

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### Background of the Problem

The primary responsibility of the principal is to facilitate effective teaching and learning with the overall mission of enhancing student achievement. Instructional leadership provided by the principal has been identified as a contributing factor to higher student achievement (Lezotte, 1994). Although numerous existing studies have investigated the relationship between the instructional leadership practices of principals and student achievement, most have not been conducted in an environment as politically driven as the current assessment-based educational system. Accountability for results is driving school reform in the United States (Cotton, 2003).

The accountability movement can be traced back to the Effective Schools Movement more than 30 years ago. Ron Edmonds, Wilbur Brookover, and Larry Lezotte were the primary researchers involved in this movement. The Effective Schools Movement was created in response to the 1966 Coleman report (Coleman, 2006), a landmark study investigating equality of educational opportunities led by James S. Coleman. The Coleman report found that family and peer influences and not school resources were the important determinants of school performance. Essentially, the Coleman report suggested that student success was directly related to family background. Edmonds (1979) and Brookover and Lezotte (1977) responded to this finding with studies involving comparisons of successful and unsuccessful schools in the same neighborhoods and communities. They found that there were unique characteristics and processes that were common to schools in which all students were learning, regardless of family backgrounds. These characteristics and processes were correlated with student success; hence the term “correlates” of effective schools. Effective schools correlates were defined as a clear

school mission, high expectations for student success, instructional leadership, frequent monitoring, opportunity to learn/time on task, a safe and orderly environment, and home-school relationships.

In 1981, Secretary of Education T. H. Bell created the National Commission on Excellence in Education as a result of widespread public perception that something was seriously remiss with regard to the nation's educational system. The Commission's resulting report entitled, *A Nation at Risk*, concluded that the declines in student performance of American students were frequently due to inadequacies in the way that the educational process itself was conducted (A Nation at Risk, 1981). The study prompted a national focus on secondary school content and curriculum, student expectations, the issue of instructional time utilization, and the need for stronger teacher education candidates and programs.

The United States entered a global skills war in the early 1990's as a result of the worldwide technological revolution. It was determined that the United States needed to raise the bar in terms of curricular standards. This initiative required modification of the current curriculum to make it more rigorous and relevant in order for American students to keep pace with the rest of the world (Lezotte & McKee, 2006). Unfortunately, raising the bar in and of itself did not improve student learning. Those students not meeting earlier standards were still not mastering the higher-standards curriculum. Although the high-achieving students were achieving to a higher standard, all students were not benefiting from the more advanced curriculum. A system was needed to hold students and the schools they attended accountable for academic achievement. Schools were expected to not only teach students, but to ensure that students learned what was taught. Thus, the accountability movement was born.

When George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act into federal law in 2002, each state sought to individually address the challenges of higher standards and more stringent accountability. The NCLB Act represents a fundamental change in the moral purpose of our schools. The mandates of the 2002 NCLB Act to produce high levels of student performance and to staff schools with highly qualified educators are perhaps the most challenging requirements in the history of the educational system. Educators are now accountable for seeing that *all* children master high standards, regardless of the differences and disadvantages they bring to the classroom door. The key provisions of NCLB include sanctions for schools that are unable to fulfill the intent of the legislation, disaggregation of student achievement data to ensure the equity of achievement for all subgroups, the attainment of adequate yearly progress (100 percent proficiency by the year 2014), and increased assessments requiring testing every year in grades 3-8. NCLB ties resources to school success and a loss of resources to a lack of success. Federal funding is now dependent upon how schools and school districts perform.

#### Statement of the Problem

As the effects of failing to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) are beginning to be experienced, more educators are recognizing that schools must find ways to respond to and meet the mandates of NCLB. Most educators have not been given the opportunity to learn the knowledge and skills necessary in identifying what changes are needed to comply with NCLB regulations. While NCLB and state accountability programs are clear about the student performance results that schools are expected to achieve, they often do not provide the schools with much guidance in terms of how to accomplish these objectives. Most school leaders have

not been taught the necessary skills, knowledge, and practices required to comply with recent accountability mandates such as NCLB.

In Virginia, ensuring academic success for all students has become more crucial than ever. With the advent of Standards of Learning (SOL) tests that meet the testing mandates of NCLB, all schools must meet and achieve certain standards to be eligible for school accreditation. NCLB prescribes a variety of interventions for schools that fail to meet these benchmarks. These interventions include, but are not limited to, technical assistance, school choice, development of an improvement plan, reconstitution, and state takeovers. Schools that fail to meet AYP accountability standards in Virginia are at risk of a plethora of interventions. One of these sanctions is the assignment of a turnaround principal to a low-performing school. The single most important factor in turning around an academically low-achieving school is the selection of the right principal for the job (Burbach & Butler, 2005).

#### The Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program

The Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program (VSTSP) was initiated by former Governor Mark R. Warner in 2004. The program was designed by a group of faculty members from the Darden Graduate School of Business and the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, with the financial support of Microsoft Partners in Learning. These parties were contracted to deliver an executive education program specifically designed for the needs of a cadre of experts charged with turning around consistently low-performing schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The program focuses on leadership challenges, strategic change, decision-making, communications and partnering (Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program, 2007).

The VSTSP Credential is an outcome based three-level process. Level I consists of basic training and results in an initial certificate. This five-day residential training provides intense, concentrated training in turnaround leadership skills. Content areas include data analysis, characteristics of high-performing organizations, analysis of low-performing schools, assessment of personal leadership qualifications, turnaround leadership skill building, and development of a school turnaround plan. Level II requires the development of a turnaround plan and results in an advanced certificate in turnaround leadership. Level II is a three-day residential program focusing on vision clarification, strategic planning, financial resource management, organizational capacity, internal business processes, and stakeholder assessment. Participants may earn Level III of the school turnaround specialist credential upon successful completion of all training modules and the acquisition of at least one of the following targets in the school turnaround plan: adequate yearly progress, state accreditation, and/or a ten percent reduction in failure rates on SOL reading and math assessments (Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program, 2007).

The Virginia Department of Education selects schools that are eligible for participation in the VSTSP. Candidates recruited are established leaders that are dynamic, committed, strategic, data-driven, and results-oriented. These candidates have demonstrated previous success at mobilizing resources and motivating people to elevate student achievement in a time-compressed manner. Ultimately, eligible divisions interview and hire the selected candidates (Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program, 2007).

#### Significance of the Study

The context of turnaround schools is a relatively new area of research and there is little by way of additive data on the subject (Burbach & Butler, 2005). Research tells principals what

to do, but not how to do it. This study will determine whether the major instructional leadership practices identified in the research as impacting student achievement (setting direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration and shared leadership, family and community connections, organizational structure) are evident in the practices of the turnaround principal. The hypothesis is that all six of the aforementioned leadership dimensions will be apparent in a case study of a turnaround school. This research will provide current and aspiring principals with increased knowledge, insight, and practices that will allow them to assess their own leadership skills and abilities. By identifying the strength of the relationships between specific principal practices and student achievement, educational leaders and politicians will gain a more accurate understanding of the leadership skills necessary to improve student performance.

#### Research Questions

This study will determine whether the major instructional leadership practices identified in the research as impacting student achievement (setting direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration and shared leadership, family and community connections, organizational structure) are evident in the practices of the turnaround principal.

Sub questions of the study include: (1) Are there additional practices impacting student achievement that are evident in a turnaround principal's repertoire that have not been identified in the research?, (2) What were the differences in the setting of direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration, family/community partnerships and organizational structure prior to and following the appointment of the turnaround principal?, and (3) Are there any leadership dimensions or functions that appear to be more prevalent than others to the academic success of the school?

## Definition of Terms

### *Achievement Gap*

Differences in academic performance among student groups (Virginia Department of Education, 2007)

### *Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)*

Represents the minimum level of improvement that schools and school divisions must achieve each year as determined by No Child Left Behind (Virginia Department of Education, 2007)

### *Assessment*

A test or other method that measures achievement (Virginia Department of Education, 2007)

### *At-risk Schools*

For the purposes of this study, at-risk schools are elementary schools that have not met the required benchmarks for adequate yearly progress for three consecutive years. The benchmarks for 2005-2006 were 73 percent pass rate for reading/language arts and 71 percent pass rate for mathematics in grades 3-5. This benchmark must have been met by all subgroups to meet the full intent of the No Child Left Behind legislation (No Child Left Behind, 2002).

### *Collaboration*

Cotton (2003) defines collaboration as a cooperative manner of approaching tasks and the feeling of solidarity that accompanies it. Collaboration is how the staff, community, and the principal work together to accomplish the goals of the school (Powell, 2004).

### *Culture*

Schein (1985) defines culture as a pattern of shared basic assumptions, invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its issues. This pattern has worked well

enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those issues (Schein, 1985).

### *Curriculum*

The curriculum is the program of studies required by the state (Powell, 2004).

### *Disaggregated Data*

Test results sorted by groups of students. Groups include students who are economically disadvantaged, from different racial and ethnic groups, have special education needs, and/or have limited English proficiency (Virginia Department of Education, 2007).

### *Family/Community Involvement*

The participation of families and communities in regular, two-way, meaningful communication involving students' academic learning and other school activities (Virginia Department of Education, 2007)

### *Goals*

Goals are short-term mini-targets that schools aim for as they move toward their ultimate destination: their vision (Harris, James, Gunraj, Clarke & Harris, 2006).

### *Mission*

Powell (2004) defines a school's mission as a means to achieve the school's vision. The mission functions as the roadmap toward the destination (Powell, 2004).

### *Organizational Structure*

Organizational structure is the process of management utilized by the principal in obtaining resources for teaching and learning, hiring the most qualified staff, optimizing time on task, and creating a climate where students are well-disciplined and safe (Powell, 2004).



### *Reconstitution*

A process that may be used to initiate a range of accountability actions to improve student performance, curriculum, and instruction that address the deficiencies that resulted in a school being denied accreditation (Virginia Department of Education, 2007)

### *Standards of Learning (SOL)*

Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools describe the Commonwealth's expectations for student learning and achievement in grades K-12 in English, mathematics, science, social studies, technology, the fine arts, foreign language, health and physical education, and driver education (Virginia Department of Education, 2007).

### *Vision*

Powell (2004) defines vision as being the dream of the principal. A vision paints a picture of what a school can become (Powell, 2004).

### Limitations

Care should be taken in the interpretation of these findings as this case study explores one elementary school in depth. It does not address middle or high schools. The Virginia turnaround principalship initiative established in 2004 is so new that there are limited participants eligible to participate in the study. Study limitations include concerns with internal validity based on school employees truthfully responding to questions regarding the administrator that ultimately evaluates them. This concern should have been minimized as participants were assured of anonymity. Threats to external validity include both setting and treatment. Study participants work in one school in a rural setting; therefore, study results can not be generalized to other schools.

## Overview of the Study

This research study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I contains the context of the problem, statement of the problem, information on the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist program, significance of the study, conceptual framework, research questions, definitions, limitations, and an overview of the dissertation. Chapter II contains a review of the literature as it pertains to the relationship between leadership practices and student academic achievement. Research methodology is presented in Chapter III. Topics include an overview of methods, research design, setting and participant selection process, data collection procedures, data quality and data analysis procedures, and a summary of the methodology. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study and Chapter V provides a discussion of the findings as well as implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that has been developed for this research study (Figure 1) was adapted from a model developed by Hallinger, Murphy, Weil, Mesa, and Mitman (1983). Hallinger et al.'s original model only included the setting direction and curriculum and instruction domains. Hallinger et al. did not include the dimensions of communication, collaboration, family/community connections or organizational structure in his model. These additional dimensions were added by the researcher as a result of more current research in the field.

Conceptual Framework

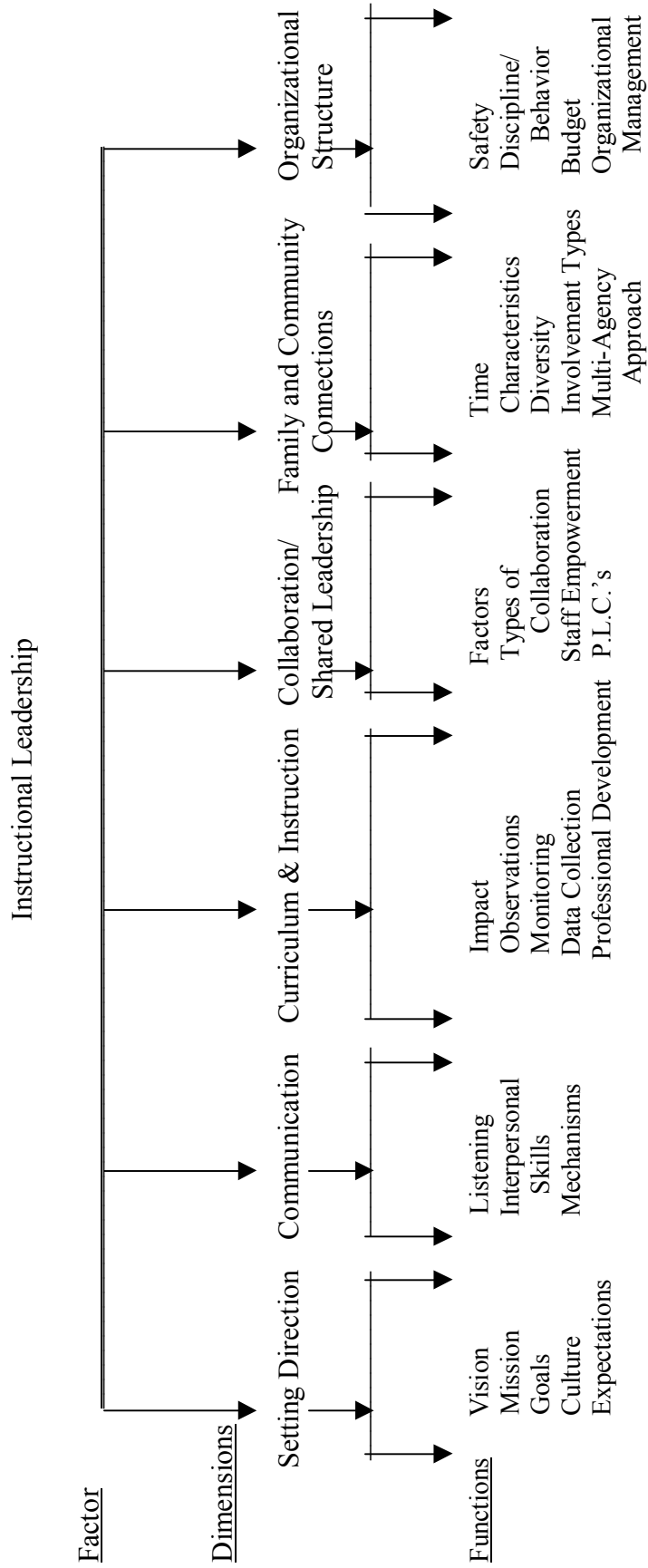


Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework Based Upon Hallinger et al. (1983)*

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A review of the literature indicates that the practices of the principal influence and contribute to the success of students. Previous findings from the effective schools research (Brookover & Lezotte, 1977; Edmonds, 1979; Sergiovanni, 2001) indicate that the educational leader possesses a greater influence on education than any other factor (Egley & Jones, 2005). Authors Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Walhstrom (2004), in their research review, suggest that successful leadership can play a significant and frequently underestimated role in improving student learning. According to Leithwood et al., the total (direct and indirect) effects of leadership on student learning account for about a quarter of total school effects. In addition, Leithwood et al. found that the greater the challenge, the greater the impact of a leader's actions on learning. Existing research shows that the effects of successful leadership are more prevalent in schools that display more challenging circumstances. There are few documented circumstances of schools being turned around without intervention by a leader (Lezotte & McKee, 2006). Many other factors may contribute to such turnarounds, but leadership appears to be the catalyst.

In related research, Hallinger, Bickman, and Davis (1990) found that school observers are well aware of the effect principals have on the learning climate, educational programs and workplace norms of schools. The educational policy community is also generally inclined to believe that principals' leadership is critical to the success or failure of educational programs and student learning. A review of the research finds little disagreement among practitioners or policy makers concerning the belief that principals have a discernable impact on the lives of teachers and students. What little disagreement there is comes primarily from three studies, Hallinger et

al. (1990), Krug (1992), and Leitner (1994). Hallinger et al.'s 1990 study involved 87 schools over a three-year time period. Participants included 1,300 teachers of third and sixth grade students in Tennessee. This study utilized third and sixth grade reading score gains from pre-post criterion-reference tests. These gains were regressed on principal leadership behaviors, clear school mission, time on task, and parental involvement. This study found no direct effect of principal leadership on student learning. Results, however, did support the belief that principals can have an indirect effect on school effectiveness (Hallinger et al., 1990). Krug's (1992) study involved 72 principals, 1,523 teachers, 9,415 students in 56 Illinois schools. Achievement results from the Illinois statewide student-assessment program were regressed on teacher and principal ratings of instructional leadership. Krug (1992) found no significant relationships between teacher ratings of instructional leadership and student achievement. Principals' self-ratings did show a significant correlation to student achievement, however (Krug, 1992). Leitner (1994) completed a study involving principals and teachers in 27 K-8 schools in an urban school district. In Leitner's study, instructional management behavior ratings were regressed on student achievement. No significant relationship was found between increased student learning and principal instructional management (Leitner, 1994).

These findings make it critical to pinpoint those characteristics and practices that will most affect an administrator's educational influence on student achievement. Six dimensions emerged from the research in which the practices of the principal influenced student achievement:

- Setting direction
- Communication
- Curriculum and instruction

- Collaboration and shared leadership
- Family and community connections
- Organizational structure

The remainder of this review will elaborate on each of these six dimensions of leadership.

### Setting Direction

Setting direction encompasses tasks such as the development and articulation of a vision, mission, and goals for the school, the development of a positive school culture and the creation of high performance expectations for both students and staff. Leithwood et al. (2004), found that leaders who set a clear sense of direction have a significant impact on student achievement. Effective leaders know that a significant investment of time will be required to develop a shared understanding of what the school should look like and what will need to be done to get there. Developing a collective understanding of the organization and its goals and activities will give the school community a sense of purpose.

A school's vision is defined by Powell (2004) as being the dream of the principal. A vision paints a picture of what a school can become. Successful principals not only have a vision, but effectively articulate that vision to staff, parents and students. The established vision leaves no doubt as to the school's priorities. A clearly defined vision provides a destination for the future. The establishment of an all-encompassing, well-articulated vision has been determined to be a key factor in the implementation of the change process (St. Germain & Quinn, 2005).

The vision should be rooted in research on best practices and should reflect the school's history and existing culture. Members of the school community should collectively create a vision that provides a profound sense of purpose for each of its members. The collective vision

emerges from the personal visions of each member (Barth, 1990). Without a common vision, decisions are made randomly. At best, policies, procedures, and programs will lack unity and fail to support one another. At worst, they may actually work against one another.

Powell (2004) defines a school's mission as a means to achieve the school's vision. The mission functions as the roadmap toward the destination. Successful schools understand and model the mission of the school. Staff members are focused and engaged and are all moving cooperatively in the same direction. A mission statement is created and published as a means of giving those involved with the organization a clear understanding of its purpose for existence. Mission statements are publicly displayed throughout the school as frequent reminders. St. Germain and Quinn's (2005) research refers to the principal's effective use of the school's mission as a guide when confronting obstacles. The mission statement should serve as the vital lifeblood of the school's daily activities and policies. It should be fundamental to every decision at every level. The school's mission serves as a polestar or guiding principle for the school to follow (Blankstein, 2004).

While a school's vision and mission are primarily designed for long-range planning, short-term successes are also necessary to assist schools in staying focused and motivated. These short-term successes can be achieved through the development and implementation of a limited number of well-written, clearly focused, specific and measurable goals. Goals can be defined as short-term mini-targets that schools aim for as they move toward their ultimate destination: their vision (Harris et al., 2006). Goals assist in the identification of priorities and establish a timeline for the process of change. They provide accountability for all stakeholders and, particularly in schools designated as at-risk, should focus on the desired results of improving the quality of teaching and learning so as to positively impact academic achievement.

Goals must be continuously monitored, amended or sometimes even abandoned, as schools critically evaluate their effectiveness in raising student achievement (Blankstein, 2004).

Effective leaders understand that, in order to be motivated to achieve school goals, the entire faculty and staff must be included in the goal identification process. The process of setting, committing to, and accomplishing school goals builds credibility, trust, and a spirit of community and cooperation within the organization. Teachers that are asked to engage in open and honest dialogue, and whose suggestions are welcomed and valued, are more likely to follow the direction set by their leader (Lezotte & McKee, 2006).

A school's culture has been referred to as how the school acts and feels in accomplishing the mission to fulfill the vision of the school (Powell, 2004). The culture of a school reflects the vision of the principal and is the way of life in terms of how things are done in the school. Schein (1985) defines culture as: "a pattern of shared basic assumptions – invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems – that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems." Schein (1985) refers to culture as a "learned product" of group experience. He states that culture is taught and learned and that the key element to culture is brought about by the structure of the organization.

According to research findings by Barth, the principal is the most potent factor in determining the culture of a school (Barth, 1990). O'Donnell and White (2005) found that principals who emphasize the improvement of their school learning climates are, in fact, helping to improve their students' ability to achieve at higher levels. A positive school culture is associated with higher student achievement as students are more motivated to perform (Lawson, 2001). Effective instructional leaders create environments where trust is evident and risk-taking



can occur with high levels of comfort. Binkowski, Cordeiro, and Iwanicki's (1995) research found that, in ineffective schools, the school culture is such that educators feel uncomfortable taking risks. Building trust and establishing relationships are the glue that holds school communities together.

