

Instructional Leadership Practices Principals use in Blue Ribbon Awarded Public
Elementary Schools in Virginia

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to identify instructional leadership practices elementary principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia implemented to influence the instructional program. A mixed methods research design was used to collect and analyze data. Principals at eleven of the sixteen public elementary schools in Virginia who received the Blue Ribbon Award between the years 2013-2015 were interviewed. An interview protocol consisting of eleven questions was used to collect qualitative and quantitative data. From the data collected during the interview process, a list of fifty instructional leadership activities was developed by the researcher. The list of fifty activities principals performed were grouped into the following categories; teacher observation practices, providing feedback to teachers, collaborating with teachers to analyze data, implementing professional development, and promoting a positive learning environment.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to identify instructional leadership practices elementary principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia implemented to influence the instructional program. Principals at eleven of the sixteen public elementary schools in Virginia who received the Blue Ribbon Award between the years 2013-2015 were interviewed. From the interviews conducted, the researcher has provided a template of fifty instructional leadership activities that principals can implement that may have an impact on student performance. The list is categorized into the following sections; teacher observation practices, providing feedback to teachers, collaborating with teachers to analyze data, implementing professional development, and promoting a positive learning environment.

Dedication

This study is dedicated to my wife and three daughters. It is because of them, that an inspiration and a relentless drive to complete a lifetime goal was achieved. The pursuit of a doctoral degree was a true family effort and through hard work and sacrifice, we have accomplished that dream. I love you with all my heart. I would also like to dedicate this achievement to my two brothers. Mom and Dad would be proud knowing the support system we provide for one another and never forgetting that family comes first. Finally, I would like to dedicate this accomplishment to my mom and dad. Growing up, you taught us all the value of hard work. It is from the morals and values you both have instilled in us, that allow us to have the courage to want to accomplish great things. It is from your example that I strive to be the man and father that you would expect.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In states across America, local school systems have been held accountable for student achievement as measured by individual state standards or the Common Core. Because of the accountability system that has been established in Virginia and other states as a reaction to the No Child Left Behind legislation enacted in 2001, expectations of educators and principals have dramatically changed. Since 1998 in Virginia, a school's performance is measured through standardized tests issued yearly by the state government. If a school is not meeting the required state standards, school principals must implement instructional strategies necessary to raise the performance of all stake holders in that school, including teachers and students. It is because of this focus on instructional standards that the role of the principal has changed dramatically over the last 15 years.

School leaders are expected to be the change agents that move a school's instructional program that is not meeting the state minimum requirements to a school with an instructional program that is achieving the mandated state benchmarks. In order for these leaders to inspire change, their roles must change accordingly to support strong instruction. This is not to say other roles of a principal are not important. Principals must wear many hats throughout the day and throughout the school year in order for all stake holders to be successful.

Research has suggested, with school leaders being tasked with finding ways to make all students successful, the primary role of school administrators has evolved into that of an instructional leader. Principals must be the leaders of their schools in the arena of instruction if a change in academic achievement is to take place. Oftentimes, this has led to successful administrators delegating managerial tasks such as books, buses, and maintenance to others in order to dedicate focused time on instructional practices.

The demands in the public educational system for principals to be effective instructional leaders has led many researchers to indicate that it is imperative for principals to implement research-based instructional practices to create a culture of success in public schools. In a study conducted by Bosker, Witziers, and Kruger (2003) in which a meta-analysis of 37 studies was completed, the researchers found that there was statistical evidence that showed there was a direct effect of practices implemented by principals on student achievement. Marzano, McNulty, and Waters (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of 5,000 studies indicating which administrative

practices had the greatest effect on student achievement. This is a small sample of the many studies that have been published demonstrating the influence school administrators have on student achievement and best practices.

Virginia schools and school divisions are held accountable for student achievement as measured by the Virginia Standards of Learning tests. These tests measure student performance in reading, math, science, history, and writing. In order for schools in Virginia to meet accreditation, they must have a 75% pass rate in reading and a 70% pass rate in math on the VA Standards of Learning Tests to be considered as meeting state requirements (VDOE, 2016).

In the 2014-2015 school year, Virginia had 22% of all its public schools not meet full accreditation; of the total 1,822 schools, 407 did not meet the state requirements. This means Virginia did have 78% of its schools meet the state requirements for the standardized tests issued, with many of these schools achieving high levels of proficiency (VDOE, 2016). These data would indicate there was an implementation of successful instructional practices by teachers and administration in the top performing schools of Virginia. The schools with the highest test scores are nominated every year for the National Blue Ribbon award. In 2015, seven Virginia public schools were awarded the National Blue Ribbon Award. In Virginia, 16 public elementary schools received this award between 2013-2015, ranking them as some of the state's top performing schools (National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, 2016).

The National Blue Ribbon Schools Program is part of the U. S. Department of Education's efforts to recognize the nation's top performing public and non-public schools. Public schools are nominated by the Chief State School Officer in each state, with "Exemplary High Performing" schools having their state's best high school graduation rates and the highest achieving students (the top 15%) in English and mathematics as measured by state assessments. All public schools must also meet their state's annual measurable objectives and be nominated by the state superintendent to be eligible for this award. At least one-third of public schools nominated in each state have student populations in which 40% or more of the school's students come from disadvantaged backgrounds (National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, 2016). It is possible in the years to come; the selection process for Blue Ribbon schools may be altered because of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2017), this act ensures that vital information is provided to educators, families,

students, and communities through annual statewide assessments that measure students' progress toward those high standards. This law was developed to support and grow local innovations, including evidence-based and place-based interventions developed by local leaders and educators (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). It is possible, that statewide assessments may change since first implemented with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, thus possibly changing the selection criteria for Blue Ribbon awarded schools. Because of the number of elementary schools performing below the basic benchmark established for standardized tests in reading and math with the accountability system in place currently, Blue Ribbon Awarded schools set the standard for achievement. This study examined the role of leadership in Blue Ribbon awarded schools and the instructional practices utilized by these principals.

A list of instructional strategies and practices implemented by principals in Blue Ribbon awarded elementary schools in Virginia was created through the data gathered from this study. The researcher examined which instructional strategies and practices were seen more frequently implemented by school administrators in Blue Ribbon awarded elementary schools. From data collected, the researcher used open coding to locate possible trends from interview statements. With the information collected and organized, it was determined which practices may have an influence in the areas of teacher observation and feedback, collaborating with teachers to analyze data, implementing professional development, and promoting a positive learning environment.

Statement of the Problem

In 2014-2015, 22% of schools in Virginia did not meet the state benchmark of full accreditation in either math or reading, with several schools being accredited with warning (VDOE, 2016). In many school divisions in Virginia, a major component of a principal's job performance is measured on the school's state standardized tests scores. In order to grow professionally, principals concentrate on procedures and practices established by school administration and their possible effects on the instructional program.

Possible activities and practices this study analyzed that principals implement to influence the instructional program of the school were; teacher observation and feedback, collaborating with staff and analyzing student data, the implementation of professional development, and promoting a positive learning environment (not to exclude the importance of other daily tasks such as; handling parent concerns, bus issues, sports, email, and other unexpected issues that will consume the instructional day). However, when looking at the issues

that arise daily, it makes the importance of this study greater in order to help answer; how then have Blue Ribbon schools and their leaders proven to be able to manage the everlasting problems that arise while maintaining the instructional focus of the school?

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following central question: What activities do principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia perform to influence the instructional program of the school?

This study was guided by the following sub-questions:

1. How do principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia provide feedback to teachers from classroom observations conducted by administration?
2. What do principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia do effectively to supervise good instruction?
3. What activities do principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia perform to collaborate with staff?
4. How do principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia analyze student data to make instructional decisions?
5. What professional development activities are planned by principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to identify research-based instructional strategies and practices implemented by principals of Blue Ribbon award elementary schools. The data collected provides current and future administrators with a concentrated list of successful initiatives put in place by top performing schools in Virginia, consisting of instructional strategies and practices implemented by principals in Blue Ribbon schools. The practices identified in the study can be used by principals for replication to enhance instructional programs in public schools and raise student achievement. In addition, the study helped to give a greater understanding on what various school divisions and principals in Virginia value and added to the importance of additional research in instructional leadership.

Thus far, research has provided evidence that the role of leadership may have a significant relationship and correlation with the success of high poverty rural and urban schools. In a study conducted by Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2013), researchers observed 7,420 individual principals and used 28,147 annual principal observations as the basis of their data. The research in the Branch study provided evidence that highly effective principals may be able to raise the achievement of a typical student in their schools between two and seven months of learning in a single school year and concluded that ineffective principals lower achievement by the same amount (Branch et al., 2013). The data from this study will provide principals and division leaders in rural and urban schools with similar demographics with a compendium of strategies in which principals at successful schools, as measured by state testing results, have implemented to impact the instructional program.

Description of Terms

The definitions to the terms identified below have been included to provide a clear understanding of terminology used throughout the research on instructional practices used by principals in Blue Ribbon schools.

1. Blue Ribbon Awarded Schools – Program established by the U. S. Department of Education in 1982 to identify the top performing public and non-public schools in the United States. These schools are nominated by the Chief State School Officer in their state, with “Exemplary High Performing” schools having their state’s best high school graduation rates and the highest achieving students (the top 15%) in English and mathematics as measured by state assessments (National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, 2016).
2. Research-based – Founded on culmination of facts based on data and research.
3. Instructional Practices – Specific methods applied in classrooms or schools that are implemented by teachers and administrators to enhance student achievement and learning in all subject areas.
4. Instructional Strategies – Specific approaches and behaviors exhibited in classrooms or schools that are implemented by teachers and administrators to enhance student achievement and learning in all subject areas.
5. Instructional Leaders – Principals who focus more on students’ academic achievement rather than being managers of the school. “They are concerned with the

- teachers and the school's impact on student learning and instructional issues, conducting classroom observations, ensuring professional development that enhances student learning, communicating high academic standards, and ensuring that all school environments are conducive to learning" (Hattie, 2015, p. 2).
6. Title I schools – Schools identified in accordance to the Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. Federal funds are currently allocated through statutory formulas that are based primarily on census poverty estimates and the cost of education in each state (U. S. Department of education, 2016).

Delimitations

1. Only principals of schools receiving the Blue Ribbon Award in the last three years were surveyed for the collection of data. This was done in an effort to interview principals who were at the Blue Ribbon Schools at the time the award was achieved.
2. Only principals of public elementary schools in Virginia were chosen in an effort to interview principals of Blue Ribbon schools with similar student demographics.

Limitations

1. Middle and high school principals were not interviewed for the gathering to gather data on instructional strategies and practices implemented in high performing schools. Therefore, the study may not be able to generalize beyond its population of elementary school principals.
2. There are other high performing schools in Virginia who did not apply for the Blue Ribbon Award and were not interviewed for this research study.
3. The population interviewed was limited to only Virginia principals; therefore the study may not be able to generalize beyond its population of Virginia principals.
4. Uncontrollable variables that may have an effect on student achievement, such as home environment.
5. Some principals interviewed for this study were not the principal of the school at the time standardized tests were given indicating these schools as top performing schools.

6. The interview protocol required principals to assess their own leadership practices. Any self-survey instrument lends itself to subjective data (Cash, 1993).

Organization of the Study

This study includes five chapters. Chapter I identifies the topic and research questions. This chapter contains the introduction, statement of the problem, research questions (including the main research question for the study and important sub-questions), the significance of the study, description of terms, delimitations, limitations, and organization of the study.

Chapter II contains the review of literature and relevant research to provide research-based instructional practices and strategies used by principals in elementary schools through higher education. This chapter also provides a summary of the research studied on a principal's effect on student achievement.

Chapter III contains the methodology that was applied for this study. This chapter identifies the population, research design, the data needed for this study and where it was obtained, a description of the interview protocol used, informed signed consent and how it was obtained, and the data gathering process to include how these data were managed and analyzed.

Chapter IV contains a summarization of the data gathered and analyzed. Chapter V includes a conclusion derived from the analysis of data gathered. Chapter V contains a discussion of the findings, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Wagoner, Kegan, Lahey, Lemons, Garnier, Helsing, and Rasmussen (2006) state self-reflection and recognition is the hardest and most powerful step in accepting one's responsibility as a leader. In an era of high stakes testing, principals must recognize what actions they can take that may have an effect on student outcomes and the instructional program. Effective principals concentrate and self-reflect on actions that promote instructional leadership. In order for principals to concentrate on their role as an instructional leader, they must self-reflect on which tasks are being performed as an administrator that can be delegated or prioritized to allow for more time to be focused on classroom instruction.

One of the largest obstacles standing in the way of principals being instructional leaders is the sheer volume of non-instructional work the job demands. Principals spend many hours outside of the classroom handling non-instructional issues such as; overseeing facilities, sitting in non-instructional meetings, and handling disciplinary incidents. (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012).

Principals are expected to be educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relations/communications experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special programs administrators, as well as guardians of various legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives. In addition, principals are expected to serve the often conflicting needs and interests of many stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, district office officials, unions, state, and federal agencies (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005, p. 4).

However, successful schools have principals who make time to immerse themselves into the instructional leadership role that is essential to promote student success and systematically make time to monitor the instruction that takes place in the classroom (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012).

Marks and Priny (2003), define instructional leadership as viewing the principal as the primary source of educational expertise. These principals support and systematize effective teaching, maintain high expectations for teachers and students, supervise classroom instruction, coordinate the school's curriculum, and monitor student progress, while focusing on teaching and learning. School divisions are hiring aspiring administrators that are certified, but may not be

equipped for the shifting role of the principal from manager to effective instructional leader. “As a result, an increasing number of school divisions are creating intense support systems for principals to build the skills they need to effectively lead schools” (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005, p. 5).

School divisions are training their principals in instructional leadership in response to the recent research, suggesting there may be instructional practices principals implement that have an effect on the instructional program. The research indicates that a principal who implements effective instructional practices may have an effect on student performance outcomes. Robison, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) performed a meta-analysis of 27 studies examining the effect of a principal’s instructional leadership on student outcomes. From this study, Robison, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) found that the average effect of instructional leadership on student outcomes was three to four times that of transformational leadership. The study concluded that when principals concentrate their work and learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes.

The data derived from the study conducted by Robison et al. (2008), showed a mean effect size of .42 when measuring the impact of an effective instructional leader on student outcomes. This can be interpreted as a moderately large and certainly as an educationally significant effect. Robinson’s 2008 study found direct involvement in the support and evaluation of teaching through regular classroom visits and delivery of formative and summative feedback to teachers. This study also found the mean effect size for the influence of the principal or designee was 1.1 standard deviations in elementary schools compared to 0.42 in high schools, suggesting that leaders’ oversight of teaching and the curriculum has more impact in elementary than in high schools (Robison et al., 2008). The first meta-analysis, including 22 of the 27 studies, involved the comparison of the effects of transformational leadership characteristics and instructional leadership on student outcomes. The second meta-analysis in this study was a comparison of the effects of five inductively derived sets of leadership practices on student outcomes based on 12 of the 27 studies (Robison et al., 2008). In the study conducted by Robinson et al. (2008), the majority of the 27 studies took place in the United State and was published between 1978 and 2006. The studies examined by Robison et al. (2008) provided evidence about the links between leadership and student outcomes, with 16 studies examining

leadership in elementary schools and 15 of the 27 studies narrowing the analysis of school leadership to the principal only.

