

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE PRINCIPAL'S COMMUNICATION  
IN THE COMER SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT MODEL

By

Virginia T. Crawford-Patterson

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Virginia Polytechnic Institute  
and State University in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

In

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Dr. William J. Glenn, Chair

Dr. Theodore B. Creighton

Dr. Billy K. Cannaday Jr.

Dr. John F. Eller

November 4, 2008

Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: School, Principals' Practices, Effective School Leadership, Reform Models,  
Communication, Comer School Development model

# An Investigation of the Principal's Communication in the Comer School Development Model

By

Virginia Crawford-Patterson

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

(ABSTRACT)

The principal's role has evolved over the past two decades with the accountability demands that are forcing changes in school practices. In the age of school reform, the principal of the twenty-first century must provide the structure; resources and support that schools need to succeed. Research indicated that successful school leadership makes important contributions to the improvement of student learning (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). One common trait identified that principals consistently demonstrate when exercising leadership is highly developed communication skills (Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2006). Some principals are finding it increasingly difficult to meet the needs of all students, reduce the achievement gap, find viable strategies for reaching adequate yearly progress, and have chosen to address these critical concerns by implementing school reform models.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the characteristics of the principal's communication in the operation of the Comer School Development model. The Comer School Development model's emphasis on certain conditions improved the characteristics of the principal's communication with all stakeholders. This information can be beneficial to principals in any school as well as a Comer School Development model to improve school effectiveness. Data collection included: (a) descriptive data, (b) one principal interview, (c) focus group (n=6) (d) seven observations, (e) and the results discussed in themes.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Sanders and Hattie Crawford Jr. who showed me perseverance and to my husband Jerry and daughter, Kayla whom I love very much. Thank you for being my biggest cheerleaders.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge and give thanks to God who is the source of my strength. In addition, I respectfully acknowledge my advisor, Dr. Glenn. Your guidance and insightful comments, as well as criticisms have been invaluable to me as a professor and advisor. Thank you for your patience and time. Thank you, Dr. Creighton for your support and advice during OTR. You have contributed to the fruition of my dissertation. Thank you, Dr. Eller for your enthusiasm and encouragement. A special thanks to Dr. Cannaday. You often shared the importance of keeping balance during this experience. Your leadership has taught me how to keep the main thing the main thing and stay the course. I am truly grateful.

Thank you Jerry for the many sacrifices you made during the last four years. Your support and love helped to make this a reality.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DEDICATION.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>CHAPTER I OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Effective Principals.....	1
Comer Model .....	3
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM .....	4
SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY .....	5
RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	5
OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS.....	6
LIMITATIONS.....	7
DELIMITATIONS .....	7
OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION .....	7
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK .....	8
<b>CHAPTER II REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....</b>	<b>10</b>
ESTABLISHING VISION AND GOALS.....	10
COMMUNICATION .....	14
<i>Parental Involvement and Community Partnerships.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Comer Model .....</i>	<i>22</i>
<b>CHAPTER III OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>27</b>
RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	27
ASSUMPTION AND RATIONALE FOR A QUALITATIVE DESIGN.....	27
<i>Type of Design .....</i>	<i>27</i>
SETTING AND PARTICIPANT SELECTION PROCEDURES .....	28
<i>Selection Process .....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Setting .....</i>	<i>29</i>

PARTICIPANTS SELECTION .....	29
INFORMED CONSENT AND PERMISSION PROCEDURES .....	30
<i>Assurance of Confidentiality</i> .....	31
DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES .....	31
<i>Interview</i> .....	31
<i>Focus Group</i> .....	32
<i>Observations and Field Notes</i> .....	33
<i>Document Review</i> .....	34
DATA QUALITY PROCEDURES .....	35
<i>Validity</i> .....	35
<i>Internal Validity</i> .....	36
<i>External Validity</i> .....	36
DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES .....	37
<i>Data Management</i> .....	37
SUMMARY .....	38
<b>PROLOGUE TO CHAPTER IV .....</b>	<b>39</b>
PARTICIPANTS.....	39
Principal Background.....	39
Teacher A.....	39
Teacher B .....	39
Teacher C .....	39
Teacher D.....	39
Teacher E .....	39
Parent .....	39
BES Academy.....	40
<b>CHAPTER IV FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<i>Common Themes</i> .....	46
<i>Vision</i> .....	46
<i>Annual Operating Plan for School Improvement 2007-2010 School: BES Academy</i> .....	51
<i>School Improvement</i> .....	57

<i>High Expectations</i> .....	60
<i>Teaching and Learning</i> .....	64
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP .....	66
<i>BES Academy Title I Parent Involvement Policy</i> .....	69
SUMMARY .....	71
<b>CHAPTER V SUMMARY, FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE</b>	
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FUTURE STUDIES .....</b>	<b>73</b>
SUMMARY .....	73
FINDINGS .....	74
<b>Finding 1:</b> The principal’s communication of the vision influences the School Planning Management team (SPMT)’s discussions about student’s academic and behavioral success positively.....	74
<b>Finding 2:</b> The principal communicates the vision clearly and frequently to all stakeholders.....	74
<b>Finding 3:</b> The principal’s communication practices influences the school improvement work. ....	74
<b>Finding 4:</b> The principal utilizes an infrastructure for data management and interpretation for decision-making.....	75
<b>Finding 5:</b> The principal communicates high expectations for all parents, students, and equally high demands for staff who serve them. ....	75
<b>Finding 6:</b> The principal creates opportunities for continuous learning for adults tied to student learning and school goals. ....	76
<b>Finding 7:</b> The principal provides for two-way communication with staff, parents, and the community. ....	76
<b>Finding 8:</b> The principal develops a collaborative culture through communication. ....	77
<b>Finding 9:</b> The principal interprets communiqués with diverse population accurately when communicating.....	77
<b>Finding 10:</b> The principal used various mechanisms to influence parental and community involvement in student’s academics. ....	78
<b>Finding 11:</b> The principal sought opportunities to communicate with various community organizations.....	78

What are the practices and behaviors that the principal uses to communicate with the school community? .....	78
<b>Finding 12:</b> The principal uses celebration to communicate the vision and priorities of the school. ....	78
<b>Finding 13:</b> The principal communicates that staff operates under the guiding principle, consensus building. ....	79
<b>Finding 14:</b> The principal communicates the staff operates under the no fault guiding principle in the Comer model. ....	80
<b>Finding 15:</b> The principal communicates the staff operates under the guiding principle, collaboration in the Comer School Development model. ....	80
<b>Finding 16:</b> The principal expressed clear and concise language in communiqués. ....	80
<b>Finding 17:</b> The principal monitors instruction through frequent classroom walkthroughs and creates a focus on student learning. ....	81
<b>Finding 18:</b> The principal maintains school publications that inform internal and external groups about the school. ....	81
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE .....	81
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH .....	84
CONCLUDING STATEMENTS .....	84
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>APPENDIX A INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANTS .....</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>APPENDIX B DISTRICT CONTACT LETTER.....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>APPENDIX C INTERVIEW GUIDE .....</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>APPENDIX D FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW .....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>APPENDIX E OBSERVATION GUIDE.....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>APPENDIX F DOCUMENT REVIEW CHECKLIST .....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>APPENDIX G FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW CHECKLIST .....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>APPENDIX H RAW DATA MATRIX: PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW .....</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>APPENDIX I RAW DATA MATRIX: FOCUS GROUP .....</b>	<b>106</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

1	Correlation Matrix- ADI Dimension of Communications.....	8
2	Chain of Evidence Matrix.....	33
3	BES Academy 2007-2008 Suspension Data.....	40
4	BES Academy’s School Proficiency on Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) Tests.....	41
5	Proficiency Percentages of Subgroups SOL Passing 2006-2007 .....	42
6	Proficiency Percentages of Subgroups Passing 2007-2008 .....	43
7	Common Themes by Questions.....	47

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Conceptual framework based on Creighton (1996).....	9
Figure 2. Focus group participants.....	30
Figure 3. Comer school development model sign. ....	44
Figure 4. Annual operating school improvement plan for 2007-2008. ....	55
Figure 5. Title I parent involvement policy. ....	71

## CHAPTER I OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

### *Effective Principals*

There has been growing research on the impact of school leadership, school effectiveness, and school improvement. In a changing society, producing and sustaining an effective school is an enormous challenge.

Ferrandino and Tirrozi (2004) detailed the many expectations of school leaders in the era of school reform:

Yesterday's principal was often a desk-bound, disciplinarian building manager who was more concerned with the buses running on time than academic outcomes. Today's principal must concern herself with not only discipline, school safety, and building management, but also must act as an instructional leader who knows how to use research and testing data to improve teaching methods, student achievement, and classroom management. Today's principal is a visionary leader who spends significant time working with faculty and interacting with students and rarely sees her desk. Today's principal coordinates staff development and community engagement. Today's principal wears far too many hats (p.31).

Researchers agreed that although the leadership of schools is a complex phenomenon, the outcomes of successful school leadership are readily identifiable (MacNeill, Cavanagh, & Silcox, 2003). The role that principals demonstrate in improving the condition and student achievement in their schools is of specific importance. Schmoker, Dufour, Reeves, and Fullan's research identified a recurring theme that principals play a significant role in the school improvement process (Robertson, 2007). Some scholars identified that effective principals establish a clear focus on student learning, help shape the school's culture on effective instructional programs within the school improvement process, and communicate the vision for learning and high expectations for the students and staff (Cotton, 2003; Davis, 1998; Harris, 2007). Effective leader research studies indicated that school change is impossible without strong leaders collaborating and communicating the guiding beliefs and goals for their schools (Bennis & Nanus, 2003, Davis, 1998; Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, & Manning, 2001; Harris, 2007; McEwan, 2003). Anderson (2006) concurred that communication can help shape the culture of the school

and the communication structures define the culture of the school through the interpretation of goals, values, standards, and beliefs.

Fullan (2003) pointed out that the development and communication of a vision relative to goals and change processes can benefit the whole child. Similar to Comer (1988), he argued that one should address the cognitive and social needs of children not served well in the past (Fullan, 2003). Although there are challenges leaders have with shaping the school culture teachers, students and others share, the principals are guardians of the values, beliefs, and expectations, which define their school culture. Therefore, one of the most critical requirements of the principal in the school is to convey timely and thoughtful communication to students, teachers, support staff, parents, and community.

Communication has appeared consistently in discussions of effective school leadership. Bennis and Nanus (2003) emphasized that leadership is all about communicating and effective principals regularly utilize communication skills in soliciting beliefs and ideas, advocating positions, and persuading others. Also, researchers pointed out that highly effective principals communicate a genuine interest in others and demonstrate their human side with the capacity to listen, empathize, interact, and connect with students, teachers, and parents (McEwan, 2003; Sorenson, 2005). McEwan (2003) described three indicators of principals' behavior that show that they communicate the vision and the mission of the school. Principals provide for systematic two-way communication with staff regarding the achievement standards and the improvement goals of the school; establish supports, and implements activities that communicate the value and meaning of learning to students; develop and uses communication channels with parents to set forth school objectives. Since all of the indicators are important in the school's culture, an effective leader who creates a collaborative environment with open communication may see academic and behavioral benefits for students in a successful school improvement reform.

Furthermore, the school leader must have knowledge and understanding of effective communication strategies. Although, oral communication is frequently considered to be the most personal, immediate, and influential form of relating information (Young & Castetter, 2004), other means of communication can be extremely valuable. For example, Sorenson (2005) stated the school leader should document formally a corrective action for an employee if warranted, and he should disclose this information to the individual personally. On the other hand,

communicating in the hallway to understand an important issue can assist in cultivating goodwill, boosting morale, and gathering accurate information (Sorenson, 2005).

Webb and Norton (2003) shared that effective communication is essential in developing trust, mutual respect, and clarity of function. Other researchers agreed that effective principals continually communicate their high expectations to students and staff (Andrews & Soder, 1987; McEwan, 2003; Manassee, 1985). Thus, communication emerged as a theme from the studies regarding the leader's role in providing focus on the vision and shaping the culture.

### *Comer Model*

Regarding the issue of school reform, principals have critical concerns with meeting the academic needs of all students, reducing the achievement gap, and finding viable strategies for reaching adequate yearly progress. Several researchers have responded to the increase of concerns by developing and testing comprehensive elementary school programs designed to meet the needs of all students and specifically educationally disadvantaged students. Slavin's Success for All, Levin's Accelerated Schools, and Comer's School Development program are three comprehensive models.

This study focused on the Comer School Development model. Comer stressed teachers and students should focus on a few academic courses and spend longer periods doing so. His program emphasizes psychological, social, and intellectual development of students. In addition, Comer discussed the importance of the development of a school planning and management team (Comer, 1984, 1988). He contended that a wide range of student skills using his design that seeks to improve social climate in a school as a prelude to enhancing its academic focus, hence, student achievement can be enhanced (Comer, 1988).

Comer discussed the importance of developing a school improvement plan that focuses on academic and social goals and specifies processes and structures needed to monitor and modify these goals. Based on the factors mentioned below, communication is important within the structure of the Comer process. For example, "the Comer model provides a structure as well as a process for mobilizing adults to support students' learning and overall development" (Comer, 2001, p. 18).

Three structures comprise the basic framework from the Comer operating system (Comer, 2001):

The School Planning and Management Team develop a comprehensive school plan; sets academic, social, and community relations goals; and coordinates all school activities, including staff developments. Critical dialogue around teaching and learning is established and the team monitors the progress of the school plan to identify adjustments as well as opportunities to support the plan. Members of the team include school administrators, teachers, other staff, and parents.

The Student and Staff Support Team promote desirable social conditions and relationships. It connects all of the school's student services, facilitates the sharing of information and advice, addresses student needs, accesses resources outside the school, and develops prevention programs. Serving on this team are the principal and staff members with expertise in child development and mental health, such as counselor, social worker, psychologist or nurse.

The Parent Team involves parents in the school by developing activities through which parents can support the school's social and academic programs. Composed of parents, this team also selects representatives to serve on the School Planning Management Team.

The Comer Model Team operates under three guiding principles: All adults in the building should adopt a problem-solving rather than a fault-finding orientation; the adults should reach decisions by consensus rather than vote or principal fiat; and adult groups should cooperate with each other and should always place student needs above their own (Comer, 2001). Certain practices are associated with the Comer model and effective principals, one of which is communication. Therefore, it is critical that practitioners understand within the Comer model whether the characteristics of the principal's communication influences the operation of the Comer School Development model.

#### Statement of the Problem

While other reforms focus on either curriculum enrichment or cognitive practices that enhance learning, the Comer model emphasizes improved school climate and academics. When considering the current wave of school reform models, and the emphasis on improving student achievement, many principals are exploring ways to become effective and influential in the school to ensure all students achieve academically.

The issues addressed in this study are important for several reasons. First, there has not been research conducted about the characteristics of the principal's communication in the operation of the Comer model school. Secondly, Comer's research team conducted their studies in urban communities (Cook, Murphy, & Hunt, 2000). However, the researcher conducted the study in a suburban community. In addition, the Comer program was heavily psychological and developmental at its core, and academic matters were secondary. Thus, the gap in the research indicated that Comer attempted to address achievement by improving the conditions at the school, as opposed to other reforms that focus directly on achievement.

### Significance of Study

Previous research has evidenced the importance of the principal's communication as critical to effective leadership. Although the literature confirmed that the Comer process is effective in promoting healthy social and academic development, Comer's own research staff (Cook, Murphy, & Hunt, 2000) conducted all of the research about the program's effectiveness in urban schools. In addition, it did not focus on the principal's communication in operating the model effectively. Therefore, this qualitative case study was a step toward understanding whether the principal's communication influences the operation of the Comer School Development model in a suburban Title I school. Principals in a Comer School Development model, as well as other school reforms will gain knowledge from the research to evaluate their own communication skills. By identifying the perceptions and strengths of the principal's communication in the Comer operation, principals will develop an understanding of specific characteristics of communication warranted to improve all students' performance.

### Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of the school community regarding the characteristics of the principal's communication in the operation of the Comer School Development model?
2. What are the perceptions of the school community regarding the characteristics of the principal's communication, interactions, and relationships in regards to parent community outreach and involvement?
3. What are the practices and behaviors that the principal uses to communicate with the school community?

## Operational Definitions

*Academic Achievement* – The relative success of students in learning and mastering the school subjects that they study, as measured by Virginia Standards of Learning tests of the knowledge and skills that were taught (Ravitch, 2007).

*Accelerated School* – A school reform designed by Henry Levin in which all students in a school are given the enriched and challenging instruction ordinarily given to gifted and talented students (Ravitch, 2007).

*Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)* – An individual state’s measure of yearly progress toward achieving state academic standards, as described in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation (Ravitch, 2007).

*Comer Program* – A reform model school program designed by James Comer that promotes collaboration among parents, educators, and the local community to improve the social, emotional, and academic outcomes for children (Ravitch, 2007).

*Communication* – Exchange of thoughts, messages, or information, as by speech, signals, writing, and behavior (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2007).

*Culture of the School* – The climate of a school, as defined by its traditions, celebrations, tone, values, ideals, expectations, sense of community, and usual ways of doing things (Ravitch, 2007).

*Effective Schools* – Schools in Virginia that meet or exceed the benchmarks of the 2003 Standards of Learning tests and schools that meet or exceed the accreditation pass rate in language arts, mathematics, science and social science (Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools In Virginia, 2000).

*Leadership* – Those persons occupying various roles in the school, who work with others to provide direction and who exert influence on persons and things in order to achieve the school’s goals (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

*School Community* – All staff, students, teachers and parents that have a stake in what happens within the school. (Academic Development Institute, 2008)

*Title I Schools* – Schools that use Title I funding with other Federal, state and local funds to improve the academic achievement of low-income students (Ravitch, 2007).

*Triangulation* – Multiple methods and data sources used to enhance the validity of research findings (Yin, 2003).

## Limitations

In the scope of inquiry, it was not the intention that the in depth responses and information be representative of the perceptions of other elementary principal's communication in a Comer School Development model. The researcher reviewed the reflexivity concept as critical to ensure the study's integrity. Reflexivity is the researcher's ability to keep track of one's influence on a setting" (Hatch, 2002, p.10). Thus, information requested of individuals was limited based on what they shared because some knew that I am a principal in the same school division.

## Delimitations

The researcher narrowed the scope of the study because it focused on an analysis of grades 3, 4, and 5 reading, math, and science data as measured by the Virginia Standards of Learning Test to demonstrate the success of the school. The location for this study was a suburban Title I school in Virginia. Although other principal's practices can contribute to school improvement, this study focused on the principal's communication in the operation of the Comer School Development model factors. Furthermore, the literature review was limited to behavior practices of principals that lead to effective schools. Finally, the researcher examined the characteristics of the principal's communication based on the operation of the Comer School Development model at this site. These were the limitations and delimitations for this study.

## Overview of the Dissertation

The researcher organized this study into five chapters. Chapter I contains the overview of the study, information about the Comer School Development model, the statement of the problem, significance of the study, research questions, definitions, limitations and delimitations of the study, and an overview of the dissertation. Chapter II contains a review of the literature in the area of the Comer School Development model and the effective practice of the principal's communication as it relates to academic success and parental and community partnership. Chapter III contains research methodology. Topics include an overview of the methods, research design, the setting, and participant selection process, data collection procedures, data quality and data analysis procedures and a summary of methodology. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study and Chapter V provides a discussion of the findings as well as the implications for practice and recommendations for further study.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework developed for this research study (see Figure 1) was adapted from the eight communication descriptors (see Table 1) illustrated by Creighton (1996). The data revealed all coefficients were above the .18 level required for significance (Creighton, 1996). The descriptor: Exhibits sensitivity toward diverse populations in communications displayed low correlations with the majority of other descriptors.

Table 1

*Correlation Matrix- ADI Dimension of Communications*

V008	1.00								
V021	.53	1.00							
V034	.54	.57	1.00						
V047	.51	.68	.65	1.00					
V060	.35	.55	.39	.45	1.00				
V073	.57	.61	.53	.68	.58	1.00			
V086	.62	.57	.65	.57	.58	.62	1.00		
V099	.32	.37	.33	.30	.50	.42	.49	1.00	

Note. Illustrates the correlation of the eight communication descriptors: (V008)conveys opinions succinctly and appropriately when communicating,(V021)expresses clear and concise language in communiqués, (V034)checks for understanding when communicating, (V047)uses appropriate communication modes, (V060)uses language appropriate to situation, (V073)interprets communiqués accurately, (V086)seeks first to understand when communicating,(V099) exhibits sensitivity towards diverse populations in communications.

Through the lens of the eight domains from the communication dimension descriptors, the researcher reviewed most of the observational data.

## Conceptual Framework

### Communication Dimension Descriptors

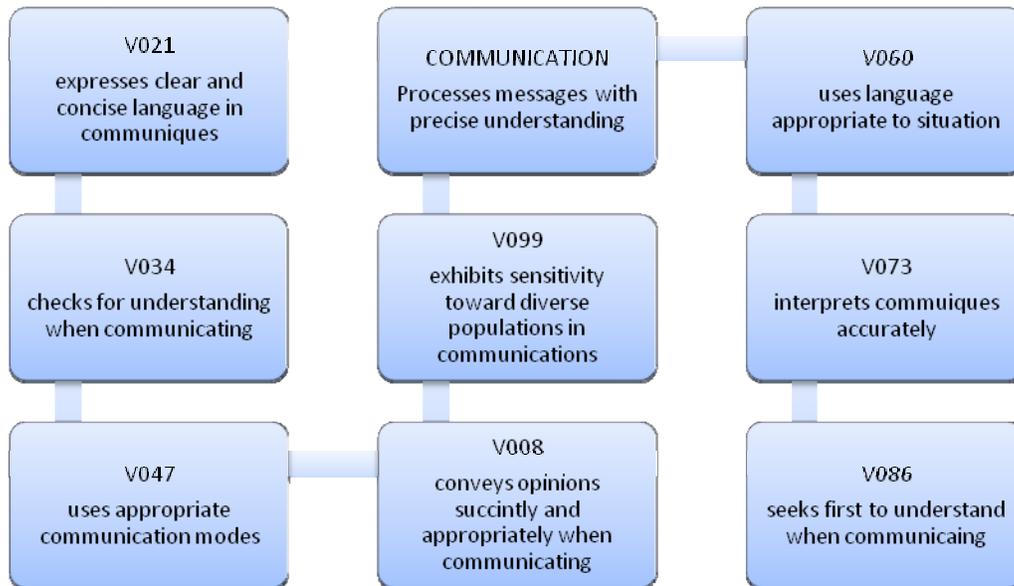


Figure 1. Conceptual framework based on Creighton (1996).

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of the literature included conceptual research in the area of the principal's effective practices including communication as it relates to vision and goals, communication, parental involvement and community partnerships and the Comer School Development model. Study selection criteria consisted of successful /effective principals, leadership practices that lead to effective schools and reform programs that analyze the evolving role of the principal. First search was the main search engine to access research journals and peer reviewed articles. The Virginia Tech library database was used to access doctoral dissertations about principal's practices and characteristics. Additional sources included texts on school leadership, the principal's role, and data analysis.

Successful key words/phrases used for the search were school, elementary principals' practices, effective school leadership, reform models, communication, and Comer School Development model. The selected literature in Chapter II is representative of the documents that allowed the researcher to gather the documentation to build a rationale for the researcher's study and the methodology.

#### Establishing Vision and Goals

Student learning has been at the center of school reform for the past decade, and the enactment of No Child Left Behind has elevated that concern to unprecedented heights (Smith & Piele, 2006). The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP, 2001) believed that we cannot have first-rate schools without first-rate school leadership (NAESP, 2004). Research on school outcomes (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Marks & Printy, 2003; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003) has shown that the leadership of principals influences their school improvement work. More importantly, such leadership practices benefit the organization as a whole by fostering shared purposes and goals, school structure and networks, and collaborative organizational culture (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). As evidenced in the literature, effective school change must begin with a vision of what school staff wants the school to become.

Scholars agreed that effective leadership practices demonstrated by principals are visible entities in all phases of schooling and provide active support to teachers. Researchers stated that the principal's leadership in effective schools create a visible presence when he or she models

behaviors consistent with the school's vision, live and breathe their beliefs in education, and organize their resources to accomplish building and district goals (Andrews, Basom, and Basom, 1991).

Recent research on school leadership has clearly identified vision and goal setting as major factors in principals' effectiveness (Cawelti, 1984; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Waters, et al., 2003). The principal's leadership is a balance of management and vision. For example, principals have the autonomy to make decisions based on their school's needs and can hold people accountable for results. Cawelti (1984) emphasized that effective principals have a sense of vision as to the kind of school learning environment they intend to create. "Principals articulate goals, directions, and priorities to citizens, faculty, and students in their school" (p.3).