“Relational trust” is a concept which emerged from a ten-year study of achievement in math and literacy in 12 Chicago public schools by the Center for School Improvement at the University of Chicago. The four components of relational trust are respect, competence, personal regard for others, and integrity (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Effective leaders create relational trust by showing a genuine regard for the professional role, interest in the concerns of others (respect), awareness of others' personal interests (personal regard), and a willingness to act on those concerns (competence) toward an ethical outcome (integrity) (Blankstein, 2004). Genuine application of the components of relational trust will naturally create a warm and nurturing environment for all stakeholders. The affective bonds between the principal, students and teachers associated with a sense of community are crucial in engaging and motivating students to learn. The principal must nurture teachers to make them feel valued and professional. Research done by Spaulding (1997) indicates that active administrative support of teachers is necessary, although supportive principals are rare (Thomas, 1994). Powell's study (2004) found that teachers identified the effective principal's leadership as the key to school success. The culture of the successful principal's school was described as being happy, warm and nurturing. The school community reflected a feeling of “family” where mutual respect and rapport were evident. The principal knew all of the school's students by name. Knowing each child personally was also found to be a strength in Templeton's (1997) research regarding successful principals.

The underlying norms, values and beliefs held by administrators and teachers are critical components of effective schools. Binkowski et al. (1995) found that there must be a commitment to building a shared sense of mission or culture in a school. A school culture that embraces collaboration and a focus on school improvement designed to examine curricular and instructional issues is imperative. The principal must have an accurate perception of the values and skills of his/her staff members. Staff members, in turn, need to be aware of the priority that the principal places on the improvement of classroom teaching (Chesler, Schmuck & Lippitt, 1975). Principals with innovative staffs are in tune with their teachers' feelings and values about education (Chesler et al., 1975). Effective principals support and assist teachers in the design and facilitation of learning experiences that inspire, interest, and actively involve students (O'Donnell & White, 2005). All staff must embrace the expectation that all children can learn at high levels.

A principal's expression of high expectations is part of the vision that guides high-achieving schools. There is widespread agreement in the research that having genuinely high expectations is a vital component of school success (Binkowski et al., 1995; Larsen, 1987). Research has consistently found that high-achieving schools reflect clear and consistent communication of the leader's expectations of high performance from both students and staff (Edmonds, 1979). High achievement then becomes a shared expectation of the entire school community. Effective principals provide resources and oftentimes, pressure, to keep the momentum going and everyone similarly focused (Leithwood et al., 2004). There is a constant push toward improvement on the part of effective principals; along with meaningful support for improvement initiatives.

Research done by Chapman (1998) focused on the levels of professional treatment by principals toward teachers and the corresponding effects on student achievement. Chapman's study sought to ascertain if students in the Virginia Beach City Public Schools, where teachers perceived that their administrators treated them very professionally, scored significantly higher than students in Virginia Beach City Public Schools where teachers believed they were treated less professionally. A professional treatment index, derived from highly correlated school climate variables, was constructed to separate the 51 elementary schools in Virginia Beach City Public Schools into four groups. Analysis of Variance and Duncan's multiple range test for post hoc comparisons were used to determine if academic achievement was significantly different among the groups of schools in each year of the four-year study. Focus group interviews (with 30 teachers) were conducted at three elementary schools that recorded high levels of professional treatment. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data in these focus groups revealed that the following factors contributed to higher levels of professionalism which, in turn, contributed to overall increased student achievement: (1) trust and confidence in faculty; (2) comfortable and caring learning environment; (3) personal and professional respect for faculty; (4) empowerment of faculty; (5) ability of faculty to take risks without fear; (6) listening to faculty; (7) support of faculty; (8) high expectations of faculty; and (9) encouragement and praise of faculty (Chapman, 1998). Chapman found that the academic achievement level of students was indeed significantly higher in elementary schools where teachers reported the highest levels of professional treatment.

Teachers involved in Powell's (2004) study provided this valuable insight during one of the research study interviews:

Leadership, leadership, leadership. Our principal has a clear vision for our school. He

allows for input but is still “in charge” so there is no chain of command confusion. Kids come first. We create within the limits required by the state and federal organizations and are fully supported in this by our administration. Our administration is also very supportive of teachers. There is an overall expectation that everyone in the building will give and receive respect. (p. 178)

The comprehensive vision of a school must guide the school’s improvement priorities and choices. When this does not occur, all tasks assume equal importance and it becomes overwhelming to develop focused work plans (Cotton, 2003). Principals in high-performing schools express different priorities than do principals in lower-performing schools (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Chubb and Moe’s research indicates that the principals of lower-performing schools emphasize students’ basic literacy skills, good work habits, citizenship and occupational skills. Leaders of higher-performing schools focus upon academic excellence, personal growth and human relations skills of students.

In conclusion, the vision of the principal is a key element of effective schools. Using this vision, the principal is then able to influence the mission of the school and therefore create the culture of learning and success for all. The effective principal generates loyalty and leads with an emphasis on school community. In a time of test-based accountability when principals often focus solely on improving test scores, these research findings underscore the importance of creating and maintaining an inviting climate that fosters respect, trust, optimism and caring.

### Communication

Researchers have established that there is a positive relationship between a principal’s human interaction and communication skills and student success (Binkowski et al., 1995; Stolp, 1991). Witherspoon (1996) refers to the fact that leadership exists only through communication.

Leaders have roles as creators of culture, decision makers and change agents. These roles necessitate effective communication skills to develop shared meaning, search and use information concisely, and communicate visions to enhance an organization's future.

The term "communication" is derived from a Latin word that means "common." The purpose of communication is to establish a common bond or a common understanding among individuals. The establishment of commonness is based upon trust, mutual respect, frequent exchanges of ideas, and opportunities to engage in discussion of important matters (Joekel, Wendel, & Hoke, 1994).

In her research on leadership behaviors in collaborative environments, Thomas (1994) refers to the need for the principal to organize communication channels to facilitate information flow. A fully informed public is a happy public. The effective principal reflects an openness to ideas and a willingness to listen to others. This reflective listening skill promotes a higher level of trust when it comes to shared decision making (Thomas, 1994). Templeton (1997) speaks highly of the principal that respectfully reflects many questions back to the adults to find their own solutions.

St. Germain and Quinn (2005) refer to the effective use of interpersonal skills as a "must" for administrative success. Research done by Wendel, Hoke, and Joekel (1996) found that principals of high-achieving schools are capable and caring administrators in the interpersonal sphere as well as in the public and task-oriented domain. The effective principal that has refined his/her interpersonal skills listens to and responds to everyone. S/he is available and supportive both professionally and personally. S/he is accessible and visible and cultivates connections and relationships through the "management by walking around" principle. The effective leader's communications contain relevant and meaningful content and consistency.

Wendel et al. (1996) determined that the successful principals that they profiled in their study used their communication skills to build close relationships. They then utilized these relationships to extend communication patterns. These administrators worked to improve their oral and written communication skills, valued others' ideas and feedback, and worked to improve their listening skills. When hiring new staff, these principals sought applicants with effective communication skills.

A study completed in 2005 by Egley and Jones investigated the relationship between professionally and personally inviting behaviors of Florida elementary school principals and teacher job satisfaction, school climate and school accountability ratings. Survey respondents were third, fourth, and fifth-grade teachers. Respondents rated and ranked their principals' professional and personally inviting behaviors through the completion of a rating scale. Egley and Jones (2005) found that their Professionally Inviting Behavior Scale results rated all principals highest on their expectation and communication of high performance levels from their co-workers. The second highest rated item was the communication of expectations for high academic performance from students. This commitment to high expectations may be the catalyst principals use to mobilize others to produce superior performance and achieve higher levels of success. Kouzes and Posner (2002) found that when leaders challenge others and enable them to reach peak achievements, they win respect and produce extraordinary results.

Non-verbal cues are also an important means of effective communication. Templeton (1997) indicates in his research, that the principal often uses touch as a sign of caring. The effective principal shows adults that s/he cares by listening, building, accepting and respecting relationships while modeling how s/he cares for students and adults. Effective verbal and non-

verbal communication techniques let children and their families know that the child and his or her needs always come first.

Researchers continue to explore the importance of a leader's emotional intelligence or his/her ability and willingness to relate to employees as people. Recent evidence suggests that the emotional intelligence involved in giving personal attention to an employee increases the employee's enthusiasm, reduces frustration, communicates a sense of mission, and indirectly increases performance (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Teachers tend to avoid communication with principals who use positional power and authority in improper ways (Spaulding, 1997). These principals tend to pressure teachers into conforming or to retaliate against teachers for non-conformance. "Muscle-flexing" principals appear insecure, threatening, and incompetent and often create distrust regarding their intentions. Principals who micro-manage are also not well thought of by their subordinates (Spaulding, 1997).

Binkowski et al. (1995) found that the higher-performing schools in her study had established numerous formal and informal mechanisms to enhance communication within the school community. The establishment of common planning time for teachers was one strategy used to encourage effective communication. This common planning time was frequently used to discuss the improvement of instruction. The National PTA (1997) has identified various formal and informal mechanisms designed to encourage regular, two-way, meaningful communication between the home and the school community (Figure 2).

The best practical advice that was found in the research comes from Jane Arkes, a principal interviewed by Stolp (1991): "...work on team building; put your agenda second;

know that you don't have all the answers – everyone has limitations; learn from students and staff; put people before paper” (p. 4).

### Curriculum and Instruction

In successful schools, the expectation is that all students will meet or exceed state or local standards. The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) defines successful schools as those making adequate yearly progress on defined benchmarks. In Virginia, successful schools are defined as those accredited by achieving passing scores on the Standards of Learning assessments. Principals must promote student learning in order for schools to meet these high expectations. The principal must convey, by every action, that the first priority of the school is the success of every student. This should also be the goal of every teacher (United States Department of Education, 1999).

Principals do not directly affect student achievement. Principals do not deliver instruction to students, as do teachers, who have a direct impact on student achievement. Leaders contribute to student learning indirectly, through their influence on other people and/or through features of their organizations. Principals have an indirect impact and influence on student achievement through such means as formulating school goals, setting and communicating high expectations, organizing classrooms for instruction, allocating necessary resources, supervising teacher performance, monitoring student progress, and promoting a positive, orderly learning environment (Powell, 2004).



### Practices Designed to Encourage Communication

Use of a variety of communication tools on a regular basis
Establish opportunities for parents and educators to share partnering and information regarding student strengths and learning preferences
Provide clear information regarding course expectations and offerings, student placement, school activities and student services
Mail report cards and regular progress reports to parents and offer follow-up conferences and support as needed
Disseminate information on school reforms, policies, disciplinary procedures, assessment tools and school goals, including parents in any related decision-making process
Conduct conferences with parents at least twice a year, with follow-up as needed; conferences should accommodate the varied schedules of parents, language barriers, and the need for child care
Encourage immediate contact between parents and teachers when concerns arise
Distribute student work for parental comment and review on a regular basis
Translate communications to assist non-English speaking parents
Communicate with parents regarding positive student behavior and achievement, not just misbehavior or failure
Provide opportunities for parents to communicate with principals and other administrative staff
Promote informal activities at which parents, staff, and community members can interact
Provide staff development regarding effective communication techniques and the importance of regular, two-way communication between the family and the school community

Figure 2. *Practices Designed to Encourage Communication* (National PTA, 1997)

Principals of high-achieving schools study teacher approaches, assist in the delivery of instruction, make regular visits to classrooms and follow-up with teachers in a timely manner (Larsen, 1987). They demonstrate a consistent and relentless focus on building capacity and improving the quality of teaching and learning within their schools. They keep the curriculum first and foremost and remain actively involved in the school's instructional program (Larsen, 1987).

Principals must have a respectable knowledge base with regard to curriculum (or know where to go to locate the answers to important questions.) They must be able to recognize effective classroom instruction as well as provide programs that address individual student needs. Strong school leaders stay current with regard to effective instructional practices in order to provide support and effective feedback to teachers. Effective principals maintain high visibility throughout the school.

Researchers have identified a link between a principal's classroom observations and feedback to teachers and student achievement performance (Larsen, 1987). A study completed by Heck (1992) found that the amount of time principals spent directly observing classroom practices was one of the most important predictors of student achievement. A strong observation and evaluation process, then, is critical to the overall instructional process. Having already established positive relationships, connections, and trust with the staff will assist in the process of self-reflection and the acceptance of constructive criticism throughout the evaluative process.

Wendel et al. (1996) found in their study that principals of effective schools allow their teachers more instructional autonomy than do principals in less-effective schools. They state that, "along with pursuing excellence and upholding the quality of education for all, the other action that administrators can take is to provide instructional autonomy to teachers" (p.

43). When principals encourage staff autonomy, they inherently encourage teachers to take risks and experiment with different techniques or unique approaches to instruction. Principals of high-achieving schools are described in the research literature as being supporters of teacher innovation. They accept that some new ideas may work and some may not (Wendel et al., 1996). Wendel et al. suggest that effective principals encourage their teachers to take risks as they tend to be risk takers themselves. Their research goes on to report that the outstanding principals they studied not only supported “experimentation and staff growth” (p. 128), but that they all attributed their success “to their willingness and ability to take calculated risks.” In virtually every case, however, they stated clearly that their desire to take risks was for the sole benefit of their students and/or their schools.

Edmonds (1979), Brookover and Lezotte (1977), established in their early research that frequent and careful monitoring of student academic progress was a major attribute of effective principals and their schools. Student academic progress should be measured frequently through a variety of assessment techniques. The results of these assessments should then be used to improve individual student performance as well as the performance of the total instructional program. Lezotte and McKee’s recent research (2006) enhances the earlier research with the addition of technology tools that permit teachers to do a better and timelier job of monitoring student progress. These technology tools allow students to monitor their own learning and, where necessary, adjust their own behaviors. Computerized practice tests, the capability to obtain immediate results on homework assignments, and the ability to see correct solutions developed on the screen are some of the more recent monitoring tools supporting student learning. Effective leaders continue to ensure that their schools systematically identify

struggling students and that they target potential problems early on. They are proactive rather than reactive when it comes to monitoring and providing support to their students.

Historically, the culture of education has not emphasized the ongoing collection and analysis of data. Recent research, however, has established that successful principals are data-driven and that they frequently assess the relationship between student learning and curriculum objectives (Lezotte & McKee, 2006). Effective leaders stress the utilization of a variety of data and teach staff members to analyze the data in different ways, using it to guide instruction (Powell, 2004). When student performance data is utilized to refine the instructional process, administrators and teachers must know how to interpret and analyze the data. Procedures should be established for dissemination of results to parents and the school community. All teachers should be actively involved in the data disaggregation and analysis process, which should include all of the school's subgroups. Instructional processes are refined and adjusted as a result of the school's extensive data analysis. Short-term goals may be fine-tuned, added, or even changed completely, depending on the outcome of the data analysis process.

Blankstein (2004) refers to the importance of data collection and analysis, especially as it relates to the identification of the root causes of a problem. Blankstein suggests that, without data collection and analysis, one must rely on perceptions. As perceptions lack a concrete foundation and are based upon opinions, there is little or no data to support conclusions generated in this manner.

Effective leaders initiate and nurture a school culture that embraces data as a vehicle to improve student learning. Data analysis is used to support change initiatives and guide continuous improvement efforts. This common commitment to the utilization of data, within the

context of the organization's mission, provides the basis for day-to-day decision making regarding instruction, policies and procedures (Lezotte & McKee, 2006).

The analysis of a school's data often generates the need for additional high-quality, sustained professional development to support the redefined goals of the school. Burrello, Hoffman, and Murray (2005) suggest that to bring about change, there must be an emphasis on professional development. The effective leader recognizes that learning is a continual process for both staff and students. S/he is creative in finding ways to secure internal and external support and resources for professional development. Several studies refer to the finding that successful principals are proactive in securing meaningful professional development opportunities (Powell, 2004; Spaulding, 1997; Binkowski et al., 1995). These professional development options are primarily research-based and revolve around innovative teaching techniques. Innovative teaching practices that evolved in the study of effective principals (Powell, 2004) included flexible scheduling, reduced class size in primary grades, extended-year programs, tutorials, creative use of technology, field trips, frequent assessments and data-determined grouping. Binkowski et al. (1995) found similar best practices in her study of high performing elementary schools: minimized pull out programs, reduced class size initiatives, development of integrated units, flexible grouping strategies, cooperative learning, literacy development programs and activities stressing metacognition. Leithwood et al. (2004) suggest that student learning varies as a consequence of class size, student-grouping practices, teacher's instructional practices and the extent of monitoring of student progress. Alignment between intended, taught, and tested curriculum is imperative. It is also critical that the school ensures alignment among goals, programs, policies and professional development. The effective principal is always focused on directing professional development resources to build staff

capacity to move toward implementing key practices deemed essential to realizing the school's vision (Burrello et al., 2005).

### Collaboration and Shared Leadership

Creating a democratic community where there is a common purpose as well as respect for differences is essential for change to occur (Burrello et al., 2005). This democratic community includes and welcomes staff, students, parents, and the community into the life of the school. Successful principals empower staff and build capacity through the development of a collaborative environment and opportunities for shared leadership. Cotton (2003) defines collaboration as a cooperative manner of approaching tasks and the feeling of solidarity that accompanies it. Collaboration, in which participants work together to achieve a shared goal, requires an increased awareness of and emphasis on facilitative and human relations skills. A strong commitment to mutually-established goals is also of vital importance in a collaborative environment (Thomas, 1994). The ultimate goal of collaboration is the enhancement of teaching and learning.

Louis (1990) found that higher performing schools reflected a picture of co-management where coordination and joint planning were enhanced through the development of consensus among staff members at all levels about desired educational goals. Teachers who feel that they work in concert with the principal and are considered leaders in the school develop a sense of ownership and thereby increase the probability of a successful school. Principals that delegate decision making in specific areas to committees are modeling and encouraging teamwork. Principals that participate in these committees as members rather than directors are building leadership development as well as promoting trust and collegiality (St. Germain & Quinn, 2005). Blankstein (2004) finds that successful administrators often play a supportive role; acting as

participants rather than leaders in meetings. These principals allow participants to create and explore their own directions, rather than following a set agenda with a predicted outcome. Given sufficient time and consistent messages about the value of collaboration, teachers learn to trust their colleagues and are more willing to share their best practices and challenges (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Teachers are very vocal about being involved in and participating in the decision making process (Spaulding, 1997). Principals who make decisions using only their own knowledge run the risk of reaching only partial solutions. This may also cause resentment among staff members who are deprived of participating in the decision. Spaulding (1997) refers to the concept of pseudo-participation whereby the principal's goal is to get what s/he desires, while making it appear to be a faculty decision. Without total commitment from the staff, most changes will not be maintained. The showing of favoritism has also been found to have negative consequences (Spaulding, 1997). Favoritism tends to create a sense of unrest and distrust among faculty members.

A climate that encourages group participation is a characteristic of effective schools (Thomas, 1994). According to Fullan and Hargreaves (1998), there are four main types of cultures associated with collaboration.

1. Individualistic – In this type of learning environment, teachers are accustomed to developing their own practices and techniques for classroom management and may not consider the relevant experience of their colleagues.

2. Balkanized – This culture is characterized by the presence of deep-rooted cliques within the staff. These cliques align themselves with a particular technique or ideology and pit themselves against groups with opposing ideas.

3. **Contrived Collegiality** – In this culture, teachers appear to be collaborating, but they aren't actually focused on the deeper issues of teaching and learning. Teachers in this culture are only collaborating on the surface.

4. **Collaborative** – In a collaborative school culture, teams of educators are fully committed to helping students learn by becoming active learners themselves. They solve problems in concert with their professional colleagues, recognizing that collaboration must take place with the overall goals of the school in mind. The team itself becomes a mini-learning community, actively seeking best practices from other members, as well as other schools and literature on best practices.

True collaborative school communities focus on topics such as professional practice forums, peer observations, curriculum planning, professional study/book groups, grade level/content area teaming, interdisciplinary teaming, task forces, teaching strategy and professional interest teams (Blankstein, 2004). Blankstein (2004) found that schools where collaboration is the norm share some very distinct characteristics including a commitment to shared vision, mission and goals; engagement and administrative support of teachers in meaningful collaboration; a culture of trust and respect; a staff who have real authority to make decisions; well-managed and democratic meetings; frequent discussions of effective team practices; a well-developed plan providing time for collaborative teams; clear purposes and goals and acquisition and dissemination of training in effective teamwork strategies. In their research, Lezotte and McKee, (2006) confirmed Blankstein's findings that effective teams possess clearly-defined roles and expectations, accountability, and adequate training necessary to become effective participants in the continuous improvement process.



The increasing concern of the public regarding the condition of public schooling has provided the impetus for more parents and other community members to seek avenues of influence in school decisions. This reinforces the notion that effective principals must be flexible, are encouraged to use strong personal outreach strategies and should make valiant efforts to collaborate with community and social service agencies for child care, health care and transportation (Thomas, 1994).

It is obvious that the traditional role of the principal is changing. Principal preparation programs need to be reorganized to provide the training needed to lead a school in this changing collaborative environment (Thomas, 1994). Specific training should include techniques and strategies designed to empower others to assume leadership roles. Staff should then be trained and ultimately entrusted to make academic and instructional decisions (Powell, 2004). No decisions should be made without the input of those most affected by them. Binkowski et al. (1995) found that administrators must teach teachers how to work as a team and how to make decisions by consensus. For school-based management structures to be effective, teachers need increased authority to make decisions related to curriculum and instruction (Cotton, 2003). Site-based teams need genuine decision-making authority; not just in an advisory capacity. Legal requirements, budgetary procedures, problem-solving, conflict resolution, and consensus building should all be included in the training process (Cotton, 2003). True collaborative training takes deliberate effort and a significant time commitment, which is why many schools do not explore this path.