Robison, et al. (2008) measured a principal's effect on student outcomes by taking the information gathered from the 27 studies and entered the results into a spreadsheet under the following headings: sample characteristics, leadership theory and instrumentation, student outcomes and assessment tools, contextual variables (student background, school community context), indirect leadership effect, study design and analysis techniques, and main findings, including the magnitude of direct and indirect effects of leadership on student outcomes. "In nearly every study, the design included some control for student background effects, either through the use of gain scores or covariates" (Robison et al., 2008, p. 653). However, the study did not talk about which background effects were chosen.

The five categories or dimensions of leadership practice identified by Robinson were derived from the 199 listed survey items or constructs. These five categories identified were;

- Establishing goals and expectations (.43 mean effect size)
- Strategic Resourcing (.31 mean effect size)
- Planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum (.42 mean effect size)
- Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development (.84 mean effect size)
- Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment (.27 mean effect size). (Robison et al., 2008, p. 653)

Each listed item was then coded against one of the dimensions and the mean effect size and standard error for each leadership dimension calculated (Robison et al., 2008).

In a similar study, Marzano et al. (2005), reported that an effective principal on average can affect student performance outcomes by 22 percentile points; reporting the average correlation of an effective instructional leader on student outcomes was measured at .25. This suggests a principal's role on average has an effect of 10% on student achievement outcomes. In this study, Marzano set out to answer the following question: Does principal leadership have an effect on student achievement in school? Marzano (2005) concluded the answer to this question was yes. Principal leadership does have "discernable effects on student achievement" (Waters and Marzano, 2006, p. 6).

Evidence was found in a study conducted by Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2013) indicating that highly effective principals raise the achievement of a typical student in their schools between two and seven months of learning in a single school year, specifying that ineffective principals possibly lower achievement by the same amount. In this study, Branch et al. (2013) measured the effectiveness of a principal by examining the extent to which math achievement in a school was higher or lower than would be expected based on the characteristics of students in that school, including their achievement in the prior year. Branch et al. (2013) indicated by comparing students in the same school under different leadership, any influence of outside variables such as economic status of the student population, would not have a large effect on the data reported. In their project, Branch et al. (2013) combined different data sources to create matched data sets of public school students, teachers, and principals over many school years. Data for the study was collected through the Texas Education Agency, a statewide data base, and through the Public Education Information Management Systems. “The Public Education Information Management Systems reports key demographic data, including race, ethnicity, and gender for students and personnel, as well as student eligibility for subsidized lunch, a key indicator of poverty” (Branch et al., 2013, p. 2). Branch et al. (2013) indicated that this database could be merged with student achievement by school, grade, and year, concentrating on the years from 1995-2001. There were three methods to merging these data to account for any differences in effectiveness.

First, Branch et al. (2013) took the average math achievement gains adjusted for student background characteristics and school mobility rates during the first three years of a principal leading a school. Next, the researchers took the difference in the average adjusted math achievement gains between students attending the same school under different leaders, looking at all Texas principals. The last measure implemented was to take math test result data from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills Assessment, which is administered each spring to students grades 3-8, for the principals’ schools included in this study to account for the additional year to year fluctuation in average adjusted achievement gains surrounding leadership transition (Branch et al., 2013). During this period, the study observed 7,420 individual principals and used 28,147 annual principal observations (Branch et al., 2013).

Bruggencate, Luyten, Scheerens, and Slegers (2012) found that the principal’s role in establishing a strong instructional organization appeared to be precisely the area that deeply

predicts school effectiveness. This study asked teachers from 97 schools to answer various questions to indicate to what extent specific administrative practices were put in place at their school (1= to a small extent, 4= to a great extent). Sample items included:

- “At our school, student outcomes are systematically analyzed”
- “At our school, we have clear procedures to ensure that every staff member will receive the right information”
- “At our school, teachers collaborate with each other to learn”
- “At our school, activities are organized to enhance the image of our school”

(Bruggencate et al., 2012, p. 712).

Bruggencate et al. (2012) found significant positive results for school leader behavior on performance orientation and development orientation. “The findings also showed that school leader behavior affected student outcomes both indirectly and directly. Rational goals and open systems behaviors had both significant, positive indirect effects on the average promotion rate and negative direct effects on the average final examination scores” (Bruggencate, Luyten, Scheerens, & Slegers, 2012, p. 720). Rational goals behaviors were measured by teachers’ responses to principals implementing activities that systematically analyze student outcomes. Open systems behaviors were measured by teachers’ responses to activities organized by principals to enhance the image of the school.

Sanzo, Sherman, Clayton (2011), conducted a study to examine best practices of principals in school leadership in which there was accountability as determined by standardized test scores. The methodology of this study consisted of an inductive exploratory method designed to provide evidence of how successful middle school principals created school environments in which there are high levels of student achievement (Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011). The researchers conducted a literature review indicating statistical data on the importance of school leadership and coded interviews of ten principals in Virginia in which an open coded constant comparison process was used (Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011).

Sanzo et al. (2011) indicated that every one of the ten principals interviewed for their study, emphasized their role as an instructional leader. The researchers indicated “principals felt they helped raise student achievement scores by establishing an instructional environment that supports good attendance, student engagement, and school schedules that are restructured to enable at-risk students to receive intervention and remediation” (Sanzo, Sherman, and Clayton,

2011, p. 38). One principal shared the success at his school indicating for some of the AYP subgroups at that school, not specifying which subgroups; “there was a 40-50 percent point increase in the past three years in student achievement scores in math” (Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011, p. 38). This principal indicated the increase in math tests scores was in relation to instructional practices implemented by school leadership. These principals shared a lot of their time was spent being visible, monitoring classroom instruction and spending time in the classrooms, implementing research based strategies such as Bloom’s Taxonomy, and reviewing assessment data (Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011).

In a study conducted by Valentine and Prater (2011), the researchers indicated their findings demonstrated that the principal leadership behaviors of promoting instructional and curriculum improvement were linked to student achievement (Valentine & Prater, 2011). The study conducted by Valentine and Prater was a statewide study in Missouri. The researchers wanted to “develop an understanding of the relative impact of principal’s managerial, instructional, and transformational leadership on student achievement as measured by a standardized high-stakes test in public high schools” (Valentine & Prater, 2011, p. 5). The researchers also set out to ask if leadership factors play a role on student achievement scores as measured by the Missouri Assessment Program (Valentine & Prater, 2011). Data were collected by Valentine and Prater (2011) from 155 principals of public high schools who had served in their current school for three years. The researchers found a positive relationship between a principal’s role and student achievement in five categories, these five categories being: instructional improvement, curricular improvement, identifying a vision, providing a model, and fostering group goals (Valentine & Prater, 2011).

Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) suggested that school leadership is “second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning” (p. 27). The researchers concluded that the direct and indirect effects of school leadership on pupil outcomes are small but educationally significant, indicating that school leadership effects student achievement by five to seven percentile points in pupil learning (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) report; “While evidence about leadership effects on student learning can be confusing to interpret, much of the existing research actually underestimates its effects” (p. 3). In this study, Leithwood et al. (2004) concluded that the effects of leadership on student learning account for about a quarter of total school effects.

In the article, *High Impact Leadership*, Hattie (2015) concluded that effective instructional leaders are concerned with the teachers' and the school's impact on student learning, instructional issues, and conducting classroom observations. According to Hattie (2015), effective instructional leaders focus more on students than teachers, while supervising instruction. During walk-throughs and observations effective instructional leaders focus on what students are learning, rather than on what teachers are teaching. As an effective instructional leader, "the principal is key to ensuring that teacher observations are effective and needs to have an understanding of what good teaching and student learning looks like" (Protheroe, 2011, p. 113).

Reeves (2009) reported effective instructional leaders conduct meaningful classroom observations. These principals are able to discuss instructional practices they see in the classroom and the variables that teachers and leaders can control to promote student learning. Protheroe (2011) specifies when planning teacher observations, principals need to carefully define what they are looking for, indicating three important elements; "Teaching to standards, evidence that students are engaged in learning, and researched based instructional strategies" (p. 115). Protheroe (2011) concluded there is a new paradigm for teacher observations in effective schools. Gone are the days of infrequent and brief classroom observations, but today's successful schools have principals that conduct frequent observations of varied lessons and are focused more on student learning and effective teaching than student behavior and classroom management.

According to Duke (2003), in Virginia, principals report spending more time supervising and evaluating teachers because of the implementation of the Standards of Learning tests. These principals reported receiving training in order to identify effective instructional strategies to maintain school climates that are conducive to teacher and student growth. In the study conducted by Duke (2003), effective principals put aside managerial tasks and devoted a substantial amount of time to classroom observations and clearly recognize teaching and learning as the main business of the school.

In a 2014 McRel publication, *Coaching That Makes A Difference*, "The Importance of Informal Observations in an Era of Rigorous Teacher Evaluation", Kerr and Maxfield explain the importance of maintaining a consistent walk-through observation schedule in which walk-throughs last 10-29 minutes. The researchers stated these walk-through schedules help to provide

the instructional support needed and are vital to creating open communication and trust among teachers and principals in order for each teacher and the school to succeed (McRel Vol. 72, 2014).

Monitoring classrooms for effective teaching to develop and supporting teachers are fundamental practices implemented in outstanding schools that excel against the odds (Robertson & Timperley, 2011). Leaders who do not take an interest in learning and classrooms are seen and judged by teachers within the building as being uninterested in teaching. Effective leaders visit and observe classrooms and provide teachers with quality feedback that support teaching and learning (Robertson & Timperley, 2011). The researchers in this study, report that “where monitoring is effective, the quality of teaching is noticeably higher than in schools where monitoring is poor and infrequent” (Robertson & Timperley, 2011, p. 76). This is measured as a diagnostic assessment of skills, strengths, and talents. Principals can identify high quality teaching and spread these strategies to the rest of the staff through dialogue and professional development. The dialogue after an observation between a principal and teacher should provide meaningful feedback, encouragement, and questioning about the teaching taking place (Robertson & Timperley, 2011).

Hattie (2015) stated that being an effective instructional leader required strong leadership driven by a relentless determination to maximize the impact on student learning, improve the nature of the evidence about that impact, and make the right decisions going forward. According to Protheroe (2011), the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) recognizes that effective principals spend large amounts of time in classrooms, observing teaching and providing detailed feedback regarding how teachers’ effectiveness can be improved. “School leaders support teachers’ professionalism by sharing feedback with teachers on the degree of student engagement and behaviors of the students” (Protheroe, 2011, p. 113).

Kerr and Maxfield emphasize after classroom observations occur, immediate feedback should be given by the principal or instructional coach and professional development should transpire with the teacher (McRel Vol. 72, 2014). Robertson and Timperley (2011) describe the importance of feedback from classroom observations by principals being based on teaching and learning. Effective “leaders create circumstances to meet with teachers to discuss pedagogy and pupil learning” (Robertson & Timperley, 2011, p. 77). Robertson and Timperley (2011) indicate that during the post observation dialogue, the professional conversations that have the most

influence, are focused on teaching and learning. The research suggests that these post observation conferences have a greater impact and are more beneficial if questions are developed by the principal prior to the meeting. For meaningful analysis to occur, leaders must ask carefully prepared questions (Peiser & Santoyo, 2012).

“For collective feedback, leaders gather data during their walk-throughs to share with the school faculty in order to provide an idea of where an effort is, or is not, taking hold” (Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman, & Hensley, 2012, p. 21). Principals need strong skills in providing open, constructive, and accurate feedback (Protheroe, 2011). During these meetings, effective instructional leaders have a collaborative mindset. “Instead of focusing on the principal as the instructional leader working alone, the principal’s role becomes one of facilitating the learning of others” (Matthews & Crow, 2003, p. 56). Wagner, Kegan, Lahey, Lemons, Garnier, Helsin, and Rasmussen (2006), discuss the importance of principals to model the learning for teachers, collaboration, and the willingness for teachers and administrators to receive constructive feedback.

Providing feedback to teachers is not always an easy task. Administrators have to be well prepared and willing to have difficult conversations with teachers. There are circumstances where a “top down” leadership approach may be necessary. A former principal who now coaches principals nationwide, Hall said; “This wasn’t always a rainbows and unicorns approach, his message to staff was clear and consistent. His job was to help teachers to become more effective, more impactful, and more successful in their roles as facilitators of student learning” (McRel, 2014, p 15).

As part of an effective instructional leader’s role to monitor classrooms and coach teachers on successful classroom practices, research suggests principals should frequent classrooms on a consistent basis and provide feedback. This can be done through structured walk-through observations in which post observation meetings are scheduled to provide teachers with feedback. Exceptional school leaders are very intentional about how they conduct walk-throughs and observations, placing the utmost emphasis of giving the right feedback to teachers (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012). In the book, *Leverage Leadership*, Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) report that principals who conduct walk-through observations of teachers lasting 15 minutes and providing face to face feedback every week are providing their teachers in one year’s time with as much feedback as the average teacher gets in 20 years. The author emphasizes that successful

principals systematically track their observations and provide frequent feedback to monitor and ensure feedback translates into practice.

Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) provides a template for principals to calculate the amount of time needed in order to successfully visit classrooms and provide feedback. This template demonstrates that principals can observe 15 teachers for 15 minutes and would be spending less than four hours of their time a week monitoring classroom instruction. Principals can implement meaningful feedback to the teachers observed into practice with 7.5 hours devoted to 15 teachers in 30 minute interval feedback sessions. Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) report feedback is more meaningful if it is given in small portions at a time. Therefore, teachers would learn more as educators receiving one piece of feedback on a more frequent basis maximizing teacher development. Bambrick-Santoyo's conclusion that if principals adhere to the observation template provided in *Leverage Leadership*, it will hold these principals accountable for visiting and observing classrooms and allot for more time to handle other priorities. The template provided by Bambrick-Santoyo allots for each of the teachers being observed for 15 minutes and feedback sessions lasting 30 minutes. The total spent by the principal on classroom observations and providing meaningful feedback would total 11.5 hours, or in other words, one and a half workdays a week, leaving 3.5 days left for other administrative responsibilities (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012).

If a principal conducts one walk-through observation lasting 15 minutes for a teacher, he or she has observed one percent of the classroom instruction for the week. On average, teachers spend 1,250 minutes a week providing instruction to the students. However, by holding data meetings with teachers, and reviewing student progress data, a principal can gauge 6-8 weeks of instruction during a 30 minute meeting (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012). Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) state that, "if traditional observations are a glimpse through a peephole, then data analysis meetings throw open the doors for instructional leaders" (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012, p. 36). These data analysis meetings provide the collaboration needed between teachers and administration to effectively influence the instructional program within a school. Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) imply that successful collaboration takes place through observation and feedback and is developed through frequent professional development, in which everyone is part of a team and a culture of support and trust has been developed. To ensure lasting success of instructional programs,

building this culture of collaboration among school staff is an essential practice of an instructional leader to promote the success of all students (Bambrick-Santoyo (2012).

A vital role of a school administrator is collaborating and empowering staff. The mission of a school cannot be carried out by one person. Principals have to be the instructional leader of multiple instructional leaders within their building. Fostering intellectual and self-motivated growth on the part of teachers means that the instructional leader, whenever possible, uses an approach that demands greater choice and thought on the part of the classroom teacher (Glickman, 2002).