Schwahn and Spady (1998) also recognized the importance of vision to focus change but suggested:

Leadership and productive change begin with the creation of a compelling organizational purpose. Today, nearly all school systems have the key elements of such a purpose: a set of beliefs, core organizational values, a mission statement, and a set of student learning goals. Nevertheless, a compelling purpose alone will not result in productive change--- change that makes a positive difference in student learning and how schools operate. (p.45)

Research has emerged about principals who led the operation of cultures in high performing, high poverty schools (Cawelti, 1999; Council of Chief School Officers, 2002, Fullan, 2003). The research identified seven common characteristics for assessing the leadership in the schools. First, the principal is a strong educational leader. Second, there is a focus on clear standards and improving results. Third, teamwork helps to ensure accountability. Fourth, teachers are deeply committed to helping all students achieve. Furthermore, high expectations are set for all students. In addition, collaboration is encouraged among faculty and staff. Last, engaging families reinforce classroom learning at home.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP, 2008) in *Leading Learning Communities*, defined the following as indicators of quality in schools: (a) leadership that places student and adult learning at the center of school; (b) expectations for and commitment to high standards of academic performance; (c) safe and secure learning environments; (d) curriculum and instruction tied to student learning goals; (e) collaborative

learning community for adults; and (f) an engaged community. Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, and Karhanek (2004) agreed that promoting a collaborative culture and empowering staff through shared leadership are important factors for successful school improvement. In addition, this is good practice. For example, school staffs who engage in collaborative team learning are able to learn from one another and thus create momentum to ignite continued improvement towards student and staff learning. Therefore, the development of a collaborative culture is vital for effective school leadership.

In a longitudinal study of 50 low- income and language minority schools, Johannesen and Groth (2003) used a framework for analyzing organizational change in one state's reform initiative. The organizational structure focused on ongoing professional development, a high degree of staff involvement, a vision of the school based on improving student learning, continuous monitoring, and evaluation of both program and student achievement, reallocation of resources to support a school wide plan, and strong principal leadership. Other researchers discussed effective school leadership. LaPointe and Davis (2006) wrote, "A growing consensus on the attributes of effective school principals shows that successful school leaders influence student achievement through two important pathways- the support and development of effective teachers and the implementation of effective organizational processes" (p.18).

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) provided a comprehensive review of knowledge about successful school leadership based upon quantitative research studies, multiple case studies, and single case studies. Six claims were described that could be defended by the research evidence and may be generalized to most school contexts. Successful school leadership makes important contributions to improvement on student learning. Principals are one primary source to successful leadership. He or she should distribute leadership to others in the school and community, and a core set of basic leadership practices is valuable in almost all contexts; setting directions; developing people, and redesigning the organization. Successful leaders must act in ways that acknowledge the accountability-oriented policy. Several schools serving diverse populations enact practices to promote school quality, equity, and social justice through building powerful forms of teaching and learning; create strong communities in schools; nurturing the development of educational cultures in families.

Although educators know outcomes in students' achievement are a decisive criterion for determining school effectiveness, educators do not typically find changes in student achievement

immediately because of changes in the organizational structures (Johannesen & Groth, 2003). Johannesen and Groth (2003) categorized schools into three types based on the principal's leadership in the school improvement process and organizational structure of the school. In Type I schools, principals demonstrated leadership in the school's improvement process in which the organizational structure was changed. Type II schools principals did not lead the school improvement process, but the principals were involved in the implementation of the plan without changing the organizational structure. In Type III schools, the principals did not lead the process nor did the principal implement any change processes with the organizational structure.

Out of the six factors, four factors distinguished Type I and Type II schools from each other: (a) a high degree of staff involvement, (b) the vision based on improving student learning, (c) continuous monitoring, and evaluation and (d) the principal's involvement in the implementation process. Type II schools focused on a curricular model without changing the organizational structure. Type III schools did not focus on an organizational structure or academic approach. While Type II schools grappled with implementing a comprehensive school reform, Type III schools did not implement a comprehensive school reform, and it was evident in the academic achievement for the students. A critical component not discussed in this study is whether the schools in Type I and II were able to sustain their reform efforts towards continuous improvement in academic achievement (Johannesen & Groth, 2003).

Sebring and Byrk (2003) identified three areas of improving schools in an eight-year study for the Consortium on Chicago School Research of public elementary school principals: (a) leadership style; (b) reform strategies; (c) issues focused on. Of particular importance was that principals collaborated with others to develop and monitor progress toward a comprehensive, coherent development school plan. Secondly, the principals articulated a vision for their schools and invited teachers and parents to further elaborate and shape this vision. Due to the commitment required, principals actively sought opportunities to bring parents, teachers, and other staff members into leadership positions to implement change.

Gurr, Drysdale, and Mulford (2006) conducted multiple case studies focusing on the leadership of principals that demonstrated success through improved student learning outcomes in five Tasmania schools and nine Victoria schools in Australia. Researchers found in Tasmania schools that principal's values and beliefs were strongly child centered. Principals described as visionary or inspirational with creative thinking inspired the same qualities in others. In addition,

leaders support/encourage others to take on leadership roles, and encourage staff to accept responsibility for their own professional learning, and foster support for learning groups and cultures through addressing unfavorable attitudes of parents to education.

Furthermore, evidence from the case studies showed that school success was derivative from the development of a shared vision for the school. The school vision comprised four aspects of school direction. First, the vision focused on each individual child; a safe environment; expectations regarding student, staff, and parent's behaviors; and the scope of lifelong learning and community social capital. Secondly, the focus of the school vision reflects the school curriculum and teaching strategies. Associated with the principal's values and the school's vision and mission were school, teaching, and learning outcomes. Last, the studies suggested that successful leadership comprises monitoring, evaluating, critical reflection, and change (Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2006).

In Victoria, the following themes were identified: the principal's contribution to success; values and beliefs, personal characteristics, styles of leadership, understanding the context and the situation; and leadership interventions in the area of teaching and learning, student outcomes, and school capacity building (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2006). Thus, the two studies conveyed the importance of the principal's contribution to school success. Both studies showed common sets of traits, such as the importance of the principal's values and beliefs, the contributions of the principal to the education programs and to teaching and learning (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2006).

### Communication

Many themes consistent with the other research on effective leadership practices emerge from these studies, specifically communication. In a school implementing the America's Choice reform model, Supovitz and Poglinco (2001) identified a set of behaviors for effective instructional leaders through principal interviews, survey data, and site visits. Their findings showed effective instructional leaders emphasized collaboration and communication, develop other leaders, use symbolic acts to reinforce "visions of instructional focus, and develop a consistent set of expectations and incentives for teachers that keeps the entire staff focused on meeting school wide goals" (Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001, p 2.).

Harris (2007) posited that elementary schools are flourishing under effective leadership although the principal's job is stressful and time consuming. She interviewed 35 out of the 100

principals recognized for outstanding leadership as National Distinguished Principals, or whose school that was identified as high performing Blue Ribbon Schools. In the area of leadership, one principal said that leadership was incorporated into the school's mission statement, which "was a reflection of the best of everyone's thinking about what this school would be" (Harris, 2007, p. 18). Another principal emphasized how important it is to "know where she is going, be well-planned and organized, and build meaningful and caring relationships" (Harris, 2007, p.18).

In the area of communication, a principal said he wrote three notes each day to students, staff, and parents (Harris, 2007). Several principals emphasized the importance of collaboration with parents about student discipline. Furthermore, principals reported building support and establishing relationships with the community, as well as communicating school successes and attending community events. Finally, in the school improvement process, Harris (2007) commented principals are using whole faculty study groups to support school improvement. Another principal said her school's success resulted from reviewing data that drive changes in the school (Harris, 2007). Because of working collaboratively with others, all principals believed that when their students succeeded school success was attained (Harris, 2007).

Sheffield (2006) described a recent study that scrutinized research on the effects of the principal's leadership on student achievement and identified 66 leadership practices in 21 areas of leadership responsibility. Two of the leadership responsibilities that had high correlation with student success were communication and visibility. For example, the responsibility of communication included being accessible to teachers, parents, and students; maintaining open lines of communication with staff; and providing means for the staff to communicate frequently with the principal. Sheffield (2006) explained that given a closet as an office space that was tiny, offered minimal privacy, had insufficient heat and no air conditioning, and for approximately three hours a day ground noise from the cafeteria could be heard allowed him to meet these responsibilities.

Sheffield (2006) stated:

Most school principals are safely tucked shielded by the school secretary and office personnel. In my little office, everyone had access: parents, students, teachers, and especially salespeople. More often than not, I was the one to approach with questions about the missing mittens, misplaced newsletters, and free and reduced price lunch forms. Every teacher stopped by my office to talk on the way to the faculty lounge. Sometimes

they talked about their own children or grandchild. Parents too might linger a little longer than necessary after picking up their children, which usually indicated that there was some small matter to be discussed. Students eat their lunch right next door, thus I could see the students daily... the after school program was in the cafeteria and children would sheepishly come into my office to ask for help with homework.... I loved the shaft because in a regular office students would have rarely been able to reach the inner sanctum of the principal to ask for help with double-digit addition. (p.58)

In United Arab Emirates, Halawah (2005) used two instruments to study the relationship between effective communication of high school principals and school climate. The Evaluation of School Climate was an instrument designed to assess school climate by students. Another instrument used measured communication effectiveness between school principals and teachers. Both instruments consisted of Likert type items. The researcher selected six out of twenty-three schools randomly to participate in the study and coded each to maintain confidentiality. Approximately 90 students ( $n=555$ ) were chosen from each school to participate. Also, about 35 teachers ( $n= 208$ ) from each of the six schools were chosen to participate to respond to the principal's communication effectiveness survey.

Halawah (2005) measured the principal's communication effectiveness by averaging teacher responses on an effectiveness communication survey. He compared results of students' responses on the school climate survey with the teacher's responses on the effective communication survey from the corresponding school. He used analysis of variance to compare the schools and an independent t test to compare gender. According to the indicators, the results showed a high level of effective communication between principals and teachers in most of these schools. He related that better climates were in schools where communication was effective between the principals and teachers. When he compared male schools to female schools on the principal communication effectiveness, results showed the males' responses were 4.20 and females 3.61. This was statistically significant ( $t= 5.78, p<.001$ ).The study demonstrated a difference between males and females principals' communication effectiveness in the areas of maintenance, security, and instructional management with an advantage favoring females. However, it was evident that male principals communicated more effectively with teachers. The study concluded that school climate had a positive relationship with the effectiveness of the principal's communication.

In the past decade, accountability has reshaped the very nature of the principal's job. Today's principals are not just called to task when things are not going well; however, the expectation is to provide daily a highly public account of exactly how well things are going (Lashway, 2001). An essential ingredient in the principal's work is to intentionally share meaningful information, to build a culture of care, to develop and contribute to communication in the school where as many as possible participate, and to manage different themes of discussion in different areas of communication (Presthus, 2006). Therefore, successful principals are communicating virtually 100% of the time they are on the job, listening, speaking, writing, and reading (McEwan, 2003). Arlestig (2007) said, "Through communication, the principal leads and unifies his or her staff members in the work necessary for academic results and school improvement" (p.2). Scholars say effective communication is an implicit and explicit feature of most aspects of leadership (Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 2001; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Marzano, 2003).

McEwan (2003) described a middle school principal from Tallahassee, Florida as a communicator exemplar, "open and honest, no matter what" (p.3). She interviewed students and parents who left her school, and asked them to share something positive about their experience at the school, what they appreciated most and what they would change. Furthermore, she asked all teachers, parents, and graduating eighth graders to evaluate her performance using a district-designed instrument plus three open-ended questions she added: What do I do that you value? What do I do that you do not appreciate? What else would you like to share with me that will help me grow as a professional (McEwan, 2003). She made a point of talking with parents when she met them outside of school. She always asked how things were going and if they had any suggestions. She shared the positive comments via e-mail with her teachers (McEwan, 2003). This description conveyed the principal's communication as authentic, genuine, and humanistic.

Arlestig (2007) studied communication and leadership processes based on an interpretative perspective. Using the interpretative method, he tried to understand organizational processes through qualitative methods. Arlestig described that a bureaucratic organization communication process operates in the form of disseminating information effectively and efficiently. For example, the exchange of communication is "the leaders' ability to formulate messages and the recipient's ability to listen and reproduce meaning are critical aspects in the communication process" (p. 264). This exchange of communication gives leaders control as

opposed to providing mutual understanding and interpretation. However, in a decentralized organization, interpretations and the exchange of ideas and information are critical. In a democratic context, the focus is on conducting the work not on the result. He asserted that principals' everyday actions to visions and goals should be a visible and important part of communication between principals and teachers. During interviews, teachers expressed high expectations for the principals. They wanted leaders who communicated the right answers and expressed them in a way that did not create confusion or misunderstanding. For example, a teacher stated how the principal often talked about the teacher's task and mission, but did not clarify their own responsibilities.

Furthermore, Arlestig (2007) presented a table that displayed frequency of conversation topics principals discussed with teachers. Twenty-two percent of conversations were about rules and three percent of conversations were about curriculum and vision, respectively. Only eight percent of conversations with teachers were about academic goals. Teachers conveyed that a discrepancy existed between ordinary work, teaching, and school improvement. Interestingly, the principals said they communicated information about school improvement in individual dialogue as well as in service trainings. Hence, the findings revealed that opportunities and ways to communicate about how the school culture influenced their work was lacking, and the communication between the principals and the teachers did not stimulate learning.

Although there are numerous ways to convey a message, one-way communication is prevalent in schools. Ubben and Hughes (1987) stated the principal is in a position to influence the relationship between the school, the community, and staff. They discussed that face-to-face encounters provides the best basis for understanding a situation. When principals understand that sending out information is not the same as communication, public relation efforts will not fail. They shared five important questions to ask when examining the quality of information: (1) If the message was received, was it read (heard)? (2) If it was read (heard), was it understood? (3) If it was understood, was it understood in the right spirit? (4) If it was understood in the right spirit, will it be acted on in a positive way? (5) How do you know? Hence, effective face-to-face communication is critical in the development of relationships between the school communities.

In a case study by (Blasé, 1987), the data suggested that principals' knowledge was linked to commitment, communication, and cohesiveness. It was noted by Blasé (1987) that knowledge and expertise were strongly correlated with teachers with accessibility, decisiveness,

goals and direction, problem solving, participation, fairness, and personal factors such as compassion, friendliness, security, intelligence, and working long hours. More importantly, the teachers' perspective denoted that the principal demonstrated clear expectations. Teachers indicated the principal stood behind them and recognized their efforts. He encouraged them to set high goals and provided material feedback.

Moreover, about half of the teachers reported that effective principals tended to define overarching goals and sought teacher input on the implementation of policies and plans related to these goals. The teachers perceived the goal development processes as a complex set of interactions, which kept the system moving, and increased the probability of understanding, agreement, and commitment to common purposes (Blasé, 1987). In conclusion, the findings suggested that the actions of supportive principals increased the probability of productive interaction among teachers, students, and parents. In fact, teachers were more open with students and parents under effective principals' leadership. Thus, meetings, conferences, and telephone conversations tended to produce authentic communication (Blasé, 1987).

When expectations and standards are high, principals should be communicating a clear vision that reflects the belief and value of the school community to ensure that all students have adequate and appropriate opportunities to meet high standards, and develop a school culture that is flexible, collaborative, innovative, and supportive of the efforts to improve achievement of students. Hence, the research has verified that effective communication demonstrated by principals contributes to student's success.

#### *Parental Involvement and Community Partnerships*

The effective leadership literature discussed that principals develop and use communication channels with parents and community to set forth school objectives. Papalewis and Fortune's study (as cited in Powell, 2004) found a strong relationship with communities and families of students in thirteen high performing, high poverty schools. For example, the principal sent home communication for non-English speaking families in two languages. Further, parents were encouraged to be involved in the school and learned how to work with their children at home.

Pena (2000) studied how parents in an elementary school with a Mexican American population over 95% were not involved in their children's educational experience. Pena reported that the language barriers, among other issues such as cultural attitudes about the role of the

parents, parent cliques, parent's educational level, attitudes about the staff, and family issues such as childcare, influenced the involvement of parents in the activities organized by the school. Communication was a critical issue because the school did not provide accommodations for parents that felt intimidated and confused because parents did not understand the language. Most communication was print based only. In addition, some parents felt unwelcomed, patronized, and judged negatively because of their need for assistance.

The parents suggested that the following would improve parental involvement:(a) change attitudes of school staff to make parents feel more welcome; (b) schools should consider parents' interests when planning activities; (c) recognize that even if parents cannot be at school, helping at home is also a valuable contribution; and (d) provide parents with knowledge about how to be involved in a range of involvement opportunities are ways to improve parental involvement (Pena, 2000).

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) say leaders are proactive, client oriented, and focused within their environments when they respond to legitimate concerns from parents and others as they attend to key aspects of the school's vision and communicate that vision clearly and convincingly. Standard 6 of the National Association of Elementary School Principals' (2002) *Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do* states: "Effective principals actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student and school success" (p.67). The following actions show how to involve families and communities:(a) engage the community to build greater ownership for the work of the school; (b) share leadership and decision making;(c) encourage parents to become involved in the school and in their own children's learning, and (d) ensure that students and families are connected to the health, human and social services they need to stay focused on learning.

As critical as parental involvement in school can be, parents do not always feel inclined to become involved in schools. Comer (2004) observed,

Many of today's students at greatest risk for underachievement or school failure are growing up in families that did not experience three generations of acculturation and upward mobility...Most often both parents, or the single parent, are in the workforce with low-paying jobs. The parents want their children to be successful in school and in life, but they themselves have not had the experience they need to help their children do so. (p. 89).

The research substantiates the significance of community involvement in children's education. Fiore (2002) summarized nine responsibilities for principals in the area of community relations. Of these responsibilities, the following are noteworthy for the purpose of this study. The principal sets a positive, friendly, and open tone for the school. The principal assesses school and community perceptions of needs and resources and provides parent education on topics of interest to parents and family members. The principal appoints qualified staff to coordinate the school's community relations program and create professional development activities to assist staff in developing strong communication skills. In addition, the principal communicates regularly with all key players, soliciting their input formally and informally. Furthermore, the principal recognizes and celebrates the accomplishment of all members of the school community, and maintains school publications that inform internal and external groups about the school.

Sanders and Harvey (2002) revealed four factors in an urban elementary school case study that supported the principals' leadership in developing a school–community partnership. First, factors linked to the principals' action as a leader were a high commitment to learning, principal support for community involvement, a welcoming school climate, and two-way communication about the level and kind of community involvement. The findings in the study illustrated that the developed partnerships supported school's effort to provide challenging and nurturing learning environments for the students. This type of support is significant for school improvement (Sanders & Harvey, 2002). Secondly, "Open two-way communication played a major role in helping partnerships to grow, improve, and intensify over time" (Sanders & Harvey, 2002, p.1366). In fact, community partners were encouraged to communicate with the school when their resources, foci, or other capabilities changed so that the collaboration with the school continued to be positive (Sanders & Harvey, 2002).

As a result of these partnerships, the school had student computers, classrooms libraries and additional library books, an honor roll incentive program, a after school program, financial support for partnership activities and events, community speakers for parent workshops and relationships with community businesses, organizations, as well as individuals. Finally, this case study suggested that communities play a vital role in helping schools to improve when the principal communicate the importance of having them as partners. In conclusion, the parental and community research indicated that effective school leaders spark students' learning when

working collaboratively; articulating a vision and clear focus goals; and communicating and utilizing community partnership. Thus, student achievement is likely to improve when there is a deliberate effort for administration, teachers, parents, and community partners to work together in small groups as well as school wide to discuss sources of student success to implement in a school improvement plan.

### *Comer Model*

The Comer School Development Model Program is one reform model that initially aimed at focusing on creating a positive school climate. A Comer school is a school with a comfortable atmosphere and a school climate that allows for optimal learning for all students. There are not many studies conducted on the Comer School Development Model; it is significant to note Comer's own researchers have conducted research on the Comer Model. According to Aguilera, Crane, Hamer, Morrison, and Serrano (1998) the Comer School Development Program has been successful in improving urban schools because of its emphasis on systemic change, child development, and parental involvement.

Anson et al. (1991) outlined a casual model of Comer's theory that showed the steps involved in testing the theory. It entailed describing and assessing how well the three teams operated, how widely governance was shared, and to what extent the program's goals were disseminated, and by how much parental involvement are enhanced. Anson et.al (1991) stated given quality implementation, the questions arise:(a)Does the school social climate improve, particularly in regards to the quality of interpersonal relationships among staff, among students, and between teachers? (b) Does the school's academic climate improve when the social climate is better and children behave more conventionally? (c) Do higher test scores result from this climate and social behavior changes for all minorities? Anson raised questions that were pertinent to the school's academic and social climate, and there were not any aspects of the effectiveness of the principal's leadership questioned in the model.

King (1994) conducted an analysis of three reform models one of which was the Comer School Development Model. She found Comer presented two structural components for educating students that illustrated his commitment to the development of the whole person .The Focus Program addressed reading and math academics for students who were a year or more behind their grade level. Small group instruction occurred at least three times a week to

supplement regular classroom work. In addition, he addressed students' psychological and social problems in a discovery room (Comer, 1980).

Furthermore, parents and school staff integrated the teaching of basic skills and social development activities. These sessions made up the extended day program in Comer's Model. Comer's educational approach varied. In some instances, he proposed to use a prescriptive approach in all schools; on the other hand, he deferred to a facilitative approach based on the particular school in question to determine the curriculum. Finally, in the governance structure, Comer focused on process and structure. It is noteworthy that Comer's model required time of all parents rather than only those who are most highly dedicated. Based on the study, the results did not indicate if the Comer model was effective in reaching the goals; but it did note Comer was the most costly to implement (King, 1994).

Aguilera et al. (1998) conducted a study in nine elementary schools in San Diego Unified District using the Comer Visitor Observation and survey instruments. The observations focused on the school's climate. Schools categorized into high implementing Comer, low implementing Comer, and control schools indicated that the school climate varied among schools. Findings showed 13 of the 41 survey questions correlated significantly with the observation data by the five researchers. Each school calculated the mean and the schools labeled with the highest means were the high implementing Comer Schools. In addition, the schools with the three lowest means were classified as the control schools; thus, remaining schools were grouped as low implementing Comer. An interesting phenomenon occurred when researchers confirmed the ratings from previous data of each school through direct observations. Results showed that one school fell from a high to low Comer school because of change in administration and new teachers not trained in the model. In addition, Aguilera, et al. (1998) revealed that a school could be practicing good teaching and learning methods including creating a positive school environment, but not known as an "official" Comer School.

Cook, Murphy and Hunt (2000) evaluated the long standing, and national reputation of being "exemplary" in the U.S. Department of Education report: Building Knowledge for a Nation of Learners (1997) and because important claims have been made about its effectiveness in promoting healthy social and academic development. Cook conducted an independent study of the program effectiveness based on a randomized experiment with 23 middle schools in a predominantly African American suburban area in Prince George's County, MD (Cook et

al.,1999). Contrast to other researchers, the results indicated that the Comer Model had no effect on school climate or students' mental health, social behavior or school performance. National experience with the Comer's process had been at the elementary level where students were younger and remained in school longer showed a limitation of the study. In addition, the program excluded Latino students even though it was supposed to benefit all minorities. Furthermore, it used a state minimal competency test in math as the academic achievement measure in which the test discriminate at the passing score rather than across the entire range, so there were scaling problems (Cook et al., 1999). In conclusion, the student achievement measure was inadequate and the sampling design did not include the type of urban schools and students based on the design of the program.

Cook, Murphy, and Hunt (2000) tested whether a school's academic climate and social climate improved because of the Comer program and whether these changes mediate effects on individual students. A local organization of social workers known as Youth Guidance were responsible for implementing the Comer program in kindergarten through eighth grade in Chicago. The population studied was poor, African American students. The findings showed that the Comer program implemented for 6 years caused positive changes in standardized test scores and beliefs, feelings, and behaviors relevant to disruptive and illegal behavior.

Research has revealed that quantitative and qualitative studies capture and document the effects and process of implementing the school development program. Quantitative studies compared schools that implemented a school development program that showed significant effects on achievement (Haynes, Emmons, Gebreyesus & Ben-Avie, 1996). An analysis of achievement data in the Benton Harbor Michigan Schools showed significant average 4-year gains, between 7.5 and 11.0 percentile points in reading and mathematics at the second, fourth, fifth and sixth grades for School Development Program (SDP), exceeding gains reported for the school district as a whole.

The Prince George's County Public Schools revealed that average percentile gains on the California Achievement Test between 1985 and 1987 were greater for the schools that used the school development program than the district. For example, at the third grade level, SDP schools gained about 18 percentile points in mathematics, 9 percentile points in reading, and 17 percentile points in language. However, the district showed gains of 11, 4, and 9 percentile points respectively in mathematics, reading, and language (Comer, 1988).

Cauce, Comer, and Schwartz (1987) reported that students in seventh grade from SDP schools had significantly higher averages in language and mathematics as well as an overall higher mean grade equivalent on the California Achievement Test than students in non-SDP schools. Furthermore, a follow up study of 92 sixth and eighth grade students at a New Haven middle school found significant differences in favor of the students in SDP schools in mathematics, language, and total battery on the Metropolitan Achievement Test. Forty-seven were from a non-SDP elementary school and 45 were from an SDP school prior to entering the middle schools. Students from SDP schools obtained consistently higher scores on all other achievement measures such as report card grades (Haynes, et al., 1994).