Peter Senge, in his 1990 best seller, *The Fifth Discipline*, introduced the idea of a “learning organization” to the business community. One of the basic principles of a learning organization was that of “team learning”. The principle of “team learning” was translated into an

educational context by Sergiovanni who theorized that the idea of school as a learning community suggested a kind of connectedness among members that resembled what was found in a family, a neighborhood, or some other closely-knit group (Sergiovanni, 1992). The research regarding the growth of the concept of the learning community began with Sergiovanni's research and continued on to the establishment of the Professional Learning Community. There is a growing body of research that indicates the need for schools to establish themselves as professional learning communities that are engaged in continuous improvement efforts (Burrello et al., 2005). The ultimate goal of the professional learning community is to enhance the interconnectedness of the home, the school, and the community so that students benefit from the initiative (Harris et al., 2006). Professional learning communities are characterized by reflective dialogue, mutual respect, concern, caring, reliability, and a commitment to a common larger cause (Blankstein, 2004).

The building principal is ultimately charged with guiding the staff and others involved through the planning process and is the key to effective shared decision-making. Thomas (1994) refers to the principal as the manager of the decision making process. As author Carl Glickman (2003) observed: "In successful schools, principals aren't threatened by the wisdom of others; instead, they cherish it by distributing leadership" (p. 56).

#### Family and Community Connections

The research is abundantly clear: Nothing motivates a child more than when learning is valued by schools and families/communities working together in partnership...These forms of involvement do not happen by accident or even by invitation. They happen by explicit strategic intervention. (Fullan, 1997, p. 22)

Research shows that the support and involvement of students' families and the community are fundamental to student achievement in schools (Blankstein, 2004). Parents are essential participants in the educational process (Binkowski et al., 1995). Research done by Cotton (2003) and Gaziel (1995) found that principals of high-achieving schools are more involved in outreach to parents and the school community than are principals of less-successful schools. Gaziel's (1995) study of principals' utilization of time found that principals of high-performing schools devoted 66 percent more time on the establishment of parent and community relationships than did the principals of average schools. Schools should have a formal mechanism for including parents as decision makers on school teams and committees. There should be a coordinated schoolwide outreach in place. Deliberate plans should be made to include parents in a meaningful way in the business of school. Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, and Simon (1997) suggest in their research that there are six types of parent and community involvement in schools (Figure 3). The goal of the effective school leader is to get parents and community members involved at the highest level possible.

Effective principals are visible and available to parents. They strive to form meaningful relationships with families and community members. Successful principals are able to make connections with parents and others by showing a respectful concern for each person's life, situation, and family. By caring for students, principals care for their families (Templeton, 1997). Principals of at-risk schools must work to make families and community members feel valued and welcomed in the school. Community involvement is critical in at-risk schools (Harris et al., 2006) as deliberate efforts must be made to gain (or regain) the confidence of parents and to improve the reputation of the school within the local community.

### Types of Parent and Community Involvement in Schools

Type	Description
1	Designed to provide families with training in how to establish a supportive home environment for student learning through home visits, information on child-rearing practices, and family support programs.
2	Communication level of involvement with parent-teacher conferences, classroom newsletters, and weekly communication envelopes of students' work.
3	Represents the volunteering level of involvement and includes volunteer recruitment, training, participation in the classroom, and school wide administrative support.
4	Provides learning-at-home activities with a focus on the skills required for student success and how parents can support their children in their academic achievement.
5	Decision-making level of involvement with volunteers participating in the school's program development and overall administration.
6	Creation of partnerships with various stakeholders to integrate community resources into a school's daily programs and to support the school's overall administration and management of resources.

Figure 3. *Types of Parent and Community Involvement in Schools (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997)*

Communities and families in at-risk schools should be perceived as assets that can be capitalized upon and integrated into the school in a manner that values their contributions.

The school's culture must be as supportive of families and community members as it is of students and staff. This often requires the breaking down of traditional community barriers. Effective leaders must celebrate and value diversity of language and cultures and recognize them as community assets. Principals must recognize the intrinsic worth of a diverse student and community population and must openly support educational quality and excellence for all students (Harris et al., 2006). Constituents must be partners with the school; working for the success of all students (Powell, 2004).

Family involvement surfaced as a significant partner necessary for the advancement of student achievement for all students (Binkowski et al., 1995). The nuclear or extended family is not the only source of social capital for a child, however. Community agencies, neighbors, churches, clubs, etc. are all capable of contributing to this form of capital. These networks, people and agencies can build strong community support and commitment to a common purpose. This, in turn, may strengthen the capital provided by healthy family cultures or compensate for unhealthy cultures (Leithwood et al., 2004). Adopting a multi-agency approach to problem-solving and understanding the wider needs of the community, assists schools in reaching all students (Harris et al., 2006). The Improving America's Schools Act, passed by Congress in 1994, provided expanded support for the development of schoolwide Title I programs in the United States. These schoolwide programs encouraged collaboration between and among the school and community agencies to better meet the needs of the school community. Examples of agencies in which schools collaborate to meet the needs of the school and the community are: counseling and social services, food banks, clothing banks, healthcare (including vision and

dental), libraries, service learning opportunities, parent information center (including ESL training, GED programs, parent hotlines, Special Education and parenting resources) and community revitalization programs. In 1994, Congress also added a goal focusing on parental involvement to the National Education Goals. Goal #8 states: “By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children” (National Education Goals Panel, 1995).

Leaders cannot view the school and the students’ homes in isolation from one another. Neither can schools operate in isolation from other agencies of the communities they serve. Leaders need to understand how the school and the home connect with one another and with the community at large. They need to examine how their schools can increase the productivity of such connections so as to impact student learning in a positive manner. Considerable evidence has been collected regarding school-sponsored practices aimed at building productive family educational cultures. These practices include school-community partnerships, parent education programs, and school-linked, integrated social services (Leithwood et al., 2004). Cotton (2003) suggests that principals of high-achieving schools perform specific tasks to impact positive parent and community relations including: clear communication of the vision and goals of the school, solicitation and genuine consideration of constituent input, engagement of parents and community members as classroom helpers/tutors, utilization of neighborhood facilities for area meetings/discussions, and the designation of schools as community centers. Examples of parent/community member involvement that assist to ensure the healthy development of schools are found in Ward’s (2004) research. These include the development of responsive parent committees that provide critical feedback on school and district issues, the organization of regularly scheduled community forums to provide stakeholders with an update of school and

district educational progress, and the mobilization of community partners to support various reform initiatives.

Schools exist for and serve the community. Research is clear that family, school, and community relationships directly affect student outcomes; hence the need to connect with the community is of paramount importance to the success of a school (Harris et al., 2006). It truly takes a village to raise a child.

### Organizational Structure

Although the effective principal's primary focus is that of an instructional leader (Powell, 2004), there are managerial issues that also require the attention of the effective administrator. According to Powell's research, the principal must be able to wear many hats and must effectively manage resources, time, discipline and instruction. Principals must be keepers of the vision, culture builders, collaborators and instructional leaders. They must create safe learning environments in an effort to maximize academic success. Effective principals bring about safe and orderly environments by exhibiting personal warmth and accessibility, ensuring that there is broad based agreement regarding standards for student behavior, communicating high behavioral standards for students, seeking input from students about behavior policies, applying rules consistently from day to day and from student to student, delegating disciplinary authority to teachers, and providing support services and/or removal of seriously disruptive students (Edmonds, 1979; Larsen, 1987). Administrators must implement a discipline plan that is effective and allows teachers to teach and students to learn. Principals must utilize competent managerial skills to ensure that the school runs effectively and efficiently. They need to know how to access funds for budgetary needs from a variety of sources in order to hire and maintain the best staff and provide resources for teaching and learning. Successful principals need to be

able to schedule time for learning that is free of interruptions and maximizes instructional time. The principal must know how to access medical and social resources for students as primary needs must be met before learning can occur (Powell, 2004).

Spaulding's (1997) research speaks to the need for principals to be organized. It also touches upon the concept of initiating effective staff meetings which are both brief and focused. St. Germain and Quinn (2005) describe successful principals as those who react in a proactive manner to situations, readily confronting and resolving issues. Effective principals shield staff from excessive intrusions and/or pressure exerted by forces outside of the school (Heck, 1992). St. Germain and Quinn's research on successful principals stresses the importance of the development and utilization of positive negotiation skills.

Successful principals understand and respect the relationship between efficient managerial functions and academic achievement. A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient and effective learning environment (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, 1996).

Results of a questionnaire on instructional leadership administered to elementary school teachers and principals in California (Larsen, 1987) confirmed previous findings in the literature that instructional leadership behaviors significantly influenced student achievement levels. The 510 survey respondents, which represented a 60 percent total response rate, were from schools of varying achievement levels. One of the conclusions of the study found that principals of higher-achieving schools demonstrated specific instructional leadership behaviors significantly more frequently than did principals of lower-achieving schools. These behaviors included: (1) ensuring that school instructional goals are developed in congruence with district policies; (2)



ensuring that instructional goals are clearly communicated to everyone; (3) communicating high expectations for student academic performance to staff members; (4) participating in formal and/or informal discussions concerning instruction as it impacts student achievement; (5) ensuring that systematic procedures for monitoring student progress are utilized by staff members; (6) assisting teachers in securing available resources for program implementation; (7) making regular visits to classrooms; (8) evaluating curricular programs; (9) observing innovative curricular programs; and (10) establishing a safe and orderly school environment with a clear and consistent discipline code (Larsen, 1987).

Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) found a substantial link between leadership and student achievement. Their meta-analysis examined 70 quantitative studies over a 30-year period beginning in the early 1970's and involved 2,894 schools, 1.1 million students and 14,000 teachers. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty identified 21 specific leadership responsibilities that were significantly correlated with student achievement. The researchers then generated the average effect sizes that these 21 leadership responsibilities had on student achievement. These effect sizes operated in isolation and were not considered to be additive in nature. The average effect size found between leadership and student achievement was .25. This means leadership practices explained 25 percent of student achievement scores. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty interpreted this correlation by considering two schools (school A and school B) with similar student and teacher populations. Both schools demonstrated achievement on a standardized, norm-referenced test at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. Principals in both schools were also average in that their abilities in the 21 key leadership responsibilities were ranked at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. Principal B improved her demonstrated abilities in all 21 key behaviors by exactly one standard deviation. Research findings by Waters et al. indicated that this increase in leadership ability

translated into mean student achievement at school B that was 10 percentile points higher than in school A. A one standard deviation improvement in school A's leadership practices was associated with an increase in student achievement from the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile to the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile. This represented a statistically significant difference in achievement. The following chart (Figure 4) identifies these leadership behaviors and their average effect sizes. Figure 4 clusters the 21 behaviors so that they are assimilated into the six dimensions reviewed in the literature.

The findings clearly indicate that effective educational leadership makes a difference in improving student learning. Variables that have been identified in the literature review as impacting student achievement include setting direction, effective communication, knowledge of curriculum and instruction, collaboration and shared leadership, family and community connections, and organizational structure. Although all of the variables should operate in an integrated and connected manner, collaboration was the variable that was mentioned most frequently throughout the literature review process. This collaborative cohesiveness involves teachers, support employees, parents, community members, businesses, district staff and state-level staff. Building capacity and developing and empowering teacher leaders is critical to the school improvement process. In order to accomplish the collective vision of the school, all players need to be involved, participating, contributing members of the team. Our students deserve nothing less.

### Leadership Behaviors, Effect Sizes, and Student Achievement

<u>Dimension 1: Setting Direction</u>		<u>Dimension 2: Communication</u>	
Change agent	.30	Communication	.23
Culture	.29		
Ideals/Beliefs	.25		
Affirmation	.25	<u>Dimension 3: Curriculum &amp; Instruction</u>	
Focus	.24	Intellectual Stimulation	.32
Optimizer	.20	Monitoring/Evaluation	.28
Relationships	.19	Resources	.26
Visibility	.16	Knowledge of C & I	.24
Contingent Rewards	.15	Assessment	.16
<u>Dimension 4: Collaboration</u>		<u>Dimension 5: Family Connections</u>	
Situational Awareness	.33	Outreach	.28
Input	.30		
Flexibility	.22	<u>Dimension 6: Organizational Structure</u>	
		Order	.26
		Discipline	.24

Figure 4. *Leadership Behaviors, Effect Sizes and Student Achievement (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003)*

After reviewing the literature, six dimensions emerged from my research in which the behaviors and practices of the principal influenced student achievement: setting direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration, family/community connections, and organizational structure. From this literature review a thesis evolved: Effective leadership practices positively impact student achievement. Current research tells principals what to do, but not how to do it. This study identifies practices from the research that will assist principals as they attempt to turn a school around in terms of academic achievement. In Chapter III, the process of collecting data is presented to determine if there is a relationship between behaviors and practices of turnaround principals and the six dimensions identified in the literature review as being critical to student achievement. My hypothesis is that this research study will find all six leadership dimensions evident in a case study of a turnaround school.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Overview of the Methods

Chapter III explains the methodology that was used in carrying out this qualitative case study, giving special emphasis to the analysis of data. The five major components of this chapter include: assumptions and rationale for a qualitative design, research context and study participant selection, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures and a summary of the methodology.

This study determines whether the major instructional leadership practices identified in the research as impacting student achievement (setting direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration and shared leadership, family and community connections, organizational structure) are evident in the practices of the turnaround principal.

Subquestions of the study include: (1) Are there additional practices impacting student achievement that are evident in a turnaround principal's repertoire that have not been identified in the research?, (2) What were the differences in the setting of direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration, family/community partnerships and organizational structure prior to and following the appointment of the turnaround principal?, and (3) Are there any leadership dimensions or functions that appear to be more prevalent than others to the academic success of the school?

### Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design

A qualitative design was selected to conduct this descriptive case study of a turnaround principal's leadership practices in a low-performing school. Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as "...an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem" (p. 15). McMillian (1996) suggests that a qualitative perspective emphasizes a phenomenological view in which reality exists in the perceptions of individuals. Qualitative studies focus on detailed meaning and understanding and take place in naturally occurring situations. A qualitative approach is selected based upon the nature of the study's research question. Qualitative research studies ask "how" or "what" questions rather than "why" questions (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative approaches are used when an audience is receptive to this method.

A descriptive case study approach was selected as this approach was best aligned with the nature of the research questions. Merriam states that

A descriptive case study in education is one that presents a detailed account of the phenomenon under study...They are useful in presenting basic information about areas of education where little research has been conducted. Innovative programs and practices are often the focus of descriptive case studies in education. (Merriam, 1998, p. 38)

Yin (1989) defines a case study as a type of qualitative research that investigates a phenomenon within its real life context. Case studies are characterized by the examination of a specific subject bound by time and place, retrieval of multiple sources of information resulting in in-depth data collection, and inclusion of detailed descriptions of the context and the setting of the study (Creswell, 1998).

The qualitative research design emphasizes the researcher's role as an active learner who can tell the story from the participants' view rather than as an "expert" who passes judgment on the participants (Creswell, 1998). This approach appeals to the researcher as she has not been through the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Training program and has no experience leading a turnaround school.

The researcher's selection of a qualitative, descriptive case study provides the most appropriate method for studying the leadership practices of a turnaround principal. The study is bound by time (2004-2008) and place (an individual school). The case study approach permits the researcher to experience the phenomenon as an active learner. The program of emphasis (VSTSP) is examined in detail by the researcher. The results of the case study are presented in such a manner as to benefit all school administrators as they strive to improve academic achievement within their schools. Results will also benefit policy makers as they examine the turnaround specialist program to determine whether the program is worthy of expansion, continuation, or abolishment.

#### Research Context and Study Participant Selection

Participants in the study were selected utilizing a criterion sampling method. The Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program requires a three-year commitment to a school in need of improvement. The VSTSP program was implemented beginning in the school year 2004-2005 with ten turnaround principals placed in seven Virginia school districts. The end of the turnaround principals' three-year commitment date would have been at the close of the 2006-2007 school year. As of June 1, 2007, four of the original ten principals were no longer employed as principals of the schools that they had been originally assigned. An additional school had not only changed principals, but the entire school itself had been transformed into an

alternative school. Of the original ten turnaround specialists, only five remained as principals in their respective schools. The fact that only five turnaround principals and their schools were ultimately eligible for study, in addition to the limited research available on such a new initiative, solidified the researcher's selection of a qualitative study design. As the researcher was looking for improvement of academic progress and achievement over time, the designation of adequate yearly progress over the 3-year period became the first indicator selected (see Figure 5).

In terms of increasing academic achievement over time, schools #3 and #5 were not selected as they were not consistent in maintaining AYP status during the three year period 2004-2007. The remaining three schools, School #1, School #2, and School #4, then became the focus of the selection process. Schools #1 and #2 were both located in a large metropolitan area while School #4 was located in a small rural county in Virginia. Creswell (1998) states that "the study of more than one case dilutes the overall analysis; the more cases an individual studies, the greater the lack of depth in any single case" (p. 63). Based upon this belief, the researcher chose to look at Standards of Learning assessment results over the 3-year period as an additional indicator for the selection of one study school (Table 1). SOL assessments in reading and math at the fourth grade level were not mandated until the 2005-2006 school year.



**AYP School Designations**

	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007
School #1	Did not make AYP	Made AYP	Made AYP
School #2	Did not make AYP	Made AYP	Made AYP
School #3	Made AYP	Did not make AYP	Made AYP
School #4	Did not make AYP	Made AYP	Made AYP
School #5	Did not make AYP	Made AYP	Did not make AYP

Figure 5. AYP School Designations (Virginia Department of Education, 2007)

Table 1

*Standardized Test Scores Over a Three-Year Period*

<u>Grade 3 Reading</u>	<u>2003-2004</u>	<u>2004-2005</u>	<u>2005-2006</u>
School #1	77	89	92
School #2	63	81	98
School #4	79	86	79
<u>Grade 3 Math</u>			
School #1	91	95	94
School #2	73	84	90
School #4	69	90	96
<u>Grade 4 Reading</u>			
School #1			90
School #2			89
School #4			63
<u>Grade 4 Math</u>			
School #1			90
School #2			84
School #4			58

Table 1 (continued)

<u>Grade 5 Reading</u>	<u>2003-2004</u>	<u>2004-2005</u>	<u>2005-2006</u>
School #1	94	90	94
School #2	76	78	87
School #4	43	62	85

<u>Grade 5 Math</u>			
School #1	90	94	97
School #2	85	95	98
<u>School #4</u>	<u>43</u>	<u>69</u>	<u>73</u>

Note. Percentage of students in three identified schools passing reading and mathematics in grades 3-5 over a three-year period.

School #1 and School #2 were conveniently located in a large metropolitan area of Virginia. This particular school system, however, would not permit the researcher entry into their county to complete this research study. School #4, located in rural Virginia, was open and amenable to the research study. Verbal approval was obtained from both the school principal and the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction of the school district. School #4 then, became the researcher's selected school of study.

Once the prospectus was approved by the researcher's committee, permission to initiate the study was requested from the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once approval from the IRB was granted, the researcher approached the appropriate district and school personnel regarding participation in the study. Focus group interviews were planned to include teachers who had taught at the selected school for five years or more. These focus group participants had experienced prior administrative practices as well as current turnaround leadership practices. Each participant who agreed to be interviewed was asked to complete a consent form agreeing to the conditions for the research. The Principles of Informed Consent (information, comprehension, voluntariness) were discussed with each participant. Participants were given copies of the consent form prior to the interviews. For purposes of confidentiality, the school used in the study and the names of persons interviewed were identified with pseudonyms.

#### Data Collection Procedures

Data collection is a deliberate, conscious, systematic process that focuses on the both the data and the process of the research activities so that others may comprehend how the study was performed and can judge its adequacy, strength, and ethics (Rossman, 2003). Rossman states: "Data gathering entails diligently recording and reflecting, recording those reflections, and

reflecting on those recordings” (p. 179). Data collection for case studies requires multiple forms of data collection as the researcher attempts to build an in-depth picture of the case (Creswell, 1998). The researcher utilized the following data collection sources for this study: two one-to-one interviews with the turnaround principal of the selected school, three focus group interviews consisting of all professional educators that have been at said school for five years or more, school and classroom observations, and an analysis of artifacts and documents. These four sources were utilized to triangulate the research data. The researcher utilized the Constant Comparative Method with the one-to-one interviews, the focus group interviews, observations, and the document reviews.

### *Interviews*

In-depth interviewing is the hallmark of qualitative research (Rossman, 2003). Rossman suggests that researchers interview to understand individual perspectives, to probe or clarify, to deepen understanding, to generate rich, descriptive data, to gather insights into participants’ thinking, and to learn more about the context of the study. The strength of an interview, according to Rossman, comes from the relevance of the interview questions and from the researcher’s skill in asking follow-up questions. Well-thought out questions and effective questioning techniques encourage the participant’s perspective to unfold as the participant views it and not as the researcher views it (Rossman, 2003).

*One-to-One Principal Interviews.* An interview protocol was developed based on Creswell’s (1998) work. Creswell’s model for interview protocol includes the title of the project; the date, time, and place of the interview, the name of the interviewer and the interviewee; a brief description of the study; the interview questions, and a closing remark thanking participants for their involvement. Merriam (1998) suggests that there are three types of interview formats that

might be utilized in an interview: highly structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. The types of questions selected should be based on the desired interview atmosphere and may include all three formats. The researcher developed this study's semi-structured interview questions based upon the six domains derived from the literature review. See Appendix A for the One-to-One Principal Interview Guide.

*Focus Group Interviews.* Focus group interviews were conducted with professional educators who had been teaching at the study school for five years or more. These focus groups were able to provide feedback and comparisons regarding the practices of the current turnaround principal versus prior school administrators. Interview protocol was followed as previously described. The researcher utilized semi-structured questions for the focus groups to solicit the opinions of the participants. Interview questions were, once again, correlated with the literature review domains. See Appendix B for the Focus Group Interview Guide.

Using the One-to-One Principal Interview and the Focus Group Interview Protocols, the researcher conducted pilot interviews to determine the appropriateness and relevance of the proposed interview questions and to develop and refine interviewing skills. Pilot interviews were conducted with the assistance of two elementary principals (separately) in the researcher's school district. The pilot interviews gave the researcher practice in maintaining neutrality as well as practice in operating the recording devices.