Furthermore, principals and teachers both play a part in forging an effective leadership relationship. Instructional leaders provide opportunities for teacher growth, but teachers are also responsible for seizing these opportunities (Marks & Priny, 2003). Robinson (2007) reported in higher performing schools, leaders work directly with teachers to plan, coordinate, and evaluate teachers and teaching. They are more likely than their counterparts in lower performing schools to provide evaluations that teachers describe as useful, and to ensure that student progress is monitored and that the results are used to improve teaching programs (Robinson, 2007).

The researchers of the International Successful School Principal Project (*ISSPP*) found that establishing and maintaining a culture of collaborative learning through teacher leadership is essential to sustain student success over time in high poverty schools (Jacobson, 2011). Developing teacher leaders stems from shared instructional leadership that involves ongoing collaboration between the principal and teachers on curriculum, instruction, and assessments. For meaningful collaboration to occur the principal seeks out the ideas from expert teachers in these areas and works with teachers for school improvement by providing professional development. The principal and teachers share the responsibility for staff development, curricular development, and supervision of instructional responsibilities (Marks & Priny, 2003). In a study conducted by Sanzo et al. (2011) principals indicated they wanted the faculty to participate in the professional knowledge, providing one instructional strategy every meeting, and present information to their peers, doing this through in-services and vertical team meetings.

In a study conducted on effective leadership practices of principals, in the category of facilitating professional development, Sanzo et al. (2011) found that for professional development in these schools, administrators turned the faculty meetings over to the teachers. One principal interviewed stated that teachers in their school were required to develop two

professional goals each year to work towards to help them grow as professionals (Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011). Wagoner et al. (2006), highlight that principals should commit to every meeting being focused on instruction. Other daily operation items that would fill up time during a staff meeting should be handled through email, memos placed in teachers' mailboxes, or a newsletter. This may require a change in how faculty meetings have traditionally been set up, but for a principal to be an effective instructional leader, a principal must demonstrate that what is important to them is represented by where staff professional development time is spent. For this reason, it is essential that professional development is planned with an instructional focus.

Highly effective administrators meet with their school leadership team to plan for professional development in which professional development is a distributed responsibility to other staff such as teacher leaders, assistant principals, or instructional coaches (Robertson & Timperley, 2011). The principal should be heavily involved with the weekly meetings throughout the year, monitoring the process and making sure state standards and the division's curriculum are being implemented with fidelity. To involve all teachers in this process, effective principals implement professional learning communities within their schools. This process takes time and should be implemented based on one's relationship with their staff. "We spent three solid years, once a week, in our professional learning communities whether it's grade level or across grade level, looking at different units on reading instruction and assessments" (Reimer, 2010, p. 69). Reimer (2010) reported that Blue Ribbon awarded elementary schools developed professional learning communities centered on reading and established a reading instructional framework. This study indicated that establishing a system for professional development was one of the key strategies performed by the principals of Blue Ribbon schools.

As an effective school leader, it is essential for a principal to systematically plan for professional development to educate and make teachers better at their craft. Growing consent on the attributes of effective school principals has shown that successful school leaders influence student achievement through two important pathways, the backing and development of effective teachers and the implementation of effective organizational processes (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). Professional development can be implemented as an organizational process by effective school leaders at both the school district level by district leaders and at the building level by the school principal.

Depending on the size of the school district, student demographics, and other organizational factors, professional development would be differentiated in response to that school or school districts' needs. Small schools may provide professional development in which the principal models desirable forms of instruction and monitoring these practices in the classroom. In high achieving high poverty schools, research indicates there is a substantial effort to implement professional development (Parrett & Budge, 2012). However, equally successful instructional leaders, of larger schools typically, may influence their teachers in more indirect ways of planned professional development experiences (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004).

Educational research has indicated that professional development of teachers is essential for school divisions of all sizes. This research has supported the importance of principals providing professional development for teachers in all states grades K-12. School systems around the globe attribute instructional improvement to professional development of teachers. In all countries, establishing professional development was a trait possessed by effective principals (Jacobson, 2011). Additionally, the research on educational professional development indicates effective instructional leaders plan staff development based on data. Sanzo et al. (2011) stated that most principals who participated in their study emphasized the importance of providing instructional professional development in which effective methods of utilizing data were applied. Wooleyhand (2013) reported that teachers are very skilled at breaking down the results of formative assessments to make critical decisions in their classrooms. This study reported "teachers use formative data to reflect on the needs of their students, re-teach the content, and re-group the learners to promote success of all students" (Wooleyhand, 2013, p. 3).

Jacobson (2011) reported that in the United States, highly effective principals used standardized test data to help establish the direction of their schools, plan for professional development, and to target problem areas for improvement. Brown and Green (2014) found the teachers' involvement with analyzing individual students' data and setting higher expectations for all their students contributed to the success of their schools. It was highlighted in the study by Brown and Green (2014) that students felt competent and capable of learning in these Blue Ribbon Awarded schools. The researchers concluded perhaps, "students felt more competent in their abilities because their teachers used data to make instructional decisions that met their needs" (Brown & Green, 2014, p. 14). Implementing structured times for staff to collaborate to

make common assessments and review student data has been demonstrated in schools across the country as an instructional strategy that effective principals implement that may influence the instructional program.

In an article published by NASSP in 2010, *Restoring Hope*, the author reflects upon a school in the state of New York to turn its instructional program around and the importance of implementing structured times for staff to collaborate to analyze data and provide professional development. Instructionally, the school administration implemented common planning creating a daily collaborative exchange of teaching practices and lesson planning between content teachers and special education teachers to meet student needs (Cinaca, 2010). “In addition, because substantive collaboration only happens with purposeful planning, co-teaching teams attended training sessions every other Friday for a year during their planning time; during those sessions, teams focused on curriculum content, communication strategies, and instructional approaches” (Cinaca, 2010, p. 6). Cinaca (2010) indicated another instructional change that was made to Thomas High was the implementation of common assessments, with teachers and school leaders working collaboratively to review student performance data on the common assessments. These data meetings would help drive future instruction at this school.

Maslyk (2012) conducted a study to identify characteristics of principals in Blue Ribbon schools in the state of Pennsylvania. In this study, Maslyk (2012) set out to find characteristics of principals that may lead to establishing a strong instructional organization as measured by standardized tests. This was a case study in which a qualitative method was used, with interviews being conducted of a “limited number of principals meeting the criteria for their school to be recognized as a Blue Ribbon Awarded school” (Maslyk, p. 58, 2012). The study explored how these principals perceived their own leadership styles and their impact on student performance as measured by the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (Maslyk, 2012). Maslyk (2012) reported that there are many variables that can affect student performance on standardized tests; however the study was set out solely to focus on the possible influences of school leadership. Maslyk (2012) found that from the coding and use of NVivo 9 software to analyze data, in the area of instructional leadership, it was prevalent the principals in these schools placed a high emphasis on managing the instructional program with the academic success of their students.

From the interviews and data analysis, the researcher determined four primary categories that emerged; “organization and operations, roles and relationships, data-driven practices, and an instructional leadership model” (Maslyk, 2012, p. 75). The researcher discovered in the area of instructional leadership that managing the instructional program and promoting school climate were much more prevalent than defining a school mission (Maslyk, 2012). “Under the category of roles and relationships, a collective efficacy was shown to have been coded twice as much as shared leadership with organization and operations playing a minor role in the category of data collection compared to accountability” (Maslyk, 2012, p. 76). Maslyk (2012) stated the findings correlated with other studies on leadership, “supporting the importance of establishing a vision, promoting collaboration, and sharing leadership” (p. 105).

Research has indicated several methods to measure instructional leadership. Many studies have utilized qualitative data, coding interviews of principals that have been conducted. Other studies have taken a quantitative approach, utilizing student test scores as a possible measure to indicate successful instructional practices that were implemented by principals. In the study conducted by Goldring, Cravens, Porter, Murphy, and Elliott (2015), the researchers utilized the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED) based on researched based instructional practices that may have an effect on student achievement. This study included a sample of schools in which teachers and principals participated. The study included 63 schools, 47 elementary, seven middle, and nine high schools from eight districts in six states in the United States. The VAL-ED was used by Goldring et al. (2015) and measured the following successful instructional programs and operations conducted by principals.

- Planning – articulate shared direction and coherent policies, practices, and procedures for realizing high standards of student performance.
- Implementing – engage people, ideas, and resources to put into practice the activities necessary to realize high standards for student performance.
- Supporting – create enabling conditions; secure and use the financial, political, technological, and human resources necessary to promote academic and social learning.
- Advocating – promotes the diverse needs of students within and beyond the school.
- Communicating – develop, utilize, and maintain systems of exchange among members of the school and with its external communities.

- Monitoring – systematically collect and analyze data to make judgments that guide decisions and actions for continuous improvement.” (Goldring, Cravens, Porter, Murphy, & Elliott, 2015, pgs. 7-8)

In order for a principal to effectively implement the strategies measured by the VAL-ED and other survey instruments used to measure instructional leadership, they must be willing to empower others in instructional leadership roles. In many elementary schools, a principal does not have an assistant principal to monitor the instructional program. Successful elementary principals include teacher leaders in the instructional design of the school’s academic program. Teacher leaders are defined as “teachers with expertise, professionalism, enthusiasm, passion, and commitment” (Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann, 2009, p. xvi). These teachers enhance teaching and learning and help tie the school community together (Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann, 2009).

These teachers can be vital to help establish the instructional program for a school. According to Harrison and Killion (2015) there are ten essential roles that teacher leaders play that can help support the instructional program of a school. These ten roles are; resource providers, instructional specialists, curriculum specialists, classroom supporters, learning facilitators, mentors, school leaders, data coaches, can serve as catalysts for change, and are learners. Ash and Persall (2000) state that positive school change is neither a top down, nor bottom up approach. Instead, it is an interactive and participative process with the principal serving the role as Chief Learning Officer of the school in order to build an organizational climate that encourages and supports emergent leadership throughout the school. “The principal’s direct customer is the teacher. The work of the principal as the CLO begins with spending time with teachers, in and out of classrooms, engaged in conversations about teaching and learning. It is through this process, and within this kind of open, inviting organizational culture that teacher leadership is likely to emerge” (Ash & Persall, 2000, p. 5).

Goldring et al. (2015) identifies the definition of leadership as the individual or collective “process of influencing others to achieve mutually agreed upon purposes for the organization” (p. 182). Literature on educational pedagogy published from the mid to late 1990’s began to demonstrate the importance of a school principal on academic performance and the emergence of the instructional leadership role. It was at this point in time that the literature began to focus on principals becoming instructional leaders and delegating managerial tasks. The research in the literature review and in this study is focused on the strategies effective principals implement that

may have an effect on student academic performance. Research in the literature review was chosen to establish a pattern of strategies successful school administrators employ and instructional programs implemented that may lead to student success.

Overall, many of the studies, articles, and books reviewed provided statistical data supporting the premise that effective principals can have a positive impact on students' academic growth. Effective principals identified in the literature review, provided teachers with professional development, enabled collaboration, and established interventions based on data analysis. Discussed throughout the research were effective principals' ability to become involved in the instructional practices and curriculum in their schools. These principals also had high expectations for students and staff and empowered their teachers to make collaborative decisions on best practices for their schools, while establishing a culture of learning. The research conducted for the literature review provides evidence supporting the impact a principal may have on student achievement and influencing the instructional program, warranting further research with a focus on leadership strategies implemented by effective principals in Blue Ribbon public elementary schools in Virginia.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

This study focused on the activities principals perform in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia to influence the instructional program of the school. Blue Ribbon elementary schools are recognized by the United States Department of Education as being one of the top performing schools in their state. This chapter contains the research questions which guided the study, the population, the research design, a description of the data needed, what instrument was used to collect the data for the study, and how the data was gathered, managed, and analyzed.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following central question: What activities do principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia perform to influence the instructional program of the school?

This study was guided by the following sub-questions:

1. How do principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia provide feedback to teachers from classroom observations conducted by administration?
2. What do principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia do effectively to supervise good instruction?
3. What activities do principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia perform to collaborate with staff?
4. How do principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia analyze student data to make instructional decisions?
5. What professional development activities are planned by principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia?

Population

Principals at Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia were chosen for this study in order to focus on the activities these principals perform to place on emphasis on the

instructional program of the school. For a public school to receive the Blue Ribbon Award, it must first be nominated by the Chief State School Officer in each state, with “Exemplary High Performing” schools having their state’s best high school graduation rates and the highest achieving students (the top 15%) in English and mathematics as measured by state assessments. All public schools must also meet their state’s annual measurable objectives to be eligible for this award (National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, 2016). Once a school has been nominated, the principal must fill out a six part application with demographic information, along with a detailed account of the school’s instructional programs and supports systems.

Administrators at Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia were chosen because of their students’ academic success and performance on the VA Standards of Learning Tests. In order to receive this award, each school performed in the top 15% of all elementary schools in Virginia on the math and reading Standards of Learning Tests. Public school principals were chosen for this study in an effort to collect data from principals presiding over schools with similar student demographic populations.

Of the Blue Ribbon public elementary schools selected, only those elementary schools that applied and were given the Blue Ribbon Award in the past three years (2013-2015) were chosen for this study. The three year window was chosen in an attempt to ensure the same principal was still at the school awarded at the time of recognition. Since 2013, 16 public elementary schools have met the criteria and received the Blue Ribbon Award in Virginia. From these 16 elementary schools chosen for the study, two were Title I schools. Six elementary schools were recognized as Blue Ribbon Awarded schools in 2013, seven were recognized in 2014, and three were recognized in 2015.

One school from the 16 public elementary schools who received the Blue Ribbon Award between 2013-2015 had a population under 200 students. There were seven public schools who received the award with student populations under 500. Six public elementary schools with student populations between 500-700 students and two elementary schools with student populations over 800 received the Blue Ribbon Award between the years 2013-2015. Out of the 16 schools that received this award between the years 2013-2016, 13 schools were led by female principals and three elementary schools were led by male principals. From the three elementary schools led by male principals, two were principals with 600 or more students, with one male principal leading a school with 223 students. Eleven principals from the sixteen awarded

elementary schools participated in this study. Out of the eleven principals interviewed, seven principals served as the principal of the school at the time the Blue Ribbon award was given for academic excellence. All elementary schools used in the study consisted of grades kindergarten through grade five, except schools A, F, and I who also had a pre-school program. Descriptive demographic data for each public school that participated in the study is listed below in the following table.

Table 3.1

Blue Ribbon Awarded Public Elementary School Description/Population Table

School	Average Daily Membership	% of students eligible for free/reduced lunch	Category that best describes where the school is located	Racial/Ethnic Composition of the School
School A	223	63%	Rural	0% American Indian or Alaska Native 0% Asian 15% Black or African American 5% Hispanic or Latino 0% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander 80% White 0% Two or more races 0% English Language Learners in the school 16% students receiving special education services
School B	270	52%	Rural	0% American Indian or Alaska Native 0% Asian 26% Black or African American 3% Hispanic or Latino 1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander 64% White 6% Two or more races 0% English Language Learners in the school 16% students receiving special education services
School C	689	6%	Suburban	0% American Indian or Alaska Native 44% Asian 5% Black or African American 4% Hispanic or Latino 0% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander 45% White 2% Two or more races 6% English Language Learners in the school 6% students receiving special education services

(continued)

Table 3.1 (cont.)