Qualitative studies formed an important and integral part of school development program's evaluation and its implementation process (Haynes, et al., 1998). Haynes, et al. (1998) sought to understand the processes by which the nine school development structures were built in ten selected schools. Researchers shared the conditions that facilitated the operation of the nine elements in the school program development: (1) direct school development and district collaboration, (2) positive interpersonal relationships, (3) facilitators' knowledge and use of preexisting change mechanism in the schools, and (4) parent and student participation. Their findings revealed that the role of the district facilitators in the selected sites was crucial in shaping and directing the initiation of the SDP in the schools, and the changing existing mechanisms worked to the advantage of these schools (Haynes, Emmons, Gebreyesus, & Ben-Avie, 1998). However, researchers learned that staff members' negative experiences with previous school reform programs, staff members' lack of desire to change, low interaction comfort level between parents and staff, and teachers' resistance to parent involvement were conditions that hindered the implementation of the school development programs in schools.

Principals took the following steps to alleviate some of the staff's conceptual misunderstanding during implementation of the principles of the school development program. Principals promoted team leadership, made efforts to increase parental involvement through various mechanisms, and worked synergistically with the district facilitators and school staff to identify solutions for the problem they faced. They encouraged broad participation of the school staff in the decision-making process of the schools' academic and social affairs. The respondent summarized changes that occurred during the implementation process of the school development program:

Traditionally in any school, you have decisions that are being made, usually by the principal, what have you, and I think that for a lot of us it was uncomfortable when introducing the Comer process that we found ourselves in the position of being a part of that decision- making process... I think I can honestly and truly say that we are moving to a point that I can envision that no... pertinent decisions will be made without... parental input, as well as the management team's input for the coming years (p.139).

Therefore, the willingness of principals and the school staff to implement the program was the key to the success of the facilitator's work in this implementation process (Haynes, et al. 1998). Although there is an extensive amount of research on successful schools and effective principals, the number of studies on leadership pertaining to the Comer model is limited specific to the characteristics of the principal's communication as it influences the operation of the Comer School Development program.

In conclusion, evidence in the effective leadership practices and the Comer School Development literature were establishing and communicating a vision, clear learning goals, and high expectations for all students, communicating and developing relationships with parents and community and continuous school development. The review of the literature herein describes the principal's leadership practices, specifically communication that influences academic success. A thesis evolved from the review of the literature. Effective communication influences students' academic success positively. In Chapter III, the process for collecting the data is presented to determine if the principal's communication with staff, parents, and students improve using eight communication descriptors in the operation of the Comer School Development model. One theory is the principal's communication with staff, parents, and students should improve based on the Comer model's operation. A second theory is the characteristics of the principal's communication should improve the school's social climate given the conditions in the Comer model. The last theory is the school's academic achievement should improve because of the principal's communication within the Comer School Development model.

## CHAPTER III OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter III is a description of the methodology utilized to conduct a qualitative case study of the principal's communication within the operation of a Comer School Development model in a suburban Title I school. Specifically, the purpose of this research study was to determine if the principal's communication improved within the operation of the Comer School Development model. The seven components of this chapter include the assumption and rationale for a qualitative study, setting, participant selection procedures, informed consent and permission procedures, data collection procedure, data quality procedure, data analysis procedure, and a brief summary.

### Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of the school community regarding the characteristics of the principal's communication in the operation of the Comer School Development model?
2. What are the perceptions of the school community regarding the characteristics of the principal's communication, interactions, and relationships in regards to parent community outreach and involvement?
3. What are the practices and behaviors that the principal uses to communicate with the school community?

### Assumption and Rationale for a Qualitative Design

#### *Type of Design*

A qualitative case study was selected to understand the characteristics of the principal's communication as it influences the operation of the Comer School Development model. Rossman and Rallis (2003) stated, "the strength of case studies is their detail, their complexity, and their use of multiple sources to obtain multiple perspectives" (p. 105). Yin (2003) has defined the case study research method as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are clearly not evident; and in which multiple sources are used" (p. 13). He stated, "case studies

are most likely to be appropriate for ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control” (p. 9). However, “the key concern is to understand the phenomenon of interest from the participants’ perspectives, not the researcher’s” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6).

In addition, case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, artifacts and documents and reports) and reports a case description and case-based themes (Creswell, 1998; Yin, 2003). Case study research enables educational researchers to examine schooling processes to identify factors that influence school functioning and a variety of outcomes for students (Sanders & Harvey, 2002).

Furthermore, qualitative case study design is characterized as being “particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic” (Merriam, 1998, p.29). This study focused on the particularistic aspect of the principal’s communication. According to Merriam, this specificity of focus makes it an especially good design for practical problems, questions, situations, or puzzling occurrences arising from everyday practice. “Descriptive means that the end product of a case study is rich; and detailed in depth description of the phenomenon under the study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). The description of the principal’s interaction and communication will be included in the study. Last, “heuristic means that case studies illuminate the readers understanding of the phenomenon under study” (p. 30). Thus, the case study can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader’s experience, or confirm what is known as the researcher studies the principal’s communication. The system studied was a bounded system unique to this school division. In addition, the researcher served as a data collection instrument when carrying out observations and interviews. In addition, the researcher organized and analyzed the data in themes and then focused in on the most salient themes. More importantly, the results will benefit the school and the principal as she continues to communicate to diverse stakeholders.

## Setting and Participant Selection Procedures

### *Selection Process*

Purposeful sampling is the sampling strategy used in selecting the school to address the purpose of the research (Patton, 2002).The setting is a National Distinguished Title I school in a

suburban county in central Virginia. BES academy was selected because of its performance on the Standards of Learning tests in reading and mathematics. The school is fully accredited by the Virginia Department of Education based on the Virginia Standards of Quality and virtue by having passed the Standards of Learning Tests for three consecutive years and is recognized as one of six schools in the nation to receive an ASCD school change award. In addition, BES academy implements the Comer School Development program to involve staff and community. Other criteria used in the selection process were poverty range (free and/or reduced price lunch eligible at or above 75%, at least 50% minority level, number of students who are English Language Learners at 25% or above, pre kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and principal in a school for 3 years or more. More importantly, the researcher is employed in the school district that made it convenient to visit the site.

### *Setting*

BES academy is located in a suburban school district and has a current enrollment of 655 students. The student population consists of 50% African Americans, 32% Hispanics, 17% Caucasians, and 1% Asians and students identified as others. Seventy-eight percent of the student population qualifies for free/reduced lunch, 32% of students speak Spanish as their first language and a high percentage of students live in less than desirable trailers, apartments and multi-family homes. BES's transiency rate has been 55.6%, 54.1%, and 47.9%.

### *Participants Selection*

The participants for this case study consisted of the school's principal, selected staff and a parent. The researcher asked the principal to recommend informants who have worked at the school for more than three years and who would share a list of individuals that they believed would participate and can communicate responses to research questions. Based on the informant's suggestion, the researcher contacted the individuals and requested participation. The researcher requested the principal to recommend parents who have children in grades three, four, or five because the students have attended the school for three or more years to participate in the focus group. Only one parent agreed to participate in the focus group. The following individuals were selected to participate in the focus group (see Figure 2).

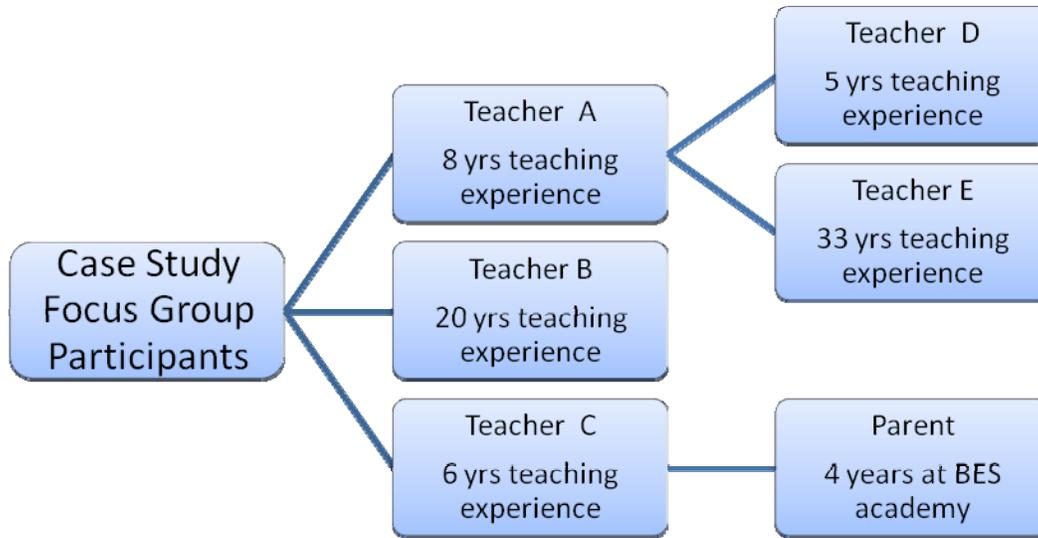


Figure 2. Focus group participants.

#### Informed Consent and Permission Procedures

Prior to conducting the research, the researcher reviewed the procedures and ethics of research by Lock et al. (2000). Once the committee granted the approval, the researcher adhered to procedures and policies outlined by the school district. Specifically, the researcher completed all paperwork warranted for the study to gain approval by the district as well as all requirements outlined by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The school district and the principal of the school granted permission in order to conduct the study.

The initial step in gaining access and entry to BES academy involved a visit to the superintendent's designee to discuss the nature of the study. During the visit, the researcher gave the designee a letter (see Appendix B) and a copy of the approved proposal request to conduct the research study (see Appendix A). The superintendent granted the researcher permission. The researcher contacted the principal at BES academy to schedule an appointment to discuss getting permission to conduct the study. At the time of the visit, the researcher gave the principal a copy of the superintendent's letter granting permission and a copy of the abstract. The principal consented to schedule an interview and observations.

Next, the researcher requested to speak with staff at a faculty meeting and to discuss some staff participation in a focus group. The principal provided names of two parent contacts to

discuss participating in the focus group. However, only one parent consented to participate in the focus group. In addition, the researcher requested participants to sign a consent form.

#### *Assurance of Confidentiality*

The researcher provided full disclosure to participants during the study. Johnson and Christensen (2004) explained, “Confidentiality means that participant’s identity, although known to the research group, is not revealed to anyone other than the researcher” (p.112). She used a coding system to identify the principal, the parent, and staff to maintain confidentiality when disclosing responses to the interview questions. In addition, the interviews were audio taped and transcribed. BES academy is the name given to the school. The subjects were informed that they are free to withdraw based on human subjects’ regulations, from the study at anytime and that their participation was voluntary (Slavin, 2007).

#### Data Collection Procedures

##### *Interview*

The researcher used an interview protocol to conduct a semi-structured open-ended interview individually with the school’s principal. Seidman (2006) offered advantages and disadvantages for interviewing. First, an advantage is “interviewing provides access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand meaning of that behavior” (p.10). Seidman pointed out that the “primary way a researcher can investigate an educational organization, institution, or process is through experience of the individual people, ‘the others’ who make up the organization or carry out the process is by interviewing” (Seidman, 2006, p.10).

According to Miller and Crabtree (2004), a semi-structured nature of in-depth interviews is organized around open-ended ideas that elicit rich, detailed material for analysis. On the other hand, Seidman (2006) said, “Interviews take a great deal of time and, sometimes money; and interviewing requires that researchers establish access to, and make contact with potential participants whom they have never met” (p.12). Hence, interviewing provided in depth information into answering the research questions designed for this study.

The researcher developed an interview protocol based on Merriam’s (2001) guidelines. Merriam (2001) advised on making an interview guide, which is a list of questions to be used in the interview (cited in Powell, 2004). The interview guide and protocol were utilized around the

semi-structured questions for the principal (see Appendix C ).The protocol is not only an instrument; it contains the procedure and the rules. The protocol is a major way to increase the reliability of case study research and to guide the investigator in carrying out the data collection from a single case study (Yin, 2003).The researcher used a digital voice recorder and a micro cassette recorder to record all the dialogue. Then, the data was transcribed and copied to a rewritable compact disc (CD) using a transcribing kit.

### *Focus Group*

Johnson and Christensen (2004) stated, “A focus group is a type of group interview in which a moderator leads a discussion with a small group of individuals to examine, in detail, how the group members think and feel about a topic” (p. 185). A focus group was used to collect qualitative data that are in the words of the group participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The focus group was composed of six participants. Advantages of focus group methodology are attitudes and opinions are socially formed and focus groups provide a social environment in which to articulate them, gives us new insight, gives us a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and the focus group will complement other methods of data collection as well as provide in-depth information in a relatively short period (Breen, 2006). Johnson and Christensen (2004) explained that a focus group could be useful for exploring ideas and concepts, providing the window into participants’ internal thinking, obtaining in-depth information, examining how participants react to each other, allowing probing, tapping, and a quick turnaround.

The focus group session took one hour. With tape recording, the transcripts were used to provide a check against bias or misinterpretation (Opie & Sikes, 2004). Consequently, the use of the focus group provided in- depth information about what other individuals think about the practices and specifically the communication of the principal in the Comer School Development model. The chain of evidence matrix (see Table 2) shows the research questions and the sub questions from the principal and focus group interview.

Table 2

*Chain of Evidence Matrix*

<i>Research Question</i>	<i>Principal Interview</i>	<i>Focus Group</i>	<i>Observations</i>
What are the perceptions of the school community regarding the characteristics of the principal's communication on the operation of the Comer School Development model?	1. Discuss how you communicate succinctly and appropriately with your school planning team, regarding academic, social, and community goals.	1. Discuss how the principal communicates succinctly and appropriately with your school's planning team regarding academic, social, and community goals.	Convey opinions succinctly and appropriately when communicating
	2. Discuss how you coordinate and communicate school activities and staff developments.	2. Discuss how the principal coordinates and communicates school activities and staff developments.	Express clear and concise language in communiqués
	3. Discuss how you communicate with staff, parents, and students to promote desirable and social conditions and relationships.	3. Discuss how the principal communicates with staff, parents, and students to promote desirable and social conditions and relationships.	Use appropriate communication modes
	4. Discuss how you facilitate the sharing of information to address student's needs, access resources outside the school and develop prevention programs.	4. Discuss how the principal facilitates the sharing of information to address student's needs, access resources outside the school and develop prevention programs.	Exhibits sensitivity toward diverse populations in communication
	5. Discuss your communication to your school community about the importance of problem solving as opposed to fault finding in regards to student success	5. Discuss how the principal communicates to the school community the importance of problem solving as opposed to fault finding in regards to student success.	Interprets communiqués accurately.
	6. Discuss the ways you communicate concern and openness in the consideration and resolution of problems.	6. Discuss the ways the principal communicates concern and openness in the consideration and resolution of problems.	Seeks first to understand  Checks for understanding

*Observations and Field Notes*

Observations of the principal's communication took place on seven days in a naturalistic environment using an observation guide and checklist. An advantage of observations was the researcher had the ability to record actual behavior rather than obtain reports of preferences or

intended behavior (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Also, information was provided on the environment and behavior of those who could not speak for themselves (Opie & Sikes 2004). The observer as a participant interacted with the subjects but did not take an established role in the group (Opie & Sikes, 2004). As such, the researcher remained objective when listening to personal conversations and prompting answers to issues but not actually engaging with those answers.

Observational data was an excellent way to discover what was occurring in the setting, understanding the importance of contextual factors, and providing a good description (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The researcher made a concerted effort to provide explicit details of all aspects of the interviews including setting, mood, word usage, and actions. Individuals may change consciously or unconsciously the way they behave when being observed, observations was inevitably influenced by the observer “interpretation,” and it was very time consuming (Opie & Sikes, 2004).

In order to understand whether the characteristics of the principal’s communication influenced the operation of the Comer School Development model factors, observations of the principal took place during staff meetings, school management planning meeting, and a school improvement meeting. Eight communication descriptors from an administrative diagnostic inventory by Creighton (1996) were used during observations to determine the communication dimension. In order to maintain the integrity of the process, documentation of the activity is in the field notes. Field notes were used to document observations including the following: the physical setting; participants in the setting; activities, and conversations. The researcher observed only and posed questions when appropriate.

#### *Document Review*

Several school documents such as the School Improvement Plan, parent/student Handbook, staff handbook, school newsletters, communication to parents, students and teachers, PTA communication, media communication, meeting minutes, the school’s web page, schedules, and any other forms of communication (see Appendix G) were reviewed to corroborate data from other sources to provide insight and different perspectives. Johnson and Christensen (2004) identified strengths of document reviews. A strength that was useful was the researcher obtained background data on how communication within and outside the school building was shared and corroborated the data with other methods of data collection.

More importantly, the researcher wanted the research findings to reflect people's perceptions accurately. Thus, she was in one local setting and reviewed documents produced by key participants within the School Development Model. For example, minutes taken in various meetings, reports on individual student records, newspaper accounts of associated events and letters to parents were useful for exploration. Although some documents were representative of only one perspective and may not have provided insight into participant's personal thinking (Johnson & Christensen, 2007), the researcher added insights and understanding missed when only a single method was used.

## Data Quality Procedures

### *Validity*

Validity in qualitative research demonstrates that an investigator must be able to trust that the report is done ethically and the results can be established as trustworthy (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Seidman, 2006). Johnson and Christensen (2004) said researchers use validity strategies to assure that the research is trustworthy and defensible. The following was included in the study: low- inference descriptors, triangulations, participants' feedback, and peer review.

The use of low inference descriptions phrased verbatim to the participants' accounts and the researchers' field notes (Johnson & Christensen, 2004) was a strategy to check validity. Another strategy was using triangulation to cross check information and conclusions using multiple procedures or sources. "Multiple sources of evidence helped establish the potential problems of construct validity because the multiple sources of evidence essentially provided multiple measures of the same phenomenon" (Yin, 2003, p.99).

Verification of the discussion and feedback of the researcher's interpretations and conclusions with the actual participants took place. After the interview transcription, participants read the transcripts from their respective interview to confirm accuracy of the data. The researcher amended or corrected any statements during the meeting. Finally, the researcher discussed the interpretations and conclusions with interested and disinterested peers who were not involved in the study to provide solid evidence and insights regarding conclusions.

The extent to which the study can be conducted following the same procedures is the goal of reliability not on replicating the results of one case by doing another case (Yin, 2003). The desired outcome in this case was that the readers agree that given the same set of data and

situation the description of the outcomes will be clear. Strategies to assure reliability included using triangulation in data gathering, explaining the investigator's role in detail in the research process, peer review and the choice of sampling method. The researcher reviewed relevant literature thoroughly to ground this study.

### *Internal Validity*

Merriam (1998) stated, "Internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality" (p. 201). Merriam raised the following questions: "Are investigators observing or measuring what they think they are measuring"? and "How congruent are the findings with reality" (p.201)? This research included member checks, peer examination, and triangulation in order to enhance internal validity. Triangulation resulted from utilizing multiple methods of data collection including interviews, observations, document reviews, and analysis. Repeated observations of the same phenomenon in different settings were included in the research design. The researcher asked a colleague to comment on the findings as they emerged, and conducted member checks through exit interviews were strategies to enhance internal validity.

### *External Validity*

"External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations" (Merriam, 1998, p.207). Yin (2003) concurred, "whether a study's findings are generalizable beyond the immediate case study" (p. 37). This single case study was not generalized. However, the researcher presented theoretical explanations that fit the data. One strategy the researcher used was theory triangulation.

The researcher for data interpretation used multiple theories and perspectives (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Another strategy for theoretical validity that was used was pattern matching. The researcher made predictions to see if they occurred (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). One theory was the characteristics of the principal's communication with staff, parents, and students should improve based on the Comer model's implementation. A second theory was the characteristics of the principal's communication should improve the school's social climate given the conditions in the Comer model. The last theory was the school's academic achievement should improve because of the principal's communication within the Comer School Development model. Thus, the researcher sought to interpret and explain the data using multiple theories.

## Data Analysis Procedures

### *Data Management*

Data was organized and stored in a secure location. According to Opie and Sikes (2004), qualitative researchers handle their data in different ways, but all face the need to organize the data collected for a study, and to analyze it in a way that offers a credible and meaningful account of the data in relation to the research questions they have identified (p.166). Yin (2003) stated, “Data analysis consisted of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing and otherwise recombining both quantitative and qualitative evidence to address the initial propositions of a study” (p.109). In order to prove or disprove the propositions, the researcher considered the relationship between the theoretical propositions and the data. In order to prepare the text for coding, the researcher collected, sorted, labeled all field notes, interviews, transcripts, and forms of communication. The data was labeled using codes and types of data (interview, observation, or document review), identifier (interviewee, location observed, or type of document), notes, and comments. Qualitative software was used for data management and analysis to analyze a set of semi-structured interviews with the principal and staff/parents. The software allowed the user to make changes rapidly and easily. In addition, the software helped to manage, shape, and make sense of the information collected. Furthermore, the researcher used the software to discover patterns, identify themes, gleaned insight to present informed findings.

The text was categorized using computer assisted qualitative data analysis software when collected from the open-ended interview (Yin, 2003). The researcher imported text data into excel as separate documents. Then, data was coded using categories based on themes to analyze and make sense of the data (Opie & Sikes, 2004). Subsequently, developing a case description framework assisted in the organization of the case study to identify an embedded unit of analysis and an overall pattern of complexity (Yin, 2003).

Moreover, because of the purpose of this study and the research questions guiding this inquiry, an analytic framework centered on the characteristics of the principal’s communication provided the background for the interpretation of the data. Yin (2003) said that a “case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points and on multiple sources of evidence with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion” (p.13). Triangulation helped to converge and corroborate

results from different respondents in order to increase the credibility or likelihood of the correctness of the research finding (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

Breen (2006) states,

An analysis of focus group data therefore aims to achieve the same aims as many one – to-one interview analysis, except that through the process of trying to arrive at group consensus in the session, some recorded comments may change in their level of importance, as they may be made by one individual and then refuted by others. An analysis of the focus group data includes a summary of the most important themes, the most noteworthy quotes, and any unexpected findings (p.472).

Yin emphasized, “When you have really triangulated the data, the events or facts of the case study have been supported by more than a single source of evidence (p. 99). Data triangulation helped to minimize bias that resulted from relying only on one source or method to collect data such as the interview. Finally, I collected the data, examined, and explained the results discovered in order to draw conclusions.

### Summary

Chapter III included a description and rationale for the methodology and sample selection process for this study. The researcher shared the rationale for a qualitative case study approach. The researcher provided an explanation for data collection and analysis in this study as well as a basis for assuring validity and reliability.

## PROLOGUE TO CHAPTER IV

### Participants

Writing a prologue gives the reader details about the participants and the school thereby allowing them to consider its transferability to his or her specific situation. This foreword will assist the reader with establishing context from which to view the participant's comments as well as become familiar with the principal, five teachers, and a parent who participated in the study.

#### *Principal Background*

The principal has 22 years administrative experience in education of which seven of the years have been at BES academy. When she arrived to her current county, she was a reading specialist one year and then she moved into her principal position. She is quiet in her demeanor, but can easily be distinguished as the person in charge. Her mannerisms are personable with staff and student s alike.

#### *Teacher A*

Educator for 8 years and teaches 3rd grade inclusion

#### *Teacher B*

Educator for over 20 years in Special Education specifically working with students with learning disabilities

#### *Teacher C*

Educator for 5 years and teaches 5<sup>th</sup> grade students

#### *Teacher D*

Educator for 6 years and teaches 4<sup>th</sup> grade inclusion

#### *Teacher E*

Educator for over 30 years/ reading specialist

#### *Parent*

Mother of a third grade student and PTA board member

*BES Academy*

The year 2008 marked BES academy school’s 53<sup>rd</sup> year in the district. During 2007-2008, BES academy had pre-kindergarten through fifth grade with an enrollment of 682 students. Student membership consisted of 336 African Americans, 115 Whites, 219 Hispanics, 5 Asians, 4 American Indians, and 3 unspecified. Reports on enrollment showed that there were 56 special education students, 1 gifted student, and 521 free/reduced lunch students. The attendance rate was 94.9% at BES academy in 2007-2008. The data report shows 41 black students, 7 Hispanics and 9 white students had out of school suspension (see Table 3).

Table 3

*BES Academy 2007-2008 Suspension Data*

<b>Group</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Att Rate</b>	<b>ISS</b>	<b>OSS</b>	<b>Expulsion</b>
Asian	1%	5	93.7%	0	0	0
Black	50%	336	95.2%	0	41	0
Hispanic	32%	219	95.7%	0	7	0
White	17%	115	92.3%	0	9	0
LEP	16%	108	96.8%	0	3	0
Non-LEP	84%	574	94.5%	0	55	0
Special Ed	13%	87	93.6%	0	22	0
Non-Special Ed	87%	595	95.0%	0	36	0
Disadvantaged	63%	427	94.7%	0	50	0
Non-Disadvantaged	37%	255	95.1%	0	8	0
<hr/>						
Students	682					
Attendance	94.9%					
Suspension In School	0					
<hr/>						
Suspension Out of School	58					
Expulsion	0					

The school staff consisted of six kindergarten teachers, six first grade teachers, six-second grade teachers, five teachers at grades three and four, and four fifth grade teachers. A special education team supporting the learning environment consisted of two teachers of learning disabled students, one speech teacher, one teacher of mentally disabled students, and one teacher

of emotional disabled students. Resource teachers consisted of art, music, physical education, library, and computer technology. BES academy is a Title I school and has support from four Title I teachers including a math teacher. In addition, five instructional assistants support instruction in general and special education.

