought was best for the school community.

The second ISLLC standard, regarding nurturing a school culture and instructional program conducive for student learning, relies heavily on the work and trust the principal establishes with teachers. Each of these principals trusted the teachers in their building to make sound educational choices. Each principal knew what programs were unique to their school and what would be required to maximize student success. Each principal took the time to analyze and examine their data so effective decisions could be made. They did not incorporate just any idea because it was the educational hot topic of the moment; the educational decisions they made were predicated on knowing their students and what was needed for genuine success. Each of these principals established a culture of high expectations, hired teachers with high expectations, and asked them to have the same high expectations of their students.

The third ISLLC standard is one that calls on sound management, organizational safety, and wise use of resources. Implied in this standard is the need to know who is working in your building and to trust those people to do their job. This standard also discusses the practice of distributing leadership to make it a shared endeavor. According to the assistant principal at Mark's school, Mark would "do whatever was needed to get the job done." This standard also highlights the need for a leader who can promote and protect the welfare and safety of the school to maximize student achievement. All five principals had a strong sense of humility and a greater sense of the good for the organization. One of Nancy's assistant principals compared her to a great military leader who does what is needed for the good of the men. According to the NPBEA (2002), a principal should possess "skill in job analysis, supervision, selection, professional development and appraisal of staff positions…to strengthen the ability to use

personnel resources" (p. 9). As an example of selection and professional development of staff, four of the assistant principals working for Bob at the time of his nomination have all been promoted to building principals within the same district. His mentoring and ability to select outstanding assistant principal leaders is a testimony to the skill referenced in the third ISLLC standard.

The fourth standard regarding collaborating with key stakeholders to analyze the educational environment involves all three traits of situational awareness, attention to relationships, and humility of self. According to the NPBEA (2002), "this standard addresses the fact that cooperation among schools, the district and the larger community is essential to the success of educational leaders and students" (p. 11). The principals for this study were adept at knowing their community, their resources, and how they should go about garnering support from these groups:

- Nancy ventured out and attended a church service where many of her students' parents attended.

- Carla went to the apartment complex where she knew her most needy students lived so she could meet and talk directly with the parents.

- Mark set up a minority parents group because he knew this segment of the school population was not always heard or present at parent groups.

Each principal knew they had to reach out and they did this through listening and assessing the needs of their school community. The principals then formed a strong relationship which helped to guide their decision-making process. "To work with all elements of the community, educational leaders must recognize, value, and communicate effectively with various cultural, ethnic, racial and special interest groups" (NPBEA, 2002, p. 12).

The fifth ISLLC standard indicates that administrative leaders promote the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner. The nominators for all five of the principals spoke of this standard as the one that clearly separated the principals from the rest of their peers. Nancy's nomination letter said, "she leads by example; she will never ask of others that which she is not willing to do herself." Bob's overall praise and responses from students and staff are reflections of his belief in fairness and integrity. Bob also spoke of what he calls "educational malpractice." He says, "if it is not going to help students succeed, then why are we doing it?" Mark's nominators speak of his attitude to get the job done and being there 100% for his staff and students. According to the NPBEA (2002), this standard calls on the principal to be the "first citizen of the school district/community (p. 13). They must be able to serve as role models, accepting responsibility for using their position ethically and constructively on behalf of the school/district community."

Finally, the sixth ISLLC standard asks administrative leaders to promote student success by being knowledgeable and responsive to the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context. Principals need to be aware of the impact of the economic, social, and cultural context on individual students and the school population as a whole:

- When Nancy goes to the local church and sees how parents feel when coming in to her school, she puts into practice this standard.

- When John understands the impact that poverty may have on students in his Title I school, he asks his teachers to dress appropriately and not be a distraction—he shows he understands this standard.

- When Mark begins an interest group for minority parents and provides tutoring for at-risk students, he understands this standard. Each of the five principals has an ongoing

dialogue with community and policy-making individuals in shaping policies that are best for their building.

- Bob took the time to meet with any family who was unhappy with the boundary change implemented by the school board to hear their complaints and concerns. He didn't take the decision sitting down, but he chose to be an active participant by inviting parents and students for individual conferences. He then promised those families that if they weren't happy with their child's education they could leave; the majority of families chose to stay.