The researcher utilized two separate recording devices during all of the interview sessions to ensure that duplicate audio copies were available. The researcher then had the interviews transcribed by a professional transcriptionist.

### *Observations*

Observation plays an important role in qualitative studies as the researcher can note body language and affect in addition to a participant's oral language (Rossman, 2003). Rossman suggests that researchers observe to understand context, to see tacit patterns, to see patterns that people are unwilling to discuss, to provide direct personal experience and knowledge, and to move beyond the selective perceptions of both the participants and the researcher. The observational process allows the researcher to learn about actions and to infer the meanings those actions have for participants (Rossman, 2003). See Appendix C for the Observation Guide.

The researcher observed all areas of the study school facility during the instructional day, both inside and outside of the building. Observations included the attendance of the researcher at a staff meeting and a P.T.A. meeting. See Appendix D for the Observation Location Checklist.

### *Document Review*

Qualitative researchers often supplement observations and interviews with the study of documents and artifacts produced in the course of everyday events (Rossman, 2003). Gathering documents and artifacts is relatively unobtrusive and potentially rich in portraying the beliefs and values in an organizational setting (Rossman, 2003).

Documents that were reviewed by the researcher include, but were not limited to, school newsletters, school handbooks, parent communication, monthly calendars, individual classroom letters, principal memorandums, staff communications, PTA communications, lesson plans, classroom schedules. Student portfolios, and school and teacher web pages. A document review guide (Appendix E) assisted in the organization of the review process. Appendix F contains a Document Review Checklist that ensured that multiple documents were examined by the researcher.

## Data Analysis Procedures

Glatthorn and Joyner (2005) refer to data analysis as being a three-step procedure consisting of (1) reducing the data, (2) reporting and displaying the data, and (3) interpreting the data. The process of data analysis in a qualitative study consists of two sets of overall strategies, one analytic in nature (categorical) and the other (holistic) focusing more on description (Rossman, 2003). Case studies, according to Rossman, use both categorizing and holistic strategies. The researcher's study utilized the holistic strategy to describe the data connections in their actual context, resulting in a narrative picture of the turnaround school. The conceptual framework and research questions of the proposed study focused on categories and domains emerging from the literature review. These categories provided for the researcher's initial coding of the data using the Constant Comparative Method (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The Constant Comparative Method is a detailed organizational data analysis process in which the researcher follows a prescribed format. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) describe this format as: (1) carefully reading and coding each data piece, (2) organizing each data piece into categories, (3) comparing each new data piece to existing categories to determine whether the new data fit into existing categories or fall into new categories, (4) looking for emerging themes within each category, and (5) repeating the process for finding the most salient themes.

In this case study, the researcher collected data from four sources including the one-to-one principal interviews, focus group interviews, observations, and thorough review of relevant documents. As indicated in the data collection section, both the one-to-one and the focus group interviews were audio taped using two tape recorders. Following each interview, the audiotape of each interview, as well as any field notes recorded, were transcribed. Member checks were performed following all transcriptions to ensure accuracy of information. Following the member



checks, transcripts were coded according to the six domains identified in the literature review (setting direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration/shared leadership, family/community connections, organizational structure) as well as new domains that were introduced as a result of the data analysis. Transcription data was then transferred to individual index cards or post-it notes. Cards and post-it notes were filed in folders under each of the six domains listed above.

Large chart paper with the domain titles front and center were used to organize the individual index cards or post-it notes. The Constant Comparative Method was utilized to analyze the coded cards to determine under which, if any, domain that the data would be filed. Data that fit into more than one category was placed accordingly under separate domains. Observations and review of documents were also coded using the Constant Comparative Method. Different colored index cards/post-it notes were used to distinguish between interview, observation and document review data.

The researcher used a combination of techniques to represent and report the findings in this study. A narrative format was used to provide the reader with detailed and thick descriptions of the turnaround school and the turnaround principal's leadership behaviors. Direct quotations were utilized to provide the reader with the actual thoughts of the participants in context. Tables and figures were developed, when appropriate, to illustrate the development of leadership domains. The goal of the researcher was to present the study in a clear, concise, and comprehensive format.

In qualitative research, the reader must be able to trust that the research study has been done in an ethical manner and that results are valid, reliable and credible. Validity, reliability, and credibility are assured in the study through the implementation of the following procedures:

1. Use of member checks. Transcriptions were reviewed by participants to ensure accuracy (Merriam, 1998).
2. Use of peer examination. Cohort member peers, with prior administrative experience, were requested to perform peer examinations of the findings as they emerged (Merriam, 1998).
3. Use of triangulation. Data from multiple sources (one-to-one interviews, focus group interviews, observations and document review) were utilized (Merriam, 1998).
4. Attention to the researcher's biases (Merriam, 1998). The researcher in this study entered the study with no predetermined outcome theory. As a practicing principal, the researcher had no bias regarding the outcome of the proposed study and was able to remain neutral regarding the study itself. The researcher remained committed to reporting results accurately with the sole purpose of fully understanding the study under review.

### Summary

Chapter III began with the researcher restating the purpose of the research and the specific research questions used to guide the study. The researcher then presented the rationale behind the selection of a qualitative inquiry using a case study approach.

The research context and study participant selection section described the criterion sampling method used to select the study school. This section also spoke to the issues of access and entry, confidentiality, and the Principles of Informed Consent.

Data collection procedures were described in the next section. Interview protocols, observation guidelines and checklists and document guidelines and checklists were presented.

In the final section, the data analysis process was described. The methods of transcription and coding were developed. The methods of assessing validity, reliability and

credibility were outlined. It was suggested that a narrative approach, supported with tables and figures, would be used by the researcher to report and present the study's findings.

## PROLOGUE TO CHAPTER IV

It is the obligation of the researcher to provide the readers of this qualitative research a detailed description of the study's context to allow them to determine the "similarities" with regard to their particular situations (Merriam, 1998).

### Setting

The selected Study School is located in rural Virginia. Upon driving into the small town in which the Study School is located, one passes multiple trailers and auto repair shops. The area is rather dilapidated and the majority of the property is unkempt and/or abandoned. Then, out of this rather depressing environment, one views a large, imposing two-story brick school with teal window detailing. The school is a bright and cheerful addition in an otherwise bleak setting. The school marquis boasts the name of the school and the phrase, "A Center for Environmental Studies." A banner hung above the front entrance reads, "A Virginia Fully Accredited School. A community center directly to the right of the school suggests a sense of community cohesiveness.

Tenth day Study School enrollment reports for the 2007-2008 school year reflect the following student membership: 134 African American students, 20 Hispanic students, 69 White students for a total enrollment of 223 students. Enrollment reports also indicate that there are 39 students with disabilities, three students labeled as academically gifted, 17 enrolled as LEP students and 197 students on free or reduced meals. Study School's attendance rate was 95.6% in 2006-2007. The reports indicate that ten students were retained during the 2006-2007 school year and that there were ten total incidents of out-of-school suspensions (Table 2).

Table 3 offers an overview of the Study School over time. SOL results are presented for grades 3-5 over a three-year period: 2004-2005 through 2006-2007. Results appear to reflect

low third grade scores in 2006-2007, especially in English, science and math. When one compares third grade scores in 2004-2005 to fourth grade scores in 2005-2006 to fifth grade scores in 2006-2007, there appears to be a dip in the scores in grade four. This may be due to the fact that 2005-2006 was the first year that the fourth grade was SOL tested.

Table 4 reflects subgroup proficiency for 2006-2007 SOL test results. Less than 75 percent of third grade students in the school scored at the proficient level in English. Less than 75 percent of African-American students scored at the proficient level in both third grade English and science. Less than 75 percent of White students scored at the proficient level in third grade English, third grade math, and fourth grade math. Special education students fared the worst overall, with less than 75 percent of special education students scoring at the proficient level in third grade math, fourth grade English, fourth grade math, and fifth grade science. Less than 75 percent of free or reduced meal students scored at the proficient level in third grade English.

Third grade SOL scores in 2006-2007 were addressed through the School Improvement Process and corresponding School Improvement Plan (Figure 6). Strategies identified to address weak third grade reading and math scores included implementation of the Breakthrough to Literacy program in kindergarten through grade two, participation of special education students in quarterly benchmark testing, and utilization of Student Performance by Question results to identify individual student skill gaps. Remediation and tutorial sessions were then developed based upon these identified skill gaps.

Table 2

Demographics (10<sup>th</sup> Day of Membership 2007-08)

<u>Ethnic Subgroups</u>					
<u>Subgroup</u>	<u>Number of Students</u>			<u>Percentage of Students</u>	
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
African American	70	64	134	52.23	47.76
Hispanic	11	9	20	55.00	45.00
White	36	33	69	52.17	47.82
TOTALS	117	106	223	52.47	47.53

<u>Other Student Subgroups</u>		
<u>Other Subgroups</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent of School Population</u>
Students with Disabilities	39	17.49
Academically Gifted	3	1.35
Limited English Proficient	17	7.62
Free or Reduced Meals	197	88.34

<u>Student Attendance</u>			
	<u>2004-2005</u>	<u>2005-2006</u>	<u>2006-2007</u>
Attendance Rate (%)	94.59	95.5	95.6

<u>Student Retention and Suspension</u>			
	<u>2004-2005</u>	<u>2005-2006</u>	<u>2006-2007</u>
Total Retained	2	6	10
Total Enrollment	199	196	220
Percent Retained	1.01	3.06	4.55

Total Incidents of

Out-of-School

Suspensions	2	2	10
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Note. Number and percentage of ethnic subgroups, other student subgroups, student attendance and student retention and suspension at Study School as reported on Tenth Day Membership reports from the 2007-2008 school year

Table 3

*Student Achievement – Virginia State Program SOL's*

Grade Level/Test	School Percent Proficient		
	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007
Third/English	85.71	78.57	51.43
Third/History/Social Studies	95.24	85.70	86.21
Third/Math	90.48	95.80	77.78
Third/Science	100.00	84.90	75.86
Fourth/English		62.50	82.14
Fourth/Math		58.30	75.00
Virginia Studies	75.00	85.70	95.45
Fifth/English	62.07	84.84	83.33
Fifth/English/Writing	100.00	84.37	92.31
Fifth/Math	62.23	73.10	93.33
Fifth/Science	56.00	78.30	85.19

Note. Percent of student proficiency over a three-year period as reported in the 2007-2008 Study School Improvement Plan.



Table 4

*Percent Proficiency by Subgroups as Reflected on 2006-2007 SOL Test Results*

Grade Level/Test	Percent Proficiency							
	All	African-American	Hispanic	White	LEP	IDEA	Free/Reduced	
Third/English	51.43	53.85	NA	44.44	NA	0.00	51.61	
Third/Math	77.78	80.77	NA	70.00	NA	42.86	81.25	
Third/History	86.21	86.36	NA	85.71	NA	NA	84.00	
Third/Science	75.86	72.73	NA	85.71	NA	NA	76.00	
Fourth/English	82.14	80.95	100.00	80.00	100.00	50.00	83.33	
Fourth/Math	75.00	76.19	100.00	60.00	100.00	40.00	75.00	
Virginia Studies	95.45	93.75	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	94.74	
Fifth//Reading	83.33	78.95	100.00	87.50	100.00	80.00	86.36	
Fifth//Writing	92.31	94.12	100.00	85.71	100.00	100.00	95.45	
Fifth/Math	93.33	89.47	100.00	100.00	100.00	80.00	95.45	
Fifth/Science	85.19	88.24	100.00	85.71	100.00	50.00	95.00	

Note. Percent Proficiency by subgroup as reported in Study School Improvement Plan for 2007-2008. LEP=Limited English Proficient. IDEA=Special Education. NA=Not applicable.

## Participants

The principal of Study School has been in the educational field for 33 years. Her teaching career began in a bordering county and spanned 17 years in that county. She then came to her current county, where she has served as a teacher, assistant principal and principal for 16 years. Study School's principal served as the interim principal during the 2003-2004 school year. She was then appointed by the Governor to be the turnaround principal at Study School in 2004-2005. This then, is her fifth year as Principal of the Study School.

In addition to a full-time principal, Study School consists of the following teaching complement: two kindergarten teachers, three first grade teachers, two second grade teachers, two third grade teachers, two fourth grade teachers and two fifth grade teachers. There is a self-contained TMD teacher, a behavioral specialist and an inclusion teacher on staff. Study School is a schoolwide Title I school and is supported by three full-time Title I teachers. Fine arts instruction is provided by an artist-in-residence, music teacher, physical education teacher, and media specialist. Support is also provided through the services of a speech and language therapist, and a part-time school guidance counselor. There are six instructional assistants who support the administration of the office, special education instruction and regular classroom instruction. The school has a personal caregiver for one of their students, two special services teachers (ESL and Academically Gifted), two reading intervention teachers, four cafeteria workers, two and one half custodial employees, a nurse and a crossing guard.

One of the issues that Study School and the surrounding county deal with each year is the teacher turnover rate. Many new teachers are hired in said county from out of state, particularly from the north where it is more difficult for new teachers to secure teaching positions. After getting two to three years of experience in Virginia, these teachers tend to return

“home” where they are hired due to the fact that they have gained valuable employment experience. Study School is working together with the surrounding district in an attempt to recruit and increase the number of local hires who, hopefully, will remain in the area and provide consistency with regard to educational employment.

#### Summary

The prologue to Chapter IV was developed to provide the reader with the characteristics of the Study School and the participants that were interviewed and/or observed.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this research study was to determine whether the major instructional leadership practices identified in the research as impacting student achievement (setting direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration and shared leadership, family and community connections, organizational structure) were evident in the practices of the turnaround principal.

Subquestions of the study included: (1) Are there additional practices impacting student achievement that are evident in a turnaround principal's repertoire that have not been identified in the research?, (2) What were the differences in the setting of direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration, family/community partnerships and organizational structure prior to and following the appointment of the turnaround principal?, and (3) Are there any leadership dimensions that appear to be more prevalent than others to the academic success of the school?

The study's research design consisted of one-to-one interviews with the turnaround principal, focus group interviews with those teachers who had taught at Study School for five years or more, school and classroom observations, and document review.

One-to-one formal interviews with the principal were held on two separate occasions. Informal discussions with the principal were frequent and occurred multiple times during and in between the researcher's visits.

Three focus group interviews were held on specific days during teacher planning times. Two teachers participated in the first focus group; one was a Title I teacher and the other taught fifth grade. The second focus group consisted of a Title I teacher, a third grade teacher and a

second grade teacher. The third focus group was comprised of a special education teacher and a kindergarten teacher.

Interview data are referenced throughout Chapters IV and V. The letters, P=Principal's transcript and FG=Focus Group transcript are followed by numbers that identify the specific group and page number of the transcript. For example, (FG3, 2) indicates that the data came from the transcript of the Third Focus Group and it would be found on page two of the corresponding transcript.

Observations were completed by the researcher throughout the school and in each classroom. Regular education classes, special education classes, music, library, PE, and greenhouse instruction were observed. The school grounds, hallways, office, cafeteria, teacher's lounge, and the workroom were all part of the observation process. The researcher was permitted to sit in on a staff meeting as well as participate in a school PTA meeting and student celebration. The Study School was most hospitable in every way imaginable during the researcher's visits. It was obvious that the staff and the students were proud to show off their school.

Multiple documents were reviewed as part of the research study process. School newsletters, handbooks, and parent communications were abundant. Parent communication was obviously an area that the school had established as a priority. Monthly and yearly calendars, class newsletters, the school's website, principal's memorandums, staff communications, class and school schedules, plan books, PTA minutes, and student work/portfolios were all reviewed as part of the document review process.

Each of these research methodologies will be discussed as separate entities as they relate to the themes previously identified in the research as positively impacting student achievement

(setting direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration and shared leadership, family and community connections, organizational structure.) Responses derived from the sub questions of the study will follow.

### Setting Direction

#### *One-to-One Principal Interviews*

The principal's vision for her school is to sustain the gains that the school has made. It is important to her that the school continues to flourish with regard to student achievement. The principal's statement that, "the true sign of leadership is sustainability" supports this belief. Another aspect of the school's vision is that the students will be successful in the future. It is the principal's belief that she is preparing and encouraging students to be life-long learners.

The principal states that the school's mission statement would be the unified one developed by the division. This mission states, "We will do our best and by doing our best, we will achieve success." This year, the school has taken on "Believe, Achieve, Succeed" as their motto. The principal wrote a song that students frequently sing, entitled "Do Your Best." The song is designed to encourage student success. Students and staff members sing it periodically when they get students new to the school as well as at all assemblies.

When the school community was originally developing school goals, the principal implemented a concept known as a turnaround design. The turnaround design consisted of the school analyzing their S.W.O.T. factors. These factors; stresses, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, were examined in terms of their significance to the functioning of the school. The resulting needs assessment became the foundation for the school's original goals. The needs at the initial onset of the school when the principal first arrived are different from what they are today. Some goals have changed, some have been eliminated and new ones have evolved over

the years. All of the school's goals have been and continue to be based upon results of applicable data.

At turnaround training, we studied the content of the book, "Moving from Good to Great." As principal, I returned to my school to attempt to implement some of those practices. As a staff, we talked about actions that applied to our school and modified our plans accordingly. You must be able to take a good objective look at your building needs and resources. When people are able to speak freely, without fear of punitive actions, they tend to speak honestly and truthfully. At first, you may have people who are hesitant to share because they have a more traditional way of doing things. The key is to develop a relationship with these people. Developing a relationship means they know they can trust you to function as a member of the team. If you don't have trust, you are fighting a losing battle. You not only have to talk the talk, you have to walk the walk. You have to be willing to roll up your sleeves and deal with the issues. It's not an I; it's a we. (P, 2)

The principal describes the school's culture as family oriented, community driven, a partnership of learners, and a community of learners. The school does not only "live" within the walls of the school itself, but reaches out into the community with business partnerships where community members actually come through to work with the students. Assisting the students are the Rotary Club and the Kiwanis Club, as well as bankers located in the city. According to the principal, "all four legs need to be working." By this she means that the school, the community, the students, and the parents must all be working together for a school to be successful.

In terms of expectations, it is obvious that the principal has high expectations for not only students and staff members, but also for herself. She subscribes to the theory that one must



“inspect what they expect.” This belief will become evident as we move further into the findings.

### *Focus Group Interviews*

The focus groups felt that the school’s vision was established when they decided collectively that they wanted to follow the turnaround model. As a group, they wanted all students (and their parents), when they walked through the front doors of the school, to feel like they were there for a purpose. The educational staff was there to serve the students and their families, much like a business. It was then that the school’s motto was established, which was “Believe. Achieve. Succeed.”

The one thing that we constantly tell our students is to always do their best. This has also become part of our mission. Our long term vision is that we want every single one of our students to achieve in the four core areas and all of our third graders reading on grade level by the end of third grade. That’s our vision for the next five or ten years. We want our community – every single person in this school – helping us with this goal. This means cafeteria workers and bus drivers as well, as it takes everybody to help. (FG1, 2)

We believe that all children can learn and we do what is necessary to make sure that they are successful. They all may not have the same success rate and their timing may not be the same, but we try to make sure that students shine in at least one area. All children can do something, learn something, and feel good about themselves in the process. (FG3, 1)

### *Observations*

High expectations were evident throughout the school. Posters with school rules were displayed in many areas of the school hallways. The rules included: walk slowly and quietly, speak softly, keep hands and feet to self, walk on the right, and wait patiently for your turn.

Two examples of high expectations were evident in interactions with the principal and her students. In the first incident, a student entering the building responded to my question with “yeah.” The principal stopped the student and reminded her of school etiquette. The child turned to me and apologized saying, “I’m sorry. Yes, ma’am.” In another encounter, which exemplified the principal’s wonderful sense of humor, a young man entered the office wearing his pants very low down on his hips. The principal conferenced quietly with the young man about his pants sagging down. She told him that the other students would begin to call him “Fruity or Fruit of the Loom” if he didn’t pull up his pants.” The young man immediately complied, grinning from ear-to-ear.

The school’s motto of Believe, Achieve, and Succeed was found in many areas of the school. It is spelled out with blocks in the front of the display cabinet in the main hallway. It is found in the many songs and chants that the students sing with pride throughout the day. It is part of the morning and afternoon announcements. The motto has become a unifying part of the school’s daily routine.

### *Document Review*

School improvement goals, cooperatively developed annually and reviewed quarterly by the School Improvement team, focus on community involvement, parental involvement, differentiation of instruction, research-based professional development, increased academic

achievement in reading and math, utilization of the Four Blocks reading model and Breakthrough to Literacy, and the promotion and integration of technology (Figure 6).

In an interview session with the Study School's principal (Duke, 2005), the principal's high expectations are outlined:

I'm 50-plus years old, and I've been an educator for 33 years, but I still give it my all. And that's what I expect from my staff. The children deserve nothing less. I have 225 unused sick days because I can't stand to miss school. I want that same level of commitment from everyone in this school. Sometimes I wonder why people today get into teaching. They don't seem to have the passion and the enthusiasm for helping kids that teachers used to have. Being a turnaround principal means keeping people inspired to do their very best. How can we expect students to push their limits if teachers and instructional aides and custodians and cafeteria workers aren't willing to do the same? Enthusiasm breeds hope. Hope is what I look for in the eyes of my students. When hope is there, I know we're on the right track. (p. 5)

There also continue to be some individuals who believe that African-American students cannot meet high academic expectations. The way I see it, if these kids can memorize the lyrics to hundreds of rap songs, they can remember what they need to know to pass the SOL tests. We just have to show them we believe they are capable learners. (p. 5)

## 2007-2008 Study School School Improvement Strategies

### School Improvement

Strategy #1: Continue to analyze community involvement activities.