Table 4 demonstrates an overview of the school’s proficiency SOL test scores for grades 3 through 5 since the inception of the Comer School Development model in 2004 until the present. The scores appear to fluctuate in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading during 2004 through 2007. It showed a 7 percent decrease in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading scores from 2006-2007 to 2007-2008. This maybe the result of a new third grade test administered during 2007. Results reflect a consistent dip in fifth grade writing scores during the years 2005-2007. However, in 2007 more than 90 percent of fourth and fifth grade students scored proficient or better on the reading test.

Table 4

*BES Academy’s School Proficiency on Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) Tests*

	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
History 3	95%	93%	94%	94%
History 4	***	82%	73%	86%
History 5	83%	***	***	***
Math 3	97%	91%	94%	93%
Math 4	***	91%	77%	88%
Math 5	94%	97%	93%	98%
Math 6	***	100%	89%	90%
Reading 3	77%	75%	90%	83%
Reading 4	***	96%	93%	97%
Reading 5	96%	97%	95%	96%
Science 3	88%	86%	89%	84%
Science 5	98%	90%	95%	99%
Writing 5	***	95%	92%	81%

Note. Percent of student proficiency over a four- year period as reported from the Virginia Department of Education

Tables 5 and 6 showed subgroups SOL test proficiency during 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years respectively. Results in 2006-2007 showed less than 75 percent of students with disabilities scored at the proficient level in fourth grade reading, math, and Virginia Studies. Results in 2007-2008 demonstrated students with disabilities scored above 75 percent with the exception of third grade reading, science, and fifth grade writing. In the school improvement plan, the team identified priority actions and strategies to address areas of improvement based on the 2006-2007 SOL tests (see Figure 4). Some strategies were flexible small reading and word study groups, inclusion classes in third, fourth and fifth grades and increase technology use as an instructional tool.

Table 5

*Proficiency Percentages of Subgroups SOL Passing 2006-2007*

<i>Grade Level Test</i>	<i>All Students</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Students with Disabilities</i>	<i>Disadvantaged Students</i>
Reading 3	90	92	89	88	***	89
Math 3	94	94	89	100	***	94
Science 3	89	92	83	88	90	87
History 3	94	98	90	88	100	93
Reading 4	93	90	96	93	73	94
Math 4	77	75	76	87	64	82
VA Studies 4	73	78	73	63	50	73
Reading 5	95	94	93	100	***	95
Writing 5	92	94	84	100	***	79
Math 5	93	92	91	100	***	92
Science 5	95	97	88	100	***	94

Note. Proficiency of subgroups SOL passing 2006-2007 as reported by Virginia Department of Education

Table 6

*Proficiency Percentages of Subgroups Passing 2007-2008*

<i>Grade Level Test</i>	<i>All Students</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Students with Disabilities</i>	<i>Disadvantaged Students</i>
Reading 3	83	88	71	94	58	85
Math 3	93	92	90	100	83	94
Science 3	84	79	84	94	67	83
History 3	94	94	94	94	77	93
Reading 4	97	98	100	87	100	96
Math 4	88	88	91	80	83	86
VA Studies 4	***	***	***	***	***	***
Reading 5	96	98	96	94	***	97
Writing 5	81	81	78	88	50	81
Math 5	98	100	100	100	***	98
Science 5	99	98	100	100	***	100

Note. Proficiency of subgroups SOL passing 2007-2008 as reported by Virginia Department of Education

BES academy is a beige brick building with an added section near the library. The buff, shiny floors demonstrated that cleanliness is a priority. The Comer School Development model sign is in front of the school's office (see Figure 3). The sign signifies the expectations for exercising continuous collegiate consensus, collaboration and a no fault finding environment among all stakeholders. Near the front entrance hallway are several plaques that note great accomplishments for BES academy students and staff. BES academy won two national awards in 2002. The state of Virginia chose BES academy as a Distinguished Title I School based on its high-test scores and was one of six schools to receive a Fordham University School Change Award, which resulted partly on BES's organization around the Comer school development program. In 2005, BES academy was one of five high-performing elementary schools chosen to participate in a Virginia best practice study by the National Center for Educational Accountability. The state of Virginia identified BES academy as a Virginia Index Performance school of Excellence (VIP) in 2006. To achieve this recognition under this program, achievement of the students in a school must exceed the Commonwealth's accreditation standards and the minimum requirements of the NCLB Act of 2001 for at least two consecutive years.

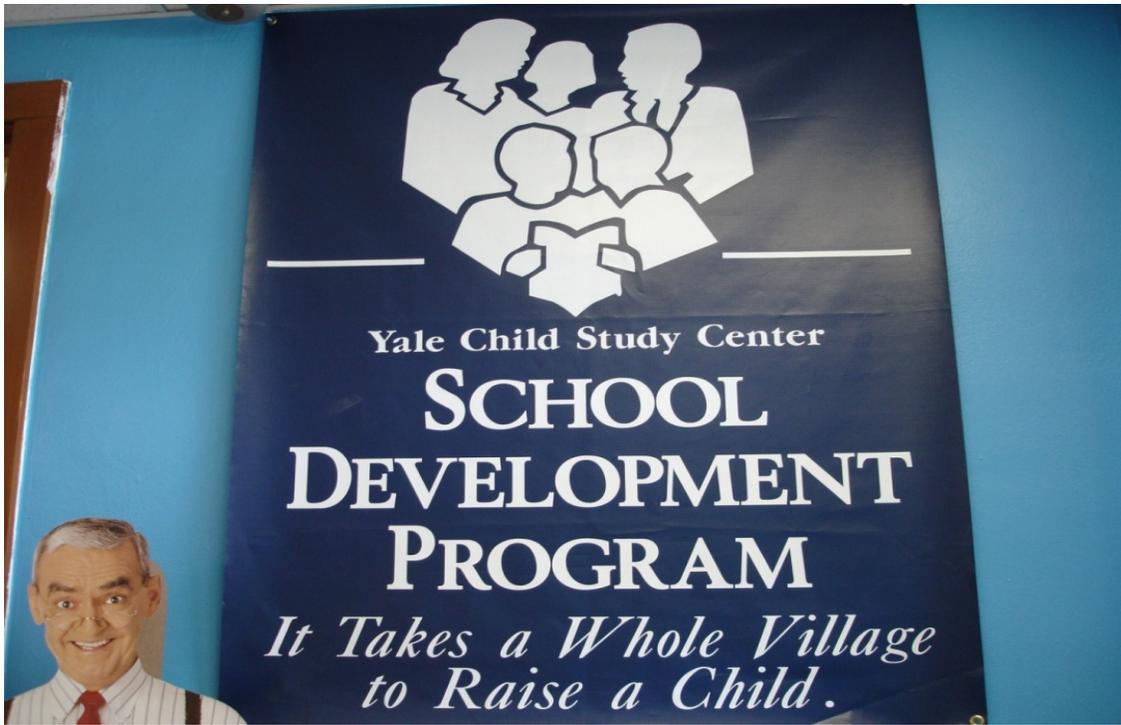


Figure 3. Comer school development model sign.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

Effective educational leaders have competencies in a variety of areas. However, this research focused on the principal's communication in the operation of the Comer School Development model. Two research questions guided this investigation of whether the principal's communication influenced factors of the Comer School Development model. *(1) What are the perceptions of the school community regarding the characteristics of the principal's communication in the operation of the Comer School Development model?, (2) What are the perceptions of the school community regarding the characteristics of the principal's communication, interactions, and relationships in regards to parent community outreach and involvement?, and (3) What are the practices of the principal's communication that appeared to be more prevalent than others to the academic success of the school?* The researcher gathered data in the form of a principal interview, focus group, observations, and document reviews. Observations included seven visits to the school site. A focus group was comprised of staff members and a parent (N=6). Documents for review were the 2007-2008 parent/student handbook, staff handbook, 2005-2007 PTA meeting minutes, school bulletins, and the 2007-2010 three-year strategic school improvement plans. Results reported in Chapter IV are in narrative and tabular form. The findings section includes the raw data of the principal's interview and the focus group reported according to the themes and the communication descriptors. When applicable, data from the document reviews and observations are included in the results. Last, the summary section is included in this chapter.

The researcher reports the results from the principal's interview and focus group in a narrative format. Referenced in the following sections are interview data from the principal and focus group and analysis of observations and documents. Letters (TA, TB, TC, TD, TE, and P) that identify teachers' and parent statement denote focus group transcript. The letters PI=Principal's transcript. The number enclosed in parenthesis denotes the page number of the transcript. For example, (TB, 1) means teacher B, page 1. Raw data from each question are in (see Appendices H and I). The organization of the following sections are based on themes discussed in Chapter III and themes that are important to the principal's communication in the operation of the Comer School Development model.

### *Common Themes*

Table 7 presents common themes that emerged from the principal interview and the focus group responses to the interview questions. Two or more responses to an interview question identified a common theme. The table contains four columns. The first column shows the question, the second column shows the principal's response the third column presents the focus group response and the fourth column shows the document that references that theme. In addition, the themes included the number of times (n) each response was listed.

### *Vision*

Vision provides a sense of direction and a basis for assessing the current school status and potential strategies, programs and procedures for school improvement. Recognized in the Comer School Development model was the school planning management team (SPMT). During the interview, the principal noted the SPMT team collaboratively fueled several discussions about the vision for the school. From the principal's communication, it was evident that she had a vision for the school and the principal articulated the vision that influenced the school's success.

During the interview, the principal discussed that communication is critical with the school's planning management team regarding the school's vision. It was evident that she dialogues with the school planning management team about the vision for the school.

The school planning management team is under the common principle that speaks to the engine of the school and the purpose for that engine is that it incorporates representatives from all grade levels in our department. With that committee, we talk specifically about global issues that affect the school. So when we have to deal with any setting, revising our mission, vision, or revising what we are going to focus on for the year, it goes clearly through the planning management team for discussion. Any action that the school planning management team takes is allocated to sub committees. (PI, 1)

Table 7

*Common Themes by Questions*

<i>Question</i>	<i>Principal Interview</i>	<i>Focus Group</i>	<i>Document Review</i>
Discuss how the principal communicates appropriately with your school’s planning management team regarding academic, social, and community goals.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>SPMT (Comer model)</b></li> <li>2. <b>Vision/Mission</b></li> <li>3. Grade level meetings/Curriculum meetings</li> <li>4. <b>Data</b></li> <li>5. <b>School Improvement Plan</b></li> <li>6. <b>PTA Board</b></li> <li>7. Staff development</li> <li>8. <b>Staff, Student, Support Team (SSST) (Comer)</b></li> <li>9. <b>High Expectations for student and staff</b></li> <li>10. Communication</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>SPMT (Comer)</b> (n=5)</li> <li>2. <b>Vision</b> (n=4)</li> <li>3. Curriculum meetings (n=3)</li> <li>4. <b>Data (n=3)</b></li> <li>5. <b>School Improvement Plan (n=5)</b></li> <li>6. PTA Board (n=1)</li> <li>7. Staff Development</li> <li>8. <b>SSST (n=3)</b></li> <li>9. <b>High expectations for student and staff (n=5)</b></li> <li>10. Newsletter (n=4)</li> </ol>	<p>School Improvement Plan</p> <p>Parent/Student Handbook</p> <p>Staff Handbook</p> <p>SPMT Meeting Minutes</p> <p>Bi Weekly Newsletter</p> <p>Weekly Calendar</p>
Discuss how the principal coordinates and communicates school activities and staff developments.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Communicate with team leaders</b> as needed.</li> <li>2. Surveys</li> <li>3. Emails</li> <li>4. PTA board</li> <li>5. Collaboration meetings</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Team leader</b> meetings (n=4)</li> <li>2. Surveys (n=3)</li> <li>3. Emails (n=5)</li> <li>4. BES Bulletin</li> <li>5. PTA board (n=2)</li> <li>6. Parentlink (n=1)</li> <li>7. <b>Collaboration</b> meetings (n=2)</li> </ol>	<p>BES Bulletin</p> <p>Technology Survey</p> <p>Bi Weekly Newsletters</p> <p>Weekly Calendar</p>
Discuss how the principal communicates with staff, parents, and students to promote desirable and social conditions and relationships.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Parent/Student Handbook w/<b>high expectations.</b></li> <li>2. Assemblies</li> <li>3. Staff retreat/build relationships</li> <li>4. Conferences/Phone calls</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Parent/Student handbook w/ <b>high expectations</b> (n=6)</li> <li>2. Assemblies (n=4)</li> <li>3. Parent Conferences</li> </ol>	<p>Report Cards</p> <p>Interim Reports/Progress Reports</p> <p>Parent Compact</p> <p>Parent/Student Handbook</p>
Discuss how the principal facilitates the sharing of information to address your student’s needs, access resources outside the school, and develops prevention programs.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Meet with <b>community</b> collaborates (Rotary organization, DSCR, DuPont.</li> <li>2. Core values</li> <li>3. Presentation School Improvement to Central personnel and to community organizations</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Community</b> liaison (n=2)</li> <li>2. Core values (n=6)</li> </ol>	<p>Report Cards</p> <p>Intervention Records</p> <p>Data Matrix</p>

(Table continued)

Table 7 (continued)

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Principal Interview</i>	<i>Focus Group</i>	<i>Document Review</i>
Discuss how the principal communicates with parents the school activities that he/she can support the school's social and academic goals, or the programs.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Parental Involvement</b> Quarterly assemblies</li> <li>2. Library Night</li> <li>3. Staff Development on Time to Teach Program</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Parental Involvement</b> Assemblies (n=5)</li> <li>2. Library evening (n=3)</li> <li>3. Staff Development Time to teach Program (n=6)</li> </ol>	School Website Parentlink BES Bulletin
Discuss how the principal communicates to the school community the importance of problem solving as opposed to fault finding in regards to student success.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Communication</b> using e-mails.</li> <li>2. Comer's Guiding Principles</li> <li>3. Data discussions</li> <li>4. Staff meetings</li> <li>5. <b>SSST</b> meetings</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Emails (n=4)</li> <li>2. SPMT (Comer's guiding principles) (n=5)</li> <li>3. Data Discussions (n=4)</li> <li>4. Staff meetings (n=2)</li> <li>5. <b>SSST</b> meetings (n=2)</li> </ol>	Email Grade Level Meeting Minutes
Discuss the ways the principal communicates concern and openness and the consideration and resolution of problems.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Communication</b> Direct, open honest dialogue/</li> <li>2. <b>SPMT</b> meetings</li> <li>3. <b>SSST meeting</b></li> <li>4. <b>PTA meeting</b></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Communication</b> Face to face (n=2)</li> <li>2. Ownership by staff</li> <li>3. (V034)Checks for understanding (n=3)</li> <li>4. (V021)Expresses clear and concise language</li> <li>5. <b>SPMT</b> meetings (n=3)</li> <li>6. <b>SSST meeting (n=2)</b></li> </ol>	
Discuss how the principal communicates to the parents and the community the visions and goals for your school.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>School Improvement Plan</b></li> <li>2. Open House/School Calendar</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>School Improvement Plan /Brochure</b> (n=4)</li> <li>2. Open House School Calendar (n=3)</li> </ol>	Bi weekly parent letters BES Bulletin School Improvement Plan
Discuss opportunities that the principal sought and communicated to parents that foster their support for learning opportunities.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Communicate expectations</b> to parents to become involve with PTA. Staff development</li> <li>2. Title I parental Involvement</li> <li>3. Parent Invitations to SPMT</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Extended Day enrichment and remediation activities.(n=3)</li> <li>2. PTA Staff Development (n=4)</li> <li>3. SPMT (n=4)</li> </ol>	Newsletter/Time to Teach Letter about SOLs testing

Note. Common Themes by Questions

The principal does not see herself as the sole source of instructional expertise in the school. She says, “I reiterate the vision of the school during staff developments held the second Thursday of each month geared towards developing the goals around the global issues the school deals with during the school year.” She advises teachers to talk with their colleagues for assistance and ideas about how to ensure success in the learning environment for every child. “I organize opportunities for staff members to get together during curriculum meetings to generate goals and objectives.” (PI, 1) The principal constantly communicated and publicized clear, attainable goals. When the researcher conducted the focus group she found that in virtually, all instances, their statements echoed those of the principal.

BES academy’s teachers characterize the school as having a cooperative environment where they communicate with the principal and work together through the SPMT structure for the common good of children. The focus group noted how the structure of the school planning management team benefits the school. “I am on the school’s planning management team. We collect data on how our students are doing academically and discuss the things we need to work on. She let us know everything about the school.” (TB, 1) “The SPMT meetings that teacher B was talking about is really the vehicle of where everything is of a concern is discussed. The principal e-mails and says, “Are there any issues that you want me to bring to the SPMT meeting?” “She is very open about hearing what are some people’s concerns and questions. She might have some of her own. (TE, 1) “With SPMT, we have a free agenda of open discussion. Whatever we want, we can mention it, it is open to the community, parents, students, and instructional assistants, and each team has a representative that must attend.” (TC, 1) For example, a community liaison who runs the community center in a local apartment complex would attend to find out what was going on in the school. The focus group concurred with the principal about the operation of the SPMT in the school. “Another way of communicating the vision of the school is in a calendar included in the handbook that goes home to families at the beginning of the school year and if you go to the office, there is a school calendar that is located there and that is where teachers can write down field trips or schedule anything”(TC, 2).

In studying the principal’s communication, I noticed the principal’s procedures to develop and implement an integrated three-year strategic plan for school improvement were a major vehicle for communicating goals and developing the staff’s commitment to them. More importantly, the plan serves as a road map to attaining the vision. The principal participated in

team meeting discussions that focused on addressing specific intervention for student achievement. In addition, she discussed with the core planning team that consisted of representatives from all grade levels, resource teachers, special education teachers, reading specialists, and the PTA president strategies to close gaps to improve student achievement. After completing a current internal organizational assessment using data, the team developed areas of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). The goals focused on academic excellence for all students/closing achievement gaps, safe and supportive learning environments, and implementing self-directed learning and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (see Figure 4).

During the presentation of BES's school improvement plan, the principal communicated the vision for the school. The school's development and communication of the school improvement plan (see Figure 4) was a road map towards achieving student success. The plan communicated by the principal served to formalize the initiatives undertaken during the school year. The School Improvement Team established common language and goals centered on the vision that guided their future decisions and actions. A requirement by the district is that the core planning team members present the school's strategic three-year plan for school improvement to central level personnel and school board members. Furthermore, in order to have all stakeholders understand the academic and behavioral focus for students at BES academy, the principal created a brochure outlining the school improvement goals and priorities as a communication tool for parents and the community. The principal provided a copy of the brochure to each committee member, school board members, parents, and community members.

In addition, at the peer review the principal expressed clear and concise language, used appropriate communication modes, and used language appropriate to the situation. She named the members of the core planning team including teacher representatives from physical education, music, two reading specialists, an ESOL teacher, a title I math teacher, a special education teacher, kindergarten teacher, a first grade teacher, a second grade teacher, three third grade teachers, two fourth grade teachers and a fifth grade teacher. She outlined the vision, mission, and core beliefs of BES academy:

*Annual Operating Plan for School Improvement 2007-2010*

*School: BES Academy*

**Goal#1:** Academic Excellence for all Students/Closing the Achievement Gaps

**Key Success Measure:** Achieve and sustain levels of student achievement to earn full accreditation and make AYP under NCLB for all subgroups.

**Core Strategy:** Implement inclusive practices for students in all NCLB subgroups and for students who learn differently.

<b>Priority Actions</b>	<b>What System Support/Resources?</b>	<b>Who is Responsible?</b>	<b>When Done?</b>	<b>How to Measure?</b>	<b>Annual Status</b>
Priority Action #1: Refine the implementation of Sheltered Instruction Observational Protocol (SIOP) in grades 3-5.	CCPS ESOL Support	3-5 Classroom Teachers ESOL & Special Education Dept. Language Arts Support Staff	Nov. 06- Jun. 08 Ongoing	Classroom Observations  Pre & Post Coaching Conferences  Lesson Plans  Student Achievement on PALS Quarterly Assessments ( DRA & DSA) , and weekly tests	Annual AYP  Meet CCPS SOL advanced target pass rate for all subgroups  Decrease in retention rate  Increase in overall pass rates of NCLB subgroups
Priority Action #2: A SIOP teacher coach trained to facilitate the implementation of SIOP model.	Consultant Trainer from the Center of Applied Linguistics  ESOL Support	SIOP Teacher/Coach	Aug.07' - Jun. 08'	Letter of completion in SIOP model and coaches training Certificate of Participation	Annual AYP  Meet CCPS SOL advanced target pass rate for all subgroups  Decrease retention rate  Increase overall pass rates of NCLB subgroups

(Figure 4 continued)

<b>Priority Actions</b>	<b>What System Support/Resources?</b>	<b>Who is Responsible?</b>	<b>When Done?</b>	<b>How to Measure?</b>	<b>Annual Status</b>
Priority Action #3: Create “Push-in” coaching model with special education and ESOL staff.	Utilize Differentiating Literacy Instruction Framework developed by school district’s exceptional Education and Curriculum & Instruction Dept.	K-5 Classroom Teachers  ESOL & Special Education Staff	Sept. 07- Jun. 08	Student achievement on PALS Quarterly Assessments ( DRA & DSA) and weekly tests	Improve passing rate of all subgroups on the English & Mathematics SOL test
Priority Action #4: Eliminate overlapping of small group reading schedules.	Flexible use of personnel Master schedule	Collaboration & consensus with administration & all grade levels	Mar.07’- Jun.08’	Revised Master Schedule	Interim & summative data collected on the quarterly alternate ranking sheet  Student Achievement on PALS, Quarterly assessments
Priority Action #5: Create flexible small groups in mathematics.	School District’s Math Specialist	Grades 3-5 Classroom teachers  Math Specialist	Jan.08’-Jun. 08’	Performance on quarterly assessments	Increase in percentage of students achieving in the advanced proficiency range on the SOL tests
Priority Action #6: Refine word study routines & procedures in grades 1&2.	Language Arts Specialist  Reading Specialist K-2 with Language Arts Support Team	Grades 1-2 Classroom Teachers  ESOL & Special Education Staff  Language Arts support staff  Paraprofessionals	Sept.07’- Jun.08’	Growth in Developmental Spelling Analysis (DSA) level  Higher proficiency in reading fluency, comprehension & writing	Attaining a higher percentage of students exceeding the Spring PALS benchmark  Increase the number of students reading on grade level by the end of grade 3

(Figure 4 continued)

**Goal #2:** Safe and supportive Learning Environments

**Key Success Measure:** 85% of BES academy students with no suspensions or expulsions.

**Core Strategy:** Promote positive school culture and discipline frameworks that increase every student’s connection to and engagement in school and the core values.

Priority Actions	What System Support/Resources?	Who is Responsible?	When Done?	How to Measure?	Annual Status
Priority Action #1 Train staff and implement the “Time to Teach” methods, strategies, and procedures	Title I funding Time to Teach resources and materials	All BES academy’s staff  Dr. Joanna Faulk trainer	Aug, Oct, Nov. 07, & Feb. 08	Classroom observation 100% participation of BES academy staff	Decrease in the number of office referrals Decrease in the number of suspensions
Priority #2 Build staff background knowledge of Professional Learning Communities by engaging in whole faculty study groups of the book Whatever It Takes by Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Karhanek	Districts’ Curriculum Academy 2007 Instructional Division	BES academy curriculum training team	Aug., Sept., Oct., & Nov. 07’  On going	100% participation in book study and staff meetings	Development of grade level norms and S.M.A.R.T. Goals
Priority #3 Implement “Time To Teach”	Dr. Joanna Faulk-Trainer	All classroom teachers & support staff	Aug., Oct., & Nov. 07’ - Feb. 08’	Survey of Teachers/support staff of effectiveness of methods	Decrease Discipline referrals Decrease suspensions
Priority Action #4 Engage families in understanding principles of positive discipline frameworks	Prevention consultant, mental health department	BES academy’s parents	Feb.08’ - Jun.08’	Attendance of parents at Parent Workshops	District annual parent survey

(Figure 4 continued)

**Goal # 3:** Academic Achievement: Self-Directed Learning and 21st Century Skills

**Key Success Measure:** Increased integration of technology in all curriculum areas.

**Core Strategy #1:** Improve staff and students' effectiveness and use of technology as a tool to increase productivity and synthesis of information.