School	Average Daily Membership	% of students eligible for free/reduced lunch	Category that best describes where the school is located	Racial/Ethnic Composition of the School
School D	878	5%	Suburban	0% American Indian or Alaska Native 6% Asian 6% Black or African American 5% Hispanic or Latino 0% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander 79% White 4% Two or more races 3% English Language Learners in the school 8% students receiving special education services
School E	627	49%	Rural	0% American Indian or Alaska Native 1% Asian 37% Black or African American 13% Hispanic or Latino 1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander 38% White 10% Two or more races 6% English Language Learners in the school 11% students receiving special education services
School F	374	21%	Small City or town in a rural area	0% American Indian or Alaska Native 16% Asian 3% Black or African American 4% Hispanic or Latino 0% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander 74% White 3% Two or more races 3% English Language Learners in the school 8% students receiving special education services
School G	288	52%	Small City or town in a rural area	0% American Indian or Alaska Native 1% Asian 37% Black or African American 9% Hispanic or Latino 0% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander 51% White 2% Two or more races 76% English Language Learners in the school 10% students receiving special education services

(continued)

Table 3.1 (cont.)

School	Average Daily Membership	% of students eligible for free/reduced lunch	Category that best describes where the school is located	Racial/Ethnic Composition of the School
School H	551	5%	Suburban	0% American Indian or Alaska Native 27% Asian 3% Black or African American 9% Hispanic or Latino 1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander 54% White 6% Two or more races 18% English Language Learners in the school 11% students receiving special education services
School I	512	38%	Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area	0% American Indian or Alaska Native 11% Asian 11% Black or African American 35% Hispanic or Latino 1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander 38% White 4% Two or more races 29% English Language Learners in the school 17% students receiving special education services
School J	181	46%	Rural	1% American Indian or Alaska Native 0% Asian 1% Black or African American 1% Hispanic or Latino 0% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander 91% White 6% Two or more races 0% English Language Learners in the school 15% students receiving special education services
School K	351	18%	Urban or large central city	0% American Indian or Alaska Native 2% Asian 7% Black or African American 1% Hispanic or Latino 0% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander 89% White 1% Two or more races 0% English Language Learners in the school 9% students receiving special education services

Research Design

A mixed methods research design was used to collect and interpret data. Principals at 11 of the 16 public elementary schools in Virginia who received the Blue Ribbon Award between the years 2013-2015 were interviewed. Interviews were conducted over the telephone. An interview protocol consisting of 11 questions was used to collect qualitative and quantitative data. Seven questions were developed to collect qualitative data from each principal. These

questions were developed to allow for open ended responses. Four questions were developed to collect quantitative data. The four questions designed to collect quantitative data were in the form of multiple choice items. These four multiple choice questions allowed principals to answer with alternate actions. From the alternate actions, qualitative data was collected and analyzed.

Data collected from the interviews was analyzed to determine the most frequently used activities that principals at Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia perform to influence the instructional program of the school. Answers given from interviews were used to provide a compilation of activities to be implemented by public school administrators. These qualitative and quantitative data collected from the interviews were analyzed and interpreted. The conclusions from this study will help lead to future research on instructional leadership practices.

Needed Data

Data regarding the activities of principals who served in administrative positions at Blue Ribbon awarded elementary schools in the state of Virginia in the past three years (2013-2015) was needed for this study. These data helped to determine specific activities principals spend time on as instructional leaders that help to improve the instructional program. There was a need for collected data on the instructional leadership categories included in the development of the interview protocol based on John Hattie's article published in 2015 titled, *High Impact Leadership*. In this article, Hattie concludes from a meta-analysis of 27 studies conducted by Robison, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) the following categories are high impact strategies for instructional leadership; Focus on Students and Learning, Concerned With Impact on Student Learning and Instructional Issues, Conducting Classroom Observations, Ensuring Professional Development, Communicating High Academic Standards, and Ensuring That All School Environments Are Conducive To Learning.

Instrumentation

The interview protocol was developed based on principles from John Hattie's (2015), *High Impact Leadership*. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected based on the activities that principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia perform to influence the instructional program of the school. Qualitative and quantitative data collected helped to provide information on how principals at Blue Ribbon schools supervise good

instruction and provide classroom observation feedback to teachers. Information on how principals analyze data was collected from the interview protocol. The interview protocol provided qualitative data on how principals at Blue Ribbon schools systematically plan for professional development. Utilizing a mixed methods approach provided qualitative data and mean averages for quantitative data on what instructional actions these principals most frequently implement to promote student achievement.

The interview protocol contained 11 questions used to collect qualitative and quantitative data. Seven questions were developed to collect qualitative data from each principal. These questions were developed to allow for open ended responses. Four questions were developed to collect quantitative data. The four questions designed to collect quantitative data were in the form of multiple choice items. These multiple choice questions included the option for the participant to write an alternative answer for each item.

Principals were contacted directly to participate in the study through email and telecommunications. Attached to the email was a personalized recruitment letter for each principal, the informed signed consent form, and the interview protocol. An email was sent to all 16 principals of Blue Ribbon Awarded public elementary schools in Virginia in the past three years. By sending the interview protocol to the principals before the interview was conducted, principals had the opportunity to review questions prior to the interview. With four out of the eleven questions being multiple choice items, principals had an opportunity to quickly answer several questions prior to the interview. Having these multiple choice questions answered prior to the interview allowed the opportunity for a short amount of time to be needed for the interview process and hopefully encouraged participation.

The interview protocol was developed to help indicate what practices principals at Blue Ribbon schools implement that relate with the instructional leadership categories based on John Hattie's research. Hattie stated, "Instructional leaders focus more on students. They're concerned with the teachers' and the school's impact on student learning and instructional issues, conducting classroom observations, ensuring professional development that enhances student learning, communicating high academic standards, and ensuring that all school environments are conducive to learning" (Hattie, p. 37, 2015). Based on this research, the interview protocol for this study was structured around the following:

- Focus on Students and Learning

- Concerned With Impact on Student Learning and Instructional Issues
- Conducting Classroom Observations
- Ensuring Professional Development
- Communicating High Academic Standards
- Ensuring that All School Environments Are Conducive To Learning.

Each category of the interview protocol was composed of questions that were developed for respondents to supply answers providing actions and practices principals implement that influence the instructional program and may have an effect on student performance. Questions developed for the interview protocol were designed to find out what practices are frequently implemented by principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia.

Each interview question was developed to help indicate which activities principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia perform to influence the instructional program of the school. Qualitative data and quantitative mean statistical data were collected to determine which practices were more commonly implemented by participating principals. These data were analyzed to draw conclusions on the impact these activities may have on the instructional program of a school. For this study, a table was developed linking interview questions with the study's research questions. Another table was created to align the interview questions with John Hattie's (2015) high impact strategies instructional leaders implement that may impact student achievement. Located below Table 3.2 was developed to align the study's research sub-questions with the interview protocol. Table 3.3 was created to align the interview questions with John Hattie's (2015) high impact strategies.

Table 3.2

Research Sub-Question/Interview Protocol Alignment Table

Research Sub-Questions	Interview Questions
How do principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia provide feedback to teachers from classroom observations conducted by administration?	Answered in interview questions 1-3
What do principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia do effectively to supervise good instruction?	Answered in interview questions 4, 5, and 7
What activities do principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia perform to collaborate with staff?	Answered in interview questions 6, 8, and 9
How do principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia analyze student data to make instructional decisions?	Answered in question 8
What professional development activities are planned by principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia?	Answered in question 10

Table 3.3

Interview Protocol/John Hattie High Impact Strategies Alignment Table

Supervising Good Instruction and Providing Feedback To Teachers
Item 1 (Qualitative) – Teacher Observation and Supervising Instruction -How do you collect teacher observation data for feedback while conducting formal classroom observations?
Item 2 (Qualitative) – Feedback for Teachers -How is feedback provided to teachers after a formal classroom observation?
Item 3 (Qualitative) – Teacher Observation and Supervising Instruction – How do you collect teacher observation data for feedback while performing walk-through observations?
Item 4 (Quantitative) – Duration of Walk-through Observations – Which of the following best represents the amount of time you spend in a classroom during a walk-through observation?
Item 5 (Quantitative) – Frequency of Walk-through Observations – Which of the following best represents the time spent on classroom observations?
Item 6 (Qualitative) – Classroom Environment – What actions as an administrator do you perform to ensure that a positive school environment is created in all classrooms to support a strong instructional setting?
Item 7 (Quantitative) – Visibility – Which of the following items represents on average where you spend more time supervising instruction?
Item 11 (Qualitative) – Informational Data – How many years did you serve consecutively at your school prior to receiving the Blue Ribbon Award? If you were not the principal during the application process for the Blue Ribbon Award, are there any continuing instructional programs implemented that you believe attributes to the school’s success?
Collaborating With Staff and Analyzing Student Data
Item 8 (Qualitative) – Analyzing Student Data – What actions as an administrator do you perform to collaborate with teachers and staff to analyze student assessment data to make instructional decisions?
Item 9 (Quantitative) – Professional Learning Communities – Which of the following best represents the time spent in grade level meetings with teachers?
Professional Development
Item 10 (Qualitative) – Planning and Implementation of Professional Development – What actions do you take as an administrator to systematically plan for professional development?

Feedback on the interview protocol was given by the researcher’s dissertation committee at Virginia Tech. With the feedback given, the necessary changes were made to connect the

study's research questions to the interview protocol. The interview protocol was approved by the researcher's dissertation committee at Virginia Tech. The interview protocol was sent to the Institutional Review Board of Virginia Tech for approval and approved by the IRB, prior to being sent to participating principals.

Informed Signed Consent

The interview protocol was approved by the researcher's dissertation committee at Virginia Tech and was submitted to the Institutional Review Board of Virginia Tech for approval to carry on with the study. After approval was given by the IRB, the researcher sent written request for consent via email to each principal at the 16 elementary schools that have been recognized as Blue Ribbon Awarded public elementary schools in the past three years for participation in the study. The consent included the purpose of the study, procedure, interview protocol, and a section explaining confidentiality of the study. The consent form was attached to the email then sent to all 16 principals. Also included on this email were the recruitment letter and interview protocol. Principals who were willing to participate were asked to send back the consent form signed. Principals were given one week for response. If there was no response, the researcher performed a follow up email to possible candidates. If a response was not given via email, the researcher contacted possible participants by phone. In total, consent for participation for the study was given by 11 principals out of 16 possible participants, equaling a 69% participation rate. Once consent was verified and received, participants had the opportunity to review and answer questions found on the interview protocol. Including the interview protocol on the same email as the consent form allowed for a user friendly process. Once consent was given by the participating principal, the researcher scheduled a time to conduct the interview. The researcher asked for the interview to be conducted within a two week period and emailed a thank you letter and transcription of the interview to participating principals.

Data Gathering

To collect data for the study, written request for consent for participation in the study was sent via email to each principal at the 16 elementary schools that have been recognized as Blue Ribbon Awarded public elementary schools in the past three years. Once consent was verified and received, participants had the opportunity to review and answer questions found on the interview protocol. Once consent was given by the participating principal, the researcher

scheduled a time to conduct the interview. The researcher asked for the interview to be conducted within a two week period and emailed a thank you letter to all participants along with the interview transcription.

Data were gathered using an interview protocol developed by the researcher. Eleven principals of the sixteen recognized Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia in the past three years were interviewed via telephone interview. These participating principals would remain anonymous for this study. Answers to interview questions were recorded by the researcher using the Microsoft Word program on the computer. The researcher asked participants if they were willing for the interview to be recorded electronically on an iPad to be transcribed later by the researcher using Micro Soft Word. All participants were willing to be recorded electronically and the researcher recorded the interview using an application on the researcher's iPad that saved the interview in a digital file. Each principal's school was given an alias to protect confidentiality. Schools were described in the study using labels such as School A and School B. Listed below are the questions that were asked during interviews (the official interview protocol can be found in the appendices of this study):

Interview Questions for Blue Ribbon Principals

1. How do you collect teacher observation data for feedback while conducting formal classroom observations?
2. How is feedback provided to teachers after a formal classroom observation?
3. How do you collect teacher observation data for feedback while performing walk-through observations?
4. Which of the following best represents the amount of time you spend in a classroom during a walk-through observation?
 - a. On average, I spend more than 15 minutes in a classroom during a walk through observation
 - b. On average, I spend 5-10 minutes in a classroom during a walk-through observation.
 - c. On average, I spend less than 5 minutes in a classroom during a walk-through observation.

5. Which of the following best represents the time spent on classroom observations?
 - a. On average, I conduct walk-through observations of approximately 50% of classroom teachers once a week.
 - b. On average, I conduct walk-through observations of approximately 75% of classroom teachers once a week.
 - c. On average, I conduct walk-through observations of 100% of classroom teachers once a week.
6. What actions as an administrator do you perform to ensure that a positive school environment is created in all classrooms to support a strong instructional setting?
7. Which of the following items represents on average where you spend more time supervising instruction?
 - a. On average, I spend more time being visible in classrooms supervising instruction in grades K-2.
 - b. On average, I spend more time being visible in classrooms supervising instruction in grades 3-5 (grades in which SOL tests are administered).
 - c. On average, my time is divided equally for grades K-5 being visible in classrooms supervising instruction.
8. What actions as an administrator do you perform to collaborate with teachers and staff to analyze student assessment data to make instructional decisions?
9. Which of the following best represents the time spent in grade level meetings with teachers?
 - a. On average, I take part in weekly grade level meetings every week to discuss student learning and instructional issues.
 - b. On average, I meet with each grade level bi-weekly to discuss student learning and instructional issues.
 - c. On average, I meet with grade levels once a month to discuss student learning and instructional issues.
10. What actions do you take as an administrator to systematically plan for professional development?
11. How many years did you serve consecutively at your school prior to receiving the Blue Ribbon Award? If you were not the principal during the application process for

the Blue Ribbon Award, are there any continuing instructional programs implemented that you believe attributes to the school's success?

Data Analysis

Once interviews were completed, the researcher used the results from the qualitative and quantitative items to draw comparisons between the eleven principals. The results from the interviews allowed the researcher to make conclusions on which instructional practices are utilized the most by principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia. The results also helped to identify what these principals value most as indicated by the amount of time spent on specific instructional items or activities implemented more frequently in these schools.

The data gathered from the qualitative interview questions were coded by the researcher. Results for each item were reported based on the frequencies in similarities between instructional practices utilized by principals as reported by the participants. Quantitative interview questions were analyzed by the researcher using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to help organize statistical data. The Microsoft Excel program organized mean data for each quantitative question asked during the interview in an effort to provide a descriptive analysis. According to Creswell (2014) a descriptive analysis should contain data for variables in a study including the description of the results through means, standard deviations, and range of scores.