Action Step 1: Distribute a feedback form to community participants.

Action Step 2: Evaluate effectiveness of activities based on attendance and feedback from participants.

Action Step 3: Continue to research untapped community resources.

Strategy #2: Continually develop parental involvement activities to increase parent participation to 80% or more.

Action Step 1: Analyze parent involvement activities from 2006-2007 as based on attendance.

Action Step 2: Provide a form for parents to evaluate activities.

Action Step 3: Provide opportunities for Pre-K parents to visit the kindergarten classroom to aid in transition from Pre-K to kindergarten.

Action Step 4: First grade team will utilize backpacks from the Parent Resource Center to involve parents and students in home-school activities.

Action Step 5: A schoolwide calendar of workshops, seminars, and parental involvement activities will be developed and implemented collaboratively with Title I teachers and parents and distributed to all parents and placed on the Study School's website.

### Instruction

Strategy #1: Continue to differentiate instruction based on student performance data through lesson plans and classroom observations.

Figure 6. *Study School Improvement Goals for 2007-2008*

Action Step 1: Observe classrooms for differentiated instruction.

Action Step 2: Monitor lesson plans weekly.

Strategy #2: Continue to assess students in SOL format.

Action Step 1: Administer a minimum of 1 test per week in SOL format in grades 2-5.

Action Step 2: Faculty and staff will model test taking skills including providing test buster cues, highlighting, eliminating and good test-taking practices.

Strategy #3: Provide enrichment and remediation activities through Intercession, after-school program, PALS intervention, Book Buddies, and Title I services.

#### Professional Development

Strategy #1: Continue to provide professional development opportunities in the areas of research based instructional strategies.

Action Step 1: Participate in Summer SOL Institute

Action Step 2: Participate in research-based instructional strategies workshops or presentations (Differentiation of Instruction, Write-On, Data Analysis).

#### Reading

Strategy #1: Student learning and achievement will continue to improve so that 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> graders will pass the SOL test with 80% or above.

Action Step 1: Utilize Student Performance by Question report in reading to guide instruction.

Action Step 2: Continue to use pacing guides which reflect the Blueprints.

Figure 6. *Study School Improvement Goals for 2007-2008 Continued*

Action Step 3: All teachers, including special education, will use state department and district pacing guides.

Action Step 4: Monitor implementation.

Strategy #2: Continue to use the Four-Blocks Reading Model in grades K-5 and integrate with Breakthrough to Literacy in K-2.

Action Step 1: Attend conferences, inservices, and workshops on the Four-Blocks Model and Breakthrough to Literacy.

Action Step 2: Monitor implementation.

Strategy #3: Monitor student progress.

Action Step 1: Use benchmark nine weeks assessments in 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grades, including special education students.

Action Step 2: Evaluate the remediation program.

Action Step 3: Develop immediate classroom remediation efforts.

Action Step 4: Analyze data to improve instructional strategies.

Action Step 5: Integrate Science and Social Studies content with English activities.

### Math

Strategy #1: Student learning and achievement will continue to improve so that 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders will pass the SOL test with 80% or above.

Action Step 1: Utilize our Student Performance by Question Report in math to guide instruction.

Action Step 2: Continue to use pacing guides which reflect the Blueprints.

Figure 6. *Study School Improvement Goals for 2007-2008 Continued*

Action Step 3: All teachers, including special education, will use state department and district pacing guides.

Action Step 4: Monitor implementation.

Strategy #2: Assess students in SOL format.

Action Step 1: Administer the benchmark testing each nine weeks to Grades 3-5, including special education.

Action Step 2: Analyze benchmark results.

### Technology

Strategy #1: Staff development will continue to be provided to promote technology awareness, interest, and participation.

Action Step 1: Continue to provide training for Breakthrough to Literacy.

Action Step 2: Provide training for Grade Quick for new teachers.

Action Step 3: Provide training for Marco Polo, United Streaming, URSULA, Infocus Projector, Excel, Power Point, Test Designer, Promethean Board, etc. for new teachers and additional training where needed.

Strategy #2: Student learning and achievement will be improved through the effective integration of technology.

Action Step 1: Utilize A+ Learning, the Internet, Reading Counts, Accelerated Reader, United Streaming, etc.

Action Step 2: Assess student progress using A+ Learning, Scholastic Reading Inventory, and online sites.

Figure 6. *Study School Improvement Goals for 2007-2008 Continued*

Several posters on the walls of both the main office and the principal's office reflected high expectations and respect for students. One of these is on the principal's office wall and is a handwritten poem from a student named Antonio.

She is principal – more than a friend.

She can help you all the way to the end.

A true way to tell a very nice lady.

It's a woman with a good sense of feeling...maybe.

She encourages you more than words can say.

She makes you have a happy day.

Leaving mad, sad, or saying "I can't do it,"

Is not in her vocabulary – she'll say, "Put your mind to it!"

Another poster in the front office conference room entitled, "Managing from the Heart" reads:

**Hear and understand me**

Even if you disagree, please don't make me wrong.

Acknowledge the greatness within me.

**Remember to look for my loving intentions.**

Tell me the truth with compassion.

Finally, a large plaque on the wall of the office reads:

Children are our hope for the future.

But we are the hope for theirs.



## Communication

### *One-to-One Principal Interviews*

Weekly newsletters are used as communication tools. Progress reports are also sent home weekly. Monthly newsletters communicate those activities that are going on for the month, as well as sharing lunch menu options.

This school has an open door policy whereby if you call and want to come in, you are welcome to do so. Parents and community members are invited to come in and participate in lessons. We are open to the parents and the community so that they know we have nothing to hide and no hidden agenda. We try to get as actively involved as possible, and by virtue of people being in the school participating and helping, they in turn see what the school is doing for our students. Opening the lines of communication from the office to the parents and to the community, along with our business partnerships, helps to maintain open and honest dialogue. We feel that we have developed an environment where we treat people as we would like to be treated...the Golden Rule.

(P, 3)

In an interview session with the Study school's principal (Duke, 2005) the principal espouses that:

Study School's small enrollment is also a plus, in my estimation. I know every student by name. Nothing delights me more than visiting each classroom on a daily basis and asking students questions about what they're studying. I want them to know that I care about what they are learning. I love having the chance to congratulate students when they are able to provide correct answers to my questions. Of course, getting into

classrooms on a daily basis also lets me find out when students aren't keeping pace or grasping their lessons. (p. 2)

Another change has been the introduction of incentives. Students who have perfect attendance or who do well on tests may get taken to lunch or win a prize donated by someone in the community. Because attendance is critical to reaching our goals, I do spot checks of class attendance. If all the students in a class are present, they all get a reward. When I learned that all of my fifth graders had passed their practice test in writing, I made a beeline for each fifth-grade class and we danced the Electric Slide to celebrate. There's no reason we can't have some fun while we're raising performance. (p. 4)

#### *Focus Group Interviews*

The school's Parent Resource Center is full of information designed to assist and support parental involvement in our school. Every student takes home a Wednesday folder with information for parents. Progress reports are sent home weekly in these folders so that parents will be able to keep up with their child's achievement and behavior progress each week. Parents cannot say then, that they have not been kept informed, as they are requested to sign weekly progress reports. Students write down their homework in daily planners where there is a section for parents to sign and/or add comments. Interim progress reports are sent home every four weeks. Report cards are sent home every nine weeks. Local newspapers, as well as district and school websites, are utilized extensively for communication purposes.

With my students, I communicate daily with the home. I welcome open communication with each and every one of my parents. It is very important to have communication because consistency between home and school will make for a successful child. When

one is out of place it is not a good situation. My parents know that they can call me. I call them. I have established a daily parent/teacher communication composition book so that parents can send me notes and/or ask me questions. Even my principal has called one of my parents to let the parent know that her child did something well. (FG3, 2)

In terms of staff communication, the principal puts up a daily memorandum every day so that we know what is happening for that day. She also makes announcements each morning and afternoon and sometimes sends e-mails. That is how we obtain information from her during the school day. (FG1, 2)

Staff meetings are held at least once per month as are grade group meetings. The principal also meets with each grade group (K-1, 2-3, 4-5) monthly to discuss items specifically related to that particular grade level grouping. These small grade group meetings are very successful as the teachers feel a little less intimidated to ask questions in a smaller group setting.

Communication is encouraged through the school's Title I initiative, which provides instructional sessions for parents including Make It-Take It workshops. Title I plans an activity a month to encourage and maintain effective communication between home and school. Title I has implemented an annual fourth and fifth grade SOL challenge night where parents come out and participate with their children in games that the teachers have developed to help the students succeed on the SOL's.

### *Observations*

Warmth emanated from the staff as soon as I entered the front security doors. The school nurse buzzed me in on my first visit and front office employees welcomed me on my subsequent visits. Excellent public relations were reinforced through the positive personalities of the front

office staff. These individuals were competent and professional, coupled with good-natured, cheerful dispositions.

The front office lobby was full of informational tools for parents and community members. Monthly calendars were posted in the lobby near a poster entitled, “What’s Going on at Our School?” There was a lunch menu posted and citizenship/character traits for January and February. A large banner was hung in the main hallway, consisting of the phrase, “In our school, no child is left behind.” Cultural diversity was celebrated throughout the school; reflecting the values of the community. A large portrait of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was on view in the main lobby. The front hall bulletin board boasted a salute to HBCU – Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Staff members with HBCU affiliations were listed on the bulletin board along with their colleges of choice. Many bulletin boards throughout the hallways displayed African American themes for Black History Month such as African American achievers, African American educators, leaders, scientists, writers, generals and admirals. The morning announcements on one of my visits introduced a trivia question reflecting Black History Month. The question was, “What was the oldest black women’s college in the United States? It was founded in 1881 in Atlanta, Georgia and boasts a famous alumnus – Alice Walker. Name the college.” Of course, the principal added that only responses answered in complete sentences would be accepted for the trivia question contest.

In addition to these examples of attention to cultural diversity, the February PTA meeting focused on African American History. Each grade level presented a song, dance, rap or story around this theme. This was followed by the most wonderful surprise the researcher could ever have imagined. The principal held her audience of staff, students, parents and community

members spellbound as she ended the meeting by belting out a Negro Spiritual. Communication was definitely utilized in unique yet effective ways!

Morning announcements were made by the principal each day. These announcements included introduction of visitors for the day, birthday recognitions, school announcements such as assembly times for the PTA meeting, Jump Rope for Heart money due date, and an announcement regarding the school book fair where the school mission was reinforced yet again; “When you can read, you can succeed.” The trivia question of the day was introduced and a student recited the pledge. Every child in the school gets the opportunity to lead the pledge on the morning announcements. Students and staff then paused for a moment of silence before beginning their school day.

Afternoon announcements were also made by the principal at the close of the school day. Guests were once again thanked for visiting Study School, the winners of the trivia question contest were read and announced, and walkers, van riders, car riders, and finally buses, were called.

The importance of establishing and maintaining effective interpersonal skills was observed in multiple situations. The Study School principal knew each child by name and greeted them each morning as they entered the schoolhouse doors. She knew parents and asked questions specific to individual family situations. It is obvious that the principal knows her students and their parents and has established, developed, and cultivated these relationships. The principal adheres to the MBWA theory: management by walking around. One of her staff members was quoted as saying, “I can be feeling bad on a bad day, but in the morning she (the principal) yells out ‘Good Morning’ and that makes my day.” The principal’s subsequent quote

supports this observation: “There is not a program, not a material, not a thing...but rather it is people who will turn a school around.”

### *Document Review*

School newsletters are a primary means of communicating with the home and the community. The newsletter posted in the school’s lobby contains important dates for the month and a principal’s message. For Valentines Day, the principal suggests gifts of books and/or journals. She also informs parents of the upcoming March 5<sup>th</sup> grade Writing SOL.

The school’s website is also a valuable, user-friendly communication tool. The website includes the principal’s introductory message, a link to year-round education, PTA officers and meeting dates, a school calendar, faculty and staff roster, school events link which contains monthly newsletters and photographs of school events, current lunch menu, tour of the school, local listeners link and a link containing school resources, including the school’s student handbook.

The school’s master schedule reflects multiple opportunities for communication including collaborative planning, and vertical and horizontal teaming between and among grade levels.

The school’s lobby is filled with informational items (calendars, newsletters, posters) that are designed to communicate information to parents as they enter the school facility. There is a large plaque that is engraved with “Virginia Fully Accredited School: 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007.”

## Curriculum and Instruction

### *One-to-One Principal Interviews*

The primary technique that Study School has employed to assist in ensuring that teachers are teaching the curriculum and students are learning the curriculum has been the administration of benchmark testing and the constant analysis of data this testing provides. Consistent pacing guides have also contributed to the school's academic successes. Study School elected to utilize a pass rate of 80% on benchmark tests, rather than the required state 75% pass rate. This is evidence of the high expectations that the school has for both students and staff members. Weekly assessment tests are administered and are similar in content and format to the benchmark and SOL tests. Study School operates on a year round schedule, which allows for four intercession periods (fall, winter, spring, and summer). These week-long intercessions allow for student remediation or acceleration, depending on preceding benchmark assessment results. The winter intercession (held the week of January 28, 2008) was comprised of 177 students out of a total enrollment of 223. In other words, 79% of the total student population enrolled in the winter intercession program at Study School.

After school tutorial sessions are also held on Tuesdays and Thursdays to assist struggling students. The school enjoys partnerships with Nestle, Taco Bell, the Natural History Museum, Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Local Listeners. All of these collaborative partnerships are focused on increasing the academic achievement of the students. These organizations will be addressed in further detail in the Family/Community Partnerships section.

Regular observations are completed as required by the division. The principal also does daily walk-throughs of classrooms, often participating in the instructional process. Lesson plans are submitted by the teachers each week to ensure concurrence with the district pacing guides.

The principal prides herself on the establishment of vertical and horizontal teaming. Vertical and horizontal planning is planning that occurs between and across grade levels. This type of teaming requires not only common teacher planning times, but also requires individual and group trust, respect, and commitment.

Faculty meetings are held regularly, as are community meetings. The faculty meeting held on February 11, 2008, consisted of the following agenda:

1. Instructional strategies for second semester
2. Celebrating African American History Month
3. Book Review – How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms
4. School Improvement Plan Review
5. Staff Development Opportunities
6. Announcements and Concerns

It is clear to see that the focus of this staff meeting centered, most appropriately, around curricular and instructional issues. Staff development has been an area of increased emphasis by the principal. The staff is currently reading Carol Ann Tomlinson's book, "How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms." Each grade level is taking a chapter of the book and presenting it to the rest of the staff. All staff members have received copies of the book. During the 2006-2007 school year, the book that the staff reviewed for professional development was Robert Marzano's "Classroom Management that Works."

#### *Focus Group Interviews*

As teachers, we are constantly checking the pacing guide and checking the curriculum. I know with my grade group, we review our test scores from each Friday to review what needs to be retaught. Sometimes we decide that we have to review based upon what



we've seen. But we are always checking that pacing guide and the questions so that we are not over-teaching something. If we know that students are strong in an area, we won't put all of our eggs in one basket so to speak...we will touch on those things that we have to just go back and look at. It can be one small thing, but maybe fifteen or twenty questions on that particular area, so we just need to make sure that we are covering everything. (FG1, 3)

We use both the state and the district pacing guides when planning for instruction. You have to overlap them because on the benchmark tests, the district will have something on there that is not supposed to be tested, yet you have to make sure that the students have mastered that skill. I personally feel that the state pacing guide is much better and easier to teach. When it comes down to it, the district is not going to be looking at which pacing guide you are using, they will be looking at your overall progress in meeting state standards. (FG2, 3)

We use URSULA., which is a district test bank that contains sample test items for SOL review. In addition, we use released test items and a computer program in our computer lab entitled, A-plus. A-plus is a computer program geared to our Virginia SOL's. (FG2, 3)

We use our pacing guides, blueprints and curriculum guides to plan our instruction. We also do a lot of content area integration to have students see logical connections. We try not to teach skills in isolation. We try to use a format similar to the SOL format when we administer our weekly Friday assessments. We also have our writing camp coming up in the next couple of days. This helps us to focus on reading and writing. We have an author, Kimberly Johnson, coming to work with our students. (FG2, 3)

The media specialist has accepted the arduous task of analyzing individual student achievement data each nine weeks. She utilizes an Excel program as well as color-coding to delineate who has been successful with each standard and who needs remediation and review. This information is then shared with all staff members who analyze the data to plan programmatic interventions for each student.

As media specialist, I credit the entire team for all the hard work and gains that we have made. The test data analysis that we do pinpoints areas of weakness where additional reinforcement is needed. We try to make sure that weekly testing and benchmark testing formats are similar to SOL formats. Scantron sheets are used to familiarize students with filling in bubble circles. The fact that every educator is talking about the assessments and the results contributes to everyone being on the same page. Weekly and benchmark testing occurs in all four content areas in grades 3-5. Reading and math are given in grades 1-2. (Informal interview, field notes)

### *Observations*

The researcher's first Study School observation was during the winter intercession in late January, 2008. Along with student remediation courses in both reading and math, an observation was made of the accelerated/enrichment class. This class, taught by the school's media specialist, was held in the school's computer lab. Students were working on an advanced curriculum, which included solving algebraic equations. There appears to be a great effort at this school to differentiate educational opportunities to best meet the individual needs of all students.

Upon return visits during the regular school term, the researcher observed every classroom in the Study School. My observations reflected an emphasis on learning to read, emphasis on writing, alphabetical order, counting and writing to 100 (coinciding with the 100<sup>th</sup>

day of school), and place value (tens and ones) in grades kindergarten and one. There were two student teachers teaching at the kindergarten level. Second and third grade students were reading to learn using audiotapes to introduce the basal story. I observed a second grade classroom during their music class and as they visited the school's greenhouse for a lesson. The music teacher taught a lesson on form – recognizing the chorus and the refrain of a song (AABA). Students were actively engaged and fully participating. Classical music was played as the students exited the music room en route to the school's greenhouse. The greenhouse, part of an Environmental Studies grant award, is run by members of the Virginia Cooperative Extension. Master gardeners come and teach students on a weekly basis. Flowers and tomato plants were growing inside the greenhouse. This second grade class learned about the parts of a plant (flowers, stems, leaves, roots), perfectly correlated with their SOL science objectives. Each student got to make a plant to take home for Valentines Day. The students each planted Star of Bethlehem plants to take home. They were very proud of their efforts and could not wait to show off their planting expertise.

Students in one particular fourth grade classroom were working with the school guidance counselor. They were playing Bully Bingo and were actively involved and participating in the ensuing discussions regarding bullying prevention.

Observations of grade five revealed the following posted instructional objectives: probability, plot, atoms and molecules. One fifth grade teacher presented a visual analogy of a sliding board to review the elements of a story (*conflict* was the bottom of the slide, *rising action and building tension* was the ladder of the slide, the *climax* was the ledge of the slide before one slides down, the slide itself was the *falling action*, followed by the *outcome or resolution* at the bottom of the slide.) Application of this skill was to occur the next day as students were going to

match up the story they were reading with the slide story elements. Students in this classroom also practiced their spelling words using snaps and claps for each word.

The special education classroom, with twelve students and two instructional aides, was a flurry of activity. Students had collected all kinds of food boxes, cans, etc. and were getting ready to read the labels of these items to determine their nutritional content. This classroom boasted of instruction that focused on basic life skills.

The bulletin boards and hallway displays presented curricular schoolwide themes, as well as displaying student work. The kindergarten-first grade hall was full of 100<sup>th</sup> day presentations, student writing samples, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. artwork, Dental Health Month posters, Heart Healthy displays and African American Achievers bulletin boards. The second-third grade hall was full of 100<sup>th</sup> day celebration hearts and projects and African American history boards. The fourth and fifth grade hall was full of Black History memorabilia, citizenship posters, and the school safety patrol schedule. Part of the school's Natural History Museum grant award was for two exhibits to be displayed in the school for the entire year. The first exhibit, the Nature Center, is a display in the hallway going down to the kindergarten and first grade wing. This is a beautiful display, made out of natural wood and full of models and photographs of a variety of animals. Beside this display are seven small study carrels with TV/VCR combinations. At each study carrel are videos on math, science, and history topics that students may view, with permission from the staff being the only requirement. These TV/VCR sets and the accompanying videos are part of the collection acquired through the Environmental Studies magnet grant award.

The second Natural History Museum grant award exhibit is in the main hallway by the front office. This exhibit is a huge exhibit entitled, Animals of the World. This exhibit consists

of a beautiful presentation of preserved animals in display cases, accompanied by maps locating the animals' original habitats and locations. There are stations so that visitors can stop and view one animal at a time.

An observation of the health and physical education department uncovered yet another grant recently secured by the school. The physical education teacher, in collaboration with the classroom teachers, district health and physical education director, principal, nurse, and Parks and Recreation designees, had written and secured a Governor's Childhood Obesity Grant for \$17,800. This grant was designed to be utilized toward health and wellness activities as well as nutritional awareness. Items that were literally being unloaded as I observed included treadmills, an elliptical machine, a rowing machine, foosball table, air hockey table, and a large boom box. The rear of the stage was being transformed into a mini-gym for the students. The teacher informed me that the boom box would also be available for the PTA to use as they had no sound system.

My observations of the Study School reflected an environment where learning opportunities abounded everywhere. There was literally nowhere that one could look in this particular school where there was not some kind of instruction (formal, informal, direct, or indirect) taking place.

#### *Document Review*

Review of the faculty meeting agenda for February 11, 2008, revealed that the majority of the discussion revolved around curricular and instructional issues. Instructional strategies for the second semester were discussed. Based upon benchmark testing results, grade levels (and Title I teachers) discussed what the next steps should be regarding enrichment, on level instruction, and remediation plans.

A discussion ensued concerning the celebration of African American History month at the daytime PTA meeting. The school was striving for 80% parent participation in this student-led event.