Three Emerging Themes

No "magic pill" for becoming an award winning principal was revealed through the analysis of the interview transcripts. Rather three themes regarding what made the principals successful emerged: (a) placing importance on having a genuine and meaningful relationship with whomever they were dealing with, (b) shining the spotlight on their school community rather than on their own personal success , and (c) the possessing the trait withitness. It appears that all leadership traits and skills could fall under one of these three themes.

First Theme: Success with Relationships

According to Kouzes and Posner (2002), leadership involves a relationship. Leaders have to lead people and in doing so relationships have to be established. The success of leaders had much to do with the relationships they have with others including those they are to lead.

- John's teachers talked about how he recognized their strengths and allowed them to work with what they had.

- Bob, at his first introductory meeting, purposely included two members of his administrative team so they could address areas and questions that he didn't know yet.

- Carla's focus group shared during their interview that for once they felt recognized by their principal for the hard work they were doing and, in turn, they wanted to do more.

The findings indicate that these principals did what Reeves (2006), English (2000), Kouzes and Posner (2002), and Collins (2001) argue is necessary—they caused people to act. The emphasis placed on relationship building produced another benefit that the principal could implement and that was one of effective decision making. Because these five principals spent a considerable amount of time speaking to all members of their school community, they gained valuable and insightful information when it came to the best decisions for their school. They processed that information and used it efficiently to help better their school community. All three high school principals were assistant principals in the building where they were named principal. The scope of knowledge gained as assistant principals helped tremendously when they became principals. No time was wasted on learning a new staff, a new bell schedule, or the main stakeholders who had to be "pleased" with their decisions. For Carla and John, their small yet clear decisions set the tone and established a more defined culture and morale in the building. None of the five principals were afraid to make decisions or second guess the decision they made because they knew what had been shared or talked about before they got the job. John talked about establishing a clear dress code and not allowing certain items to be worn by any staff member. While a few faculty members bristled at the suggestions, John stuck to his word and shared why the dress code was needed and how it reflected the professionalism of staff dealing

with students. Nancy instituted a new bell schedule with a built in remediation period and knew that staff and faculty had discussed this prior to her selection as principal. The decisions these principals made may have been risky, but they were grounded in the fact that the principals knew the decisions were what faculty wanted.

Second Theme: Spotlight on Others

Another theme that emerged for all five principals was that they took the focus off of themselves and directed it toward others. Collins talks about the Level 5 leader in his book *Good to Great* (2001). "Level 5 leaders channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the large goal of building a great company. They are incredibly ambitious but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves." Collins goes on to indicate that the Level 5 leader achieves greatness through a blend of personal humility and professional will. The transcripts corroborated this premise. These principals understood the long hours they would have to put in as well as the amount of time spent after the school day was over so they could learn about the special needs and requirements of their school and the needs of their students and staff. And none of this was done for their own self gratification.

What also made each of these principals successful was the knowledge of who was working in their building and how the strengths and abilities of others would be beneficial for the entire school community. John recognized the skills and abilities of several teachers at his school and asked those teachers to model lesson for others to learn from. This is a skill that comes from knowing his staff and knowing the areas of improvement his staff may need. This spotlight shines on teachers in the building rather than having someone come from the outside to whom teachers may feel less of a connection. Carla has the parents in her building as active participants when she invites them in to volunteer or help out in the cafeteria for lunch duty.

These activities encourage parents to come in and be a part of the school rather than feel pushed to the side. Each one of the principals in some way praises the positive results in their school by sending out a computer generated newsletter to the community or by making an appearance on the school announcements. Their visibility and public praise of students, faculty, and staff help to shine the spotlight on a segment of the population that may not have had any attention or recognition. Bob's transparent leadership and mentoring of his assistant principals helped to promote four assistant principals to building principal positions. Bob also invited his administrative staff to his first open meeting as principal so all could hear the voices and opinions of those represented in the school community. Each principal has the ability to do whatever it takes to get the job done for their school community and does not need the adoration to keep up this motivating spirit.

None of these five principals came to their job with outstanding credentials, none had written a book about leadership, none had presented at a conference, and none had been lured from another county or state with the promise of pay or prestige. All had done what Collins (2001) said great leaders do, "they were seemingly ordinary people quietly producing extraordinary results." Also, when asked what they knew about themselves to be a strength or a challenge, each of the principals each could readily respond. For example, Nancy knew she was a rule follower, so discipline came easy for her. Mark mentioned how he loved to live and be a part of the school community where he was principal so he could be readily accessible to those in the area.