The data analysis for this study was a descriptive analysis in which the researcher reported the data gathered through the cumulative responses to the items found in the interview protocol. By coding answers given for qualitative items and analyzing the mean data for quantitative items, the researcher was able to gain a greater insight on which actions were commonly implemented by principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia. By reporting this descriptive analysis from the research obtained, the reader should have a greater knowledge of what activities principals implement to influence the instructional programs in elementary schools. The data collected provided evidence for conclusions developed by the researcher and added to the importance of additional research in instructional leadership.

Data Management

Data were saved electronically in numerous locations by the researcher. These data were stored using USB drives and saved using the researchers desktop and iPad. The research data was also stored using Google Drive and through Google Mail. Electronic folders were developed to help manage data. A spreadsheet was created using a Microsoft Excel program to store statistical data. In this spread sheet a section was developed for each participant that contains vertical columns in which the 11 items located on the interview protocol were represented. Columns were created horizontally for qualitative and quantitative data to be entered based on participants responses. By using the Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet, the researcher was able to sort and filter the data for each interview question and obtain a quick breakdown for each item on the interview protocol.

Summary

The study's focus was on activities principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia perform to influence the instructional program of the school. Interviews were conducted using an interview protocol developed by the researcher. Qualitative and quantitative data were gathered to analyze and identify practices frequently implemented by principals of Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools and the amount of time spent implementing these activities. By conducting interviews, the researcher was able to determine which specific instructional activities were performed more frequently among the participating population. Conclusions were drawn from the quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the interview process.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

Sixteen Virginia public elementary schools were awarded the Blue Ribbon Award between the years 2013-2015. Eleven out of sixteen principals presiding at these elementary schools participated in the study, equaling a 69% participation rate. Of the eleven principals who participated, seven (64%) were principals at the time their elementary school was awarded the Blue Ribbon Award. After the interviews were conducted, administrators' responses were individually transcribed by the investigator into one Microsoft Word document per interview. Each participant was emailed a transcription of the interview conducted. From each transcribed document, the researcher aligned all responses for each question to organize data. Having all principals responses organized by question allowed for a thorough analysis of the data collected. Through open coding, common themes and practices implemented by principals for each interview question were developed. The remainder of this chapter will report the findings from the interviews conducted. For each qualitative item reported, a table consisting of abbreviated responses has been provided.

Findings

Item 1 (Qualitative) –Teacher Observation and Supervising Instruction

Interview Question Number 1: How do you collect teacher observation data for feedback while conducting formal classroom observations?

Throughout the interviews many principals spoke about scripting or writing down what they see in the classrooms during an observation. Scripting was found to be the most common theme among the Blue Ribbon principals interviewed. Out of the eleven principals who participated, over half of the principals reported using the strategy of scripting or writing down exactly what is seen during an observation to provide feedback to teachers. Sixty-four percent of the principals interviewed discussed recording what they saw during an observation. By scripting what is taking place in the classrooms, principals reported being able to provide accurate feedback to the teacher. Principal F reported everything that is said when in the room is scripted. In addition, the principal would speak with children in the classroom about what they

were learning and would ask students if they knew what they were learning. This principal indicated that questions are noted at the end of the scripted observation for further discussion with the teacher. Principal A described going in classrooms with a clipboard, writing down what is seen, and enjoying observing and watching the students. Principal A reported he wanted to see how engaged the students were and collected notes. Principal G discussed scripting as soon as she walked in the classroom. This principal described, putting the time she arrives in the classroom, writing down exactly what is seen, and then goes back and fills out the formal observation tool/instrument.

Principal I reported documenting what was going on in the classroom though scripted documentation, narrative form and quantitative form. This principal elaborated on writing in questions and comments for herself to provoke conversation about instructional choices later when meeting with the teacher and providing feedback. She stated that "...cognitive coaching strategies are used for questions later when I meet with the teacher, some are very scriptive ways of collecting data." During an observation this principal reported she could be looking at teacher questioning, level of teacher questioning, and scripting everything the teacher says to provide data for a post observation meeting. Principal I discussed scripting being very specific for when she meets with the teacher ahead of time. From this meeting, the teacher may want her to look at time on task, use of instructional time, how often the teacher calls on boys and girls, who the teacher may call on, where the teacher is seated, or time spent on certain strategies. Principal J described that she takes a laptop in the classroom, records everything she sees and hears, takes the laptop back to the office and prints the recorded observation, to make notes and comments, and analyzes it. This principal reported the importance of taking very detailed notes; expressing notes are detailed enough that a year later, the same supporting evidence would be concluded to complete a formal observation on a teacher. Being very detailed in the scripting process allows this principal to provide meaningful feedback.

Principals differed in reporting on the tools or programs they used to provide feedback. Forty-six percent of principals reported using an online school district evaluation tool, 21% reported handwritten documentation or use of a formal observation form, two principals did not comment on the tool utilized, and one principal reported an innovative method of making his own observation tool to collect data during a teacher observation. Principal C reported making an observation tool that allows a collaborative partnership between the principal and the teacher.

This principal specified the importance of meeting with teachers ahead of time, to see what they want feedback on for instructional purposes. Based on school goals or county goals they narrow down the exact tool. He stated, "...it is not uncommon for them to make an observation tool for that teacher, so the teacher feels more comfortable." Principal C reported not using a standard tool, instead he pulls examples of evaluation tools from 20-30 that have previously been used. From there, Principal C and a teacher will make an evaluation tool that meets the needs of the teacher. Correspondingly, Principal F stated she, "...will start with the pre-conference and ask for a copy of the lesson plan and talk through that with the teacher".

Principal B reported having a contract with an online teacher evaluation website tool that has a number of observation products and different observation tools that prompts the evaluator to observe student engagement practices or teacher pedagogy. The observation tool used by Principal B has a number of different options for doing an observation. In Principal B's school division there is a push for three walk-through observations a day with three follow-up conversations to provide feedback sessions to the teacher. Principal B specified the importance for the follow up conversations to take place after an observation to provide accurate feedback.

Principal D reported using an online teacher evaluation website tool, citing "it's a protocol used to collect data, gives timely feedback with the teacher." Principal K used an online teacher evaluation website program that includes the Virginia evaluation standards for teachers. This program helps to evaluate the standards of knowledge of content and instructional delivery. This system provides a format and under each standard there are "look fors". These "look fors" are checked off, along with the evidence that matches the standards. Principal A and Principal F also reported using an online teacher evaluation website program to collect teacher observation data. Principal E indicated using a check list, short hand notes, and a form provided by their school division to collect data from teacher observations. During observations this principal looks for effective teaching in a classroom. Similarly, Principal H reported taking anecdotal notes, from what has been observed in classrooms, from team meetings, and analyzing their student performance results when collecting teacher observation data for feedback.

Table 4.1

Interview Question Number 1

Principal	Abbreviated Response
Principal A	Writes down what is seen in the classroom
Principal B	Uses a formal online observation instrument
Principal C	Creates an evaluation tool in collaboration with the teacher
Principal D	Uses a formal online observation instrument
Principal E	Has a checklist - Writes down what is seen in the classroom
Principal F	Scripts what is seen in the classroom
Principal G	Scripts what is seen in the classroom
Principal H	Writes down what is seen in the classroom
Principal I	Scripts what is seen in the classroom
Principal J	Uses a laptop to script what is seen
Principal K	Uses a formal online observation instrument

Item 2 (Qualitative)-Feedback for Teachers

Interview Question Number 2: How is feedback provided to teachers after a formal classroom observation?

All principals interviewed stated they met with teachers individually (face to face) after a formal classroom observation. Principal D reported she did this in several ways. If it was a formal walk-through observation, she would bring the teacher in and go over the data, which was reported as being interactive and on the computer. This principal stated, “I always meet with them to go over the data whether it’s soft or hard data.” Principal G specified after the observation the teacher and administrator, “...sit down afterwards, meet in person, clarify any questions I may have; it’s a one on one discussion.” Principal I reported a meeting is set up where there is a debriefing of the lesson. Feedback is verbal and given in the written standard form the county school division uses to provide feedback, which is broken up into seven standards the school division requires. This principal described using a “...coaching model during the debriefing with a teacher, sometimes a consulting model, sometimes a combination depending on the observation.”

One key strategy discussed by principals interviewed for providing feedback to teachers was allowing for teacher reflection. Thirty-six percent of principals interviewed reported before the post observation meeting, they would provide feedback to the teacher in written or verbal form to allow the teacher a period of reflection before the face to face meeting between principal and teacher. Out of the thirty-six percent of principals who reported using this strategy, three of the four principals had served as principals at the time the school was awarded the Blue Ribbon Award. Principal H stated; “The meeting is scheduled, feedback is always given in writing with reflection questions. Once the questions are reviewed by the teacher, then a meeting is set up for specific feedback or to discuss questions the teachers may have.”

Principal C reported using an observation tool to acquire raw data. This principal will script the observation and provide it to the teacher. The teacher will have the scripted observation for twenty-four to forty-eight hours and then a scheduled post observation meeting, lasting twenty to thirty minutes, takes place. The principal and teacher talk through what they see in the data. This principal conveyed some teachers are able to see gaps and see trends, but has to work with some teachers more closely on this skill.

Principal F specified leaving the classroom after an observation and going back to the office to give serious thought to what she has scripted and what standard she feels the scripting falls into. From here, this principal will make a draft of the scripted classroom observation. Next, this principal will send the draft to the teacher prior to the meeting. During the meeting, the principal will go over the standards found within the observation tool used with the teacher. The teacher again has an opportunity to review. Then, during the conference, the principal will listen to any response the teacher may have. Principal K reported providing feedback in two ways after an observation. The principal said:

Sometimes I’ll have teachers ask to observe a certain subject and provide feedback, or more often I will do an observation and do a list of questions about the lesson. From here, I always write a conference objective to hand to the teacher to have the teacher reflect on the lesson and when we meet for the formal observation feedback we will talk about that.

Providing feedback to teachers prior to the post-observation meeting was an essential element to the post-observation process as indicated by Principals C, F, H, and K. When providing feedback to teachers during a post observation meeting with teachers, twenty-seven

percent of the principals interviewed, reported asking the teachers how they felt the instructional lesson went. Principal A reported he has a meeting with the teacher, in their classroom, or his office, the same day or day after. This is a face to face meeting with teachers and he will ask them how they think the lesson went and go over things he noticed. After a formal classroom observation, Principal F will meet with the teacher and will always ask the teacher how he or she felt the lesson went. This principal specified this gives the teacher an opportunity to reflect and think about whether the lesson met the objectives. And Principal E stated, “I meet with every teacher and go over the things I checked and didn’t check and make comments about things they can approve on, or things I think they did really well.” Prior to the feedback, Principal E will start the meeting by asking the teacher how he or she felt the lesson went.

Principal J reported feedback for formal observations is a continuous process. After one observation this principal explained she meets with each teacher about forty-five minutes. During this time, Principal J will tell teachers all the good things she saw and will share training she has had for specific areas noted. This principal will write noted areas of improvement up separately. It was stated this piece is written up separately in order to have a record that the principal and teacher discussed these items during the post observation meeting. Principal J reiterated the post observation meeting takes a lot of time. For the year, she only has an hour and a half to sit down and have a discussion with each teacher who is formally observed. This principal indicated she tries to make this time meaningful and has received good feedback from meeting with teachers for 45 minutes for each observation.

Principal J elaborated on the tool used to conduct a formal classroom observation and its role when providing feedback. She reported, “With any instrument, you can’t always see everything.” She indicated using an observation template which is more of a rubric. This template contains standards or indicators, the principal stated cannot always be observed during one lesson. Because of this, Principal J does not finalize the evaluation until she can affirm there is sufficient evidence to make a final decision for each standard. “There are some places where I don’t feel like I have enough information to place a judgment of any kind so I’ll meet with a teacher or write up what they are doing, and then I’ll do the final copy, especially for the first observation.”

Table 4.2

Interview Question Number 2

Participating Principal	Abbreviated Response
Principal A	Post observation meeting held -uses a coaching model for feedback
Principal B	Post observation meeting held -uses a coaching model for feedback
Principal C	Post observation meeting held –sends feedback prior to the meeting for reflection purposes
Principal D	Post observation meeting held
Principal E	Post observation meeting held –uses a coaching model for feedback
Principal F	Post observation meeting held –sends feedback prior to meeting for reflection purposes
Principal G	Post observation meeting held
Principal H	Post observation meeting held-reflection questions given prior to the meeting
Principal I	Post observation meeting held –uses a coaching model for feedback
Principal J	Post observation meeting held
Principal K	Post observation meeting held –gives teacher a conference objective for reflection purposes

Item 3 (Qualitative)-Teacher Observation and Supervising Instruction

Interview Question 3: How do you collect teacher observation data for feedback while performing walk-through observations?

The reported results for how data is collected for walk-through observations were almost even. Approximately half the principals explained collecting teacher observation data using a standard form/anecdotal notes or reported using a computer software program/internet observation tool. Two principals reported doing both methods for providing feedback to teachers for a walk-through observation. Principal C reported that the walk-through observations that are conducted are “fly by” observations lasting two to three minutes. During these “fly by” observations the principal is looking for “I Can” statements on the board, in which the teacher puts the objective of the day’s lesson in an “I Can” statement. For example; “I can solve simple equations in math.” This principal uses a google form (internet software program) in which he can choose a different subject. For each subject the principal has specific “looks fors”. This program is an application located on his iPad. After a walk-through observation is completed the program allows for Principal C to send the walk-through data collected to the administrative staff and teacher through email. This process allows the teacher to have a record of what they saw and where they will go from there.

Similarly, Principal B reported that as part of the observation data base or internet software program the school uses, there is an electronic walk-through form. On this form the principal has options where he can select if a standard is observed or not observed. This principal expanded on this process, indicating the administrative team will only mark not observed if the teacher has not followed through with it (they mark this if it is an expectation that teachers are required to do). The program used at this school will send an email to the teacher. Even with walk-through feedback, this principal continued to elaborate on the importance of face-to-face feedback.

Principal H described using quick notes, taking pictures on her cell phone, and sending a quick email to document whatever is observed and asking questions for follow up purposes. Principal J reported using a laptop computer. On her computer, there is an excel spreadsheet she has created. The excel spreadsheet has drop-down boxes. This principal reports some of the drop-down boxes on the spreadsheet have spaces to fill in information for specific items. The

principal will make a copy of that row located on the spreadsheet addressing a specified item for that teacher. Principal J can add more information to all areas throughout the year for continuous feedback to the teacher. This principal stated her school used to have a commercial walk-through instrument, but she likes the one she has created because she can add columns (make additions) as she sees necessary.

Correspondingly, Principal E uses a self-made walk-through observation form. This principal reported there is another check form they use that the school division has implemented. However, this principal utilizes the one that the assistant principal and she created to meet the needs of their school. Principal I reported taking anecdotal notes on a specific skill or strategy she is looking for that week. This principal stated, “This could be quantitative data. During math we may be looking for a specific strategy, could be content specific for what we are looking for, or we could be looking for culturally competent teaching strategies”. Principal F also reported taking anecdotal notes, and indicated she tries to make it a practice to do walk-through observations most days. She stated, “I try to get in every classroom three to four times a week.”

Principal G discussed using a walk-through instrument that contained specific criteria such as, if the lesson plans were available. Principal G’s walk-through form contains a “comments” section. She uses the comments section to script what she is seeing and not just checking off the specific criteria items. Principal G indicated the strategy of scripting what it seen as being an important tool for the feedback process when conducting walk-through observations.