The School Improvement Plan was reviewed at the staff meeting. It was stated that this document was a working document and was continuous in nature, focusing collectively on the years 2006-2009. It was reinforced that the ultimate goal for school improvement was full accreditation. Two teachers currently co-chair the school's improvement team. There are two parent members also on the team.

The staff was reading Carole Tomlinson's book, "How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed Ability Classrooms" as part of their professional development. Each grade level was to report out on a specific assigned chapter. Kindergarten, grade one, and grade two presented their chapters at this particular staff meeting. The topics discussed included how/when groups are changed at Study School, the school's top rationales for differentiating student instruction, and the application of differing learning styles in the classroom. The staff determined that the top rationales for them, as a school, to differentiate instruction were, (1) student needs, culture, and gender, (2) learning styles, (3) behavior, and (4) test data. Although the presentations were detailed and well done, the strength of this staff development was revealed through the thoughtful discussion about how the school staff would apply the concepts they had learned through their readings. During a particularly poignant moment, one staff member wept as she described a student who had entered her class upset that very morning. The police had been to the family's house in the early hours of the morning to settle a domestic dispute. This teacher shared how important it was for them, as caring adults, to meet their students' physical, social, and emotional needs as well as instructing them academically. The principal then shared an

interesting piece of research that found that Hispanic mothers are culturally programmed not to correct their sons in public. The relevance of this finding to the increasing rate of Hispanic students in this school was noteworthy and a lively discussion ensued.

Staff development opportunities were next on the staff meeting agenda. One of these opportunities included a Title I workshop on acceleration of students in Roanoke, Virginia. An announcement was made regarding the school science fair to be held on April 11, 2008. Topics were suggested based upon grade level standards of learning. A reminder was given to staff that all students, K-5, should be writing every day. Students would be taking the direct writing prompt in grade five, practice prompt in grade four and multiple choice writing in grade five on March 3-5, 2008. A flyer was distributed reminding teachers of a student workshop on February 20, 2008, featuring a published author, Kimberly Johnson. Mrs. Johnson is the author of several books from the Itty Bitty series. She was scheduled to visit Study School to assist students with their upcoming March writing assessments.

To provide extra help with writing for students who needed it, two of my Title I teachers, my counselor, and I set up a "Writing Camp." For several weeks prior to the state writing tests, we each worked with small groups of fifth graders for 45 minutes a day, practicing writing and reviewing the rules of grammar. (P, 3)

### Collaboration and Shared Leadership

#### *One-to-One Principal Interviews*

An example of collaboration is the grade level classes working together in teams. Curriculum guides and pacing guides provided by the district guide these teams, but the development of strategies is where the teamwork takes place and unify the grade levels. The school also collaborates through the School Improvement process by working in small group

committees and then reviewing findings with the entire team prior to making decisions. Through its strengthened relationships in the community, the principal believes that collaboration has improved.

Collaboration has improved from where I started. It's something that has progressed and you balance the trust factor in. People giving up on their territory. Teachers are territorial, and they've always done this or that, so it is important for us to take that mindset and be open to new people and ideas. We must realize that they too bring new, innovative ideas to the plate. We support them through mentors. A mentor is assigned to each teacher when they arrive here. There is also collaboration at the district level where teachers can attend grade group meetings for networking and sharing. For principals, we have meetings on our elementary level to assist us in collaborating with one another. (P, 3)

In terms of the school improvement efforts, the principal reports that the school improvement team consists of representatives from various grade levels, resource, Title I and parent representatives. When the school participated in turnaround training, the principal selected a teacher and a school improvement co-chair to attend the training in Charlottesville. These participants then had to evaluate the training, communicating with both district level members of the school board and their own school community. According to the principal, the district support of the turnaround process continues to be invaluable.

### *Focus Group Interviews*

Collaboration was actually a part of our staff meeting today. We are actually doing professional development on differentiated instruction and each grade level is taking a chapter, reading it, and presenting it to their colleagues. We do a lot of that. With our



school improvement plan, we sit down periodically and look at it as a team, but we also have committee meetings. Our school improvement plan, although co-chaired by two staff members, is a collaborative effort on behalf of the whole faculty. Different people will step up to the plate when needed. The principal definitely considers everyone as part of the team. This was evident when she took two teachers with her to the turnaround leadership sessions. (FG1, 4)

We have a lot of collaboration at staff meetings. There's a time to share what's been learned at workshops. At each staff meeting there is a time where at the very end we can share anything we might need to share with one another. We may need to give warm fuzzies to one another, concerns...we share anything. (FG3, 4)

One of the focus groups indicated that, in terms of shared leadership, even the Student Government Association representatives have been given the opportunity to become the secretary or the principal for a day. This helps the students to understand the inner workings of the school. There is a democratic voting procedure in place so that students can officially elect their representatives each school year.

### *Observations*

Roles in this school appear to be distributed in terms of individual strengths. It was interesting to see the principal take the place of the PTA president, while two teachers co-chaired the school improvement team and one teacher served as PTA treasurer. The principal, in many cases, played a supportive, facilitative role on school teams and committees. It was evident that she "shared the responsibilities" regarding the day-to-day operation of the school. The school's participation in collective professional development, and the reflective presentations made by each grade level, contribute to the overall efforts that have helped this school team move

forward. It is evident that the staff has been empowered to make collective decisions that impact their school.

#### *Document Review*

The school's master schedule reflects that common planning time has been established to support collaborative grade level teaming and vertical planning. Grades four and five have planning from 10:00 – 10:40 a.m. each day. Grades two and three plan from 11:10 -11:50 a.m., while grade one plans from 1:10 – 1:50 p.m. Kindergarten planning time is from 1:50 – 2:40 p.m.

#### Family and Community Connections

##### *One-to-One Principal Interviews*

Title I programs assist the school with maintaining positive family connections. The principal shared an example of this Title I support that had occurred just the previous week. Snuggle Up with a Parent and a Good Book was an activity where the parents came to the school in their pajamas and read books with the students. The school provided hot chocolate and cookies for all participants.

Another way that the principal supports parental involvement is through her efforts at promoting the benefits of becoming a PTA member. When the principal began her tenure at Study School, there were only about 33 active PTA members. The next year, the number of official PTA members increased to 115. School PTA membership is now steadily increasing every year. The principal reported that, when parents began to become more actively involved in the educational process, they began to trust school personnel. Although some parents still aren't as active as the school would like for them to be, school employees continue to encourage them. A thermometer located in the gym continues to be a visual reminder of PTA membership growth.

According to the principal,

I try my best to know each parent as they come through the door. I go out and greet them, calling them by name. Then when you see them out in the community, you can call them by name and that helps them to know that you remember them. It tells parents that you remember them; you are a part of my family. And that's what you want. It just makes parents feel welcome when they are here and that you are not, you know, prejudging them. (P, 4)

### *Focus Group Interviews*

Family and community involvement are a big piece here. The Study School tries to accommodate all parents by having Title I and PTA meetings during the day, so that those parents that work the second shift can come in. The parent resource person comes in and works with parents one-on-one, often doing little activities with the students. Surveys are sent home at the beginning of the year, asking parents what types of classes or information that they would like to have offered. Whether it is parenting skills or test taking strategies, the parent resource person offers those classes in the school's resource room.

Title I programs are also designed around the results of the parent survey. The school tries to do at least one activity per month with parents and the community. The Study School has participated in Grandfather's Day, Veterans Day, Snuggle up with a Good Book, Reader's Theatre, poetry readings, and SOL challenge nights. The school found that when they offered grade level specific meetings, parents were more apt to come in. When schoolwide activities are offered, the school has found that not as many parents participate.

The school's goal is to get at least 80% of parents involved in at least four different activities each year. The school tracks the activities that parents participate in. This year,

Title I tracks parent participation each nine weeks. This participation includes parents signing off on homework assignments. It also includes participation in field trips, volunteering in classrooms, and coming to activities here at the school. Parents need to realize how important they are to their child's education. We've done workshops where we've actually taught parents how to teach reading to their children. We teach them how to help their children at home. We try to include at least one workshop per year to help parents with test taking skills. (FG1, 4)

The largest number of volunteers at the Study School come from the Rotary Club. These volunteers already have their schedules established when the school has their beginning of the year breakfast! These volunteers are diligent. When they say they will be at the school, they are there. Our volunteers have a wonderful work ethic. We also have a dynamite volunteer coordinator. She is very, very good at getting people to volunteer their time and resources. (FG2, 4)

The recreation center next door helps us so much. Today we had a climbing wall activity and we had tons of parents there to support and encourage their children in this event. (FG3, 4)

### *Observations*

Teachers and staff members have stated that their principal has been the key to the success of this school. She has been described as "vibrant, lively, and enthusiastic." My observations concur with these descriptions. The principal exhibits boundless energy that one cannot help but be attracted to. She is very much a people person as evidenced by her interactions with students, faculty members, and parents.

In addition to her "in-school" interpersonal skills, the principal interacts with the

community in a powerful way. Her coordinated school outreach program includes the implementation of the Local Listeners, a group of 25-plus community business leaders who come to mentor individual Study School students on a weekly basis. The Big Brother Big Sister program is also involved with individual students in a mentoring capacity. The school boasts of some impressive community partnerships including Nestle, Taco Bell and the Natural History Museum. Through its partnership with Nestle, all of the Study School students were able to take a trip to the Natural History Museum. Through Taco Bell's generosity, every student was also provided lunch on this trip. It was through the efforts of this excursion that the school received the Natural History Museum Grant for the year long in-school exhibits (Animals of the World and the Nature Center.) In addition, Nestle provides each student and school employee with beautiful blue tote bags with the school's name embroidered on them. This is beneficial when one realizes just how many students could not otherwise afford backpacks to take their belongings to and from school.

Nestle's efforts at promoting reading and writing assistance are also noteworthy. Nestle is the school benefactor for the Reading is Fundamental Grant. The entire fifth grade class is involved in a pen pal program with Nestle employees. Students are invited to visit Nestle twice a year to meet with their pen pals.

As one enters Study School one sees an aquarium wall and a large piece of artwork depicting a local river. The artwork consists of three panels that make one large piece or can be separated into three smaller pieces or paired to make a two piece painting. Hidden within the picture are seven animals native to this river area. Below the painting is a large cabinet made from native woods and it contains several aquariums housing animals and fish. In the tanks you will find a guinea pig, a gerbil, a hamster, box turtles, and land turtles. There is also an

amphibian tank containing red-eared turtles and three tanks containing a variety of fish including a channel catfish which is native to the local river. Students and visitors alike enjoy stopping and visiting with these creatures of nature.

The close proximity of the community's recreation center gives the school easy access to community resources. The community center is frequently utilized for instructional purposes, creating a wonderful partnership at little cost. The recreation center boasts of a rock climbing wall. Each nine weeks, a boy and a girl from each class are rewarded with an opportunity to rock climb.

Observation of the school's PTA meeting on February 12, 2008 gave me a true picture of the depth of the family and community connections at Study School. This meeting celebrated African-American History Month. Prior to the student performances, the principal led the business meeting as the PTA president was in the process of moving to Raleigh, North Carolina. Discussions centered on the PTA secretary, whose home had been destroyed in a fire. The school, despite its lack of financial resources, raised money to assist the secretary in her relocation efforts.

In addition to the principal facilitating the PTA meeting, one of the school's teachers serves as the organization's treasurer. The school's special education teacher sang the opening song, "Lift Every Voice and Sing." As indicated previously, following the students' wonderful presentations, the Principal closed the meeting with a moving Negro spiritual. The staff was an integral part of this parent-teacher organization.

The principal's quote during one of the earlier interviews summarizes the efforts that the school continually makes to ensure the collective partnerships of families and the community. "The sense of community is key to the success of a school."

### *Documents*

Many documents were reviewed that support the efforts that the school has made with regard to involving families and the community in the total operation of the school. The School Improvement Plan, PTA minutes and agendas, logs of parent involvement activities and attendance, and inclusion of parents on school teams and committees (two parents are active members of the School Improvement Team) are evidence of this initiative.

### Organizational Structure

#### *One-to-One Principal Interviews*

The principal at Study School would rather be referred to as an educational leader than a manager. She indicates that she is, and will always be, a teacher at heart. The principal is emphatic about the fact that titles do not make people. She is proud of the fact that “I stayed me no matter what my role. I am who am I.”

When I go into a classroom, I apply myself and I know the curriculum. I’m not removed from the classroom because I go back to take classes and keep up with current trends in education. I think that’s one of the keys; that you stay informed. If you’re evaluating something you don’t have a clue about, how can you be objective with helping others to achieve? (P, 4)

As the educational leader, the principal prides herself in selecting her team members. She stresses that it is not the ‘I’ but the “we” that helps the school to be successful. There is no “I” in team. This school team is working not just for the good of some students, but for the good of all students. It takes efforts to help others recognize that the school is not just there for the select few, but for all of its students.

If you were to ask any of my people, they would know I am about my children and that's the purpose of school and what we're here for...student achievement. Our being recertified and meeting state mandates and accreditation takes the whole building so we need everybody on the team working together. (P, 4)

*Focus Group Interviews*

The principal is an effective manager based on how she has cultivated her relationships. She has built relationships with teachers, students, parents and the community. This makes it easier for her to manage when she already has these strong connections. It's sort of like, "I'll do this for you and you help me with this." When the principal has a discipline problem, the child already knows her as a friend. It's not like, "this woman is speaking to me and I've never seen her before," so it's a strong relationship that she has built with the students. It's the same thing with the teachers. When she says, "I need you to do this," teachers respond that they will be glad to help. She manages well due to the development of strong relationships. She is very much a people person.

I am comfortable around her. She doesn't try to intimidate you or make you feel like you're less than she is, so to speak. If there's a problem, she will take you aside and it's your business, not the school's business. She doesn't try to throw her weight around and she's fair. I think she's fair because it's hard to manage a group of grown people, but it's easier when you respect each other. We have a lot of respect for her and she has a lot of respect for us so she listens to us. If you go to her with an idea or you have a change of heart on something and you talk to her, she will try to do whatever it is that is best for the whole group. (FG1, 5)



She keeps us pumped up and on target. She keeps dates and deadlines before us and encourages us to make sure that we meet those. She encourages teachers to make sure that they are following the pacing guides. We are well-informed as she brings information back to us from meetings and in-services (FG3, 4).

She has gotten a lot of materials and things that we need. She's a go-getter. Whatever we need, we just let her know and she'll provide it for us; she'll find a way to get it for us. (FG2, 4)

### *Observations*

Observations of the organizational structure at Study School reflect an administrator who clearly utilizes the “management by walking around” technique. Her presence at the entrance of the building each morning, greeting both students and parents by name, encourages a safe, secure, and healthy school environment. The principal's interactions with students and classroom instruction are evident as she moves through classrooms on a daily basis. She does not just observe these classrooms, but fully interacts when appropriate. In one particular lesson, she jumped in during a discussion of multiple meaning words and assisted with instruction of this lesson. She asked comprehension questions in another classroom and quizzed students on their multiplication facts in yet another classroom. On the first day of my arrival, she was telling a group of fifth grade students that I was from the Richmond area. She asked the students who knew someone important that lived in Richmond. When a student said that the governor lived in Richmond, she asked the governor's name. When the student correctly replied, Timothy Kaine, the principal gave the student a dollar to buy ice cream that day. Students know to be on their toes when their principal comes to visit.

On the final day of my visit, the principal was dressed to the nines for the African-

American History Month PTA assembly. Even though she was dressed in two-inch heels, she proceeded to lead morning warm-up exercises in the gym. She then led the students in their school song, “We will, we will, do our best,” sung to the tune of “We will, we will, rock you.”

### *Documents*

Documents including, but not limited to, parent newsletters, meeting agendas, school improvement plans, and teacher and student handbooks, all reflect an organized, well-functioning school. Instruction and learning appear to be at the core of every decision made regarding this school.

### Sub questions

*(1) Are there additional practices impacting student achievement that are evident in a turnaround principal’s repertoire that have not been identified in the research?*

The principal indicated that there are differences in the fact of being trained in the turnaround leadership process. This process looks at the business perspective – the Darden School of Business and the educational perspective – the Curry School of Education and meshes the two. Essentially, the turnaround principal is getting two unique perspectives.

In the educational arena, we are preparing students for life in the business arena. The turnaround training gives one an opportunity to get into the business sector to see what their expectations of their employees are and to mesh that with current educational expectations. Looking at both of these perspectives gives us a different view of what we need for our students to succeed in the world of work. The training also gives us, as turnaround principals, a wealth of knowledge from people who have been there and done that. The training that was provided was outstanding and was continual in nature: at the beginning of the school year, mid-year, and then again in the summer. There were plenty

of opportunities for follow-up. They brought in people from the aspect of the business world as well as the educational world. They provided materials in terms of current trends in education. There were incentives to the school division for students if they met certain requirements. (P, 4)

During one of my visits to the Study School, the principal's support mentor for the turnaround program visited the school on a routine visit. When questioned as to what he felt was the most important aspect of the turnaround principalship program, he also alluded to the comprehensive, collaborative, and sustained professional development opportunities (including decision-making, change leadership, communications, and team-building) for the principals. In his estimation, the success of the program relied heavily on the business perspective coupled with the educational perspective. It was, according to him, "combining the best of both worlds."

This support mentor was mentioned by the principal as being one of the positive perks that was not available to her during her "regular" principalship. Support mentors (often referred to as consultants) were scheduled to make six site visits per year to turnaround schools, observing classrooms and offering confidential guidance. They were also available for e-mail, phone calls, and web-conferences. Consultants shared their own experiences as school leaders with track records of turning around low-performing schools.

I didn't really have any hard difficulties because when I had concerns, I could always go back and talk it out. A turnaround mentor usually talked to me and gave me some strategy to try. In a regular principalship, I didn't have someone to go to that would help me branch out and extend my thinking. (P, 5)

*(2) What were the differences in the setting of direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration, family/community partnerships and organizational structure prior to and following the appointment of the turnaround principal?*

In an interview (Duke, 2005), the Study School principal espoused the following:

I was not surprised to discover that the community held Study School in low regard.

Overcoming the perception that the school was failing many of its children clearly loomed as a major challenge. But there were others as well. The culture at Study School did not place a high value on teamwork. Teachers largely worked on their own. The school was not considered to be well organized. Teachers often were unaware of how their students had done on the state tests. There were no specific goals for school improvement. The PTA consisted of a small group of parents. Trust was in short supply. Past hiring practices had resulted in several individuals being selected on the basis of expediency rather than qualifications. Teachers did not always use their planning time effectively, nor did they always maximize engaged learning time during class. (p. 1)

Under the previous administration, the focus groups felt that they had little input in the school's decision-making process. They felt that there was basically no leadership. There was a principal on paper and in the building but no one to communicate with regarding instructional issues. The teachers felt that they were talked "to" instead of being able to share their ideas.

There was no sense of family; of a team working together. It was more of a sense of every grade level doing their own thing and the test scores reflected that. There was a lot of finger pointing and placing the blame, rather than fixing the problem (FG1, 3).

Under the current administration, teachers were asked to work together to look at school weaknesses. It was no longer supposed that a grade didn't teach an objective, rather, it was how

could that grade level help to reteach it at the next level? A dedicated second grade teacher spent every one of her planning periods from January to spring SOL testing, going into third grade classes to reinforce second grade science concepts. Teachers are now willing to step in and do whatever it takes to help any student at any grade level. This started with the establishment of personal connections and relationships when the principal came on board. According to one focus group, just as students respond to positive interactions with their teachers, so then do teachers respond to positive interactions with their principals.

Our last principal was Mr. X, wasn't it?

Wasn't it Mrs. Y.?

No, it was Mr. X.

See? They come and they go. We have had a lot of turnover with both principals and teachers. I'm amazed that we've made as much progress as we have with the constant turnover. Our last principal was in and out, but he wasn't here a lot. He was involved in other activities that kept him away from the school. Our current principal has brought more stability to our staff. She keeps us abreast. Our last principal was hands-off. He physically wasn't here. This principal is in classrooms all the time, teaching away. She is an outgoing person and, whatever we say we need, she'll get it for us. She's our support. (FG2, 4)

Working together as a team and being there for each other has brought us to this point of success. But...this didn't come overnight. Dedication. Dedication. Dedication. We had to find out what needed to be taught and get in there and teach, reteach and assess. We also needed to bring along a good, positive attitude. We all get along together pretty well. (FG2, 5)

I don't know if our current principal sleeps or not. I don't know if it is the adrenaline. She's more energetic than the previous ones we've had. She's excited. She's excited seeing the children learn. She's the cheerleader. Anything to benefit the children; no holds barred. She says, "We're here for the children, we come second." It's that energy and love for the job. She loves her job and it shows. The faculty and students all know that we are always expected to do our best. She has set very high expectations for herself, her staff, and her students. (FG3, 4)

*(3) Are there any leadership dimensions that appear to be more prevalent than others to the academic success of the school?*

The principal attributes the success of the school in terms of increased academic achievement to the analyzing of test data and to consistently administered benchmark testing. Working as a team to know the students and to keep achievement in the forefront has been the school's focus. The school does not wait until the end of the nine weeks to notify parents of student progress. Weekly reports are sent home to students in addition to nine weeks report cards. Keeping everyone aware of student academic needs as well as physical and emotional growth; all of these needs impact education. This is what the principal believes contributes to the academic gains of the school.

The focus groups believed that everybody (teachers, parents, and the community) coming together and getting on one page was the key to the success of the school. Specific techniques such as benchmark testing and adherence to pacing guides were mentioned by all three focus groups as being instrumental in raising academic achievement levels. Intervention strategies were then put into place as a result of these benchmark assessments. Analyzing the data has

teachers monitoring and adjusting their instruction on a daily basis, according to individual student needs.