Third Theme: "*Withitness*"

While this term may be the most difficult to substantiate, it is, nevertheless, important. In 1971, John Kounin established the term "withitness" to define the routines and behaviors that

mark a teacher who consistently displays good classroom behavior, effective lesson management, and individual accountability of students. While this may be a term primarily associated with teachers and the classroom, I think it still has relevance to the discussion of principals and their leadership in a school. Each of these five principals "stepped up to the plate" of what was required of them and did so without looking frazzled, nervous, or intimidated. While each of their personalities is markedly different from the other, each possessed a certain degree of aplomb or togetherness that was evident in their first year. Each had the uncanny ability to read the situation that was presented in front of them, do some research, talk with key stakeholders, and make a decision that was best for all involved in their school community. The five principals carefully balanced a direct approach to decision making with subtleness so no one felt intimidated or surprised by their decision. This is the essence of withitness. The principals were active in seeking what they needed to do (they read, they visited, they talked, they met, they planned, etc.) and all of those things were done based on the withitness they brought to the situation. In *The Mindful Leader,* Michael Carroll (2007) discusses the top ten talents of a mindful leader and one of those traits is awareness—a trait similar to withitness:

> Success requires not only technical skills but also a wide range of sophisticated awareness competencies…being comfortable with ambiguity, skillfully questioning the status quo, understanding the political impact of one's actions and words, communicating complex ideas to diverse groups, and much more. Those who demonstrate these awareness competencies are more likely to listen, adapt, speak straightforwardly, and be authentic, and such awareness has been shown to distinguish superior performers and leaders from those who struggle simply to get it right" (l 116-117).

These skills, awareness, and "withitness" are what distinguished these principals from the rest.

Implications for Practice

This study focused on principals during their first year of leadership. Unfortunately, in the district in which this study took place there is not much follow up or outreach for a principal after the award-winning principals are announced. Perhaps more attention needs to be given to providing the award-winning principals support for outreach and connection with other future leaders. It would seem to be beneficial to allow these principals a flexible schedule at least for one year to allow them to be "principals in residence." This would give the flexibility to allow them to speak at different leadership events in their area as well as around the county. It could be beneficial to allow award-winning principals time away from their building to share their stories. Could the outstanding first year principals be given permission to conduct "principal tours" and visit several new principals in the county? While school districts do an outstanding job at mentoring and working with new teachers; why not take that same effort and apply it to the leadership/principal side of the equation? This time for the principals could be one of sharing and connecting with all levels of school leadership in and around the county. Also the principals could be a resource for any aspiring assistant principals in the county. As part of the release time or time away from their building, the award-winning principal could shadow and meet with assistant principals who are identified as "high flyers" or those who are interested in eventually pursuing a principal position. Once-a-month meetings or discussion sessions could be established to discuss topics stemming from the ISLLC standards. While there is a strong component of instruction in leadership and principal preparation programs, more attention could be given to knowing the "people" side of the job. Discussion could be set up around topics of listening, establishing and maintaining positive relationships, and emphasizing the greater good of the organization.

The nomination and selection of an outstanding first-year principal is a competitive and stringent process. If other principals were also nominated and didn't win, perhaps they could also be a part of the discussion and mentoring group. The department that solicits the nominations and makes the eventual selection could allow fellow administrators to see the selection criteria so they would know what aspect of leadership the county is emphasizing. These nominating characteristics could be something shared with new or aspiring administrators within the district.

Suggestions for Further Research

The findings in this study were limited to information gathered on only five principals. Further research on the qualities of good first year principals could include interviewing or surveying all first-year principals in a particular county, area of a state, or an entire state. The questions used in this study were designed for face-to-face interviews, but they could be administered as a survey if a large sample of principals was studied. It would be interesting to hear what skills are needed in one area of the state compared to another. It would also be beneficial with a large sample to compare responses from principals at different school levels—elementary, middle and secondary.

Another future study could consist of a follow up with the same five principals used in this study to determine what happened after their first year as principal. During the time these interviews were conducted, two of the principals were in the final two years with this district. The remaining three principals were still working in the same district at their same schools. A study of how their careers and educational perspectives have changed could consist of a follow-up interview with the principals and with members of the focus groups to reveal whether the information shared in the original interview and from the first year as being principal remained.