<b>Priority Actions</b>	<b>What System Support/Resources?</b>	<b>Who is Responsible?</b>	<b>When Done?</b>	<b>How to Measure?</b>	<b>Annual Status</b>
Priority Action #1: Develop a school technology plan for the integration of technology.	District's technology integrators	BES academy administration & technology committee	Jan.08' - Jun.'08	Administration PGPP plans, technology committee meeting minutes, and published plan	Annual review
Priority Action #2: Provide K-2 teacher training and support for technology integration	District's technology integrators	K-2 teachers and support staff	Sept. 07' - Jun. 08' Ongoing	Teacher lesson plans, integrator schedules and support documentation	Increase in the number of integrators scheduled
Priority Action#3: Implement Children's Engineering Program Classroom lessons	District's funding for additional teachers to attend trainings	Trained teachers	Sept. 07' - Jun. 08'	Teacher lesson plans to include 2 lessons per quarter	Increase authentic student products

(Figure 4 continued)

**Goal # 3: Academic Achievement: Self-Directed Learning and 21st Century Skills**

**Key Success Measure:** Increased parent awareness of the utilization of technology in the learning process

**Core Strategy #2:** Improve parent participation in the use of technology as a tool to increase productivity and synthesis of information

<b>Priority Actions</b>	<b>What System Support/Resources?</b>	<b>Who is Responsible?</b>	<b>When done?</b>	<b>How to Measure?</b>	<b>Annual Status</b>
Priority Action #1  Expand the use of Library Night to include additional technology access for parents.	Technology Integrators	BES academy technology committee. Librarian, TRA	Feb. 08' - Jun. 08'	Committee meeting minutes, parent sign-up sheets	Increase the number of parents participating in Library Night
Priority Action #2: Highlight technology initiatives in school's bi monthly newsletter and Parentlink system.	Public Relations Director	Administration, BES technology committee, PR committee	Sept.07' - Jun.08  Ongoing	On-going communication and publications	Increase in the number of published items and Parentlink messages
Priority Action#3: Promote use of the school website as communication tool for parents.	District's technology department	Administration, BES academy web curator, technology and PR committee	Sept.07' - Jun.08'  Ongoing	Monthly committee meeting minutes and website updates	Increase in the percentage of parents who access the school's website  Parent survey results

Figure 4. Annual operating school improvement plan for 2007-2008.

In 2012, we envision that BES academy will be a thriving, dynamic, and inspiring educational environment that produces self-directed learners with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, and stimulates citizens of all ages to trust in, invest in, and benefit from public education.

Work in partnership with students, families and the community to ensure that each student acquires the knowledge, skills, and core values necessary to achieve personal success and to enrich the community. In pursuit of our shared vision and mission, we believe: Learning is our core purpose. Effective teaching is the most essential factor in student learning. Effective leaders support learning, trusting relationships and our core values—respect, responsibility, honesty, and accountability foster learning; our citizens, parents, students, and employees are partners in sustaining competence and investing in excellence; and excellence requires planning and change.

In addition, the principal revealed her opinion succinctly and appropriately during the presentation, when she provided an overview of the school:

A portrait of BES academy demonstrates a school whose performance for students would be predicted less than satisfactory because 78% of the population qualify for free/reduced lunch, 32% of the students speak Spanish as their first language and several live in trailers, apartments and multi-family homes. However, we have a staff that strategically designs instruction to meet the needs of all students. We developed our list of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats based on our survey, SOL, benchmark, and PALS data to determine our focus and priorities.

During a vertical grade level meeting, the principal's communication conveyed the focus was on the kids and her vision was to provide the best education for all kids. During the meeting, the principal communicated that the teacher coach will facilitate "the Shelter Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) tool to provide comprehensible content to English Language Learners (ELL)." She stressed the delivery of instruction to ELL students using "graphic organizers, outlines, picture labeling, using highlighters to highlight text and study guide." "This protocol is designed for ELL students, but look at the benefits all our kids can reap if instruction is provided in a differentiated method." Evidence revealed that vision of the school is success for students.

I followed the principal to a third grade classroom walkthrough. She demonstrated sensitivity toward a diverse population as she communicated the vision for students' success

succinctly and appropriately. Students were working in fluid groups. A teacher was administering the Directed Reading Assessment (DRA) to students individually to determine his or her benchmark during the spring testing. A student said, “Hey, Ms. C... I reached a 38 on my test.” Another student said, “I am still trying to reach 38, but I am at 36.” She took the time to impress on the students the importance she attached to academic success. She complimented and praised both students on their individual successes. “J... do you remember when you said I will never be able to read well and look at you now! You worked hard and applied the strategies taught by Ms..., and you did it”! The principal was glowing. It was evident that this was a successful moment for the students. The principal’s communication actualized the vision at BES academy. In addition, the message she carried demonstrated to the teachers that she acknowledged and appreciated their hard work. Consequently, in the operation of the Comer School Development model the principal spends time articulating the vision of the school that focuses on ensuring all students’ success.

### *School Improvement*

One of the principal’s primary goals is to continue to achieve and sustain levels of student achievement to earn full accreditation and make adequate yearly progress under No Child Left Behind for all subgroups. As she influenced the school improvement process, she communicated information about test data, the importance of working together because they all were learners and questioned instructional practices by spending time in the classrooms. An example that shows the principal embraced every opportunity to talk about data to improve instruction for kids.

At every open house I talk specifically about how we performed the previous year as it relates to the benchmarks that we set, achieved or not. So, I share what the mission is and what our goals are and of course, the goals are subject to change as we review our data throughout the year. Data drives what we do for children academically and socially. The mission statement is the same as the district; we work in partnership with students, families, and the community to ensure that each student acquires the knowledge, skills, and core values necessary to achieve personal success and to enrich the community. Our bi-weekly newsletter home to parents conveys our mission, the parent message on the report cards reflect what our focus can be and I speak during quarterly assemblies to the students regarding making our school better.(PI,5)

Learning goals are not only important for students but the principal communicates that learning goals and promoting relationships are equally important for staff. “All the grade levels have developed smart goals on data, so we are consistently looking at data, and that data is use to refocus our energies on what we need to do.” (PI, 4) For example, during a 5<sup>th</sup> grade data chat team meeting, the principal directed teachers to develop SMART goals to focus specifically on his/her classroom language arts benchmark test. She further instructed teachers to, “Monitor the progress of the students for three weeks to determine if the strategies are working.” “If not go back, and reassess the student and use another strategy.” “We will not continue to do for kids what is not working.” The principal discussed an opportunity for staff to communicate with her during a retreat. “We chartered a bus for a staff retreat at the Williamsburg Christian Center for the past two years to build our own moral. That has worked tremendously. We worked on our focus goals for that year as well as did fellowship activities to build relationships among each other. We did all kinds of competitive games. It was just wonderful. Everybody was like, “are we going next year?” (PI, 2)

The principal listened and sought first to understand her staff’s need to improve instructional time with no or minimal behavior interruptions. The focus group shared, “We are doing Time to Teach and refocusing,” this is new. It will be starting with kindergarten through fifth grade. We had a parent PTA meeting that talked about the things we were doing with Time to Teach and refocusing so, the students could start using it in their homes and understanding the expectations right off the back. Dr. Faulk was a special guest who spoke to the parents (TD, 3). The focus group confirmed, “The principal takes into account what our struggles are at our school. Almost every staff meeting we have is a staff development. Recently our staff development was on the Functional Behavior Assessment because as a school last year we were struggling with classroom management. The principal established the staff development for “Time to Teach” because she heard us” (TA, 2). It was evident that staff believes the principal supports their learning and growth by listening to the needs they have and providing staff development that enhances learning for all staff and students.

In addition, the principal sent a letter to parents communicating information about the “Time to Teach” management system. In the letter, the principal stated,

The main goal of the “Time to Teach” model is to provide teachers with more time to teach and less time on discipline issues in the classroom. We expect all students to

understand that the adult is in charge and following adult directions are the expectations. A student maybe asked to “refocus” that means they are given the opportunity to correct their behavior, on their own, without negative consequences. She invited parents to listen to Dr. Faulk share strategies the school is using to maximize their time to teach at a PTA meeting. Furthermore, documented in the School Improvement Plan teachers will engage as a faculty in a study group as they develop professional learning communities during a book study.

Acknowledged is the Student, Staff, Support team in the Comer School Development model as important to the school’s organization. During an observation of a Student, Staff, Support team (SSST) meeting, discussion centered on specific student’s academic and behavioral performance. The team took the time to review all data (intervention, remediation, testing) about each student to determine if the student should be retained in the current grade. It was very evident that a structured process is in place because a teacher did not complete all the required documentation for discussion and the facilitator indicated the case would not be considered until all the information is submitted. Secondly, a teacher was not present to discuss a student he recommended for retention and as a result, the committee facilitated by the reading specialist did not discuss it. Third, the committee began to discuss a student for retention who had not been at the school for the entire year. Teachers who teach the student were proposing retention based on skill deficits. The principal exhibited all communication descriptors except seeking first to understand the reasons teachers felt the student should be retained. The principal stated, “We will not entertain retaining a student if they have not been at BES academy all year or if they have been retained before, retention is not the answer; strategically working with the student is the answer.” Two teachers explained the number of times the student had moved to different places and the reading level was well below other students. “He is not performing at grade level.” However, the principal said, “This student cannot be judged based on not acquiring the skills because of the moves, but he has not had the opportunity to be taught consistently. Are we being fair to the student? The student needs intense intervention, not retention.” The principal conveyed all communication descriptors except checking for understanding. Academic goals are clear for students. However, the principal asked a question and did not wait for a response. She shrugged her shoulders and said, “That answers it.” This

discussion was typical of three other across grade meetings observed during the school year regarding students acquiring the necessary skills for promotion to the next grade.

### *High Expectations*

The principal communicates high expectations for all students throughout the school year. She seeks opportunities to provide students with extended experiences that are not only in the academic area.

We look at meeting the academic needs of all kids based on past performance. We try to broaden the experiences of our kids by not just remediating but offering enrichments for those students who are also sitting there and ready to take off. We have broadened the extended day program to provide opportunities like Project Dance and Jazz and Ballet and the Mad Science Club. The selection process for the Mad Science Club resulted from 4<sup>th</sup> grade students writing an essay about wanting to become a mad scientist. So we are weaving in writing skills, we are weaving in high expectations, with the understanding students must earn it. We are trying to develop the whole child, which means not only academically, but social and psychological in terms of what they want to do and what they can be. More importantly, “following the three guiding principles behind Comer: collaboration, no fault, and consensus building”. “Looking at the data is not done to generate who is at fault.” “Spinning your wheels about what the first grade teachers and the second grade teachers did not do does not help us; it just causes tension”. I can say to that woman, why did not you marry a smarter man so you could have a smarter child, so that is just how ridiculous that gets when you do the fault-finding game. Therefore, it is strictly about the three guiding principles: collaboration, no fault, and consensus building. (PI, 5) The principal sets the expectation that the staff is accountable for all students learning regardless of his/her background.

Focus group members indicated the principal communicates frequently with teachers the expectations she has for the students in the school and the teachers in the school. For example, “She challenges us to seek 21<sup>st</sup> century grants for our students for the 21<sup>st</sup> skills. I know for the longest time it was, like let’s make sure that our kids are passing the SOLS and now she says, “we’ve done that and we’re going to continue to do that, let’s start working on enrichment”. (TD, 9) She is always pushing and raising the bar a little bit higher each time. We

always seem to meet that for her. (TC, 9) “It is not passing SOLs; its pass advance SOL and soon 600 around the board” (TD, 9 laughing).

The principal communicates the importance of problem solving as opposed to fault-finding. “Well one thing she does a lot is school wide emails; it is not a personal attack. It would never be “teacher so and so stop doing that.” “When we have SPMT meeting, it is always the no fault finding principle, that we do not call anyone specifically.” “If one person is doing it then everyone is address by it. Sometimes we see the e-mail and have no idea who it is.” (TC, 5) Therefore, “as a team, group or committee we are to see how we can help the situation”. “I think what really sets the tone for the beginning of the school year is that the school sends home a school calendar that includes the expectations, you know student behavior.” (TE, 2)

Another example, of the principal communicating her expectations is at an SPMT meeting. The principal announced BES academy’s recognition for a VIP Excellence State award for the Tier II level. She said, “We are proud of our work and we have to move it up a notch to reach Tier I”. Additionally, the principal discussed the ways she communicate openness and concerns when she is resolving problems. “Sometimes I use e-mail, but I always believe that you go directly to people and have open and honest dialogue and open and honest feedback whether it is a call from a parent or a letter from a parent”. “I always present what the issues are and go directly to that person.” I believe in being very direct, up front and in many cases, I am very blunt depending on the severity of what I have to deal with.” (PI, 5) In addition, she says, “in terms of solving a problem, things are communicated top down especially if you are spinning your wheels with it.” And I think that’s how she handles things, is that we are indeed a team but make no mistake, if you get on her wrong side, like I said, she’ll send the email, but she will address people to face to face in her office. (TE, 5)

High expectations regarding success on the SOLS are in the building. Some signs are hanging in the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grade hallways. “We will pass 100%.” The lounge has the following slogans on bulletin boards: “Together we will achieve success.” “You are a lifesaver for our kids.” “Thank you for all the hard work.” During a lunch visit, the principal desire to counsel students played a large part in her interactions with children, particularly the students who committed an infraction of the school rules. As she dealt with some students for using profanity and touching each other inappropriately in the cafeteria, she carefully listened to what

they had to say about their behavior. She really took the time to let the child explain what happened. She acted appropriately when students misbehaved. The principal told the students she would call their parents to report the incident and share the consequence for their misbehavior. She requested the social worker to discuss and investigate with the students the inappropriate touching further to ensure students involved are safe in other capacities of their interactions. In this situation, the principal sought to understand the kids' behavior, and she checked for understanding with the diverse population.

On one occasion, the principal held an impromptu staff meeting. She gathered the staff to the library to celebrate teachers nominated as a BES teacher of the year and presented each with a rose. Through her words, she reminded the staff of the purpose and priorities of their school. She shared, "what a teacher does daily for children should never go unnoticed." Let us congratulate... for living the commitment to children."

The principal not only communicates high expectations for students, but staff as well. An example was in a meeting when the principal demonstrated sensitivity towards a diverse population about teachers' attendance. Her comments included, "I sense that people were taken back by the discussion about teachers being absent or the magnitude of the absences; folks have a cavalier attitude. I have the days and I am going to take it. A sense of empathy is needed and not shown when this attitude is demonstrated." A teacher said, "I was touchy when I was asked about my absences." Some of my team members said they are really not feeling well and still comes to work, it boils down to work ethic". The principal said, "How do we wrap this up and put a bow on it? Ownership begins from within." Comments suggested by teachers, "verbalize it, you are valuable to me because.. , keep discussing and make people feel they are a part of a team, such a fine line with the least confrontation, take a poll to ask thoughts and opinions. The principal said, "some may say let's drop it". If the discussion is out there, it is predicated on "ethics." Furthermore, the principal stated in some schools, students will learn in spite of the teacher's efforts but our kids need us to be here and teach effectively. The discussion concluded with team members considering providing gift cards to the team that has the least absences; and it becomes competitive. Clearly, the principal expects all teachers to be present to teach their students daily.

Furthermore, the principal expresses clear and concise language when she seeks to understand how the instructional assistants are feeling about monitoring students in the cafeteria during the lunch period.

She shared:

Instructional assistants are still feeling very overwhelmed and helpless and they cannot monitor putting kids on silent lunch. When I tell you that you cannot put kids on silent lunch and you do it, then you must eat with them. Students cannot be placed on silent lunch, if the aides come to me and say that this is being done, I am going to come into the lounge and tell you eat with your kids. Expectations are concise and clearly stated to staff about supporting the instructional assistants because of the challenges with monitoring student's behavior during lunch duty.

The principal communicates high expectations in the staff's handbook. The principal writes, "BES academy is a community where the administration and staff have high expectations for themselves and the students. Its students are treated fairly and disciplined with respect to establish an environment in every classroom that ensures all children learn and students are able to recognize quality work." Procedures in the staff's handbook reveal the expectations for staff to focus on students at all times. "It is imperative that each staff member regardless of position accept responsibility for students, especially in matters pertaining to safety. For our school to continue to be an exceptional school, we must view our school, our program, and our students as being responsibilities of all of us. All students **MUST BE UNDER ADULT SUPERVISION AT ALL TIMES.**"

The expectation for staff to attend meetings and collaborate with each other is in the handbook. "Faculty meetings will be held on the **SECOND THURSDAY** of each month. Please keep this date open each month. Team leader meetings will be held on the **SECOND TUESDAY** of each month or as needed. Committee meetings except for School Improvement Planning (SIP) will be held on the **THIRD THURSDAY**. Grade level meetings will be held weekly. Grade level agendas and meeting minutes should be turned into the office to be kept in a committee meetings notebook." "Teachers are to report to their rooms at 8:00 a.m." Practices for bus safety are in the handbook:

All teachers should accompany their classes to their buses and check out with the designated grade level person with the clipboard. Think safety, Always be on time,

Remember to wear the orange vest, Remember to bring the walkie- talkie for your grade level outside each day, Make sure your duty station is covered if you are absent, and Remember that your duty station is important for the safety of the students.

### *Teaching and Learning*

Communication from the principal conveyed opinions succinctly and appropriately that were driven by a few key ideas that was repeated at every opportunity. “Learning is our core purpose. Effective teaching is the most essential factor in student learning.” In a grade level meeting the principal shared, “test scores are indicative of our effectiveness to help all students learn, but not our primary focus, the strategies we utilize to teach effectively are the main thing.”

This grade level meeting demonstrated a systematic process using appropriate communication modes to engage each teacher in the discussion about students’ learning at the grade level. Teachers discussed evidence of current levels of student learning using benchmark assessments. The principal inquired about the strategies and ideas used to build on the strengths and address the weaknesses in learning for the student. The teachers discussed a list of interventions provided for the student who just began his schooling at BES academy.

After listening to the strategies, the principal asked, “Are there any additional strategies to be tried before we refer the student to the SSST team? It appears that the student’s behavior is interfering with his ability to learn. Behavioral strategies should be explored to minimize or eliminate disruption in the classroom. The student has not spent enough time in the learning environment to determine if the academic strategies are effective due to his behavior.” A teacher stated that the “student would not be prepared to succeed in the next grade if he is not proficient in this skill.” The principal stated, “Refer the student to the SSST team for further discussion of additional strategies.”

Other examples show the principal communicated the importance of learning as the core purpose at BES academy.

I know she is very open with hearing our concerns with a grade level. You know a certain grade level had some data simulation tests and you know, Mrs.... might think we need to rearrange these groups and sometimes maybe teachers will disagree with that. She doesn’t walk in your room and say, “this is it”, she’ll sit down; it might go the way she said it would go, because I have had times that it has gone that way and I’ve had times

that she's said, "okay, I understand your concerns. I understand your way. As long as you work it out and you form a plan, and you have it down, she will say okay. But she wants you to let her know in a certain amount of time if it is working. She is not going to just let it go. And these problems and the resolution; like, she wants updates along the way. She does not wait. She wants to know, is it working out? Did what we decide is it working; a week later; is it still working, because if it does not work then she wants us to come up with solution B. She is very consistent on checking in to see if it is working or do we need to make a change. (TC, 6)

I think she supports us in anything. I went to her and I asked to do something different in summer school. Something completely different that has never been done before in the district. A girl spelling, math, and science program. She was like, "wow, that's a great idea. Let's go for it!" She is always willing for us to come up with new ideas. She not like, "this works, we're keeping this", she always wants to do better so she's not in her little cookie cutter, she's willing to reach out and do other things and I think the kids see that as well as the teachers. (TC, 9)

Celebration is one way the principal communicates what is value. "One of her strongest attributes is that her focus is on students". (TE, 4) "I know for example fourth graders having the social studies competition to get ready for the SOLs and she was in our rooms today trying to pump the kids up". So they see her not as just as when I'm in trouble and they feel open to say, "hey Mrs. ..., I got a good grade on my test" because she's open to them... I think the thing for the teachers is we do not have to go to her only when we have a problem; we feel open to go to her just to share success. She always makes time for us and for the kids". (TD, 3) "And I think, Mrs. ..., she will brag. She brags on BES. So there's probably no one out there that she has seen that doesn't know just how great BES is or what's going on. She's going to tell you we're doing what we have to do here to get it done and she is very proud of her school and I think that is how our parents and community feel. They feel the same way because they hear the leader of the school; well she has so much pride in it, she's not down on it; have them all on board, so I think just her positive outlook on what the school's doing and how they are doing it is really helpful". (TB, 7) It is evident that the principal's communication is essential in the Comer School Development model.

Noted in the documents review, the principal had a strategic communication plan weekly. She developed a weekly calendar for the staff that summarized activities, special events, kudos,

and professional thoughts and educational quotes. Staff members appreciated having the calendar right readily available.

### Parental Involvement and Community Partnership

The Parent Team is a critical component of the Comer School Development model framework and important to BES's traditional avenues to include parents were at open houses and parent conferences. In addition, the principal sought other ways to get more parents into the building. She discussed how she communicates with parents to promote desirable and social conditions and relationships at BES academy:

We have zeroed in some parent training issues. We have spent an enormous amount of time trying to refocus and redirect students but not tapped into what parents can do at home to compliment what we do here. We provided training with our parents on "Time to Teach," the model that we incorporated this year trying to look at how we can focus more on the positive aspect of redirecting behavior versus negative aspect. We did training with all our parents at a PTA meeting. We provided hand cards; very short in description but we provided suggestions to parents by way of parenting tip cards so parents can use the same or a similar technique at home. I do not hesitate to speak about academic goals or needs for our students. (PI, 2) The principal is proactive in seeking parental participation in promoting good behavior to ensure uninterrupted instruction.

In addition, the principal said, "I do assemblies every quarter to bring parents into a non-threatening environment. I send home letters saying to the parents what recognition the student will receive." "Twice a month the library is open to parents. We are averaging thirty to forty parents a night and that is huge for us". From 6pm-8pm, parents can come out, check out books, and read to their kids. They can be on the computer. It is not structured and we give door prizes at certain intervals. They love it. Our survey results showed 23% of our kids have access to computers at home. That is unbelievable and that is why I think when the county start asking us to make a choice between Technology Resource Assistants (TRA) and world languages, I am going that is not a choice BES Academy can make. There is a need for both. (PI, 4)

Two activities have fostered opportunities for parents learning with their children. One of the big successful things BES academy has done in terms of recognizing and accepting cultural diversity is hosting an International Tasting Fair. The International Tasting Fair is

symbolic for BES academy accepting everybody. The principal uses this opportunity to say to parents, “Everybody has something positive to give. I think that is why it is such a big to do with my Hispanic parents. They just love it. Parents bring in their food and things.” In addition, the Young Author’s event “provides parents the opportunity for understanding and recognizing the achievement of a goal.” Students write their stories and create books. Staff judge the books based on illustrations and content. “We say to parents that you can support learning even if it is just by being here” (PI, 7). The principal communicates to parents:

Supporting isn’t just sitting down to do homework, but supporting learning is coming out and participating in the activities they are involved in and showing pride in what they have achieved. I was shock when we held a dance recital on a Friday night; the cafeteria was packed. Most of the parents in attendance were African American unlike the attendance at the International Tasting Fair. Next year, I am going to turn this into a PTA night. (PI, 7)

The principal knows she must look at the cultures in her school and determine what motivates them to come and support activities for the children at the school. She mentioned some African American families attended the International Tasting Fair but did not bring a dish to share with other families. Some families stood at a distance and observed. It is her vision to see the school’s culture become family oriented and emerged in school activities ongoing. In addition, the principal communicates the importance of parents understanding writing instruction during the school day. The manner that the principal interacted with a student showed the value she placed on engaging families in the learning process. For example, as the school prepared for the Author’s Night she walked to grades K-5 asking students to share what writing piece will be on display for the parents and why did the students choose that piece. She asked a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade student why she chose that writing. The student responded, “I worked on this story for two weeks. My teacher showed me how to fix my mistakes and my spelling. My parents will be proud because it is my best work.” The principal asked, “What makes it your best work?” The student says, “I started with brainstorming what to write. My idea came and I have a beginning, middle and ending to my story with lots of details. Look, I have pictures too.” The principal said to the student, “I am proud of you and your parents will be too.” Another interaction was with a fifth grade student who chose his writing for the author’s night. The principal inquired about why he chose the writing and he said, “I know it is my best

writing and besides I was able to type it on the computer and add pictures that will help the people who read my story visualize it.” The principal said, “YES.” She smiled from ear to ear because the student had not only learned the writing process, but he was carrying over what he learned in reading into his writing.

The principal developed community awareness and support for providing a safe learning environment within the school through her communication processes. She has great pride when she shares BES successes with the community.