Our academic achievement gains come from getting serious about passing. We've had some people who retired who maybe weren't really teaching the SOL's nor had that investment of being here for the long haul. All of our new teachers really stick to teaching the SOL's and they ask for help when they need it. Our librarian inputs all of our benchmark data and categorizes it in terms of strengths and weaknesses. That way we, as classroom teachers, know what we have to do with our instruction. This concrete data tells us what we need to reteach – on an individual or a class level. I don't think we could have passed a thing had we not started to focus back on those SOL's. (FG2, 1)

Strong leadership was mentioned by one of the focus groups as a factor which has increased academic achievement at the Study School.

Mainly, I believe it is our turnaround principal. Her energy has inspired us. It has really turned us around. Of course, we give the teachers credit also. I credit myself, but she has been the guide for us. Her drive and energy and her focus on children is evident. Regardless of our likes or dislikes, she always says it is children first. We are here for the children, not just some, not just a few, but for each child. Everyone cheers everyone else on. We celebrate. We work hard. We celebrate again. We work hard. This energy and commitment keeps kids and teachers coming back. (FG3, 1)

With regard to the commitment of strong leadership within the school, the principal shared some of her ideas regarding her efforts in ensuring the success of all of her students and staff members.

One thing I want you to know about me is that I do truly believe in education. It

is every child's birthright to be educated. Be it formal or informal, educators should provide the best educational opportunities possible. Parents send us the best children they have and while we have them, we can't continue to make up excuses for why they are not successful. We have to tap into what impact we have during the time we have them and try to make it successful for all children. I am an advocate for education and I stand on the fact that it is the key to all there is in society. When someone is educated about whatever it may be, if they have the knowledge, they can rise above anything. No one can take that knowledge away no matter what the obstacle; poor or rich, Black or White; no one can take that knowledge away. (P, 6)

A valid concern arose among the focus groups regarding the sustainability of the school's success upon the principal's retirement at the close of the 2007-2008 school year. They hope to be able to take what they have learned and apply it whether she is at the helm or not. The quote made by the principal that, "the true test of leadership is sustainability" now assumes more significant meaning for the Study School.

The results presented above clearly indicate the presence of all six variables identified in the literature as impacting student achievement. These variables; setting direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration and shared leadership, family and community connections, and organizational structure appear to operate in an integrated and connected manner. In addition to these variables, the findings show that two additional variables should be added to the list of factors impacting student achievement based upon this study. These two variables are continued, relevant, and sustained professional development for the administrator, and focused and consistent administrative mentoring opportunities. A more detailed summary and a discussion of the findings are presented in the following chapter.



CHAPTER V  
DISCUSSION, FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, AND RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to determine whether the major instructional practices identified in the research as impacting student achievement (setting direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration and shared leadership, family and community connections, and organizational leadership) were evident in the practices of a turnaround principal. In addition, sub questions of the study included: (1) Are there additional practices impacting student achievement that are evident in the turnaround principal's repertoire that have not been identified in the research?, (2) What were the differences in the setting of direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration and shared leadership, family and community connections and organizational structure prior to and following the appointment of the turnaround principal?, and (3) Are there any leadership dimensions or functions that appear to be more prevalent than others to the academic success of the school?

This study involved the collection of data through principal interviews, focus group interviews, school and classroom observations and document reviews. The triangulation of these data supported the hypothesis that all six variables identified in the research (setting direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration and shared leadership, family and community connections and organizational structure) were evident in the practices of a turnaround principal and within a turnaround school.

A summary of each of the identified variables and sub questions and a discussion of the interpretation of the findings are included in this chapter. Conclusions of the study and recommendations for future research are shared.

### Discussion and Findings

It can be concluded from this study that the major instructional leadership practices identified in the research as impacting student achievement are evident in the practices of the turnaround principal. These variables include setting direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration and shared leadership, family and community connections and organizational structure. Two additional variables were identified as a result of this study: continued, relevant, and sustained professional development for administrators, and focused and consistent administrative mentoring opportunities. In addition, The Wallace Foundation published their latest pre-release report on October 23, 2007 entitled, *A Mission of the Heart: What Does it Take to Transform a School?* (Johnson, J. & Public Agenda Foundation, 2007). This report, based on interviews and focus groups with Principals and Superintendents from high-needs districts, provides additional support for this study's conclusions.

#### *Setting Direction*

**Finding #1** The turnaround school reflects a collectively developed vision and highly visible mission statement, which are reinforced in multiple ways. The Study School's mission statement is reinforced through song, chants, dances and poems. Research done by Leithwood et al. (2004) suggests that leaders who set a clear sense of direction have a significant impact on student achievement. This vision and the resulting mission statement assist the school in the development of school goals.

**Finding #2** An annual, comprehensive, data-driven needs assessment is conducted at the turnaround school. School goals must then be aligned with the results of this needs assessment. The Study School has developed a comprehensive school improvement plan, which delineates responsibility, accountability, and established timelines. This plan is reviewed on a regular basis to determine if established goals need to be revised, refined, or discarded. Blankstein (2004) refers to the fact that goals must be continuously monitored, amended or sometimes abandoned, as schools critically evaluate their effectiveness in raising student achievement.

**Finding #3** There is clear evidence of high expectations at the turnaround school. The fact that the Study School staff elected to utilize a pass rate of 80% on local benchmark tests, rather than the required 75% pass rate, reflects their belief that students can learn at high levels. Edmonds (1979) refers to the fact that high-achieving schools reflect clear and consistent communication of the leader's expectations of high performance from both students and staff. The Study School's practices clearly support this research.

**Finding #4** The turnaround school community reflects a feeling of "family" where mutual respect and rapport are evident. The Study School principal refers to the fact that "all four legs need to be working." By this, she means that the school, the community, the students, and the parents must all be working together for a school to be successful. The concept of "relational trust" (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), a concept which emerged from the literature review, includes respect, competence, personal regard for others, and integrity. All of these were evident in the practices of the Study School turnaround principal.

**Finding #5** The turnaround principal reflects a positive “can do” attitude. Study School teachers report that the principal’s energy has inspired them. Her drive and energy and her focus on children is evident.

The Wallace Report (Johnson & Public Agenda Foundation, 2007) suggests that there are two types of leaders in a school. Leaders are determined to reside in one of two categories: “transformers” or “copers.” The “transformers” have an explicit vision of what their school should reflect and they bring a “can do” attitude to their position. Transformers focus intently on creating a culture in which each child can learn. “Copers,” on the other hand, typically struggle to avoid being overwhelmed. Copers are often distracted from their missions. They basically just try to get through each day.

The Study School principal appears to be a “transformer” according to this new research. A high needs principal (also a transformer) reported:

It’s not just going in there and managing it all. It’s, “Where can we take it?”...

Vision for the kids. Vision for the staff. Vision for the school. (Johnson & Public Agenda Foundation, 2007, p. 2)

### *Communication*

**Finding #6** Regular two-way communication between the staff, families, and school community is present in the turnaround school. Communication channels at the Study School reflect a variety of methods including newsletters, weekly parent folders and reports, school website information, phone calls, e-mails, and an open door policy. Thomas (1994) refers to the need for the principal to organize communication channels to facilitate information flow. It is clear that the principal has established and maintained effective communication practices.

**Finding #7** The turnaround principal is visible and accessible. The most effective communication comes from the Study School principal herself, as she greets students, parents and staff members by name as they enter the school building each morning. The Study School principal's outstanding interpersonal skills and her ability to establish positive connections and relationships with her staff, her students, and her families and community, have provided a firm foundation for academic success. This is consistent with Leithwood et al.'s research (2004) that found that the emotional intelligence involved in giving personal attention to an employee increases the employee's enthusiasm, reduces frustration, communicates a sense of mission, and indirectly increases performance.

**Finding #8** Numerous formal and informal mechanisms to enhance communication within the school community have been established. Examples of this include common planning times established for teachers, vertical and horizontal staff teaming, a fully-functioning Parent Resource Center, numerous school volunteers, partners, and benefactors, an active Parent Teacher Association, and monthly parent workshops based upon needs identified by the parents as well as data generated from benchmark assessment results. Binkowski et al. (1995) also found in their research that higher-performing schools established numerous formal and informal mechanisms to enhance communication within the school community.

### *Curriculum and Instruction*

**Finding #9** The strategies of benchmark testing, data analysis, weekly assessments, pacing guides, blueprints, and curriculum guides are crucial to the academic success of the turnaround school. Edmonds (1979), Brookover and Lezotte (1977), established in their early research that frequent and careful monitoring of student academic progress was a major attribute of effective principals and their schools. The Pre-Release Report by the Wallace Foundation

(Johnson & Public Agenda Foundation, 2007) further supported these findings through their research which found that reviewing and analyzing data on student learning is now a key component of an administrator's job. To many of the aforementioned "transformers," reviewing data on student performance and drawing relevant insights is a way to set goals, analyze issues and allocate resources.

An administrator interviewed in the Wallace Report (Johnson & Public Agenda Foundation, 2007) states that:

Now, we're looking at the child. We're looking at data again. We're going back to that data and looking at what specific needs that child has and how we can focus on that child and address those specific needs. (p. 4)

The analysis of the data led the Study School to implement some sound tutorial and remediation programs designed to address the individual needs of students. A year round calendar provided opportunities for intercessions, which allowed for student remediation or acceleration, depending on preceding benchmark assessment results.

**Finding #10** There is an emphasis on relevant, sustained, and research-based professional development for all staff members at the turnaround school. Staff development has been an area of increased emphasis by the Study School principal. The staff was currently reading and reporting on Carole Tomlinson's book, "How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed Ability Classrooms." This book study correlated with the overall school improvement goal of differentiation of instruction. This professional development emphasis supported the findings of Burrello et al. (2005) who found that the effective principal is always focused on directing professional development resources to build staff capacity to move toward implementing key practices deemed essential to realizing the school's vision.

**Finding #11** Monitoring of the instructional process is a priority for the principal. The Study School principal implements daily classroom walk-throughs, often assisting in the instructional process. Her observations and interactions in classrooms on a daily basis ensure that effective teaching and learning are taking place. Instructional observations reflect an emphasis on instructional time-on-task. The principal's quote that one must "inspect what they expect" summarizes her philosophy of monitoring and high expectations. Larsen (1987) found that principals of high-achieving schools study teacher approaches, assist in the delivery of instruction, make regular visits to classrooms and follow-up with teachers in a timely manner. The Wallace Report (Johnson & Public Agenda Foundation, 2007) refers to that finding that "transformers" see instructional leadership as their top priority. Transformers devote the majority of their efforts to evaluating, coaching, and supporting teachers to do a first-rate job. This is exactly the scenario that I observed at the Study School.

#### *Collaboration and Shared Leadership*

**Finding #12** Leadership opportunities are provided for teachers, parents, and community members. Two Study School teachers serve as co-chairs of the School Improvement Team. Parents are members of the School Improvement Team. Two teachers attended Turnaround Training along with the principal. Teachers are active, dues-paying members of the school's Parent Teacher Association. Shared responsibilities are evident throughout the school organization. Even students play an active role in the life of the school. As the principal stated in one of her interviews, "You not only have to talk the talk, you have to walk the walk. There is no 'I' in team."

Committees are formed to address specific issues. Both vertical and horizontal teaming have been implemented, allowing for spiraling of the curriculum. According to Fullan and

Hargreaves (1998), the Study School falls into the collaborative domain, as teams of educators are fully committed to helping students learn by becoming active learners themselves.

When one analyzes the data generated by this study, it is evident that the staff has been empowered to make collective decisions that impact their school.

**Finding #13** The turnaround school implements a strong mentoring program for teachers. The Study School has worked hard with new teachers to acclimate them to the culture of the school. The school anticipates that this mentoring program will continue to decrease the school's teacher turnover rate.

**Finding #14** Business leaders and community representatives are encouraged to play a supportive and integral role in the life of the turnaround school. The Study School does not only "live" within the walls of the school itself, but reaches out into the community with business partnerships where community members actually work with the students. Assisting the students are Rotary Club and Kiwanis Club members, as well as bankers located in the city.

This spirit of collaboration and shared leadership supports the finding in the literature review by Louis (1990) that found that higher performing schools reflected a picture of co-management where coordination and joint planning were enhanced through the development of consensus among staff members at all levels about desired educational goals. This is further supported by the Wallace Report (Johnson & Public Agenda Foundation, 2007), which goes on to concur that winning over the staff and community and working with them to carry out a plan for change is the way to genuinely transform a school. It means having a planning process, using data, and building capacity with your staff; empowering them to get the work done.



*Family and Community Connections*

**Finding #15** Concerted and deliberate efforts to gain the confidence of parents and to improve the reputation of the school within the local community are made by the staff of the turnaround school. These efforts include the solicitation of active business partners and school benefactors who donate time, money, and resources to the school. Community involvement is critical in at-risk schools (Harris et al., 2006) as deliberate efforts must be made to gain (or regain) the confidence of parents and to improve the reputation of the school within the surrounding community.

**Finding #16** The principal supports and encourages parental involvement in the turnaround school. The Study School offers workshops and programs, tailored to parent and community needs. PTA meetings are held on a rotating basis (during the day one month and at night the next) to accommodate the needs of working parents. This finding supports Gaziel's (1995) study which found that principals of high-performing schools devoted 66 percent more time on the establishment of parent and community relationships than did the principals of average schools.

**Finding #17** Parent, business and community volunteers are encouraged to assist students in tutorial and mentoring programs. Communities and families should be perceived as assets that can be capitalized upon and integrated into a school that values their contributions. Constituents must be partners with the school; working for the success of all students (Powell, 2004).

**Finding #18** The school is a reflection of the community it serves. PTA programs, hallway displays, bulletin boards, and guest speakers in the Study School all reflect community-

related themes. As the Study School principal stated in an interview, “The sense of community is key to the success of a school.”

Chapter II of the literature review speaks to the types of parent and community involvement in schools (Figure 3). In this research, Epstein et al. (1997) suggest that the goal of the effective school leader is to get parents and community members involved at the highest level possible. The Study School has succeeded at involving their parents and the community at the highest level according to Figure 3 (p. 36): They have created partnerships with various stakeholders to integrate community resources into the school’s daily programs that support the school’s overall administration and management of resources.

### *Organizational Structure*

**Finding #19** The turnaround principal functions as the school’s educational leader. The Study School principal is knowledgeable with regard to curriculum and instruction. The Study School principal subscribes to the “Management by Walking Around” theory. The Wallace Report (Johnson & Public Agenda Foundation, 2007) refers to the “transformers” as focusing squarely on working directly with teachers on academic problems and being committed to “walking the halls” to stay in touch with what is going on in the classrooms. “Transformers” have the same amount of time in the day as “copers”, but they schedule time to get actively involved in classroom instruction. Transformers are not closed door administrators.

**Finding #20** The turnaround principal is all about the students. The decisions that are made at the school level should be based upon the needs of the students and not the adults. According to the Study School principal, “If you were to ask any of my people, they would know I am about my children and that’s the purpose of school and what we’re here for...student achievement.” The principal must convey, by every action, that the first priority of the school is

the success of every student. This should also be the goal of every teacher (United States Department of Education, 1999).

**Finding #21** The turnaround school reflects a sense of both order and discipline. The disciplinary standards in place suggest that this is a school where teachers teach and students learn. The school schedule and routine reflect organized and structured procedures.

Based upon ISLLC's (1996) definition of an educational leader as being one who "promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient and effective learning environment," the Study School principal is the epitome of an educational leader. Her energy, enthusiasm, spirit and dedication are a true inspiration.

*Sub question #1: Are there additional practices impacting student achievement that are evident in a turnaround principal's repertoire that have not been identified in the research?*

**Finding #22** Continued, relevant, and sustained professional development for the administrator is an important factor in the advancement of student achievement.

Professional development opportunities provided to the turnaround principals synthesize two unique perspectives; the business perspective and the educational perspective. The Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education's professional development program focuses on a systemic view of change, management teams, leveraging stakeholder relationships, providing a safe learning environment and ongoing consultation. The idea is that this training must ultimately encompass the entire school, the school system, and the community.

Turnaround principals read Jim Collins book, *Good to Great*, and learned to "confront the brutal facts while never losing faith." Professional development sessions are carefully planned and

ongoing. There is time for networking built into the schedule. Administrators share successes and challenges with one another to encourage new ideas and techniques.

The Wallace Report (Johnson & Public Agenda Foundation, 2007) finds that there is little training for principals once they are certified and on the job. Senior principals that have been on the job 20-plus years have not received training in many of the areas that are now deemed to be essential such as data analysis and curriculum mapping. The Wallace Report suggests that every principal should be groomed for a high-needs school. There is nothing in terms of the skill set needed for a high-needs school that would not also benefit a low-needs school.

**Finding #23** Focused and consistent administrative mentoring opportunities are available to support the principal.

In addition to the relevant professional development opportunities provided to turnaround principals, the Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education program supports turnaround principals in applying their new learning through the establishment of consultants. These consultants, most of whom have had previous experiences turning around low-performing schools, schedule six site visits per year, observe classrooms and offer confidential guidance. The consultants are available via e-mail, phone and Web conferences. This mentoring/guidance/support was a variable deemed critical by the Study School's principal.

The Wallace Report (Johnson & Public Agenda Foundation, 2007) found that school leaders focused on the importance of having mentors as well as the need to be able to network and consult with others in similar circumstances. The report also found that providing the kinds of support necessary to allow a school leader to be successful is often more important than financial incentives. Principals unanimously agreed that the most important element needed to attract and keep top-notch people in leadership positions in high-need schools is providing the

support they need to do their jobs. These recent findings concur with the study's findings which identify administrative professional development and administrative support/guidance/mentoring as two additional variables which positively impact student achievement. Figure 7 shows a revised conceptual framework, which incorporates these two newly identified variables.

**Revised Conceptual Framework**

Instructional Leadership

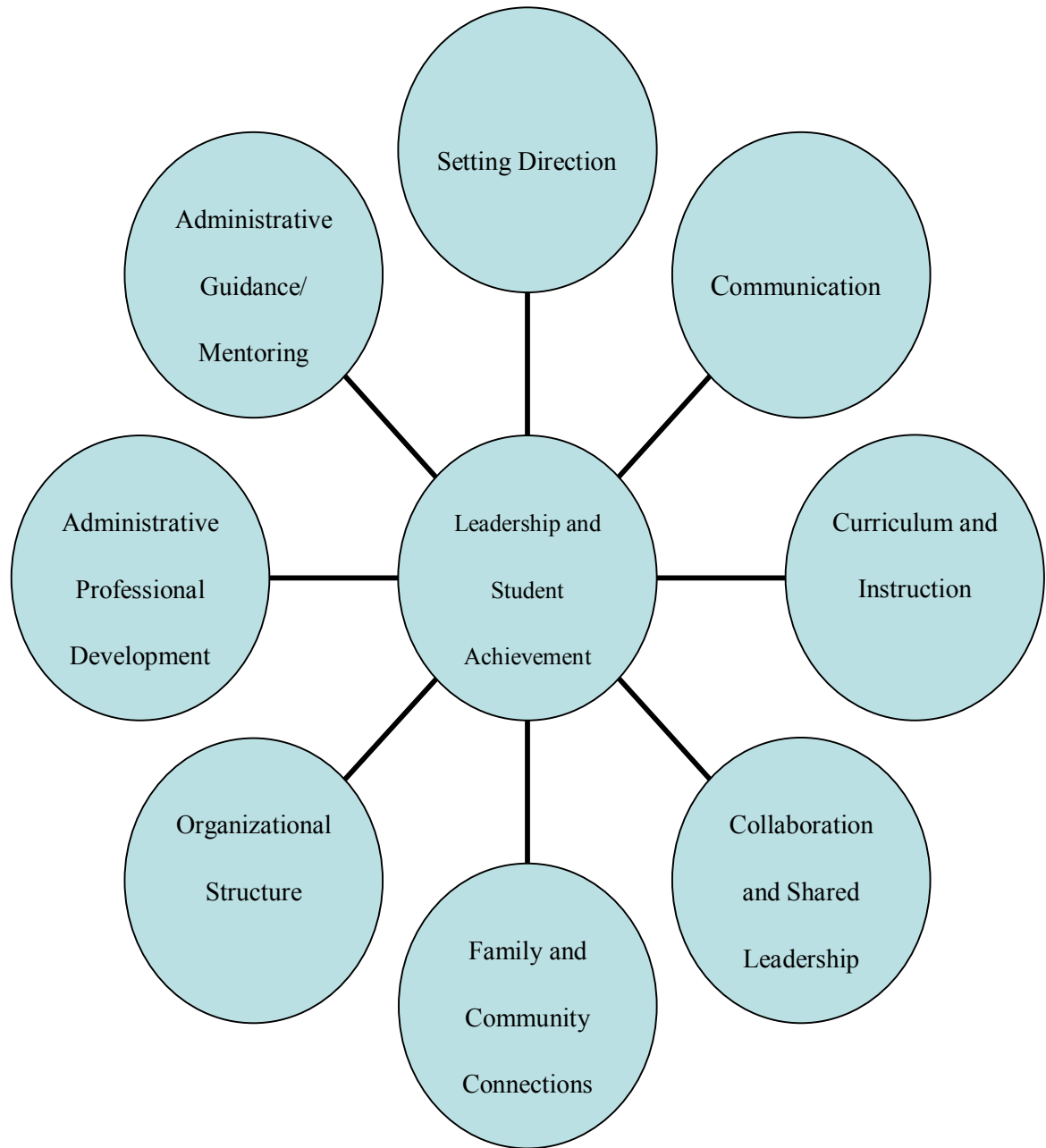


Figure 7. *Revised Conceptual Framework Originally Based Upon Hallinger et al. (1983)*

*Sub question #2: What were the differences in the setting of direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration, family/community partnerships, and organizational structure prior to and following the appointment of the turnaround principal?*

The primary difference appeared to be that, under the former administration, there was not much collaboration or unification among the staff, students, and the community. Pointing of fingers and the blame game were techniques utilized when responding to low academic achievement. Teachers felt that they were talked “to” rather than being encouraged to share their ideas and suggestions. There was not a sense of family; of a team working together.