The follow up could be designed to see how these principals have matured since their first year on the job and whether the skills and attributes discussed as they began their job stayed the same or changed dramatically.

Personal Reflections/Final Thoughts

My dissertation has been a challenging task, but a task which allowed me to learn much about myself and my beliefs about public education. When I began this dissertation four years ago, I had no idea that the process and completed product would take me so long. Changes in both my personal and professional career (including having two children, moving to a new home, and moving to a new school) are the reason for the delay. The challenge in writing this dissertation was to know when and how I work best.

I've also gained a tremendous sense of respect for the scholarly pursuit of educational research. My lens of looking at what makes a good principal has changed based on the extensive literature review, the analysis of written documents, and the need to keep an objective eye. I also see myself having changed professionally throughout the four years of writing my dissertation. My experience at two, and now three, high schools has given me the chance to see distinctive traits of leadership emerge. Some have been positive and some not so positive. But the final thought at the end of the day remains that next to the teacher in the classroom, the principal has the most distinct influence on the education of a student.

Someone asked me if I had to do this again, would I use the same process and my answer is yes. I've learned so much as my research journey took me to different schools and I met with different principals and people involved in education. I wish that my interviews could have been done more quickly, but due to the job constraints and time allowed, it was a challenging process.

I could also see this study being replicated by gathering information from a larger selection of principals or observing a group of principals over an extended length of time.

Throughout the entire process one idea has remained the same: I love the work I do in public education and I believe that the ideas in this dissertation (strong and risk-taking leadership) are worth discussing by those in our nation's public school system. I thoroughly enjoyed hearing about the leadership traits and skills that made the principals I wrote about so successful. While I do see a relationship to the ISLLC standards and learning education "skills" I see a stronger need for learning to manage the "people/relationships" of the job. These principals were incredibly skilled at managing people and situations and their background and experience helped. As I continue on my leadership journey through my work experience, I plan to call on some of these traits as an aspiring principal.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A   Virginia Tech IRB Approval Letter
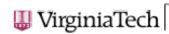
Appendix B   School District Approval Letter

Appendix C   Introductory Letter to Principals

Appendix D   Consent Form—Teachers

Appendix E   Consent Form—Parents

Appendix F   Interview Questions

Appendix A Virginia Tech IRB Approval Letter

VirginiaTech

MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 5, 2011

TO: Walt Mallory, Karla Hogan

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires May 31, 2014)

PROTOCOL TITLE: Behaviors of Onstanding 1st Year Principals and Their Alignment with the Interstate School Leadership and Licensure (ISLLC) Standards

IRB NUMBER: 11-927

Effective December 5, 2011, the Virginia Tech IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore, approved the new protocol for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm (please review before the commencement of your research).

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:
Approved as: Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 6, 7
Protocol Approval Date: 12/5/2011
Protocol Expiration Date: 12/4/2012
Continuing Review Due Date*: 11/20/2012
*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:
Per federally regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals / work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

Appendix B School District Approval Letter

███   ████████████

January 15, 2014

Ms. Karla L. Hogan

████████████████

Dear Ms. Hogan,

The Research Screening Committee has reviewed and approved your application to conduct a study entitled *Behaviors of Outstanding First Year Principals and their alignment with ISLLC.* ████████████████████████ has agreed to sponsor your project. Please contact him at ████████████ to begin the project.

You may begin the study as soon as you complete and return the enclosed approval form. We look forward to receiving the study results, which are expected to provide information of best practices for new principals.

<div align="center">Sincerely,</div>

██████████████████

Assistant Superintendent

██████

Enclosure

cc: ████████████

RESEARCH APPROVAL AGREEMENT

Research Title: Behaviors of Outstanding First Year Principals and their alignment with ISLLC

Name of Researcher: Karla L. Hogan

Date: January 15, 2014

<u>Conditions of Approval</u>:

1. Participation in this research study is voluntary for all parties. In the case of staff and parents, informed consent is required.

2. Anonymity of the <u>Schools division</u>, <u>individual schools</u>, and all <u>individual persons</u> participating in this project will be preserved in reporting the results.