For the past two years, I have done a couple of breakfasts with the Rotary Club. They have asked me to speak on particular things we are doing at BES and have inquired as to how they can help. The Rotary Club has funded our Reading is Fun (RIF) program that provides free books for all students in the building. We have a good relationship with DuPont. They provide Tyvek materials to our school. The DSCR sponsors a transportation and career fair for our students. The Admiral, who is a commander in the Navy, sets aside a day to meet and greet our students. We have a formal receiving line. He teaches the kids etiquette lessons to expose and broaden the scope of experiences for our children. It is providing that social experience that shows them a different side. We used most of our business resources to provide these opportunities for our kids. (PI, 5)

Communicating the goals for the school, the principal created a brochure of every goal lined up for our school improvement plan and gave a copy to each household. She takes pride in our school improvement plan such that we are actually doing what we say we are doing in the plan, not just putting great words down. (TA, 7) As a parent, I had an issue with one of my children and “with the open door policy; I could go in and discuss anything with either one of the principals.” The principal sat down very professionally and solved the problem I was having. There is also a procedure for parent observation developed through SPMT. (P, 7) We wanted parents to feel comfortable but we wanted it not to interfere with instruction. We developed a plan where they could come but not bring younger siblings that may disturb the class or have cell phones. (TB, 7) Another thing the principal tells us when we see a parent to make them feel welcome and comfortable. (T C, 8) We have a large Hispanic population and several years ago, the Hispanic parents would come to the PTA meetings and could not understand anything. Now a translator is present at the meetings. The parents wear headphones to listen to the translation. At parent teacher conferences, the translator is here to make parents feel comfortable. In

addition, the principal uses our parent liaison to bring teachers to the parent's house to have conferences because some parents do not have transportation. She is always concerned about that. (TE, 8) We send technology and school climate surveys home. She takes that very seriously. We always try to get the parents involved. Students get free homework passes or ice cream if the parent fills out the surveys. (TB, 8)

Several documents reviewed were indicative of the principal initiating parental involvement in the school. Communication from the principal on the school's website is limited and not current. In student's backpacks, weekly communications, delivered to parents from the principal on activities, calendar items, and meetings. She contributed articles to the bulletin; and supported providing time for each team to be involved in writing an article for it. A wealth of information that included tutoring information, parent workshops, special education resources, kindergarten readiness, homeschooling, and gifted was on a table near the cafeteria entrance for parents and the community to retrieve. In addition, a copy of the parent/student handbook as well as the school improvement brochure was on the table. Furthermore, BES academy's master schedule provided opportunities for the vertical team meetings and planning to take place among teams.

Another noteworthy document is the Title I Parental Involvement that demonstrated BES academy support and opportunities for all parents to be involved in their child's education. (see Figure 5)

#### *BES Academy Title I Parent Involvement Policy*

BES academy will:

- Convene an annual back to School Night to inform parents about the Title I program at our school, meet the staff and parent involvement opportunities;
- Offer workshops to assist parents with ways to support their children in school and parenting reading, math, and science etc;
- Hold monthly PTA meetings, which allow parents to serve on the board, participate in programs, and assist with the meeting.
- Involve parents in the School Planning and Management Team, which provides the governing arm of our school and is a decision making team.

- Utilize Student, Staff, and Support Team (SSST) that addresses social/emotional behavioral needs of individual children rather than Child Study;
- Hold annual parent/teacher conferences; provide transportation and interpreters, as needed.
- Conduct K- Orientation for kindergarten students and families the week before school starts. Issue interim reports (for grades 3-5 students) and report cards every 9 weeks (for all students).
- Distribute Parent Student Handbook first week of school.
- Utilize Home School Compact to identify responsibilities of the school, teacher, principal, student and parent relative to the student's education.
- Conduct an annual survey to better serve our families and school community.
- Provide all communication, written and oral, in English and Spanish as well.
- Provide a bi-weekly newsletter with calendar and information.
- Has a Family Service Provider who supports families and provides resources and build community partnership.

### ***Parent and Family's Responsibility***

We will:

Make sure our child attends school regularly and on time.

Make sure our child's homework is completed and do activities that continue our child's learning at school.

Attend Parent Workshops at school and in the community.

Support the school in its efforts to maintain effective discipline.

Encourage our child to bring reading materials from the school library into our home.

Attend parent-teacher conferences and communicate frequently with our child's teacher.

Read to or with our child daily.

### ***Student's Responsibility***

I will:

Go to bed at a reasonable hour.

Arrive at school on time and be ready to learn.

Pay attention to all adults and ask questions when I need help.

Ask my family to read to or with me daily.

Complete my homework neatly, on time and ask for help when I need it.

Take home and return signed homework papers to school.

Read every day.

### ***Teacher's Responsibility***

I will:

- Provide quality teaching and leadership to my students and their families.
- Communicate frequently with students, families and tutors about my student's progress in reading and show them how they can help.
- Coordinate with other programs to make sure nightly assignments do not exceed time limits.
- Recognize that students are accountable for every assignment.
- Participate in meaningful professional development in how to teach reading, how to communicate with families, and how to work with tutors.
- Treat your child with dignity and respect.
- Read aloud to my students daily.
- Expect your child to put forth effort to the best of his/her ability.
- Read every day.

### ***Principal's Responsibility***

I will:

- Set high standards in reading and writing.
- Report publicly on school wide reading scores and help teachers and parents to improve scores.
- Allocate resources to ensure high standards are met.
- Offer workshops on standards in reading and writing and ways to practice skills at school and at home.
- Provide reading material and training so that parents and teachers can help their children learn to read.
- Welcome and involve all families.
- Read every day.

*Figure 5.* Title I parent involvement policy.

## Summary

Chapter IV presented the results of the interviews in a narrative format, observations, and document reviews for the themes that the principal clearly communicated in the operation of the Comer School Development model. Vision, School Improvement, High Expectations, Teaching and Learning, and Parental and Community Involvement were the focus of the principal's communication in the Comer School Development model. Communication descriptions used by the principal were expresses clear and concise language communiqués, checks for understanding when communicating, uses appropriate communication modes, uses language appropriate to situation, interprets communiqués accurately, seeks first to understand, conveys opinions succinctly and appropriately when communicating, and exhibits sensitivity toward diverse populations in communication. However, it is important to understand that the

following communication descriptions used could be operative in any other school model and were not specific to the Comer School model.

The principal conveyed these variables in an integrated manner. For example, the principal communicated the vision is a focus on commitment to teaching and learning for all students. She communicated succinctly high expectations in a collaborative process during school planning management team meetings, grade level meetings, SSST meetings, horizontal and vertical staff meetings, PTA meetings, and community meetings. In addition, the principal communicated that it is critical to BES academy's vision to have parental and community involvement to achieve common goals linked to the purpose of learning for all. The following chapter will include details of the findings.

CHAPTER V  
SUMMARY, FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS,  
AND FUTURE STUDIES

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine if the principal's communication influenced the operation of the Comer School Development model. Through the principal interview, focus group, document reviews, and observations, a qualitative case study design was conducted to gather data. Data triangulation supported the hypothesis that the principal communicating the vision, school improvement, high expectations for students and staff, teaching and learning, and parental and community involvement are important in the Comer School Development model.

Findings have been presented as they relate to the three research questions. The research question that guided this study included:

1. What are the perceptions of the school community regarding the characteristics of the principal's communication in the operation of the Comer School Development model?
2. What are the perceptions of the school community regarding the characteristics of the principal's communication, interactions, and relationships in regards to parent community outreach and involvement?
3. What are the practices and behaviors that the principal uses to communicate with the school community?

These research questions were based on the construct "communication" from the communication dimension (Table 1) illustrated by Creighton (1996). They include conveying opinions succinctly and appropriately, expressing clear and concise language in communiqués, checking for understanding when communicating, using appropriate communication modes, using language appropriate to situation, interpreting communiqués accurately, seeking first to understand when communicating and exhibiting sensitivity toward diverse populations in communications. During analysis of data from this study, it became evident that the principal's communication influenced the operation of the Comer School Development model. In addition, the principal's communication and interactions promoted positive relationships in regards to parent community outreach and involvement.

## Findings

*What are the perceptions of the school community regarding the characteristics of the principal's communication in the operation of the Comer School Development model?*

***Finding 1:*** *The principal's communication of the vision influences the School Planning Management team (SPMT)'s discussions about student's academic and behavioral success positively.*

Comer (2001) supports providing a structure for mobilizing adults to support student's learning. For example, the principal facilitates dialogue with the SPMT team about academic, social and community goals. Anyone who chooses to attend the meeting can participate. She allots for an open 2- hour discussion about global issues that affect the school and directly influences student's academic and behavioral success. It is evident that all principals should dialogue with staff, planning teams, and community members about promoting and sustaining academic success for all students.

***Finding 2:*** *The principal communicates the vision clearly and frequently to all stakeholders.*

Researchers agree that effective principals communicate the vision clearly and frequently for learning for students and staff (Davis, 1998; Cotton, 2003; Leithwood and Riehl, 2003). The BES academy's vision states, "In 2012, we envision that BES academy will be a thriving, dynamic, and inspiring educational environment that produces self-directed learners with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and stimulates citizens of all ages to trust in, invest in, and benefit from public education." The principal models the vision through an open communication system during SPMT, SSST, grade level, staff meetings, classroom walkthroughs, and PTA and community meetings. These different forms of communication about the vision should inspire efforts and commitment to the academic success of all students. All principals should communicate and model the vision in a manner consistent with the principal at BES academy.

***Finding 3:*** *The principal's communication practices influences the school improvement work.*

Arlestig (2007) research confirms that the principal leads and unifies his or her staff members in the work necessary for academic results and school improvement. The principal provides coherence by ensuring an understanding of organizational goals through presentations to central staff and the community. An example is that she mobilizes resources important to the

goals by providing staff developments for teachers. In team meetings, the principal discusses DRA, PALS, and benchmark testing data to determine student's academic progress. In addition, she has each teacher create SMART goals and strategies that will address student's academic weaknesses. The principal and teachers monitor the goals and strategies. Furthermore, she meets with the school improvement team regularly to review, refine, or revise the goals.

***Finding 4:*** *The principal utilizes an infrastructure for data management and interpretation for decision-making.*

To provide an efficient means for entering, storing and retrieving data for decision making a data management infrastructure is essential (Tindal, Duesbery & Ketterlin-Geller, 2006). The principal has established a process of transforming data into information to dialogue with teams about student's progress. For example, the principal retrieves data from a web-based warehouse to use in discussions at grade level meetings and SSST meetings. She interprets results and decides that fluid groups are necessary to provide enrichment opportunities for students who are meeting or exceeding the benchmark tests or remediation for students who need additional time with skills. During a school improvement meeting, she said, "in order for pass rates to improve among subgroup, we must create a push in coaching model with special education and ELL staff." Hence, all principals should have data to access and discuss with teams to promote student progress and school improvement.

***Finding 5:*** *The principal communicates high expectations for all parents, students, and equally high demands for staff who serve them.*

Good and Brophy (2003) shared communicating and reinforcing high expectations helps the school community become bonded by shared values. One example that demonstrates the principal communicates high expectations regarding discipline is in the student/parent handbook (2007-2008). She says, "Discipline begins at home. Therefore, it is the primarily the responsibility of the parents to see that children behave appropriately while at school". Another example of the principal communicating high expectations to students and parents is at a PTA parent workshop. The principal discussed school goals that include a safe and supportive learning environment. She described, "A Time to Teach," a method presented to promote

student achievement and goal setting as well as reinforce students meeting behavioral expectations.

In regards to high expectations of student behavior in the cafeteria, the principal communicates students must, “talk quietly-using a restaurant voice, walk in the cafeteria, pick up food and trash under, on, and around your table, eat your main meal first, then your dessert, keep your legs under the table, and listen to and obey all instructions”. Lastly, the principal communicates high expectations to staff in the staff’s handbook. She states, “Teachers are responsible for stimulating maximum learning on the part of pupils assigned to them by providing a good environment and by guiding sound curriculum experiences and activities in the classroom, the school, and community.” It is evident that the principal communicates high expectations to ensure stakeholders share the same values in the school community.

***Finding 6: The principal creates opportunities for continuous learning for adults tied to student learning and school goals.***

National Staff Development Council (2000) refers that professional development is a collaborative learning process that nourishes the growth of individuals, teams and the school. For example, teachers communicated to the principal that support to spend more time on instruction and less time on behavior is a critical need. The principal provided professional development for the teachers. A teacher said, “Recently our staff development was on the FBA (Functional Behavior Assessment)”. “She really takes into account things that we struggle with... Last year it was classroom management.” “Therefore, she had a huge staff development day that she went and got someone from another place and did “Time to Teach,” because we asked her for that.” “That was one huge staff development because all the teachers were struggling with that so she heard us and did that staff development for us.” By communicating well with teachers, the principal was able to provide professional development. It is clear that professional development based on the needs of individual teachers is effective.

***Finding 7: The principal provides for two-way communication with staff, parents, and the community.***

Hanson (2003) refers to communication as the exchange of messages and meanings between an organization and its environment as well as between its networks of interdependent subsystems. The principal communication channels are established but not limited to SPMT,

SSST, team leaders, grade level, curriculum meetings, calendars, newsletters, e-mails, Parentlink, report cards, telephone calls, conferences, and open door policy. Most of these channels were devoted to discussion about academics and behavioral goals for student's success and school improvement.

The principal describes her communication process as "direct, open, and honest." A teacher shares her focus is on students. In addition, she's a part of the primary grades collaboration meetings where she is involved and will make very specific academic goals for some of the students. This demonstrates the principal seeks to understand, uses language appropriate to the situation and communication modes, and exhibits sensitivity toward diverse populations. The evidence reveals the principal demonstrates various communication practices that promote student and school's success.

***Finding 8: The principal develops a collaborative culture through communication.***

Anderson (2006) notes that a school, as an organization, depends on the cooperation and collaboration of its members to meet its developmental and educational goals and communication plays a major role in meeting these goals. The principal creates avenues for all stakeholders to share their thoughts and ideas. Everyone is usually involved in the decision-making process before reaching a final decision regarding academic goals for students as well as staff developments for teachers.

*What are the perceptions of the school community regarding the characteristics of the principal's communication, interactions, and relationships in regards to parent community outreach and involvement?*

***Finding 9: The principal interprets communiqués with diverse population accurately when communicating.***

Starkey and Klein (2000) underscore that parent programs and interventions work best when the strategies respect the needs of families. BES academy has a very large Hispanic population. An example shows the principal understands that Hispanic families need to have effective communication. Therefore, she provides a translator and headsets so families can understand the meetings and programs. Another example is the principal learned that the dance recital appealed to Black families as opposed to the International Tasting Fair; thus next year, she intends to hold this event in conjunction with a PTA meeting.

***Finding 10:*** *The principal used various mechanisms to influence parental and community involvement in student's academics.*

Powell (2004) supports the importance of encouraging parents to be involved in the school and learn how to work with their children at home. The principal established an open door policy. This year students were going to get a new teacher and the principal shared that information via Parentlink and invited parents to come and discuss the change even if they thought a phone call was not enough. She hosted Back to School Nights to make parents feel welcome, articulate the expectations, and communicate the vision and mission of the school. Another example is the principal held school assemblies to celebrate student's success each quarter.

In 2004-2007, the PTA was very active; however, 2007-2008 brought limited participation. The principal gave parents invitations to learn about the writing experiences of their children, to view art projects and engage in hands on science. These ways were to model for parents how to learn with their children. Principals should explore various opportunities to engage families.

***Finding 11:*** *The principal sought opportunities to communicate with various community organizations.*

Resnick (2000), Leithwood and Riehl (2003) agree that engaging the community benefits both the school and the community. The principal invites community members to participate in SPMT and PTA meetings. The Rotary, DuPont, and DSCR are community organizations that support BES academy's academic and behavioral goals for student success through resources and expertise. The banner at the entrance, "It takes a whole village to raise a child," confirms the value system of parent and community engagement at BES academy.

*What are the practices and behaviors that the principal uses to communicate with the school community?*

***Finding 12:*** *The principal uses celebration to communicate the vision and priorities of the school.*

Dufour and Eaker (1998) agree that establishing a link between recognition and the vision can promote the commitment that is to be encouraged in the school. The principal held

an impromptu staff meeting to recognize teachers nominated for “Teacher of the Year.” The principal shared, “The Teacher of the Year emulates the teaching behavior that focuses on our vision that defines academic success for all students.” She awarded each teacher nominated by the staff flowers. Then, she announced the teacher that will represent BES academy at the county level. Another example is the principal has quarterly assemblies to celebrate student’s academic and behavioral successes. She awards certificates to students who meet honor roll requirements, improve grades, and demonstrate the core values. Communication, through celebration is linked to the school’s vision.

***Finding 13:*** *The principal communicates that staff operates under the guiding principle, consensus building.*

Consensus requires listening to others and developing empathy for others’ views (Cook et al., 1998). An example, that the principal communicates consensus building is during an SPMT meeting during discussion about staff attendance. The principal says, “What did your team say about the number of absences during the week and how does it impact student learning”? One teacher responds that teachers do not feel it is your business to share reasons they are absent.” “It is a sensitive issue for people who it really is impacting.” The principal stated, “In some schools students will learn in spite of the teacher’s efforts, but our kids need us to be here and teach effectively. Hence, ownership begins within.” Some staff suggested creating a competition and providing gift cards to co-workers who are present all month. Although some teachers differed with that idea, the majority reached a consensus.

Another example was discussed during an April SPMT meeting that Kindergarten teachers are still concerned about their participation of signal duty on the bus loop. A teacher shared concerns that K teachers “walk their students to each bus for many weeks after school begins.” It would be difficult to simultaneously watch students and be responsible for signal duty. After much discussion, it was agreed that second grade teachers would take the responsibility of signal duty for the upcoming year. Principals should operate under the consensus guiding principle when the situation will affect the condition of the school or students.

***Finding 14:*** *The principal communicates the staff operates under the no fault guiding principle in the Comer model.*

Comer (2001) confirms that fingers of blame are not pointed at others but everyone accepts equally responsibility for change. An example, that demonstrates the principal communicates the no fault finding principle is at a data chat meeting. She says, “Looking at data is not to generate who is at fault. You have to take the data, read it, and move with it.” “That is kind of you know, our foundation here. It is just embedded in the procedures for everyone.” The principal’s comments denote the expectations are clear in regards to no fault finding.

***Finding 15:*** *The principal communicates the staff operates under the guiding principle, collaboration in the Comer School Development model.*

Comer (2001) found that collaboration without paralyzing the principal or any other individual requires respect for other points of view and a willingness to work cooperatively as part of a team. Almost at every staff meeting, she emphasized the importance of collaboration as the key to improving student achievement. She commented, “Teachers should seek support from each other when working with students. All the students are ours.” Another example of the principal demonstrating collaboration is she organized and scheduled teams with common planning time to meet vertically and horizontally. In SSST meetings, grade level meetings, and team meetings, teachers discussed with the principal students from all subgroups. Teams reviewed PALS and DRA data and determined the support needed for individual students.

***Finding 16:*** *The principal expressed clear and concise language in communiqués.*

Rebore (2003) supports that it is the professional advantage of educational administrators to remember that the content of their communications sets the tone for how others perceive their competence. On Monday mornings, the faculty received a communiqué with a calendar of weekly events, summaries of very important meetings and information needed to get through the week, and accolades for staff that had contributed in the prior week. The staff benefits from positive thoughts and comments and written communication that allows for planning.

***Finding 17:*** *The principal monitors instruction through frequent classroom walkthroughs and creates a focus on student learning.*

McEwan (2003) found that strong instructional leaders are constantly observing and taking note of the way teachers allocate learning time. During a language arts class observation, the teacher provided additional support to a student in a systematic way. The teacher was using Reading Recovery. The principal asked the student what he was learning and what strategies he used to read the text. It was evident that the student was comfortable with responding to the principal's inquires. "I just finish reading the story and I have to put these in order (strips of paper with story on it) to retell the story." The principal asked the student to read to her and he chooses a book he has read before. The student reads fluently and the principal hugs the student.

***Finding 18:*** *The principal maintains school publications that inform internal and external groups about the school.*

Lehr (2003) confirms that principals are frequently required to share detailed information that tells the story of their schools. The principal presented BES academy's vision, mission, and goals for student learning along with school successes in a brochure. In addition, families received BES bulletins bi-weekly in English and Spanish to inform and provide information about various grade levels' activities. This bulletin always focuses on some aspect of learning and encourages parents to follow practices at home that support learning in school. Furthermore, the principal provides press releases to local newspapers. Upon reviewing e-mails and memos, their functions conveyed information clearly and concisely such that no further explanation was necessary.

### Implications for Practice

Based on the aforementioned study findings, the researcher recommends the following implications for practice.

- The principal, in the Comer School Development Model should clarify, model and reaffirm the vision for the school during meetings and presentations. The vision should demonstrate the reality of the school and the potential of what the school can become.
- In a Comer School Development model, the principal should continue to provide a structured agenda for meetings. Rather than having an open agenda, a structured

agenda is effective because the dialogue remains focus on student's academic and behavioral success. In addition, discussions will engage the staff in the decision making process as opposed to debating about the mission.

- The principal should communicate the vision to the school community such that the community internalizes and uses it. The community should help create the vision through dialogue in the school improvement process to embrace it. Representatives from parents and community members should be part of that school improvement team to create the vision for the school.
- The principal's communication in a Comer School Development model should continue to influence the school improvement work. Hence, a concerted effort by the principal articulating continuous improvement through presentations, bulletins, e-mails, handbooks, brochures, and websites will benefit the school community.
- In the Comer School Development model, the principal should continue to utilize an infrastructure for data management and decision-making. The organizational procedure allows for quick storing and retrieval of student data to focus on learning as well as provides a mechanism for concise communication with teams about data.
- The principal in a Comer School Development model should continue to provide opportunities to dialogue with collaborative teams about students' progress using multiple sources of data. Providing common planning time for teams to meet vertically and horizontally allows for discussions and reaching decisions through consensus about student's academic and behavior progress.
- In a Comer School Development model, the principal should communicate high expectations for all students and staff through celebrations. Regular public recognitions for academic and behavior goals achieved, tasks accomplished, and ongoing improvements will demonstrate a collective commitment to student learning.
- In the Comer School Development model, the principal should continue to communicate the importance of consensus building, no faultfinding, and collaboration during SPMT meetings, staff meetings, team meetings, SSST meetings, and grade level meetings. Applying these three guided principles will help

- build cooperation and understanding among diverse individuals and promote positive learning environments.
- The principal, in the Comer School Development model should continue to have book discussions within teams and whole faculty study groups connected to student learning and school goals. Professional learning communities provide opportunities for collaborative teams to read, reflect, and analyze their professional practice in order to improve achievement results for students.
  - The principal should continue to provide for two-way communication with staff, parents, and community. It is evident that the principal creates a positive learning environment when he/she demonstrates openness, accessibility, listening, and language skills. Increase efforts to translate informational materials for non-English speaking families should continue to be a priority as a means of effective communication.
  - The principal should continue to express clear and concise language in communiqués. McEwan (2003) says that as the leader of the school, the principal is to continually explain, teach, share, demonstrate, model, facilitate, persuade, and cajole. Research supports that effective leaders understand the significance of clarity and create coherent thoughts when communicating to all stakeholders.
  - The principal should continue to demonstrate a visible presence. Visibility in various locations of the building is an effective way of communicating support to students, parents, and teachers. Through communicating, the principal may make small talk at social activities, discuss critical discipline issues with staff, dialogue with community organizations, or connect with a sullen fifth grader.
  - The principal, in the Comer School Development Model should continue to monitor instruction through frequent classroom walkthroughs and communicate a focus on student learning. Using the classroom walkthrough tool to monitor instruction for students and providing feedback to teachers is important to effective instruction.
  - In the Comer School Development Model, the principal should continue to maintain school publications that inform internal and external groups about the school. Using bulletins, brochures, letters, Parentlink, and e-mails as mechanisms to disseminate information will tell the story, and convey the vision of the school.

- The principal should conduct formal and informal approaches to evaluate the effectiveness of communication.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

1. A comparative study between a non- Comer School and a Comer school would be significant in identifying differences in the principal's communication practices without the operation of the Comer model.
2. Replication of this study in a Comer School using quantitative methods would identify, if any of the eight indicators would be statistically significant.
3. Further study on professional development strategies that center on effective communication practices for new principals is recommended.
4. Further study on the characteristics of the principal's communication influencing other reform models, specifically alternative settings is recommended to test the theory's applicability in that setting.
5. This study addressed an elementary school, research on middle and high school principals' communication is recommended. Future study could produce descriptions of principal's communication practices to improve diverse population involvement.
6. A pre and post study of the principal's communication style to see whether the model affected communication skills.

#### Concluding Statements

This study confirmed the mounting evidence that the principal's communication is important to the operation of the Comer School Development model and has a positive influence on the school's culture. Any principal can utilize the eight communication indicators to improve the academic and behavioral success for students and assess his/her communication practices. The principal's communication practices found in the Comer School Development model validates the theory that emphasis on certain conditions improved the characteristics of the principal's communication with all stakeholders as well as the principal's communication influenced the operation in the Comer School development Model. In this time of increase diversity, it is pertinent that the principal examines communication practices to expand ways to communicate and interact with various groups in a variety of settings.