Principal K reported their school uses two forms for providing feedback to teachers for walk-through observations. One form is given by the school division and one is a check off form. The check off form contains areas such as; is the objective on the board, how many students in a class, how many students working in a PLC, is the teacher walking around the room, and is there small group instruction. She indicated there is an informal walk-through form she uses more than the check list. This principal discussed if there is something she likes and sees she will write the teachers a note with positive reinforcement or feedback. If students are seen off task, the principal will let the teacher know. She is also looking for curriculum alignment throughout the building and will provide feedback if that is not seen. However, Principal K said she tries to use walk-through feedback as more of a positive reinforcement, but contributes all the positive feedback on the group of teachers at the school.

Principal D reported using an internet teacher evaluation instrument to collect walk-through observation data. This principal indicated she sometimes uses a more informal observation small note template that she will give to teachers as feedback. Principal D stated her school division allows principals to use two formal walk-through observations as one formal observation for evaluative purposes. Principal A uses a clip board, during walk-through observations. Principal A said, “I’m in classrooms every day, first thing in the morning during reading time, even if its five to ten minutes in one.” This principal reports if something is seen or stands out, whether it’s positive or negative, it will be addressed later with the teacher, or he will write it up on a walk-through form. Principal A reported the software he uses has the capability of using a formal or informal observation template.

Table 4.3

Interview Question Number 3

Participating Principal	Abbreviated Response
Principal A	Standard form or anecdotal notes and internet/software program
Principal B	Internet/software program
Principal C	Internet/software program
Principal D	Standard form or anecdotal notes and internet/software program
Principal E	Internet/software program
Principal F	Standard form or anecdotal notes
Principal G	Internet/software program
Principal H	Standard form or anecdotal notes
Principal I	Standard form or anecdotal notes
Principal J	Internet/software program
Principal K	Standard form or anecdotal notes

Item 4 (Quantitative)-Duration of Walk-Through Observations

Interview Question 4: Which of the following best represents the amount of time you spend in a classroom during a walk-through observation?

A	On average, I spend more than 15 minutes in a classroom during a walk-through observation
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B	On average, I spend 5-10 minutes in a classroom during a walk-through observation.
C	On average, I spend less than 5 minutes in a classroom during a walk-through observation.

Table 4.4

Interview Question Number 4

School	Answer
School A	B
School B	B
School C	B
School D	B
School E	B
School F	C
School G	A
School H	B
School I	B
School J	B
School K	B

B=81%
 A=9% or 1
 C=9% or 1

Principal B reported he spent closer to ten minutes in the classroom during walk-through observations looking at what the students are doing the majority of time compared to what the teacher is doing. Principal D indicated she would spend more time in a teacher’s classroom during a walk-through observation if there is a teacher on a professional support plan. Principal G reported she keeps up with data on how long she stays in a classroom during a walk-through observation through scripting. Principal I reported fifteen minutes would be close behind, depending on what she is looking for but most of the time walk-through observations are closer to ten minutes.

Item 5 (Quantitative) -Frequency of Walk-Through Observations Interview

Question 5: Which of the following best represents the time spent on classroom observations?

A	On average, I conduct walk-through observations of approximately 50% of classroom teachers once a week.
B	On average, I conduct walk-through observations of approximately 75% classroom teachers once a week.
C	On average, I conduct walk-through observations of 100% of classroom teachers once a week.

Table 4.5

Interview Question Number 5

School	Answer
School A	C
School B	A
School C	A
School D	A
School E	A
School F	C
School G	A
School H	A
School I	A
School J	Less than 50%
School K	Less than 50%
	A=64%
	C=19% and Alternative =19%

Principal A reported focusing on reading. School A utilizes a reading program called “Success For All”. The principal of School A reported being very pleased with the results from this program. He attributed this program to promoting collaborative learning at School A and helping to implement collaborative learning strategies that are carried throughout the rest of the school day. Principal A indicated he goes into reading classes every day first thing in the morning and then will go back to the office to see if anything needs immediate attention. Principal F stated she goes into classrooms for walk-through observations three times a week.

Principal I explained the size of School I prevents her from getting into all the classrooms. She stated School I has seventy five people on the teaching staff.

Item 6 (Qualitative) – Classroom Environment

Interview Question 6: What actions as an administrator do you perform to ensure that a positive school environment is created in all classrooms to support a strong instructional setting?

Fifty-five percent of principals interviewed felt being visible in classrooms and throughout the building to monitor interactions and be accessible to teachers helped contribute to a positive school environment. Principal A reported that every morning he greets students as they get off the bus and that teachers are required to be at doors as the students come in the building. This principal stated he gives continuous reminders as to what teachers say and encourages teachers to keep a positive tone with students. “Mentally being aware that tone of voice is important, they could be the only positive person the student sees all day.” Principal F commented that “leadership sets the tone in the building.” This principal reported she modeled courteous and enthusiastic greetings and interactions, and tries to know as many students as possible by name, to greet them.

Principal F discussed the importance of professional relationships with teachers and being in classrooms. She commented; “Teachers know me well, teachers feel free to have me participate in discussion and with the lesson. I will get pulled in because I am in the classrooms frequently.” Principal F reported having an open door policy for students, teachers, and parents. This principal also uses positive incentives for her students. “There is a treasure box for the students, different teachers will use the treasure box and the teachers are welcome to use it.”

Similarly, Principal E stated having an open door policy and open dialogue with teachers. She tries to involve teachers in the decision making process. This principal stated: “That is one thing they really value, that their voices are being heard.” Principal E gathered teacher input through regular faculty meetings and being accessible during grade level meetings where teachers can bring questions and concerns to be addressed. She stated there are “open lines of communication.”

Principal B reported being visible in classrooms helps create a positive classroom environment. “Even if it’s not a formal walk-through observation, I believe in checking on as

many classrooms in a day as possible. By walking through the building and being visible and touching base with a handful of students, it helps me have a pulse of the building.” Principal K reported detailed items she is looking for when observing a classroom that will help provide a positive school environment. She specified: “Every teacher is to have their daily schedule listed. They need to list the daily goals for the 4 core areas. They have to begin the lesson referring to the goal and then at the end go back to the goal, asking the students what they learned. Lesson plans are to be out.”

Principal K indicated that making sure there are established procedures and plans are performed actions she can do to promote a positive learning environment. She reported that all classrooms are set up for safety. At this school, classrooms are neat and clean. This principal reported, classrooms are a safe place for students if you were to practice a lock down drill. She stated in the primary grades there is an expectation of behavior charts to promote a positive learning environment.

Principal I described the hiring of the staff and looking for people who value a positive school environment and school staff as an action an administrator can take to promote a positive learning environment. Principal I stated the importance of modeling positive behavior as an administrator. This principal reported giving feedback on school environment through walk-throughs. Principal I stated she uses the walk-throughs to give positive feedback and some “warm and fuzzies”. This principal stated teachers at their school use positive behavioral supports with their students. She emphasized the importance of building relationships with the children, along with hiring personnel as a principal who are going to build nurturing relationships with students.

Twenty-seven percent of principals interviewed commented that relationships with parents and the community helped contribute to a positive school environment. Principal B reported the “relationship with parents is big.” This principal shares with the parents events that are going on in the classroom, provides a weekly newsletter to families, and sends the same thing out to the faculty (in the faculty email, there are more staff specific items).

Principal C specified utilizing a process of bringing staff and parents together in order to try and set up a good theme or initiative at the beginning of the year. He indicated this process gives everyone a component before the school year starts and helps to get buy in from everyone. Principal C stressed the importance of understanding their community. He stated School C has

thirty-five languages and thirty-four countries being represented. Principal C stated he wants all three groups to have a good feeling about the school and be invested in what they are doing, that this creates the best classroom environment. Similarly, Principal E emphasized the importance of parent involvement. She stated School E has a lot of volunteers, and that she tries to make herself available to parents using school messenger (a system in which recorded telephone messages can be sent out to parents and the community).

Thirty-six percent of principals felt that building upon positive staff morale helped to ensure a positive school environment. Principal D reported she does a lot to support teacher morale. One strategy she specified was at School D, teachers can leave notes based on positive comments and these notes are then shared at faculty meetings. Principal D highlighted the significance of being very sensitive to teachers' needs. She stated teachers are very comfortable coming to her, "whether it's personal or professional." She elaborated on an administrator's role to remind teachers and all staff that the expectation should be for personal issues not to interfere with their professional duties of meeting the needs of students. This principal indicated she searches for professional journal articles that are tied to the school's operational plan to support a positive classroom environment. She stated, "It's challenging to maintain the high performance level and you have to be very innovative."

Principal C reported he places "a lot of stock into teacher wellness, and the things they do to manage stress throughout the day." He reported School C will have "get togethers" outside of school to help boost teacher morale. Likewise, Principal G specified the significance of collaboration and teamwork among teachers and staff. She said, "...there is a collaborative atmosphere when teachers meet with me. I am a huge proponent in finding the positive." This principal reported when she is in the classroom she does a lot of talking with students and asking them what they are learning. When Principal G is interacting with students she gives them a pat on the back. She stated she tries to be positive with the teachers even when giving critical feedback. During this process, Principal G said the discussion is student centered, making sure that conversations are revolved around what they can do for students.

Principal F reported that School F has a social committee that works on outings for staff to build relationships for them as a team. She stated she tries to provide something every month for the whole staff. Principal F reiterated the importance of providing something to show

appreciation for staff every month. “Maybe a lunch, treats, or ice cream cone. I try to do something every month.”

Principal H stated she believes in giving teachers the support they need so they can be successful at their craft as a teacher in order to have a positive school environment. The principal indicated that support is provided through professional development. She indicated the instructional coach is used for this process. Principal H stated; “The goal of the day is to keep the teacher built up, so if they’re successful, all decisions that are made are what is best for children. Recognizing the strengths and whatever their struggles, treating it as a growth opportunity so they can get the help they need so they are successful.” Principal H stated at School H teachers know administration is not using any type of professional struggle as something punitive or disciplinary. As part of the process of keeping teachers “built up”, Principal H reported she sends an email every morning to the teachers with a positive message.

Principal J indicated the positive school environment is in relation to the staff at School J. “I have great teachers here. They were doing it when I got here, and are still doing it. They really care about kids, work hard to work together. The teachers collaborate to help students.

Table 4.6

Interview Question Number 6

Participating Principal	Abbreviated Response
Principal A	Visible to students and staff and positive relationships
Principal B	Visible to students and staff and positive relationships
Principal C	Implementing programs to keep staff morale high and positive relationships
Principal D	Implementing programs to keep staff morale high
Principal E	Involving teachers in the decision making process, open lines of communication, and positive relationships
Principal F	Visible to students and staff, positive relationships, and open lines of communication
Principal G	Collaborating with teachers, giving positive feedback for staff morale
Principal H	Utilizes professional development for professional growth (support)
Principal I	Hiring positive people and providing positive feedback
Principal J	Has a very positive staff
Principal K	Routine schedule is followed

Item 7 (Quantitative)-Visibility

Interview Question 7: Which of the following items represents on average where you spend more time supervising instruction?

A	On average, I spend more time being visible in classrooms supervising instruction in grades K-2.
B	On average, I spend more time being visible in classrooms supervising instruction in grades 3-5 (grades in which SOL tests are administered).
C	On average, my time is divided equally for grades K-5 being visible in classrooms supervising instruction.

Table 4.7

Interview Question Number 7

School	Answer
School A	B
School B	A
School C	C
School D	C
School E	B
School F	C
School G	C
School H	C
School I	C
School J	B
School K	C
	C=64% or 7
	B=27% or 3
	A=9% or 1

Principal B reported he spends more time in grades K-2 because of a new reading series implemented. Principal K reported there are times when more time is spent at lower grades at the beginning of the year but more time in upper grades closer to SOL testing.

Item 8 (Qualitative)-Analyzing Student Data

Interview Question 8: What actions as an administrator do you perform to collaborate with teachers and staff to analyze student assessment data to make instructional decisions?

Thirty-six percent of principals interviewed reported utilizing Professional Learning Communities as an action they perform to collaborate with teachers and staff to analyze assessment data. Principal B indicated weekly PLC meetings are held in School B with the focus on reading data in grades K-2. During these PLC's they are looking at student progress in reading. Principal C commented that during these meetings, "I hear some things across grade levels, so during monthly leadership meetings I like to address any concerns." Likewise, Principal D reported using PLC's in which the teachers share data with administration and come up with new ideas working together with the administrative team.

Principal H described using quarterly assessment data guided dialogues while meeting with teachers and during PLC's. She indicated at School C formative assessments are given. The teachers and administrator meet to discuss the data and to discuss the implementations of interventions. This principal indicated being able to provide interventions for people as a result of the data discussed and being able to provide enrichment to students showing strengths. During their PLC's, Principal H indicated they follow the collaborative learning piece cycle, keeping PLC questions at the forefront when meeting; "What do they want students to know, how do we know they know it, what do we do if they don't know, if they do know it how do we address those needs as well." She reported they keep these questions at the forefront as they are analyzing data, planning next units, curriculum mapping or planning, and making decisions based on interventions needed.

Principal I specified School I uses PLC's. This principal stated; "The school is a PLC. We have grade level Collaboration Learning Teams (CLT's) twice a week, one for math and one for reading. Each meeting lasting 45 minutes using assessment data to guide decisions." She later added, "The CLT's is the main way we analyze data." Principal I reported they have intervention assistant team meetings to analyze student data. She described her school using beginning, middle, and end of the year student achievement reviews to track student progress. This principal indicated their school participates in gifted service referral meetings to address the needs of higher achieving students. When describing how student achievement data are stored,

this principal praised her school division for the data collection system put into place, stating, “We have a pretty extensive data warehouse by having a dash board that gives us student data all in one place and are able to compare it and make decisions from that and not having to take time to put it into usable charts, it’s all in one place.”

Twenty-seven percent of principals reported creating a targeted list of students in which interventions are planned according to student needs when meeting with teachers to analyze student data. Principal A indicated they develop a data sheet with a list of students which is updated weekly to ensure all students are reading on grade level. This list is called the “Hot List”. From this list of students, he has discussions with teachers about students who need attention behaviorally and academically. This list is generated through ongoing class assessments, quarterly assessments, and through the Measure of Academic Progress assessments, which can be given three times a year (fall, winter, and spring). This principal went on to discuss how School A utilizes data sheets created during Response to Intervention meetings. These RTI data sheets are updated weekly.

Principal A discussed collaborating continuously with staff in order to analyze student data to make instructional decisions. This principal expressed collaborating continuously with the instructional coach at School A, who keeps track of student progress through multiple angles. Principal A specified there is a student instructional specialist he collaborates with often, who helps to plan for remedial groups. The instructional specialist helps to provide research based strategies for School A. Once this has been done, they schedule for reading assistants to be working with students during remedial groups. Principal A reports the student instructional specialist takes the students who struggle more in reading during the remediation time, emphasizing the importance of keeping this group small (no more than five students).