Under the current administration, collaboration and unity are alive and well. Teachers are encouraged to share ideas, opinions, and strategies for the benefit of the school. There is now a sense of family and of a genuine team effort. The entire school has responded positively to the current principal’s high expectations and to the challenge of Believing, Achieving, and Succeeding.

*Sub question #3: Are there any leadership dimensions that appear to be more prevalent than others to the academic success of the school?*

Although all of the areas (setting direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration and shared leadership, family and community connections, organizational structure, administrative professional development, and administrative mentoring/support) appear to be critical to the life of a school, the data extracted from the study’s research indicates that the curriculum and instruction dimension appears to be the most critical in terms of increased academic achievement (principal and two focus groups). This includes the strategies of benchmark testing, data analysis, weekly assessments, pacing guides, blueprints, and curriculum guides as being crucial to the academic success of the school.

Another important dimension is in the area of working together collaboratively as a team (principal and one focus group). The idea of everyone getting together and being on the same page was attributed to the school's success.

Communication of results (principal) and strength of leadership (focus group) were also important areas of strength for the school. It is very difficult to isolate these variables, however, as they are interconnected and often fall into more than one category.

### Implications for Practice

Based upon the findings of this study, the following practical implications are suggested:

#### *Setting Direction*

- The principal of a turnaround school should implement procedures to collectively develop a school's vision and mission. The vision should include a shared understanding of what the school should look like and what needs to be done to accomplish the vision (the mission). Subsequent decisions should then be made based upon the vision and mission.
- The turnaround principal should conduct an annual needs assessment. Short and long term goals should be collectively established based upon the results of this needs assessment. In order to be motivated to achieve school goals, the entire school community should be included in the goal identification process. The formation of committees to study the data generated by the needs assessment is beneficial.
- The principal of a turnaround school should model high expectations for both students and staff members. A constant push toward improvement on the part of



the principal, along with meaningful support for improvement initiatives, will assist in the development and maintenance of these high expectations.

- The turnaround principal should make genuine efforts to establish connections and form relationships with teachers and other school employees. The development of relational trust is important to leadership success.
- The principal of a turnaround school should reflect a positive, can-do attitude. It is important that a culture be established where the belief that all children can learn is prevalent. Principals should aim to become “transformers” who focus intently on creating a culture in which each child can learn and where giving up is never an option.

### *Communication*

- Two-way communication channels, which are helpful in maintaining open communication, should be utilized by the turnaround principal. Communication channels might include newsletters, weekly folders, an active and current school website, phone calls, e-mails, and/or an open door policy.
- The turnaround principal should be visible and accessible. The most effective communication often comes directly from the principal, as s/he greets students, parents, and staff members by name as they enter the school building each morning. One cannot run a school from behind a closed door.
- Formal and informal communication mechanisms should be established by the turnaround principal and should include the provision of common planning times for teachers. Vertical and horizontal teaming has proven to be successful in enabling and encouraging teachers to work together in school teams.

### *Curriculum and Instruction*

- The turnaround principal should monitor instruction on a frequent and ongoing basis. This monitoring should include benchmark testing, intensive data analysis, adherence to approved pacing guides and curriculum alignment. Tutorial sessions and/or year-round school intercessions should be implemented based upon the analysis of this data.
- In order to keep abreast of current educational research-based practices, the turnaround principal should emphasize the direction of professional resources to build staff capacity. In this particular Study School, differentiation of instruction was selected as the school's instructional focus. No matter what the focal area, professional development opportunities should align with the school's overall vision and goals.
- The turnaround principal should monitor the instructional process daily. Time should be scheduled each day to do walk-throughs, thorough observations, and evaluations of the teaching and learning process.

### *Collaboration and Shared Leadership*

- The principal of a turnaround school should share leadership responsibilities with the emphasis on becoming effective and contributing team members. Plenty of opportunities should be provided for teachers, parents, and community members to assume roles of leadership.
- The turnaround principal should implement strong teacher mentor programs that indoctrinate teachers new to the building and/or new to the profession. Mentors

should be well-trained, adhere to a structured mentoring program, and be able to establish positive relationships with their protégés.

- Strong business and community relationships should be encouraged by the turnaround principal. Community ties contribute to a multi-agency approach toward education. Reaching out to city councils, local businesses, and community social organizations is recommended.

#### *Family and Community Connections*

- The turnaround principal should welcome and invite business partners to participate in the instructional program of the school. Solicitation of active business partners and school benefactors often result in donations of time, money, and resources for the school.
- The turnaround principal should make deliberate efforts to involve parents in the lives of both their children and their school. Parent workshops, based upon needs identified by parents as well as school data, are important in developing, maintaining, and extending home school partnerships. Surveys and/or questionnaires are effective ways to get input from parents regarding workshop ideas and suggestions.
- The principal of a turnaround school should utilize business and community partnerships when implementing school tutorial programs. This practice will assist in bringing the community into the instructional life of the school. Reaching out to the community for assistance is not only a cost-effective measure, but also assists in positive public relations for the school.

- The turnaround principal should consider flexible rotation of parent meetings to accommodate the needs of shift working parents. As schools generally reflect the communities they serve, efforts should be made to bring the spirit of the community back into the school.

### *Organizational Structure*

- The turnaround principal, as a “transformer” should focus squarely on working directly with teachers to stay in touch with what is going on in classrooms and in the school. The “Management by Walking Around” theory is an effective technique for principals to consider. What is expected should be inspected.
- The turnaround principal should make the students the priority of the school. Decisions made at the school level should be based upon the needs of the students and not the adults. A good reflective rule of thumb is that if a school situation would not be considered acceptable for the principal’s own child(ren), it is not acceptable for any child.
- The principal of a turnaround school should clearly communicate and consistently administer a school’s discipline plan. High expectations and consistently administered behavioral standards contribute to structure, order, and discipline within the school. Clear and consistent processes and routines should be in place for such things as morning and afternoon arrival, lunch periods, recess, hallway behavior, and school and classroom rules.

### *Administrative Professional Development*

- The turnaround principal should communicate his or her professional needs to the district office for consideration. Research has suggested that relevant on-the-job training once principals have been assigned to a school is beneficial. This particular study recognizes the effectiveness of merging the business and the educational perspective throughout the training process.

### *Administrative Guidance/Mentoring*

- The principal in a turnaround school should seek mentors to assist in supporting school improvement efforts. The most important element needed to attract and retain top-notch people in leadership in high-needs schools has been identified as the availability of a support system for the leader. This study emphasized the success of consultants who visited the Study School on a consistent basis. These consultants had previous experience running at-risk schools.

### Recommendations for Future Research

1. This study addressed an elementary school only. Research on the middle school and high school levels is recommended. Extending research outside of Virginia would also increase the body of knowledge available on the turnaround principalship.
2. A comparative study between a successful turnaround principal/school and an unsuccessful turnaround principal/school would be beneficial in determining the differences in administrative leadership practices.
3. A follow-up study to determine how the Study School is progressing following the retirement of the present principal would test the current principal's theory that the key to leadership is sustainability.

4. Replication of this study utilizing quantitative methods would identify which variables, if any, assumed more importance than others and would determine statistical significance.
5. Further study on the specific professional development activities that the turnaround principalship preparation program provides is recommended. This professional development might then become the catalyst for change in principal preparation programs.
6. Further study on effective mentoring programs for practicing principals is recommended.

#### Concluding Statements

This study identified the specific administrative practices (setting direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration and shared leadership, family and community connections, organizational structure, administrative professional development, administrative guidance/mentoring) that supported increased academic achievement in a successful turnaround school. The practices utilized by the turnaround principal can be used by any administrator in any school to improve academic achievement. As referenced in the Wallace Report (Johnson & Public Agenda Foundation, 1997), leadership in high-needs schools presents special challenges, but the skills it demands benefit administrators everywhere. “I think everybody should be groomed for a high-needs school. There is nothing in terms of the skills needed for a high-needs school that wouldn’t also benefit a low-needs school.” (p. 6)

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## Appendix A

### One-to-One Principal's Interview Protocol

#### Study: Leadership Practices of the Turnaround Principal

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

#### Study Description:

I am interested in why your school is now successful and, in particular, what you, as a turnaround principal, do to ensure success. In my study, I want to answer this primary question: "What are the specific practices that turnaround principals utilize in their efforts to close the achievement gap at their appointed at-risk schools?" Sub questions include: "Is there a difference between the practices you use in your role as a turnaround principal and those you utilized as a "regular" principal?" I will be asking a series of questions to help me understand the reasons for your success as a turnaround principal.

I will be tape recording our interview in order to have an accurate transcription. You will be given a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy.

1. Your school has experienced tremendous gains in academic achievement during the past few years. To what do you attribute this success?
  
2. How long have you been principal of this school? What are your total years in the principalship?
  
3. What is your **vision** for the school?
  
4. How would you describe your school **culture**?
  
5. Do you have a **mission** statement and where is it displayed? How were your school goals developed?
  
6. What methods/techniques do you use to **communicate** with your many school publics?

7. What do you do to ensure teachers are teaching and **curriculum** and students are learning?
8. Describe **collaboration and shared leadership** in your school.
9. In what ways do you create **family and community involvement**?
10. In what ways do you see yourself as an **effective manager**?
11. In what ways is your role in a turnaround principalship different from the role you played in a “regular” principalship?
12. What has been the most difficult aspect in your role as a turnaround principal?
13. What else do you need for me to know about ways you make students and educators successful in your school?

Thank you for your participation in this study. You may rest assured that these responses will remain entirely confidential.

## Appendix B

### Professional Educator Focus Group Interview Protocol Study: Leadership Practices of the Turnaround Principal

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

Study Description:

I am interested in why your school is successful and, in particular, the behaviors and practices implemented to ensure academic success. In my study, I seek the answer to this primary question: “What are the specific behaviors and practices that turnaround principals utilize in their efforts to close the achievement gap at their appointed at-risk schools? I will be asking a series of questions to help me understand the reasons for your school’s record of academic success.

I will be tape recording our interview in order to have an accurate transcription.

1. Your school has experienced tremendous gains in academic achievement during the past few years. To what do you attribute this success?
  
2. Describe the **vision** of your school. How was this **vision** established?
  
3. Describe your school’s mission. What is the significance of this mission?
  
4. Describe the written and oral **communication** techniques utilized in your school.
  
5. How do you know that you are teaching the **curriculum** and that your students are learning?
  
6. Describe **collaboration and shared leadership** in your school.
  
7. How does your school create and encourage **family and community involvement**?
  
8. How is the principal an **effective manager**?



9. What similarities and/or differences have you personally experienced between your current turnaround principal and the previous school administrator?

10. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Thank you for your participation in this study. You may rest assured that these responses will remain entirely confidential.

## Appendix C

## Observation Guide

## Study: Leadership Practices of the Turnaround Principal

Time of Observation:

Date:

Place:

Domains	Observations
Setting Direction	Vision, Mission, Goals, Culture, Expectations
Communication	Listening, Interpersonal Skills, Mechanisms
Curriculum/ Instruction	Impact, Observations, Monitoring, Data Collection, Professional Development
Collaboration/Shared Leadership	Factors, Types of Collaboration, Staff Empowerment, P.L.C.'s
Family/Community Involvement	Time, Characteristics, Diversity, Involvement Types, Multi-Agency Approach
Organizational Structure	Safety, Discipline/Behavior, Budget, Organizational Management

Observation Guide – Page 2

Time of Observation:

Date:

Place:

Additional Observations and Comments:

## Appendix D

## Observation Checklist

## Study: Leadership Practices of the Turnaround Principal

Place	Date(s)	Comments
School Grounds		
Building		
Hallways		
Office		
Reg. Ed. Classes		
Spec. Ed. Classes		
Cafeteria		
Art		
Music		
Library		
PE		
Teacher Lounge		
Workroom		
Staff Meeting		
PTA Meeting		
Other		
Other		
Other		
Other		

## Appendix E

## Document Review Guide

## Study: Leadership Practices of the Turnaround Principal

Document(s) Reviewed:

Date:

Domains	Observations
Setting Direction	Vision, Mission, Goals, Culture, Expectations
Communication	Listening, Interpersonal Skills, Mechanisms
Curriculum/ Instruction	Impact, Observations, Monitoring, Data Collection, Professional Development
Collaboration/Shared Leadership	Factors, Types of Collaboration, Staff Empowerment, P.L.C.'s
Family/Community Involvement	Time, Characteristics, Diversity, Involvement Types, Multi-Agency Approach
Organizational Structure	Safety, Discipline/Behavior, Budget, Organizational Management

Document Review Guide – Page 2

Document(s) Reviewed:

Date:

Additional Comments:



## Appendix G

# VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

## Informed Consent for Participants

### in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: A Case Study of: Leadership Practices of the Turnaround Principal

Investigators: Yvonne B. Fawcett and Dr. Travis Twiford

#### I. Purpose of this Research/Project

The context of turnaround schools is a relatively new area of research and, as such, contains little by way of additive data on the subject. The purpose of this research study is to determine whether the major instructional leadership practices identified in the research as impacting student achievement (setting direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration and shared leadership, family and community connections, and organizational structure) are evident in the practices of the turnaround principal. By identifying the strength of the relationships between specific principal practices and student achievement, educational leaders and politicians will gain a more accurate understanding of the leadership practices necessary to improve student performance.

Results of the study might also prove useful in the redesign of principal preparation programs.

#### II. Procedures

You will be interviewed for approximately 60-90 minutes about your experiences regarding your school's administrative practices. The interview will be recorded and field notes will be taken during the interview. The interview will take place at your school. Interview protocols are attached.

Following the interview, the researcher will have the interview transcribed by a professional transcriptionist, Melissa Williams. You will then be invited to read and review the transcript and make comments and/or adjustments. You may read the transcript in the presence of the researcher.

#### III. Risks

There are minimal risks associated with this study. Each interview will be transcribed as soon as possible after the conclusion of the interview. The only individuals who will have access to the transcripts of the interviews with the participants will be myself and my advisor. Pseudonyms will be used to identify each participant in all written evidence of the interviews. Direct quotes from participants may be recorded and used in the study.



Participants may decline to answer any and all questions during the interview process. In addition, participants may select to end the interview at any time.

#### **IV. Benefits**

By identifying the strength of the relationships between specific principal practices and student achievement, educational leaders and politicians will gain a more accurate understanding of the leadership practices necessary to improve student performance.

Results of the study might also prove useful in the redesign of principal preparation programs.

No promises or guarantees of benefits have been made to encourage you to participate.

You may contact the researcher at a later time for a summary of the research results.

#### **V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Every effort will be made to maintain your anonymity in any written work resulting from this study. Pseudonyms will be utilized to identify you in any printed materials. The researcher will also make every attempt to minimize the possibility of identifying other people whose names you may mention. No mention of the actual name of the school will be referenced in the study.

Audio cassettes and digital recordings of the interviews will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's home. The researcher is the only individual who will have access to the recordings. Copies of the transcripts may be viewed by the researcher or other members of her dissertation committee.

It is possible that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view this study's collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in the research.

All data will be destroyed after the dissertation defense, publication of any articles resulting from the study, or presentations made related to the study.

#### **IV. Compensation**

There will be no compensation given to you for participating in this study.

#### **VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

You are free to stop participation in this study at any time. You may elect not to answer questions at any time.

### VIII. Subject's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I will have the following responsibilities:

- I agree to answer questions honestly. Initial \_\_\_\_\_
- I agree to allow the researcher to record the interview on tape. Initial \_\_\_\_\_
- I agree to allow the researcher to see my students' records and work samples. Initial \_\_\_\_\_

### IX. Subject's Permission

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Subject Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact:

Yvonne B. Fawcett  
 Investigator

804-730-0641/yfawcett@vt.edu  
 Telephone/E-mail address

Dr. Travis Twiford  
 Faculty Advisor

757-363-3930/ttwiford@vt.edu  
 Telephone/E-mail address

Dr. M. David Alexander  
 Department Head

540-231-9723/mdavid@vt.edu  
 Telephone/E-mail address

David M. Moore  
 Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review  
 Board for the Protection of Human Subjects  
 Office of Research Compliance  
 2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)  
 Blacksburg, VA 24060

540-231-4991/moored@vt.edu  
 Telephone/E-mail address

**[NOTE: Subjects must be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of the signed Informed Consent.]**

## Appendix H

# VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

## **Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects**

### **Focus Group Interview**

Title of Project: A Case Study of: Leadership Practices of the Turnaround Principal

Investigators: Yvonne B. Fawcett and Dr. Travis Twiford

#### **I. Purpose of this Research/Project**

The context of turnaround schools is a relatively new area of research and, as such, contains little by way of additive data on the subject. The purpose of this research study is to determine whether the major instructional leadership practices identified in the research as impacting student achievement (setting direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration and shared leadership, family and community connections, and organizational structure) are evident in the practices of the turnaround principal. By identifying the strength of the relationships between specific principal practices and student achievement, educational leaders and politicians will gain a more accurate understanding of the leadership practices necessary to improve student performance.

Results of the study might also prove useful in the redesign of principal preparation programs.

#### **II. Procedures**

You will be interviewed for approximately 60-90 minutes about your experiences regarding your school's administrative practices. The interview will be recorded and field notes will be taken during the interview. You will only be asked to sit for one interview. The interview will take place at your school. Interview protocols are attached.

Following the interview, the researcher will have the interview transcribed by a professional transcriptionist, Melissa Williams.

#### **III. Risks**

There are minimal risks associated with this study. Each interview will be transcribed as soon as possible after the conclusion of the interview. The only individuals who will have access to the transcripts of the interviews with the participants will be myself and my advisor. Pseudonyms will be used to identify each participant in all written evidence of the interviews. Direct quotes from participants may be recorded and used in the study.

Participants may decline to answer any and all questions during the interview process. In addition, participants may select to end the interview at any time.

#### **IV. Benefits**

By identifying the strength of the relationships between specific principal practices and student achievement, educational leaders and politicians will gain a more accurate understanding of the leadership practices necessary to improve student performance.

Results of the study might also prove useful in the redesign of principal preparation programs.

No promises or guarantees of benefits have been made to encourage you to participate.

You may contact the researcher at a later time for a summary of the research results.

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\_\_\_\_\_  
**Subject Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

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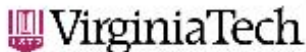
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 Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review  
 Board for the Protection of Human Subjects  
 Office of Research Compliance  
 2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)  
 Blacksburg, VA 24060

540-231-4991/moored@vt.edu  
 Telephone/E-mail address

**[NOTE: Subjects must be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of the signed Informed Consent.]**

## Appendix I



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 Institutional Review Board  
 2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)  
 Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
 540/231-4991 Fax 540/231-0959  
 e-mail moored@vt.edu  
 www.irb.vt.edu

PWAG00005721 expires 1/20/2010  
 IRB # is IRB00000667

DATE: November 6, 2007

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Travis W. Twiford  
 Yvonne Fawcett

Approval date: 11/6/2007  
 Continuing Review Due Date: 10/22/2008  
 Expiration Date: 11/5/2008

FROM: David M. Moore 

SUBJECT: **IRB Expedited Approval:** "A Case Study: Leadership Practices of the Turnaround Principal", IRB # 07-505

This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the study for a period of 12 months, effective November 6, 2007.

As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:

1. Report promptly proposed changes in previously approved human subject research activities to the IRB, including changes to your study forms, procedures and investigators, regardless of how minor. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.
2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.
3. Report promptly to the IRB of the study's closing (i.e., data collecting and data analysis complete at Virginia Tech). If the study is to continue past the expiration date (listed above), investigators must submit a request for continuing review prior to the continuing review due date (listed above). It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain re-approval from the IRB before the study's expiration date.
4. If re-approval is not obtained (unless the study has been reported to the IRB as closed) prior to the expiration date, all activities involving human subjects and data analysis must cease immediately, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

**Important:**

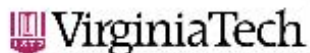
If you are conducting **federally funded non-exempt research**, this approval letter must state that the IRB has compared the OSP grant application and IRB application and found the documents to be consistent. Otherwise, this approval letter is invalid for OSP to release funds. Visit our website at <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/newstudy.htm#OSP> for further information.

cc: File

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VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE UNIVERSITY AND STATE UNIVERSITY

*An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution*



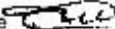
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 540/231-4991 Fax 540/231-0959  
 e-mail moored@vt.edu  
 www.irb.vt.edu  
 FWAG0000572 (exp res 1/20/2010)  
 IRB # is IRB00000867

DATE: February 4, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: Travis W. Twiford  
 Yvonne Fawcett

Approval date: 11/6/2007  
 Continuing Review Due Date: 10/22/2008  
 Expiration Date: 11/5/2008

FROM: David M. Moore 

SUBJECT: **IRB Amendment 1 Approval:** "A Case Study: Leadership Practices of the Turnaround Principal", IRB # 07-505

This memo is regarding the above referenced protocol which was previously granted approval by the IRB on November 6, 2007. You subsequently requested permission to amend your IRB application. Since the requested amendment is nonsubstantive in nature, I, as Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, have granted approval for requested protocol amendment, effective as of February 4, 2008. The anniversary date will remain the same as the original approval date.

As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:

1. Report promptly proposed changes in previously approved human subject research activities to the IRB, including changes to your study forms, procedures and investigators, regardless of how minor. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.
2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.
3. Report promptly to the IRB of the study's closing (i.e., data collecting and data analysis complete at Virginia Tech). If the study is to continue past the expiration date (listed above), investigators must submit a request for continuing review prior to the continuing review due date (listed above). It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain re-approval from the IRB before the study's expiration date.
4. If re-approval is not obtained (unless the study has been reported to the IRB as closed) prior to the expiration date, all activities involving human subjects and data analysis must cease immediately, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

cc: File

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