## REFERENCES

- Academic Development Institute (2007). *The school community journal*, retrieved 3/16/08  
<http://www.adi.org/journal/>
- Aguilera, L., Crane, P., Hamer, M., Morrison, M., & Serrano, D. (1998). *Comer schools: Are they recognizable through direct observation?* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.
- Anderson, W. (2006). *Communicating: School leadership: Handbook for excellence in student learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Andrews, R., Basom, M. R., & Basom, M. (1991). Instructional leadership: Supervision that makes a difference. *Theory into Practice*, 30(2), 97-101.
- Andrews, R., L. & Soder, R. (1987a). Principal instructional leadership and school achievement. *Instructional Leadership*, 44, 9-11.
- Andrews, R. L., & Soder, R. (1987b). Principal leadership and student behavior. *Educational Leadership*, 6, 9-11.
- Anson, A., Cook, T. D., Habib, F., Grady, M. K., Haynes, N., & Comer, J. P. (1991). The comer school development program: A theoretical analysis. *Journal of Urban Education*, 26, 56-82.
- Arlestig, H. (2007). Principal's communication inside schools: A contribution to school improvement? *The Educational Forum*, 71, 262-273.
- Bennis, W., & Nanus, B. (2003). *The strategies for taking charge*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Blasé, J. J. (1987). Dimensions of effective school leadership: The teacher's perspective. *American Educational Research Journal*, 24, 589-610.
- Breen, R. L. (2006). A practical guide to focus- group research. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 30(3), 463-475.
- Cauce, A. M., Comer, J. P., & Schwartz, B. A. (1987). Long-term effects of a system-oriented school prevention program. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 57(1), 127-131.
- Cawelti, G. (1984). Behavior patterns of effective principals. *Educational Leadership*, 41(5), 3.
- Comer, J. P. (1980). *School power*. New York: The Free Press.
- Comer, J. P. (1984). Home-school relationships as they affect the academic success of children. *Education and Urban Society*, 16(3), 323-337.
- Comer, J. P. (1988). Educating poor minority children. *Scientific American*, 259(5), 42-48.

- Comer, J. P. (2001). *Transforming school leadership and management. School development program*. Yale Child Study Center. [Retrieved August 24, 2007].  
<http://www.schooldevelopmentprogram.org/>
- Comer, J. P. (2004). *Leave no child behind: Preparing today's youth for tomorrow's world*.
- Cook, T. D., Murphy, R. F., & Hunt, D.H. (2000). Comer's school development program in Chicago: A theory- based evaluation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37(2), 535-597.
- Cotton, K. (2003). *Principals and student achievement: What the research says*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Council of Chief School Officers. (2002). *Expecting success: A study of five high performing, high poverty schools*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Creighton, T. (1996). *A construct validation of the administrative diagnostic inventory*. Unpublished dissertation. University of California, Davis.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*: Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Davis, S. H. (1998). Superintendents' perspectives on the involuntary departure of public school principals: The most frequent reasons why principals lose their jobs. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 34, 58-90.
- DuFour, R., Dufour, R., Eaker, R., & Karhanek, G. (2004). *Whatever it takes: How professional learning communities respond when kids don't learn*. Solution Tree (National Educational Service).
- Dufour, R., & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work. Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree (formerly National Education Service).
- Elmore, R. F. (2000). *Building a new structure for school leadership*. Washington, DC: Albert Shanker Institute.
- Ferrandino, V. L., & Tirrozi, G. N. (2004). Principals' perspectives. *Education Week*, 23(June 9), 31.
- Fullan, M. (2003). *The moral imperative of school leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Good, T. L., & Brophy, J. E.(2003). *Looking in classrooms*. 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

- Gurr, D., Drysdale, L., & Mulford, B. (2006). Models of successful principal leadership. *School Leadership & Management*, 26(4), 371-395.
- Halawah, I. (2005). The relationship between effective communication of high school principal and school climate. *Education*, 126(2), 334-345.
- Hanson, M. E., (2003). *Organizational communication*. Educational Administration and Organizational Behavior, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. 217-233. Boston: Allyn & Bacon
- Hargreaves, A., Earl, L., Moore, S., & Manning, M. (2001). *Learning to change: Teaching beyond subjects and standards*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Harris, S. (2007). The best from the best: Effective strategies of award-winning principals. *Principal*, 87(1), 17-22.
- Hatch, J. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Haynes, N. M., Emmons, C. L., Gebreyesus, S., & Ben-Avie, M. (1996). *The school development program evaluation process*, retrieved 8/18/08  
<http://www.med.yale.edu/comer/downloads/ralling-chapter6.pdf>
- Haynes, N. M., Emmons, C. L., Gebreyesus, S., & Ben-Avie, M. (1998). The School Development Program evaluation process. In J. P. Comer, N. M. Haynes, N. M. Comer, J. P. Hamilton, & M. Lee (1988). *The school development program: A model for school improvement*. *Journal of Negro Education*, 57(1), 11-21.
- Johannesen, K. B., & Groth, C. (2003). Becoming effective: Lessons from one state's reform initiative in schools serving low-income students. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 8(2), 167-190.
- Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. (2004). *Educational research: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches*. Boston: Pearson/ Allyn and Bacon.
- King, J. A. (1994). Meeting the educational needs of at-risk students: A cost analysis of three models. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 16(1), 1-19.
- LaPointe, M., & Davis, S. H. (2006). Effective schools require effective principals. *Leadership*, 36(1), 16-38.
- Lashway, L. (2001). *The new standards and accountability: Will rewards and sanctions motivate America's schools to peak performance?* Eugene: Eric Clearinghouse on Educational Management University of Oregon.

- Lehr, A. E. (2003). "Quality Writing, Quality Leadership." *The School Administrator* 60(1), 35.
- Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (1999). Transformational school leadership effects: A replication. *School Effectiveness & School Improvement*, 10(4), 451-479.
- Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D., (2005). A review of transformational school leadership research 1996-2005. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 4:177-199.
- Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2006). Transformational school leadership for large scale reform: Effects on students, teachers, and their classroom practices. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 17(2), 202-227.
- Leithwood, K., & Riehl, C. (2003). What do we already know about successful school leadership? Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.
- MacNeill, N., Cavanagh, R. F., Silcox, S. (2003). Pedagogic principal leadership. *Management in Education*, 17(4), 14-17.
- Manasse, L. A., (1985). Improving conditions for principal effectiveness: Policy implication of research. Special issue: Policy Implications of Effective Schools Research. *The Elementary School Journal*, 85(3), 439-463.
- Marks, H. M., & Printy, S. M. (2003). Principal leadership and school performance: An integration of transformational and instructional leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39(3), 370-397.
- Marzano, R. J. (2003). *What works in schools: translating research into action*. Alexandria, Va. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. A. (2007). *School leadership that works: From research to results*: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- McEwan, E. K. (2003). *10 highly traits of highly effective principals: From good to great performance*: Corwin Press, Inc.
- Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miller, W. L., & Crabtree, B. F. (2004). *Doing qualitative research*. Newbury Park, California: Sage.
- National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001). *Leading learning communities: standards for what principals should know and be able to do*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

- National Association of Elementary School Principals (2002). *Leading learning communities: Standards for what principals should know and be able to do*. Washington, DC: National Association of Elementary Principals.
- National Association of Elementary School Principals (2008). *Leading learning communities standards for what principals should know and be able to do*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Collaboration Communications Group, Inc.
- National Staff Development Council. (2000). A staff development code of ethics. *Journal of Staff Development*, 21(2), Retrieved July, 7 2008, from <http://www.nsd.org/library/publications/jsd/ethics212.cfm>
- Opie, C., & Sikes, P. (2004). *Doing educational research: A guide to first time researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pena, D. C. (2000). Parent involvement: Influencing factors and implications. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 94(1), 42-54.
- Powell, S. T. (2004). Leadership and school success: The behaviors and practices of principals in successful at-risk schools. (Doctoral dissertation, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2004).
- Presthus, A. M. (2006). A successful school and its' principal-enabling leadership within the organization. *Staff Issues and Professional Development*, 34, 1-20.
- Ravitch, D. (2007). *Ed Speak: A glossary of education terms, phrases, buzzwords, and jargon*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Rebore, R. W. (2003). *A human relations approach to the practice of educational leadership*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Robertson, D. E. (2007). A case study of: A principal preparation program in one school district. (Doctoral dissertation, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2007).
- Sanders, M. G., & Harvey, A. (2002). Beyond the school walls: A case study of principal leadership for school community collaboration. *Teachers College Record*, 104(7), 1345-1368.
- Schwahn, C. J., & Spady, W.G. (1998). Total leaders: Applying the best future- focused change strategies to education. *American Association of School Administrators*, 45.

- Sebring, P. B., & Byrk, A. S. (2000). School leadership and the bottom line in Chicago. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 81(6), 440-443.
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (3rd ed.): Teachers College Press.
- Sheffield, J. W. (2006). Giving the principal the shaft. *Principal* 85(3)58-59.
- Slavin, R. E. (2007). Educational research: In an age of accountability. Pearson Education, Inc.
- Smith, S. C., & Piele, P. K. (2006). *School leadership: Handbook for excellence in student learning* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press A Sage Publication.
- Sorenson, R. (2005). The seven keys to effective communication. *NAESP*, 85(2), 1-4.
- Starkey, P., & Klein, A. (2000). Fostering parental support for children's mathematical development: An intervention with head start families. *Early Education and Development*, 11(5), 659-680.
- Supovitz, J. A., & Poglinco, S. M. (2001). Instructional leadership in a standards-based reform. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Consortium for Policy Research in Education.
- Tindal, G., Duesbery, L., & Ketterlin-Geller, L. R. (2006). Managing Data for Decision Making: *School leadership: Handbook for excellence in student learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Ubben, G.C., & Hughes, L.W. (1987). The principal creative leadership for effective schools. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Allyn & Bacon
- Waters, T., Marzano, R., & McNulty, B. (2003). Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effects of leadership on student achievement. Aurora, CO: Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning.
- Webb, L. D., & Norton, M. S. (2003). *Human resources administration: Personnel issues and needs in education*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Education.
- Yin, R. (2003). *Case study research* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Young, I. P., Castetter, W. B. (2004). *The human resource function in educational administration*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Education.

APPENDIX A  
INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANTS

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY  
Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

**Title of Project An Investigation of the Principal’s Communication in the Comer School Development Model**

Investigator(s) William J. Glenn and Virginia Crawford- Patterson

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

The purpose of this study is to examine whether the characteristics of the principal’s communication influences the operation of the Comer School Development model as a requirement for a doctoral dissertation. The principal, staff, and parents will be included in the study. Information gained from the study will be made available to assist the school in understanding the principal’s communication.

**II. Procedures**

The following activities will take place to complete the study: an interview with the principal, a focus group interview; observations of the principal’s communication during meetings, during, and outside the regular school day, and a review of documents. The principal’s interview is expected to be from forty-five minutes to one hour; the focus group interview is expected to be from one to two hours in one session. Copies of the interviews and the transcriptions will be shared with the interviewees. The observations will be unobtrusive to the learning environment.

**III. Risks**

There are expected to be minimal risks to the participants in this study. Staff members who do not want to participate may opt-out of the process.

**IV. Benefits**

There is no guarantee of benefits associated with this study. Communication has appeared consistently in discussion of effective school leadership and the direct benefit of studying the characteristics of the principal’s communication can benefit the school and other principal’s in schools.

**V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Pseudonyms will be used to preserve the confidentiality of the participants. The principal interview and the focus group interview will be taped recorded in order to have accurate transcriptions. These tapes will be stored at the home of the investigator during the data collection process, given to the committee chair to store for 5 years, and destroyed at the end of the study. Transcriptions will be shared with the principal and the focus group to determine accuracy.

**VI. Compensation**

There is no compensation associated with participation with this study.

**VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

The principal and focus group are free to withdraw from a study at any time without penalty.

**VIII. Subject's Responsibilities**

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

Complete the interview

**IX. Subject's Permission**

Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board: Project No. 08-235

Approved April 11, 2008 to April 10, 2009

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

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

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Subject signature

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Witness (Optional except for certain classes of subjects)

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:

Virginia Crawford- Patterson [804-379-6226](tel:804-379-6226)/[vtcrawfo@vt.edu](mailto:vtcrawfo@vt.edu)  
Investigator(s) Telephone/e-mail

Dr. William Glenn \_ [703-538-8493](tel:703-538-8493) / [wglenn@vt.edu](mailto:wglenn@vt.edu)  
Faculty Advisor Telephone/e-mail

\_\_\_\_\_ Departmental Reviewer/Department Head Telephone/e-mail

David M. Moore [540-231-4991](tel:540-231-4991)/[moored@vt.edu](mailto:moored@vt.edu)  
Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review Telephone/e-mail  
Board for the Protection of Human Subjects  
Office of Research Compliance  
2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)  
Blacksburg, VA 24060

Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board: Project No. 08-235  
Approved April 11, 2008 to April 10, 2009

APPENDIX B  
DISTRICT CONTACT LETTER

11125 Jimmy Ridge Drive  
Richmond, Virginia 23236  
[Date]

Dr. Glenn Miller  
Department of Accountability

Dear Dr. Miller,

I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Tech conducting research for my dissertation. The purpose of my study is to examine whether the characteristics of the principal's communication influences the establishment of the Comer School Development model. I am respectfully requesting your permission to conduct research in Chesterfield County at Bensley Elementary School.

I have enclosed a copy of my Informed Consent Protocol, the application to conduct the research, a copy of my prospectus, and a copy of the application submitted to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University's Institutional Review Board to conduct research. It is my intention to conduct the research in April and May of this year.

I believe the results of this research will benefit Chesterfield County Public Schools, specifically Bensley Elementary by providing data that will support and enhance the importance of the characteristics of the principal's communication. At the conclusion of my study, I will provide Chesterfield County Public Schools with a final copy of the study results.

Feel free to contact me via e-mail at [ginny\\_patterson@ccpsnet.net](mailto:ginny_patterson@ccpsnet.net) or by phone (804) 748-1609 if you have any questions. Thank you in advance for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Respectfully,

Virginia Crawford- Patterson

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

I am interested in why your school is so successful. I would like to study the characteristics of the principal's communication. A series of questions will be asked to assist with understanding the characteristics of the principal's communication.

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

#### *Structured Questions for the principal:*

1. How long have you been principal of this school?
2. What are the demographics of your school?  
Free and reduced price lunch students  
Minority students  
Categories  
ELL students

#### *Semi-Structures Questions*

1. Discuss how you communicate with your school's planning team, regarding academic, social, and community goals.
2. Discuss how you coordinate and communicate school activities and staff developments.
3. Discuss how you communicate with staff, parents, and students to promote desirable and social conditions and relationships.
4. Discuss how you facilitate the sharing of information to address student's needs, access resources outside the school and develop prevention programs.
5. Discuss how you communicate to parents the importance of involvement in the school's activities to support the school's social and academic program.
6. Discuss how you communicate the importance of problem solving as opposed to fault finding in regards to student success to your school community.

7. Discuss the ways you communicate concern and openness in the consideration and resolution of problems.

Prompt to use if necessary:

Teachers

Parents

Students

Other school personnel

8. Discuss how you communicate to the parents and community the vision and goals for your school.
9. Discuss how you make your parents and community feel welcome to your school.
10. Discuss opportunities sought and communicated to parents to foster support for student learning.

APPENDIX D  
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

I am interested in why your school is so successful. I would like to study the characteristics of the principal's communication. A series of questions will be asked to assist with understanding the characteristics of the principal's communication.

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

*Semi-Structures Questions/Focus Group*

1. Discuss how the principal communicates succinctly and appropriately with your school's planning team regarding academic, social, and community goals.
2. Discuss how the principal coordinates and communicates school activities and staff developments.
3. Discuss how the principal communicates with staff, parents, and students to promote desirable and social conditions and relationships.
4. Discuss how the principal facilitates the sharing of information to address student's needs, access resources outside the school and develop prevention programs.
5. Discuss how the principal communicates to the school community the importance of problem solving as opposed to fault finding in regards to student success.
6. Discuss the ways the principal communicates concern and openness in the consideration and resolution of problems.
7. Discuss how the principal communicate to the parents and community the vision and goals for your school.
8. Discuss how the principal communicates with parents the importance of the school's activities to support the school's social and academic program
9. Discuss how the principal make parents and the community feels that they are welcome to the school.
10. Discuss opportunities sought and communicated to parents to foster support for student learning.

APPENDIX E  
OBSERVATION GUIDE

School \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Observation \_\_\_\_\_

DOMAINS	OBSERVATIONS
Conveys opinions succinctly and appropriately when communicating	
Expresses clear and concise language in communiqués	
Checks for understanding when communicating	
Uses appropriate communication modes	
Uses language appropriate to the situation	
Interprets communiqués accurately	
Seeks first to understand when communicating	
Exhibits sensitivity toward diverse populations in communication	

APPENDIX F  
DOCUMENT REVIEW CHECKLIST

Name of School \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Document	Date (s) Reviewed	Comments
School Handbook		
Staff Handbook		
PTA meeting minutes		
School letters		
Staff Communication		
School Improvement Plan		
Parent Link		
Other		

APPENDIX G  
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

School \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Person interviewed	Position	Transcript review date by interviewee	Comments

## APPENDIX H

### RAW DATA MATRIX: PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW

Interview Question	Response
<p>First of all, I want to thank you for this opportunity to interview you and I'm interested in why your school is so successful. I would like to study the perceptions of the characteristics of the principal's communication. A series of questions will be asked to assist with understanding the characteristics of the principal's communication. I will be recording our interview in order to have an accurate transcription. You will be provided a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy.</p> <p>How long have you been the principal for this school?</p>	<p>I have been here for seven years.</p>
<p>What are the demographics of your school? Particularly the free and reduced lunch students, your minority students, and any other category or ELL students you may have.</p>	<p>Well, first of all, we are definitely a diverse school and we are 81% free and reduced lunch. 49% of our populations are African-Americans. 33% of our students are kids are Hispanic students, and 17% of our students are Caucasian students and of course, 7% will be other, like Asians or others that may not have identified themselves.</p>
<p>Q1: Discuss how you communicate with your schools planning team regarding academic, social, and community goals.</p>	<p>I'm going to use the school planning management team as the planning focus for answering the question and that team is the team under the common principle that speaks to the engine of the school and the purpose for that being the engine is that it incorporates representatives from all grade levels in our department. With that committee, we talk specifically about global issues that affect the school. So when we have dealings with either setting; revising our mission, vision or revising what we are going to focus on for the year it goes clearly through as SPMT for discussion. Any actions that SPMT wants taken is allocated to sub-committees that will fall under SPMT emphasis on certain conditions should improve the characteristics of the principal's communication with all stakeholders. So, it's a monthly meeting that takes about two hours each month in which we discuss those issues. Other ways that we basically talk about academic, social, or community goals can be through the staff development and curriculum committees. I advise teachers to talk with their colleagues for assistance and ideas and organize opportunities for staff members to get together during curriculum meetings to generate goals and objectives. They would handle specific data in order to generate the goals and objectives for the committees. Community goals are disseminated by way of PTA Board, which I meet with them once a month to talk about how we can connect in terms of what PTA can do to support our community outreach projects or academic associations within the school. Also, staff meetings are held second Thursday of each month. It's basically geared towards not so much informational but basically staff</p>

	development on those goals and global issues that we are dealing with for the year.
<p>Q2: Discuss how you coordinate and communicate school activities and your staff developments.</p>	<p>I meet with team leaders on an as need basis for the most part. We also generate surveys through grade levels that we use to get a feel for what are the issues. For example, this year we focused on technology and technology was going to be the focus area for K-2. In order to determine the skill levels of our teachers we had the technology department come in and administer surveys to determine what their proficient areas are and what were their deficit areas. Then we generated a technology plan that talked about training for K-2 teachers as they incorporated technology as part of their instructional focus. So we use team leaders meetings, survey meetings, leader instructional specialist meetings. All of those will help to talk about staff development as related to the school</p>
<p>Q3: Discuss how you communicate with your staff, your parents, and students to promote a desirable and social conditions and relationships in your school.</p>	<p>Interesting. For the last couple of years we have zeroed in on some parent training issues. We have spent an enormous amount of time trying to refocus and redirect students but not tapped into what parents can do at home to compliment what we do here. So this year, we provided a training with our parents on Time to Teach, which is the model that we incorporated this year trying to look at how we can focus more on the positive aspect of redirecting behavior versus the negative aspect and with that we did a training with all of our parents at a PTA meeting this year. We subsequently also give parenting tips. What we call; they are little hand cards; very short in description but we provide suggestions to parents by way of parenting tip cards. So we do that. I think the other thing that we did in terms of social conditions and promoting relationships, we did a staff retreat for the past two years. That was to build our own moral and relationship with each other. That has worked tremendously. We went to Williamsburg at the Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center for the last two years to kick off our beginning of the year. We did our focus for the goals for that year as well as just fellowship activities so we could just kind of build relationships among each other. That's one way that we try to promote positive relationship among staff and getting off to a very positive start at the beginning of the year. That was awesome.</p> <p>Everybody attended. We spent the night. We chartered a bus and of course, everybody had roommates. We did all kinds of competitive games and it was just wonderful. I mean everybody was like, "are we going next year?" But I think that staff retreat was one of the best things that we could've done for the past two years.</p>
<p>Q4: Discuss how you facilitate the sharing of information to address students' needs, access resources that are outside the school, and develop any type of prevention programs that you have in your school.</p>	<p>Sharing information to address student needs. Accessing resources outside the school, for the past two years, I have done a couple of breakfasts with the Rotary Club. They have asked me to come, speak, and talk about the particular things that we are doing here and how they can help. I have done speaking engagements with the Rotary Club. I have done meetings with the J D Association, which is part of this little area here were they are trying to revitalize the Jeff Davis corridor with businesses and we've done outreach with, I can't think of the church right now, but in any event we've done</p>

	<p>speaking engagements with the Rotary Club. They provided funding for our RIF Programs to support the distribution of books. We've also as I've said met with Jeff Davis Association in which they give support; they've given the school a plaque as far as academic achievement. We try to stay in touch with businesses. DuPont is another place we have a good relationship with. They provide additional support for us for example, Tyvek materials. They give that to us free for using with almost anything. We have a wonderful relationship with Department Supply Center Richmond (<b>DSCR</b>), which provides our students an opportunity to do transportation. We have a transportation fair that is co-sponsored by <b>DSCR</b>. We have a career fair with the same thing and then we do a culminating activity with our fifth graders with the Officer's Club. The Admiral sets aside a day to come and meets and greets. We have a very formal receiving line. The kids are taught etiquette lessons so we try to expose and broaden the scope of experiences for our children. Everything is not just always academic. It's sometimes providing that social experience that can provide them an opportunity to see a different side. So we use most of your business resources that way just to provide the opportunity. In terms of addressing the needs of the students, I think certainly we're constantly providing information to our parents at PTA meetings. I don't hesitate to speak to academic goals or academic needs at any PTA meeting regardless of what the issue is. I also do a newsletter every two weeks. There is a School news bulletin that goes home. In that newsletter we focus on each grade level and each grade level is asked to provide specific information to parents as to what their children are doing and why we're doing it and what they can do to help so for the most part it's typical kinds of ways we can try to get parents acclimated to what are needs are. And of course also looking at raw data. All the grade levels have developed smart goals and the smart goals are developed on data so we're consistently looking at data and that data is used to re-focus our energies on what we need to do. So that's how I think we've done the best job at trying to meet our needs of our kids is just by frequently assessing and taking that data to make sure it translates into changed behaviors in the classroom with the teacher. That is the whole point of it. I hope I round about got that there.</p>
<p>Q5: Discuss how you communicate with parents the school activities that he or she can support the school's social and academic goals or the programs</p>	<p>One of the things that has been successful here with getting our parents in: Two things that I think that bring our parents in without hesitation, and that's the quarterly assemblies that I do every quarter. I send home notices; they get letters specifically stating what the child is going to be recognized for. The parents come. Library night is another one. Twice a month the library is open for parents. Non-threatening environment. That's what I'm trying to set up, a non-threatening environment where we're not asking parents to do anything but come and they feel the freedom to come. Those two things I think have been the most successful things that we've done to bring parents in and other than that that's kind of pretty much what we do because anything else beyond what they feel they can comfortably give will run them away so I try not to put them into tense situations where they may not be comfortable with their skill level and other things. So we give more than we ask and that is just to set the framework for making them feel comfortable coming into the school. The library night</p>