3. The researcher will share a copy of the final report with her sponsor ██████████, and the division leadership.

4. The researcher will adhere to all ██████████ Public Schools policies and regulations. See the following website:

    The researcher will follow the procedures approved by the Research Screening Committee. The Research Screening Committee and division sponsor must approve any significant changes to the methodology.

_____   _____
           (Signature of Researcher)   (Date)

Appendix C Introductory Letter to Principals

Karla L. Hogan

███████████

November 2011

Dear __(principal)_____,

My name is Karla Hogan and I am a doctoral student at Virginia Tech. My dissertation project involves studying the practices and behaviors of outstanding first year principals and their alignment with the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards.

You have been identified as one of the past award winning first year principals in ██████████ Public schools. I would like to interview you, along with one staff member and one parent to gather more detailed and specific information. This interview would require approximately an hour (60 minute) interview which I will audio tape. At that time I would also like to arrange similar interviews with the other staff member and school parent. The questions for the interview would be sent to you ahead of time so you will know what information I am seeking.

The interviews will be transcribed and a written analysis will be included in my work. The identity of your school, the names of the interviewees and ██████ will not be included in the study. I will be the only individual who has access to the information I record and it will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home. After my results have been completed and transcribed I will share them with you so you can see the final results.

I will be in contact with you to arrange a time convenient for me to conduct my interview as well as arrange times to conduct my secondary interviews. Thank you in advance for being a part of and assisting me with my study. Please contact me if you have any further questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Karla Hogan

███████████

Appendix D Consent Form—Teacher Participant

~~CENTREVILLE HIGH SCHOOL~~

███

███

November 2011

Consent Form
Behaviors of Outstanding First Year Principals and Their Alignment with the Interstate
School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards

Dear Teacher Participant:

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Karla Hogan. I am presently a doctoral student working on my dissertation through Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and I am also an administrator in ████████████ Public Schools ██████). Your selection for this study is based on your knowledge of a selected principal in your school being awarded the Outstanding First Year Principal Award. Your participation is voluntary. Please take as much time read the information sheet. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:
The purpose of the study is to learn about behaviors and practices that first year principals employ and how those administrators were recognized and then nominated for the particular award. The study will also examine those behaviors and practices and analyze their alignment to the 2008 ISLLC (Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium) standards.

Completion and return of this form will constitute consent to participate in this research project.

PROCEDURE:
You will be asked to be interviewed as a member of that principal's school. Your name was forwarded because of your knowledge of the principal and your involvement in the school. The interview will take approximately one hour and the location will be determined according to your preference. You will be asked specific questions regarding your thoughts, practices and behaviors as a member of that principal's school community. Please be aware that the interview will be recorded.

POTENTIAL RISKS and DISCOMFORTS:
There are no anticipated risks to your participation. If you feel some discomfort responding to a particular question, feel free to skip the question.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS to SUBJECT:
There will not be a direct benefit to you from your participation in the study. However the benefit that your information will provide will be for future first year principals ██████ and in any school district. The overall goal is to learn more about practices and behaviors that are noteworthy from selected award winning first year principals and how a school district's leadership and school community recognized and commended those behaviors. This information could also benefit future principal preparation programs and leadership classes.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION:
You will not receive any payment for your participation in this research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY:
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that could be identified with you will remain confidential. The information collected about you will be coded using a fake name or initials and numbers—for example principal A or principal 1. The teachers will be identified by either using fake name or initials or numbers—teacher A or teacher 1. The information which has your identifiable information will be kept separately from the rest of your data. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher (Karla Hogan) will have access to the records. The investigator (Karla Hogan) will have the tapes transcribed and may provide you with a copy of the transcript for your review. If we tape-record the interview, we will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed, which I anticipate will be within two months of its taping.

PARTICIPATION:
Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer.

QUESTIONS:
The principal investigator is Karla Hogan. If you have any questions you may contact me at either ███████████████████████████████ High School.