Principal K reported having weekly grade level meetings. This principal stated during grade level meetings, teachers bring data notebooks. For example, Principal K indicated in first grade at School K, students completed reading and math assessments (she called these “snap shots”) similar to quizzes that could be taken on the computer. She reported that for students who are not performing at a 70 percent and above achievement level (out of a 100 point scale), the teachers come up with a plan on how they reteach for that standard. She described this process explaining the teachers give quarterly benchmark tests. From these tests, teachers have to write a

midcourse corrective plan for each student if they do not meet the 70% passing rate on the quarterly benchmark.

Principal K specified she collects grade distribution sheets throughout the year. She described when interim grades go home, teachers give her copies and she reviews those. She elaborated on the process of how she reviews and comments on each report card and how she looks at these not only for academic purposes but for attendance. She said, “It’s a great way to communicate with parents.”

Three principals explained how they use SOL data and benchmark assessment data throughout the year for analyzing student data. Principal C, Principal D, and Principal E all reported using SOL data to help guide instructional decisions for all staff. Principal C indicated his staff at the beginning of year is “diving” through SOL’s. He explained meeting with teachers about student data is ongoing throughout the year. This principal reported at School C, administration meets weekly for Response To Intervention, including the assistant principal, and they go through 30-50 students needing interventions. He specified meeting with the ELL teacher every other week to make sure this teacher is getting the same data he is receiving. This principal identified the ELL teacher as being valuable resource. Principal C reported he believed ongoing assessment data review is the most powerful intervention a school can use to monitor student performance and plan accordingly for each student.

Principal D discussed how she makes sure at the beginning and middle of the year; she shares the school’s operational plan with the whole staff. From the operational plan, professional development goals are formed through the data shared. This principal reported at the end of the year, she will share SOL test data with teachers in order for them to see the areas of need and strength. Principal D said School D is “data driven”. “We review individual data and how it relates to our school and county.” She indicated the staff at School D, once a month, reviews monthly common assessment data (benchmarks). Principal D explained the teachers turn in all their data to recognize strengths and weaknesses as a grade level.

Principal E reported meetings are held at the end of every nine weeks. She explained that teachers do benchmark assessments every nine weeks in grades two through grade five. This principal explained the teachers at School E analyze the assessment data, comparing how the students performed in the classroom to the performance of other students in the school and the county school system. She expanded on comparison data and indicated the teachers talk about

things they can improve on. Principal E indicated the importance of analyzing SOL school data at the end and the beginning of the year. She expressed it was important for a teacher to see these data, “so they can see, as a teacher, these were their academic areas of strength and these were their academic areas of weakness and what they can do to improve the following year.”

Principal G reported she meets with teachers on a regular basis and they collect many forms of data. She indicated that teachers use running records, benchmark testing data, formally assess students, and use MAP data for analysis. This principal highlighted she will meet with teachers as a grade level to discuss data and meets with teachers individually for this purpose. She explained students had just finished a mid-year assessment and the process she has put in place to meet with teachers individually to discuss student performance data.

Unlike the majority of principals interviewed, Principal J reported she does most of the data analysis. Her explanation for doing most of the data analysis was to allow teachers to have more time to prepare and get ready for students. She discussed collaborating with teachers stating; “We sit down and look it over together, they have insight on what should be implemented, what objectives are difficult, which kids have more difficulty. I want to allow the teachers to have more time to prepare for teaching so I try to help with the data analysis.”

Table 4.8

Interview Question Number 8

Participating Principal	Abbreviated Response
Principal A	Keeps a data sheet of a list of students, its updated weekly, has discussion with teachers about students who need attention behaviorally and academically. This list is updated weekly.
Principal B	Weekly PLC meetings and looking at reading data.
Principal C	Meets weekly for RTI, meets with assistant principal and goes through 30-50 students in intervention.
Principal D	Reviews individual data and how it relates to their school and county, once a month they review monthly common assessment data (benchmarks).

(continued)

Table 4.8 (cont.)

Participating Principal	Abbreviated Response
Principal E	Holds meetings at the end of every 9 weeks, teachers do benchmark assessments every 9 weeks.
Principal F	They have a monthly data meeting, where they talk about results of the most recent testing, keep a watch list of students they are concerned about.
Principal G	Meets as a grade level to discuss data, she meets with teachers individually to discuss data.
Principal H	Quarterly assessment data guided dialogues, formative assessments are given, they meet to discuss the data and to discuss the implementations, being able to provide interventions for people as a result of the data.
Principal I	They use PLC's, the school is a PLC, they have grade level Collaboration Learning Teams (CLT's) twice a week one for math and one for reading, each being 45 minutes using assessment data to guide decisions.
Principal J	She does most of the data analysis, to allow teachers to have more time to prepare for their students.
Principal K	Weekly grade level meetings, teachers bring data notebooks, students who are not performing at a 70 percent and above, teachers come up with a plan on how they reteach for that standard, they do quarterly benchmark tests, teachers bring that data, have to write a midcourse corrective plan for each students if they don't meet the 70 percent on the quarterly benchmark.

Item 9 (Quantitative)-Professional Learning Communities

Interview Question 9: Which of the following best represents the time spent in grade level meetings with teachers?

A	On average, I take part in weekly grade level meetings every week to discuss student learning and instructional issues.
B	On average, I meet with each grade level bi-weekly to discuss student learning and instructional issues.

C	On average, I meet with grade levels once a month to discuss student learning and instructional issues.
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Table 4.9

Interview Question Number 9

School	Answer
School A	A
School B	C
School C	C
School D	C
School E	C
School F	C
School G	C
School H	A
School I	A
School J	C
School K	A
	C=64% or 7
	A=36% or 4
	B= 0%

Principals had various responses when answering question 9. Principal A reported he may not be there for the entire meeting. He will see if he is needed for anything and to see if there are any concerns. Principal C reported he leaves them to plan and will meet with them individually if he needs anything. Principal D indicated teachers send grade level agendas every Wednesday to her in which she reviews and provides feedback to teachers. Principal F reported she attends once a month. She stated the meeting needs to be valuable, tries not to fill up the teachers' time through scheduled meetings, but the teachers know they can come to her. Principal F reported there is a scheduled meeting once a month. Principal H and Principal I said they meet with grade levels twice a week. Principal J reported formal meetings take place once a

month but she feels they have informal meetings daily, because discussion takes place between teachers and her about student performance at lunch.

Item 10 (Qualitative) –Planning and Implementation of Professional Development

Interview Question 10: What actions do you take as an administrator to systematically plan for professional development?

The majority of principals interviewed specified professional development planned for their schools was a blend between school division professional development and school based professional development centered on individual school needs. Eighty-two percent of principals responded as implementing both school division professional development and professional development based on school needs. Principal A stated that the school division central office staff provides professional development for his school division. Similarly, Principal G reported in her school division there is system wide professional development, stating the division has gone to a, “learning focus framework” which is prescheduled. Principal B stated, “The vast majority of professional development that has been provided has been predicated by the vision of the district.” He communicated his division is working on “diving into deeper learning.” Principal B stated his school district is focusing on the 4 C’s; “communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity.” Principal B said, “The superintendent and district provides professional development on deeper learning for teachers.” He also reported in his school division it is the expectation that teachers participate over the summer in professional development.

Principal F reported her school district provides professional development for administrators “...that comes back to every school.” When this is provided, she takes her lead teacher with her. Afterwards, they go back to school and provide the training to the teachers. Principal E stated the county’s school division makes “county wide professional development decisions.” This principal reported they do not have many professional development days built into the calendar. If there is something that teachers bring to her attention, she’ll contact the director of elementary education to see if they want to do something county wide.

Correspondingly, Principal I stated his school division has “county level professional development.” She stated the school division, usually looks at newly adopted programs or curriculum. She reported the school division will send teachers to specific professional

development in math and reading for specific strategies or base courses. Principal J commented that most of the professional development is provided by the school division because of lack of funds. Principal K indicated in her school division professional development is division wide. The principal reported each month teachers in her school division are required to go to a professional development workshop for math, reading, social studies, and science on a week day after school. However, professional development in School K is also planned based on school needs.

Principal K reported at the school level, professional development is based on things they need. This principal stated she has individuals come in to do workshops. She expanded on the professional development implemented describing how teachers at School K will come in on Saturdays to do a make and take workshop, in which the principal explained is an opportunity for teachers to collaborate and share ideas and resources. This principal stated the school uses an online professional development program. She reported that all teachers at School K are required to get a minimum of six hours of professional development by April 1st every year.

Principal K explained during the month of March there is a professional development workshop every week for those who want to come and participate. At this workshop she highlighted that teachers will share what they are doing in the classroom (strategies) with other teachers or will present what they have learned from an additional professional development. This principal acknowledged it is expected for teachers to share if they were sent to a professional development workshop.

Principal C reported using the same model when planning professional development for the last seven years. He explained at School C, there is a meeting set up, where a sampling of teachers, parents, and community members participate to develop a professional development plan. They meet in separate classrooms. While they meet, they establish what they are looking for and what they can improve on at School C. At the end of the meeting, all three groups develop common goals and incorporate them with the school district's needs. During this process school needs are identified and included. As a collective group, Principal C indicated they align their ideas to formulate a plan which gives them a road map of where they want to go as a school community. This principal stated during the year, these trainings may be adjusted based on observation data.

Principal A stated he looks for needed opportunities being offered and he requires teachers to attend one conference throughout the year. He indicated teachers may be asked to attend a conference for needs that may be seen in an observation or for needs teachers have discussed with him. This principal reported School A has a school webpage where they post articles, in which there is an in-school discussion page.

Principal F reported she sets money aside in the school budget. This principal stated, “I try to set aside \$500 dollars for each teacher to go to a conference of their choice, for things that may be interesting to them. I find this important.” This principal explained at School F there is differentiation when it comes to providing professional development to teachers. She indicated some teachers may prefer math as an interest and some teachers may prefer STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math). This principal explained the teachers at School F participate in a book study each semester. She said they usually, “start off with something light” and an easy read. She described empowering two teachers at School F to lead the book study.

Principal B described professional development as being ongoing throughout the school year. He explained at School B professional development was, “...proactive and a balance of reactive in providing support for teachers.” This principal highlighted professional development is developed around incorporating project based learning. Principal B said, professional development, “...has to be reactive, things you see school wide, conferencing with students, how we can incorporate accountable talk. Students want to talk. As a classroom teacher you can structure lessons on allowing them to talk about content specific areas.”

Principal E indicated if the school division cannot provide specific professional development for a school need, they find the funds at the school level. She stated, “A lot of things are things other teachers are sharing, information they bring back from conferences and things they can share amongst themselves.” Principal G described planning for professional development by looking at the needs for what they see for their student population. Similarly, Principal H reported looking at student data and reflecting on teacher observations. She indicated collaborating with other administrators and instructional coaches and determining what their needs are as a school when planning out yearly professional development. She explained at School H teachers have job embedded professional development for the two grade level meetings that week. She communicated teachers use this time for collaborative learning and to

unpack standards. Principal H stated, “This is an opportunity to give them professional development for something they need support in.”

Principal D reported every Friday she creates a weekly memo and includes an article on best practices that relates to their school. This principal indicated at School D a curriculum specialist was brought in to provide professional development that supports their school needs. Principal I stated at the school level “...we look at the needs of the staff, more personalized professional development.” She explained at School I they have a miniature “ED Camp”. This camp according to Principal I, provides for “the needs of the staff, what people want to study or learn more about personally.”

Principal I indicated using Collaborative Learning Teams to incorporate professional development. She reported trying to do more personalized professional development and includes professional development at staff meetings. This principal explained professional development days are scheduled in the school calendar and are designated professional development days for what they need at the building level. She stated this professional development is “designed by them and for them.” Principal I complimented her school district for its support in sending teachers to conferences and allowing them to take college courses.

Table 4.10

Interview Question Number 10

Principal	Abbreviated Response
Principal A	School division and the school provides professional development.
Principal B	School division and the school provides professional development.
Principal C	Collaborative professional development plan implemented
Principal D	School division and the school provides professional development.
Principal E	School division and the school provides professional development.
Principal F	School division and the school provides professional development.
Principal G	School division and the school provides professional development.
Principal H	Collaborates with other administrators, plans professional development based on student data and teacher observations.
Principal I	School division and the school provides professional development.
Principal J	School division and the school provides professional development.
Principal K	School division and the school provides professional development.

Item 11 (Qualitative) –Informational Data

Interview Question 11: How many years did you serve consecutively at your school prior to receiving the Blue Ribbon Award? If you were not the principal during the application process for the Blue Ribbon Award, are there any continuing instructional programs implemented that you believe attributes to the school’s success?

Table 4.11

Interview Question Number 11

Principal	Comments
Principal A -8 years	
Principal B – No	
Principal C – Yes -3 years	
Principal D – Yes -3 years	
Principal E –No	“No, the school success has been the hard work of their teachers”
Principal F –No	
Principal G –No	
Principal H –Yes -1 year	
Principal I –Yes a year –AP for 2 years	
Principal J -Yes -2 years	A home visit for every rising kindergarten student is conducted. Principal J reported this helps build the bond with the school. The teachers do a lot of analysis of classroom performance, and remediate based on that. This principal reported they conduct a 9 weeks test, look at the result data and change accordingly to the data. From these data remediation is provided along with what they see the students doing well on and what they are not doing well on.
Principal K –Yes 6 years	

Chapter 5

Summary of Findings, Conclusions, Discussion, Implications for Practice, and Recommendations for Further Study and Research

This chapter contains a summary of results from the research questions answered through interviewing principals at Blue Ribbon public elementary schools in Virginia. Conclusions for the research questions have been developed based on the summary of results. Within this chapter the researcher has included a discussion of the findings and a list of implications for practice. In the discussion section is a list of fifty activities principals perform that may have an effect on the instructional program. Chapter 5 also contains recommendations for further research on instructional leadership practices principals implement to influence the instructional program.

Summary of Findings

This study was guided by the following central question: What activities do principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia perform to influence the instructional program of the school? Interview questions were developed in an attempt to answer this central question. These interview questions were designed based on the following sub-questions discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3:

1. How do principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia provide feedback to teachers from classroom observations conducted by administration? (Answered in interview questions 1-3)
2. What do principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia do effectively to supervise good instruction? (Answered in interview questions 4, 5, and 7)
3. What activities do principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia perform to collaborate with staff? (Answered in interview questions 6, 8, and 9)
4. How do principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia analyze student data to make instructional decisions? (Answered in question 8)
5. What professional development activities are planned by principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools in Virginia? (Answered in question 10)

Conclusions

1. When observing teachers, principals at Blue Ribbon elementary schools have collaborated with teachers to communicate the standards used to measure teacher performance. Scripting what is seen during a teacher observation, discussion of how the teacher felt the lesson went, and using a coaching model for providing constructive support, were practices used by principals at Blue Ribbon schools in order to provide effective feedback to teachers.
2. Principals in Blue Ribbon elementary schools are visible in the classrooms monitoring instruction as indicated in the study.
3. There were a variety of instruments discussed to collect teacher observation data. For this study, observation instruments were used by principals to help provide feedback to teachers, store data to locate trends during observations, and to collect evidence for specific feedback on instructional strategies.
4. Principals at Blue Ribbon elementary schools suggested that the administration and teachers work collaboratively to review assessment data collected. There is a designed plan for collaboration. Principals reported involving the teachers in the process of collecting data, using data to monitor student progress, and developing an on-going action plan to address student needs as indicated by the data. At these schools, student performance data was collected through planned interval assessments throughout the school year.
5. Principals at Blue Ribbon elementary schools focus on school climate and teacher morale as having a possible effect on teacher performance and student success. They do this by collaborating with teachers and demonstrating the importance of having open communication by having teachers to provide input in discussions on; student performance data, professional development, and instructional decisions that are made for the school.
6. Principals at Blue Ribbon elementary schools provide observation feedback and professional development that addresses specific staff needs. These principals provide feedback by using observation templates that are created by administration based on the school's needs, observations of teachers, and collaborating with staff.