	<p>which we've done for the last six or seven years, we're averaging probably thirty to forty parents a night and that is huge for us. From 6-8 for parents to come out and they can check out books and they can read to their kids. They can be on the computer. They can do anything they want from 6-8, it is not structured and we give door prizes at certain intervals. They love it. The computers they like because with our survey results, only 23% of our kids have access to computers. That is unbelievable and this is why I think when the county start asking us to make a choice between TRA's and world languages, I'm going that is not a choice that BES can make. There's a need for both you know. When our parents don't even have access, you know to computers, so I think like I said the quarterly assemblies and the library night are probably our two biggest activities that promote support and participation by our parents.</p>
<p>Q6: Discuss your communication to your school community about the importance of problem solving as opposed to fault finding in regards to student success.</p>	<p>Following the guiding principles behind Comer: Three guiding principles; collaboration, no-fault, and consensus building. That's it and we highlight that. Looking at the data is not done to generate who's at fault. You have to take the data read it and move with it. Spinning your wheels about what the first grade teachers didn't do, second grade teachers didn't do, does not do us any good. It just causes tension. Because I can tell them, I can even do better than that, I can say to that lady, "why didn't you marry a smarter man so you could've had a smarter child", so that's just how ridiculous that gets when you do the faulting game. So it's strictly about the three guiding principles; no-fault, collaboration, and consensus.</p>
<p>Q7: Discuss the ways you communicate concern and openness and the consideration and resolution of problems.</p>	<p>I always believe that you go directly to people and have open and honest dialogue and open and honest feedback whether it's a call from a parent or a letter from a parent, I always present what the issues are and go directly to that person. I try to stay away from global advice. That I am talking about you but I am getting all that information out to the entire school. I think that is counterproductive. I think many people feel that you are not talking to them until you actually tap them on their shoulder and say, "I'm really taking about you", so I believe in being very direct, upfront, and in many cases I'm very blunt depending on the severity of what I have to deal with. But I also try to tell teachers that I can help anyone who is open to what maybe their role in contributing to some of these issues that we may be having with parents or parent questions. So my style is one of just very openness, very upfront, on the table, let's deal with it, good, bad, or indifference, let's deal with it. Now does that mean that there's never top down No, because sometimes there are things that just have to be top down in terms of solving a problem, especially if you are just spinning your wheels with it. We have to move on. Try to deal and repair the relationship or repair of PR image with regards of what the issue may be so I just hit it head on and move on. Sometimes there is open discussion by bringing in others. Most of the time if I can do it between the two of us then it's just the two of us and we move. Time is not given to us not to address it. I just don't believe you push things under the rug. You have to deal with it front and center.</p>
<p>Q8: Discuss how you communicate to the</p>	<p>At every open house I talk specifically about how we performed</p>

<p>parents and the community the visions and the goals for your school.</p>	<p>the previous year as it related to benchmarks that we set. Whether we achieve that or not. Then I say specifically what we are doing this year. So that is a goal in open house for me from the beginning. What the mission is, what are goals are and of course subject to change as we continue to look at data throughout the year. I also send things home in our bi-weekly newsletter home to parents in terms of where we're going. I think also my parent messages on report cards reflect what our image is or what our focus can be. And as I said, quarterly assemblies. I'm always speaking to how we can make BES academy better. What you can do as parents to help us make it better and what the kids can do. I set expectations for parents, students, and staff and almost any face to face meeting I have, whether it is PTA meeting, program or whatever, I'm always talking about expectations and those expectations can fall under social, academic, or whatever. So I think that's probably the biggest way that I would talk about all the goals of the school.</p>
<p>Q9: Discuss how you communicate with parents the importance of involvement in the school activities to support the schools social program. Your PTA program. Do you have a Boys and Girl Club here? Any after school intervention programs?</p>	<p>Yes, absolutely. When we try to look at the academic; meeting the academic needs of a parent, we talk about the selection of kids based on recommendation, based on past student performance, based on all of those things. That's number one. The other part that I think that we try to do is broaden the experiences of our kids by looking at not just the remedial aspect but what can we do to enrich those kids and also meet the needs of kids who are also sitting there ready to take off, but because we are so stuck into remediation they don't get an opportunity. So what we've done with that is try to broaden the extended day program to provide like the Mad Scientist Club. The school takes on the entire cost of that. That is directly geared to fourth graders who have earned a spot by writing an essay on why they want to become a mad scientist and we select from that. So we're weaving in the writing skills, we're weaving in high expectations, and we're also letting them know that this is free but you have to earn it. You have to show us this, this, this, and this. This year we added Project Dance to extended day, Jazz, and Ballet. Another exposure for kids who have the talent and the desire for doing that but yet parents don't have the money to pay for kids to take Jazz and Ballet, so what we try to do is provide a broader spectrum of programs for kids so parents will understand that not only are we trying to develop kids academically, but we are trying to develop the whole child. And the whole child means that you're going to have to deal with academics but also social, psychological, and all interests in terms of what they want to do and what they can be. And I think what we're trying to do also is for parents who may not have a dream for their kids, I think all of what we do will set the dream for them. You know because sometimes parents really do not know how to dream. Because they feel like there is no door that is going to open. So all of what we try to do here academically, in extended day, in the Y program, providing safe environment for kids is about having a dream for kids where parents may not be able to dream. So I see it as, if people would dream for kids, then kids will understand that there is a dream out there for them. You know, if parents cannot articulate what they want for kids, but maybe we can articulate that for parents in our actions and the kinds of things we provide. The experiences, all of that so, I see that all tied into</p>

	one.
<p>Q10: Final question. You have touched on it somewhat, discussing opportunities that were sought and communicating to your parents that foster those support for learning opportunities. Anything else you can elaborate.</p>	<p>I think one of the big successful things that we've done in terms of recognizing; accepting culture diversity is our International Tasting Fair. Which I think is awesome and parents love it. I think of our young author piece. We have done that for the last couple of years. That too has been a big piece for our parents in terms of understanding, recognizing the achievement of a goal. So I think we're doing two things. We're letting parents know that their goals and aspirations can be felt through what we do and that they're real goals and aspirations that kids can achieve but you just have to have the expectations for them to achieve it. The International Tasting Fair is to say yeah, we accept everybody. Everybody has something positive to give. I think that's why it's such a big deal to do with my Hispanic parents who just love it. They bring in their food, their things, I mean it is just like they recognize us and you know that to me is important because it says, that yes you are a part of us and we do recognize that. So I think those two things, the author's contest in which we give awards to the kids for their books. They write their own story and the books are judged. In terms of illustrations or content and parents think that is a big, big deal. It is like they just kind of died and gone to heaven. Their kid has just written their first book and you can get either this certificate or this BES trophy award. So I think what we do is say to parents that you can support learning even if it's just by being here. Supporting isn't just always sitting down to help a child do homework, but supporting learning is coming out and participating in the activities they are involved in and showing pride in what they have achieved. We had a dance recital Friday night. I was shocked. The cafeteria was packed. But this was something they were comfortable with. But let me tell you what I saw in the reverse, at the International Tasting Fair I see very few of my African-American parents. I see most of my Hispanic parents. It's just the reverse at the dance recital, most of them were my African-American parents. And I was going what's the deal here and they brought flowers for the kids, bouquets, which was wonderful, but I'm going, okay, I'm turning this into a PTA night next year. But it's always just what you are comfortable with. So I try to raise expectations for the parents but also try to understand their comfort level with certain things. So sometimes I'm not sure whether I let them off the hook by doing too much versus not doing enough, I don't know. I don't know what the outcome is. I just feel that this is the road I have to take for them. Whether that's the right road, I'm not sure. Whether it gets people moving, I'm not sure either, but I certainly know what it does for my kids and that's what I have to look at. What it does for them. It may not make my parents any more independent than they need to be but for my kids right now it's the best that I can give to them. So I'm not sure if it's right or wrong.</p>

## APPENDIX I

### RAW DATA MATRIX: FOCUS GROUP

Interview Question	Response
<p>First of all I want to thank you all for agreeing to be a part of our focus group today. I'm interested in why your school is so successful. I would like to study the perceptions of the characteristics of the principal's communication. A series of questions will be asked to assist with understanding the characteristics of the principal's communication. I will be recording our interview in order to have an accurate transcription. You will be provided a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy.</p>	<p>Heads nodding</p>
<p>Q1: Discuss how the principal communicates appropriately with your school's planning team regarding academic, social, and community goals?</p>	<p><b>TB:</b> I'm on the school planning team. We collect data. Data on how the kids are doing academically, and the things we need to work on. She lets us know everything about the school. How many kids we have, issues that we're having with the kids. We discuss a lot of those things there.</p> <p><b>TE:</b> Another thing that is also held, is that once a month we have a curriculum meeting. Which is a curriculum staff development and so it's people that meet specifically with the focus of academic excellence for the school, we did the school improvement plan and there's other things, but that is the committee that's established that really kind of monitors the academic much more closely. And then also the SPMT meetings that Teacher B was talking about is really the vehicle of where everything that is of a concern is discussed and the way Mrs. ... will handle that is, we will get and email and she will say, "are there any issues that you have that you want me to bring to the SPMT meeting?" so she's very open about hearing what are some people's questions, she might have some of her own but, but every time we have an SMPT meeting she always says what do you got and I'll put it on there.</p> <p><b>TC:</b> With the SPMT also we do have a free agenda of open discussion, whatever we want, we can mention it. Like she said and also it's open to the community. Any parents can come, any students can come, any instructional assistant s are allowed to come to this open meeting. It's generally just teachers and principals but it is open to everyone in the community to come. They are allowed to come to that meeting.</p> <p><b>TD:</b> I just wanted to say that each team has their representative that; we have one person per team who must attend; and I believe there was a community liaison, and we have a parent liaison involved in that, but am I mistaken by saying someone from a community around here was coming to those meetings? A woman from a local community who runs a community center who was trying to find out what was going on in the school too to help carry it out to the community.</p>

<p>Partnership of some sort?</p>	<p><b>TD:</b> Yea, kind of. I think she just was coming more to stay informed so that they could continue the good stuff that's going on here. Because I believe she ran the local community center in the local apartment complex. So there are community members on there too.</p>
<p>Q2: Discuss how the principal coordinates and communicates the school activities and the staff developments. Does she attend your team leader meetings with you?</p>	<p><b>TA:</b> She sends us emails. We have what's called the BES Bulletin. Things that she sends to the staff and parents to keep us updated. Often the team leader meetings are where she will give information and then the team leaders come back to us as a team to share it with us.</p> <p>Yes, she attends but we keep minute meetings to submit to the administration.</p>
	<p><b>TA:</b> As far as like the staff development I think she really takes into account what our struggles are as a school. In fact I know a lot of schools have their staff meetings more logistical, like stuff coming up and I think almost every staff meeting we have it's a staff development. Not logistics. The logistics are more carried out in the BES Bulletin about what the school activities are coming up. Like recently our staff development was on the FBA(Functional Behavior Assessment). She really takes into account things that we struggle with. Every year she asks us at the end of the year what we are struggling with. Last year it was classroom management. So she had a huge staff development day that she went and got someone from another place and did "Time to Teach", because we asked her for that. So that was one huge staff development because all the teachers were struggling with that so she heard us and did that staff development for us. Which is nice.</p> <p><b>TC:</b> Another way of communicating is a calendar included in the handbook goes home to families at the beginning of the school year and if you go into the office there's a school calendar that's listed there and so that's where teachers can write down, like if they are doing field trips or anything, so it's one way for Mrs. ... to share with us, but then when teams do schedule things it is put on that calendar and then what she does with that is, well every month we will get that BES academy Bulletin. So I think that's something. The other thing that Mrs. ... does that I'm not sure if every principal does is any new email that comes to her from the county; we get a lot of emails, you know as far as passing it on and making us aware of an awful lot of what's out there, if it's staff development, she's is very good about shooting emails to the staff.</p>
<p>Parent A, as a parent how are those activities conveyed to parents? How do they know what's going on? The school activities?</p>	<p><b>PA:</b> Well we get bulletins from the school. I kind of have an inside thing because I'm on the PTA Board too and so I'm involved in a lot of things such as volunteering with anything I can do.</p> <p><b>TE:</b> I was going to say as far as communicating she'll do that in lots of instances. Like this year there was an issue where students were going to get a new teacher and so she was able to just kind of channel technology using parentlink to the parents, saying this going to happen. But, she invited all of the parents in even if they felt that a phone call was enough or if they wanted to come in one</p>

	<p>to one, but that parent link, she really believes in that.</p> <p><b>TC:</b> And I think another good thing is she opens it (Parentlink) up for us to use. She let's like a team leader or like the music teacher who is having problems with the fourth-graders remembering their recorders. She's going to allow the music teacher to use it for fourth grade so that's another way that she doesn't just do it herself.</p>
<p>Q3: Discuss how the principal communicates with staff, parents, and students to promote desirable and social conditions and relationships.</p>	<p><b>TE:</b> I think the first thing that really sets the tone for the beginning of the year is the school sends home a school calendar and so what it is, is it goes on through the month but also included in that are expectations, you know, student behavior. I think it's just kind of like a book where parents get a lot of information so that when they have questions about anything, it's really the student handbook, but that's the first thing that does go home. I think the other thing she does is sharing information about the students needs.</p> <p><b>TD:</b> I just want to say as far as the principal to the student. I think the thing that sets Mrs.... apart; I think for a student going to the principal's office has a negative demeanor to it, and I think Mrs. ... does her best to get out there and see the children in a positive sense and that the kids just don't see her as, oh, I'm going to the principal's office. I know for example fourth graders having the social studies competition to get ready for the SOLs and she was in our rooms today trying to pump the kids up. So they see her not as just as when I'm in trouble and they feel open to say, "hey Mrs. ..., I got a good grade on my test" because she's open to them. And I think the thing is for the teachers is that we don't have to go to her only when we have a problem, we feel open to go to her just to share success. She always makes time for us and for the kids.</p> <p><b>TB:</b> When they have assemblies and things like that she tells the kids what she expects of them, how they should be acting, what they need to do and I think that makes it more social.</p>
<p>Q4: Do you all have a school-wide type of behavior plan or something that you implement as a school or is it by grade level that she's implemented?</p>	<p><b>TE:</b> We're doing the new; this year the "Time to Teach and Refocus" with refocusing. Starting with kindergarten through fifth-grade.</p> <p><b>TC:</b> And they actually had a parent PTA that talked about things that we're doing with "Time to Teach and Refocusing" so they could start using it in their homes and that's the setting the expectations right off the back. What we expect from you, what we expect from parents, she sets those high expectations for every child and every parent who comes into the building and she tells the parents exactly our behavioral management. With that PTA, she had Dr. Faulk come talk to the parents. The one that we had; staff development meeting with the "Time to Teach" she had her come and talk to the parents. To let them know what are the key things you can do at home also.</p> <p><b>TE:</b> I think another thing that Mrs. ... does is, and I don't know if you guys see it in the mornings because you don't do morning duty, but if she's in the building in the morning, she is always serving breakfast. Because we serve over 300 breakfasts a day and</p>

	<p>so she is always in there you know, kind of just visiting with kids and I think students just seeing her there other than going to principal's office with not good news. But she is you know out and about during those times and she will do bus duty so I think you know she is visible and you know she'll talk to the kids and she'll you know, do whatever so I think they will get to see there is a person there and in all of those things she does establish those behaviors and hold those kids to high expectations and she does teachers to but I think that's just another way she tries to get out there.</p>
<p>Q5: Discuss how the principal facilitates the sharing of information to address your student's needs, access resources outside the school, and develop prevention programs here.</p> <p>Can you site some examples or utilize any type of specific programs or just things you have at grade levels or at teams? Such that may happen for children that will help prevent certain types of behavior?</p>	<p><b>TD:</b> I think to develop a prevention plan, I think Mrs.... is big on the prevention. We start in the beginning with the children's needs, knowing what they need and we have such small groups, however, we're trying to prevent any problems. A lot of what we do is a prevention program; you know we don't want any of these problems to arise from the beginning. She doesn't wait.</p> <p><b>TE:</b> Well I think what's in place is; because we do use the core values, like every nine weeks there is an awards assembly where kids are complimented in different; perfect attendance, you know, academic improvement, and so what it is, it's a pretty big assembly where she will notify the kids and their brought up on stage and the parents are also invited, so we do have an awful lot of parents that do come to that so I think that's just one angle where she is complimenting students for their good behavior. I know it's very of time consuming because I know it kind of knocks out a whole week for her you know, but she just feels committed to the task to do that. Another thing is when your question says, how does your principal facilitate sharing information to address students needs, probably the strongest thing, one of her strongest attributes is that her focus is on students. So every nine weeks, I know at least in the primary because we do a lot of assessments ... I always meet with my grade level teams, all my teachers and we re-look at our flexible groups which are academically based so that students are moved; and then a lot of times there might be some issues that she will come in and she's really looks in depth at the situation ... says, "well I think we can fix it this way", but you know, ... she is very concerned about student' needs so she does know really who the kids are in this school because she does takes the time. She'll look at the assessments. Then she's a part of that the collaboration meetings that we do at the primary where she's really involved and will make very specific academic goals for some of the students. and then convey that to people and hold staff members accountable for that.</p>
<p>Q6: Discuss how your principal communicates to the school community the importance of problem solving as opposed to fault finding in regards to student success.</p>	<p><b>TB:</b> Well the one thing she does a lot is school-wide emails, it's not a personal attack, but it would never be just so and so teacher A stop doing that, it's a school-wide email just letting her views be known to the whole school. When have SPMT or any meeting; any team leader meeting, any committee meeting, it's always the no-fault principle that we don't call anyone up specifically.</p> <p><b>TD:</b> If one person is doing then everyone will be addressed by it. We see the email and have no idea who it's about. It's a very no-fault and I think our consensus is maybe we need to step up and</p>



	<p>of it but I am made aware of it in an email. So basically what finally happened was the rest of the school said okay, we'll just do it. She didn't have to facilitate that and so what it is, is she puts the ownership of all that, so here you all are vested in that and I just think that that is a good example of where she didn't answer the question and doesn't a lot of the time, she is like well I don't know everything, let's work it out and I think that was one way, as it pops into my head, where the teachers just said okay it's not going to work we'll do it the way we did in the past. So nothing changed but at least everything was all discussed.</p> <p><b>TC:</b> I know she's very open with hearing our concerns with a grade level. You know a certain grade level had some data simulation tests and you know, Mrs.... might think we need to rearrange these groups and sometimes maybe teachers will disagree with that. She doesn't walk in your room and say, "this is it", she'll sit down; it might go the way she said it would go, because I have had times that it has gone that way and I've had times that she's said, "okay, I understand your concerns. I understand your way. As long as you work it out and you form a plan, and you have it down, she'll say okay. But she wants you to let her know in a certain amount of time if it's working. She's not going to just let it go. And these problems and the resolution; like, she wants updates along the way. She doesn't wait. She wants to know, is it working out? Did what we decide is it working; a week later; is it still working, because if it doesn't work then she wants us to come up with solution B. She's very consistent on checking in to see if it's working or do we need to make a change.</p> <p><b>TB:</b> And I think that is why we've done so well is that strong instructional leadership that you know, she's down there and she knows what's going on and you know, she does take the time to find out what's going on and stays abreast of it.</p>
<p>Q8: Discuss how the principal communicates to the parents and the community the visions and the goals for your school. School improvement plan, How is that conveyed to your community? How do they know what's going on in your school?</p>	<p><b>TC:</b> They had a brochure of every goal lined up for our school improvement plan and they were given a copy for each household and she also had another PTA meeting that was; she read about it and she discussed it. Dr...came in that day and talked about it. She's very proud you know, and says these are the things we're doing. I know school improvement plans; she prides herself that we're actually doing what we say we're doing on that school improvement plan, not just putting great words down there.</p> <p><b>TD:</b> And she comments on it, this is what is on your plan, we have to do this. She says that to us all the time.</p> <p><b>TB:</b> And I think , Mrs. ..., she will brag. She brags on BES. So there's probably no one out there that she has seen that doesn't know just how great BES is. Or what's going on. She's going to tell you, we're doing what we have to do here to get it done and she is very proud of her school and I think that is how are parents and community, they feel the same way because they hear the leader of the school; well she has so much pride in it, she's not down on it; have them all on board, so I think just her positive outlook on what the school's doing and how they are doing it is really helpful.</p>

<p>Q9: Discuss how the principal make parents and community feel like they are welcome to the school. I would like to hear from the parent. How do you know you're welcome here?</p>	<p><b>TA:</b> As a parent but also as teacher A, I still had an issue with one of my children and with the open door policy, I came in as a parent and I always make sure I say that, as a parent vs. as a teacher, but as a parent, open door policy, I could go in and discuss anything with either one of the principals. Mrs. ..., sat down very professionally and solved the problem I was having. There's also a procedure for parent observation and I believe that more information will be going home on that. But that is something that was developed through SPMT.</p> <p><b>TD:</b> We wanted parents to feel comfortable but we wanted it to not interfere with the instruction, so we developed a plan where they could come. They can let the teacher know, we had some different things that we put on that plan. We didn't want them bringing young siblings that may disturb the class or have their cell phones, or different things, but we wanted them to know that they were welcome to come at anytime they wanted to.</p> <p><b>TB:</b> And another thing Mrs. .. tells us is like you know, when you see a parent you need to let them know that they're welcome. You never say well, I don't have time or anything like that. She pushes us in saying, you need to let them know that they are welcome here, make them feel comfortable.</p> <p><b>TC:</b> And the thing she's big on is appearance. She likes the front lobby to look nice. The PTA paid a lot of money to get some of the murals because she wanted it to be inviting and I think that she also, you know, she has the table out front with a lot of information that is going on and around, so I think she wants that to be open to parents too.</p> <p><b>TE:</b> And also as I stated earlier, in the morning time she's visible. When parents are dropping off their children she is there and they see her and you can go up and speak to her and she'll speak back. And the assistant principal is out there when they are dropping their children off and she is opening the doors, talking to the kids, talking to the parents.</p> <p>And another, because we have a very large Hispanic population, you know, several years ago a lot of those parents would come to our PTA meetings and couldn't understand anything and so we started having a translator at those meetings so that the parents could understand what was going on and initially it was kind of interesting because somebody would get up and say something and then we stop and the translator would say it all in Spanish. Now what they do is they have head phones, so they will come in and the parents have headphones and the translator is there so it doesn't really disrupt that and I think another thing as far as making the parents feel welcome is we do have those parent conference days.</p> <p>That's another thing that is established, is that the school's translator is here. You know to help parent, to encourage them to come in and feel comfortable. We have a parent liaison here that works with our families and many times when something happens, I know she'll send that parent liaison to the house to either bring</p>
--	--

	<p>teachers out there for a conference or to bring the parents back to school. It's just not everybody has transportation and she's always concerned about that. Making sure that it's a two way street, you know making parents feel comfortable but I think the Hispanic translating has been huge.</p>
<p>Q10: Discuss opportunities that are sought in communicating to parents to support your learning here.</p>	<p><b>TC:</b> We do have the Extended Day Program. Where in the past, I believe it's been pretty much remediation and I know this year we've added some enrichment programs too. We have a Mad Science Club and a Dance Club and the STEMS which is like an engineering club, so she's trying to make; they've done a lot to try and make this after school, extended day enjoyable because a lot of kids will look at it like two more hours of school. And frankly some of our teachers look at it that way too. So she things, they get snacks, they do shopping, they get ?. Mrs. ... is very into encouraging the children and the teachers to always work their best and to meet their highest expectations. Not to stop.</p> <p><b>TE:</b> And I think she challenges us because I know there are a couple of other grants out there that she's asking people to kind of look at, for maybe the 21<sup>st</sup> century grants for next year and that's a huge grant writing kind of thing you know, but she's tossing it back out there and you know, letting people mull it over; you know, is this something that is right for us or whatever. So you know, I think she's always out there thinking, you know, what can we do to make it better? I think for the longest time it was like, let's make sure that our kids are passing the SOL and now she says, "we've done that and we're going to continue to do that, let's start working on enrichment, you know, what's down the road for us.</p> <p><b>TC:</b> She is always pushing and raising the bar a little bit higher each time. And we always seem to meet that for her.</p> <p><b>TD:</b> It's not pass SOLs, it's pass advance SOL. Pretty soon, 600 around the board(laughing)</p> <p><b>TC:</b> I think she supports us in anything. I went to her and I asked to do something different in summer school. Something completely different that's never been done before in the district. A girl spelling, math, and science program. She was like, "wow, that's a great idea. Let's go for it!" She's always willing for us to come up with new ideas. She not like, "this works, we're keeping this", she always wants to do better so she's not in her little cookie cutter, she's willing to reach out and do other things and I think the kids see that as well as the teachers.</p> <p><b>TB:</b> I think she researches things to see if it will benefit the kids. If they don't listen well, she's like, well we'll try this. Then she'll research and say well, we'll try this. She's always throwing ideas out there for us.</p> <p><b>TC:</b> Look she is playing basketball with the fifth grade class so that is a pretty good principal right there. She is pretty good principal that is willing to get down. Now she is going to play.</p>

**TB:** It's a pep rally that we're having right before the SOLs. All the fifth grade teachers are doing basketball and the third and fourth grades do volleyball. She trying to do whatever it takes to get them ready and motivated. She knows that they have been taught and she wants them to feel confident and not stress out at a stressful time of year.

**TC:** And after the SOLs she always provides them ? for each of the grade levels. We don't know if they passed or not, but did they use all the strategies that we've taught them to do to do their best and I know third and fifth grade she takes them to the ? pool to go swimming and fourth grade usually goes to CiCi's, so it's something different.

**TC:** And I think that kind of started because not many schools in the county did that. You know they might do something here but now, some of the things we've done the other school have heard about. You know she doesn't brag and she not going to, even though she if very proud of it, she doesn't go out there and toot or brag to other principal's but they have come to her and say, what have you done here? What has been so amazing? And I think a lot of them just don't understand that; they try and take them, well those test taking strategies, they worked at BES, let's do them, and so they will kind of half heartedly do them or they do them like the folks do here because they say, well they didn't work for us and I've thought, well it's more than that. You know you can't sometimes replicate those things if the heart is not there. And I think that's what it is, she's generated that heart.