My advisor through Virginia Tech is Dr. Walt Mallory. (WMallory@vt.edu)

██

The chair of the Institutional Review board (IRB) through Virginia Tech is Dr. David M. Moore
2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000
Blacksburg, VA 24060
(540) 231-4991
Moored@vt.edu
Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any question I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature_____ Date_____

Your Name (printed)_____

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature_____ Date_____

Signature of person obtaining consent_____ Date_____

Printed name of person obtaining consent_____ Date_____

██

November 2011

Consent Form
Behaviors of Outstanding First Year Principals and Their Alignment with the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards

Dear Parent Participant:

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Karla Hogan. I am presently a doctoral student working on my dissertation through Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and I am also an administrator in ████████ Public Schools. Your selection for this study is based on your knowledge of a selected principal in your school community being awarded the ████ Outstanding First Year Principal Award. Your participation is voluntary. Please take as much time read the information sheet. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:
The purpose of the study is to learn about behaviors and practices that first year principals employ and how those administrators were recognized and then nominated for the particular award. The study will also examine those behaviors and practices and analyze their alignment to the 2008 ISLLC (Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium) standards.

Completion and return of this form will constitute consent to participate in this research project.

PROCEDURE:
You will be asked to be interviewed as a member of that principal's school community. Your name was forwarded because of your knowledge of the principal and your involvement in the school community. The interview will take approximately one hour and the location will be determined according to your preference. You will be asked specific questions regarding your thoughts, practices and behaviors as a member of that principal's school community. Please be aware that the interview will be recorded.

POTENTIAL RISKS and DISCOMFORTS:
There are no anticipated risks to your participation. If you feel some discomfort responding to a particular question, feel free to skip the question.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS to SUBJECT:
There will not be a direct benefit to you from your participation in the study. However the benefit that your information will provide will be for future first year principals in ▮▮▮ and in any school district. The overall goal is to learn more about practices and behaviors that are noteworthy from selected award winning first year principals and how a school district's leadership and school community recognized and commended those behaviors. This information could also benefit future principal preparation programs and leadership classes.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION:
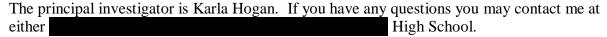You will not receive any payment for your participation in this research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY:
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that could be identified with you will remain confidential. The information collected about you will be coded using a fake name or initials and numbers—for example principal A or principal 1. The parents will be identified by either using fake name or initials or numbers—parent A or parent 1. The information which has your identifiable information will be kept separately from the rest of your data. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher (Karla Hogan) will have access to the records. The investigator (Karla Hogan) will have the tapes transcribed and may provide you with a copy of the transcript for your review.   If we tape-record the interview, we will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed, which I anticipate will be within two months of its taping.

PARTICIPATION:
Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer.

QUESTIONS:
The principal investigator is Karla Hogan. If you have any questions you may contact me at either ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ High School.

 My advisor through Virginia Tech is Dr. Walt Mallory. (WMallory@vt.edu)

▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮)

The chair of the Institutional Review board (IRB) through Virginia Tech is Dr. David M. Moore
2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000
Blacksburg, VA 24060
(540) 231-4991
Moored@vt.edu

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any question I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature_____ Date_____

Your Name (printed)_____

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature_____ Date_____

Signature of person obtaining consent_____ Date_____

Printed name of person obtaining consent_____ Date_____

Appendix F Interview Questions

1. As a first year principal, how did you lead your school community through the process of collaboratively developing, adopting, preserving and implementing a common vision?

2. As a first year principal, how did you ensure that your school provided a school culture and educational program conducive for student learning and your staff's professional growth?

3. As a first year principal, how did you promote and manage a safe and efficient school environment (e.g. discipline, safety plans, crisis plan, scheduling, transportation)?

4. As a first year principal, how did you promote collaboration with the diversity of family and community members?

5. As a principal, how do you promote integrity, fairness and ethical behavior of your staff and students?

6. As a principal, how do you promote the success of all students?

7. What skills/attributes did you possess as a new principal? Have they changed since your first year as a principal?

8. What did you consider your top priorities starting as a first-year principal?

9. What was your most outstanding contribution as a first-year principal?

10. How did your professional background prepare you for the principalship?

11. How did you maintain balance among your needs, the needs of your family, and the needs of the school community?

Questions for Nominator Interviews

1. Why did you nominate your selected principal during the first year of their

    principalship?

2. How did your principal develop, adopt, preserve and implement their vision in the

    school and school community?

3. How did your principal provide a school culture and educational program conducive

    for student learning?

4. How did your principal provide a safe and efficient school environment?

5. How did your principal promote collaboration with family and community members?

6. How did your principal promote integrity, fairness and ethical behavior?

7. How did your principal promote the success of all students?

8. What was your principal's most outstanding contribution during their first year?