Professional development is based on the needs of the students and for the professional growth of the teachers.

Discussion

Principals at these schools documented what was seen in the classrooms and used this data to isolate specific instructional strategies to be implemented or curricular strands that needed to be addressed. These principals' observations were conducted with a purpose. Reeves (2009) reported effective instructional leaders conduct meaningful classroom observations. School administrators reported using various observation templates to collect data from teacher observations. Through discussions during the interview process with principals, the researcher found administrators described tailoring observation templates to meet the needs of the school. These instruments were used to store data to locate trends during observations and to collect ongoing evidence for specific feedback on instructional strategies. The instructional strategy of collecting ongoing observational data would allow principals and district leaders the ability to track the implementation of specific instructional expectations of the school division. It was evident in this study that principals at Blue Ribbon elementary schools and their school divisions emphasized the importance of monitoring this process.

As part of the process for collecting observation data, the majority of Blue Ribbon elementary schools principals reported scripting what they observed while conducting a classroom observation of a teacher. It was emphasized during the interviews the importance of scripting what is seen during the classroom observation. Every aspect of the lesson should be scribed including but not limited to; how long the teacher is involved in direct instruction, how long each activity last, how many students were actively engaged during all parts of the lesson, did the lesson match the objective/standard for the unit and lesson plan, how many times did the teacher call on one student, and how often did the teacher answer their own question when calling on a student. These principals reported scripting as a strategic method to ensure detailed feedback to teachers. Hitchman (2015) reported similar findings. In the study conducted by Hitchman, principals reported scripting observations using an electronic data base or through hand written notes.

After gathering observational data from detailed scripting of a lesson, principals at Blue Ribbon schools highlighted the importance of providing the teacher with time to reflect upon the lesson presented. Many of the principals stated they provided teachers with observational data

prior to the post-observation feedback session. The principals interviewed for this study suggested that providing feedback to teachers prior to the post observation meetings was a method to allow reflection time. "Research promotes reflective teaching as an important distinguishing strategy between experienced and novice teachers and is a critical tool for developing teacher knowledge" (Lowery, 2003, p. 1). Some principals reported doing this by sending the scripted observation to the teacher prior to the meeting or leaving thought provoking questions for the teacher to reflect on before the post observation meeting. Teacher reflection on their practice functioned as a valuable practice to principals in Blue Ribbon elementary schools; serving as a catalyst when determining next steps for teacher performance in the classroom.

Responses to interview questions for this study led to the indication that many principals at Blue Ribbon elementary schools utilize numerous strategies implemented through the role of instructional coaches. The data collected from the study found when providing feedback to teachers, there are principals in Blue Ribbon elementary schools who will ask teachers how they felt the lesson went. Similarly, Hitchman (2015) found the majority of middle school principals interviewed for his study reported doing this practice. In an article published by Knight (2015), it is suggested asking these types of questions will guide teachers to set powerful goals. Knight suggested asking;

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how close was the lesson to your ideal?
2. What would have to change to make the class closer to a 10? (Knight, 2015, p. 12)

In order to provide effective coaching, these principals described doing whatever it takes to make the time to get into classrooms during the school day. Many of the administrators who participated in the study discussed scheduling blocks of time during the day when they would go into classrooms. These principals stressed the importance of having these blocks of time uninterrupted making it their priority to observe instruction leaving items such as email and returning phone calls to be handled during non-instructional hours. By making classroom visits the priority, these principals reported being visible throughout the building monitoring classroom instruction. Responses given throughout the interview process for this study would indicate that where a principal spends the majority of their time communicates to their staff what the principal of that school values as important. Therefore, if a principal spends the majority of their time being visible monitoring instruction throughout the school day, teachers will know the principal values their practice and has high expectations for good classroom instruction. Research from

this study would indicate the length of a classroom visit for a walk-through observation can be brief, but still provide meaningful data.

The data collected from this study combined with the research conducted by Hitchman (2015) produced interesting results in time spent on walk-through observations. The majority of elementary principals in Blue Ribbon schools reported spending approximately five to ten minutes in classrooms when conducting walk-through observations. In 2015, Hitchman concluded middle school principals reported they spent no more than ten minutes in the classroom when conducting classroom walk-through observations (Hitchman, 2015, p. 80). From the study conducted on Blue Ribbon elementary principals supported by Hitchman's research, one could conclude, that principals in Virginia report they are able to gather the sufficient data for feedback in approximately ten minutes during a walk-through observation. For elementary principals, the concluding research from interviews suggested the importance of principals spending equal time being visible monitoring instruction in grades kindergarten through grade five.

Elementary principals who participated in this study were specifically asked which grade levels they spend more time in being visible monitoring instruction. The majority of principals at Blue Ribbon elementary schools reported their time is divided equally between grades kindergarten through grade five. It could be expected a higher percentage of principals would have reported spending more time in grades three through five because the VA Standards of Learning Tests are given in those grades. The data collected for this question indicates that successful elementary principals concentrate on teacher performance in all grade levels. While observing classrooms, principals indicated monitoring the use of specific instructional practices. These principals described the expectation of implementing instructional strategies learned and communicated through professional development and professional learning communities.

In this study, many principals discussed the importance of collaborating with staff to provided professional development that best meets the school's needs. In the study conducted on Blue Ribbon schools in Minnesota by Reimer (2010), establishing a system for professional development was one of the key strategies performed by the principals. The data produced from this study would indicate the importance of leadership and vision by a school division's central office staff. It is evident the reported results from this study show the majority of professional development stems from the school division's central office. School division leaders can use this

information to support the hiring of highly qualified central office instructional staff to help plan for professional development.

Having a designed plan on how to collaborate with staff was an activity many of the principals in Blue Ribbon Elementary schools implemented to promote the instructional program. Collaborating with staff, whether through individual meetings or Professional Learning Communities has been researched to be a strategy which may have a positive impact on student success. These principals discussed scheduling meetings for collaboration to review student data and the importance of seeking teacher input on next steps taken for student success. A vital role of a school administrator is collaborating and empowering staff. The mission of a school cannot be carried out by one person. Principals have to be an instructional leader of multiple instructional leaders within their building (Glickman, 2002). For this study, it was reported the majority of principals met during planned grade level meetings once a month. Indicating, the quality of meetings held would have a greater impact than the quantity of held meetings.

From these collaborative meetings, the principal and teachers developed specific action steps to be implemented in order to increase student achievement based on student data. Several principals at these Blue Ribbon elementary schools reported developing a list of students not performing on grade level and putting into place interventions to address the individual student needs. This study described different methods for how principals and teachers analyze student data. The principal at School E explained that the teachers at her school analyze assessment data by comparing how the students performed in the classroom to the performance of other students in the school and county school district. As a principal, one would need to be careful when making this comparison due to uncontrollable factors. Many school divisions run reports comparing schools standardized test scores within the school division. In these school divisions, factors such as socioeconomic status and student demographics may be similar between schools. However, the multiple uncontrolled variables and influences that may have an effect on student performance on standardized tests should be equated into any discussion when comparisons such as these occur.

Administrators at Blue Ribbon elementary schools discussed the importance of focusing on school climate to promote a positive learning environment. These principals reported establishing positive staff morale was an essential practice to help lead schools to success. Blue Ribbon principals reported at times using walk-through observations as a means to give positive

feedback and let the staff know their hard work is appreciated. Many of the elementary principals at Blue Ribbon schools interviewed stated having staff functions and doing positive activities at faculty meetings to build comradery. “This is fostered through strategic, thoughtful, and deliberate practices by leaders to facilitate a sincere and genuine work environment where staff feels free to take risks” (Sanzo, Sherman, and Clayton, 2011, p. 41). Sanzo et al. (2011) emphasized the importance of principals working side-by-side with teachers to create a warm and caring learning environment.

As indicated throughout Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, there were many successful practices implemented by principals at Blue Ribbon elementary schools. From the data collected during the interview process, a list of fifty instructional leadership activities was developed by the researcher. These practices are based on the interviews and the conclusions from this study. These are specific activities that can be implemented by principals at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. This list was developed to provide a summary of instructional leadership practices for new and veteran administrators of schools to implement in order to promote the instructional program. The list of fifty activities principals performed were grouped into the following categories; teacher observation practices, providing feedback to teachers, collaborating with teachers to analyze data, implementing professional development, and promoting a positive learning environment. This list of 50 activities includes:

Table 5.1

50 Activities Principals Perform to Promote the Instructional Program

For teacher observations, principals should:

1. Collaborate with teachers to communicate the standards to be used to measure teacher performance.
2. Have specific instructional practices they are looking for when observing classrooms, which have been communicated with teachers.
3. Script what is seen during a classroom observation. Observations should be recorded with great detail specifying events seen during the observation such as; time and length of activities conducted during the lesson, what students are doing in the classroom, the location of the teacher in relation to the students in the room, how many times the instructor calls on students as a whole group, and other notable areas of observation based on evaluative standards for feedback.
4. Be visible in the classrooms monitoring instruction.
5. Speak with children in the classroom about what they are learning and why they are learning that skill.
6. For walk-through observations spend at least five to ten minutes in the classroom.
7. Divide their time equally between all grade levels.
8. Conduct walk-through observations of at least fifty-percent of classroom teachers during a week's time.

When collecting teacher observation data, principals should:

1. Develop or utilize observation instruments targeting specific instructional strategies expected to be seen to help provide feedback to teachers.
2. Use observation instruments as a system to store data to locate trends during observations and to collect ongoing evidence for specific feedback on instructional strategies.

(continued)

Table 5.1 (cont.)

When collecting teacher observation data, principals should:

3. Develop specific instruments for walk-through observations in which data collected throughout the year is located in one place for the teacher and administrator to view in order to locate patterns for improvement.
4. Collect data that is content specific and ensure the lesson presented aligns with the objective
5. Ensure there is curriculum alignment and evident collaboration between teachers throughout the grade level.

When providing classroom observation feedback to teachers, principals should:

1. Send feedback to teachers prior to the post observation meeting for teacher reflection.
2. Embrace open dialogue between the teacher and the principal and ask the teacher how they felt the lesson went.
3. Use a coaching model for providing feedback to teachers.
4. Provide timely and meaningful feedback.
5. Reflect upon the feedback prior to providing it to the teacher in order to prepare for meaningful discussion.
6. Provide feedback in a face to face meeting.
7. Share positives and areas of opportunity for teacher growth.
8. Schedule a block of time to meet with the teacher which is uninterrupted.

When planning professional development principals should:

1. Create professional development based on the needs of the students, the school's needs, observations of teachers, and based on the needs of the teachers for professional growth.
2. Collaborate with central office staff of the school division to plan meaningful professional development.

(continued)

Table 5.1 (cont.)

When planning professional development principals should:
3. Make professional development a continued expectation of all teachers throughout the year.
4. Seek staff input when planning professional development (through surveys, open communication, or through questionnaires).
5. Allocate monies within the school budget for professional development.
6. Provide content specific professional development that is differentiated based on individual teacher needs.
7. Model the example of being a life-long learner. Send recent journal articles to staff on best practices, promote book studies to enhance development, and implement protocols during staff developments to review published educational articles.
8. Have individual teachers present during faculty meetings on professional development they received during a conference opportunity (train the trainer).
9. Empower staff to present during faculty meetings teaching strategies and best practices that are being implemented in the school.
10. Utilize “flipped” professional development. This allows teachers to participate in professional development from home via internet through website blogs, websites with professional development videos, or through posted journal articles.
11. Plan professional development based on student performance data.

When collaborating with staff to analyze student performance data, principals should:
1. Design a plan for the year on how collaboration will take place with teachers to collect student performance data to monitor student progress.
2. Establish an on-going action plan to address student needs as indicated by student performance data, collected through planned interval assessments throughout the school year.
3. Utilize Professional Learning Communities.

(continued)

Table 5.1 (cont.)

When collaborating with staff to analyze student performance data, principals should:
4. Collaborate with instructional coaches, ELL staff (English Language Learners), Special Education teachers, school psychologists, and other school staff to discuss student progress.
5. Meet with teachers in grade level meetings at least once a month to discuss student performance data.
6. Analyze SOL data at the beginning and end of every year to determine next steps.

To promote a positive learning environment, principals should:
1. Be visible throughout the school day.
2. Focus on school climate and teacher morale as having a possible effect on teacher performance and student success.
3. Be accessible to teachers for questions and to provide support.
4. Model a positive attitude.
5. Know as many students by name as possible.
6. Encourage teacher input on instructional and building matters.
7. Encourage communication (develop a system for this).
8. Use teacher observation feedback as a time to inform teachers of the good job they are doing.
9. Hire staff that will promote a positive and collaborative environment.
10. Establish a good relationship with the community (parents, grandparents, and other community members). Encourage parent involvement and volunteers.
11. Provide a newsletter to staff and parents/community detailing upcoming events and activities in the schools.
12. Plan collaborative events for staff and provide positive incentives/activities.

Implications for Practice

This study provided valuable information on instructional activities implemented by top performing public elementary schools in Virginia. Principals who wish to improve their schools would be well-advised to consider implementing the practices cited in Table 5.1 - 50 Activities Principals Perform to Promote the Instructional Program.

Furthermore, some specific practices implemented by the Principals of Blue Ribbon elementary school were:

1. When observing teachers, principals at Blue Ribbon elementary schools collaborated with teachers to communicate the standards used to measure teacher performance. Scripting what is seen during a teacher observation, discussion of how the teacher felt the lesson went, and using a coaching model for providing constructive support, were practices used by principals at Blue Ribbon schools in order to provide effective feedback to teachers.
2. Principals in Blue Ribbon elementary schools are visible in the classrooms monitoring instruction as indicated in the study.
3. There were a variety of instruments discussed to collect teacher observation data. For this study, observation instruments were used by principals to help provide feedback to teachers, store data to locate trends during observations, and to collect evidence for specific feedback on instructional strategies.
4. Principals at Blue Ribbon elementary schools suggested that the administration and teachers work collaboratively together to review assessment data collected. There is a designed plan for collaboration. Principals reported involving the teachers in the process of collecting data, using data to monitor student progress, and developing an on-going action plan to address student needs as indicated by the data. At these schools, student performance data was collected through planned interval assessments throughout the school year.
5. Principals at Blue Ribbon elementary schools focus on school climate and teacher morale as having a possible effect on teacher performance and student success. They do this by collaborating with teachers and demonstrating the importance of having open communication by having teachers to provide input in discussions on; student

performance data, professional development, and instructional decisions that are made for the school.

6. Principals at Blue Ribbon elementary schools provide observation feedback and professional development that addresses specific staff needs. These principals provide feedback by using observation templates that are created by administration based on the school's needs, observations of teachers, and collaborating with staff. Professional development is based on the needs of the students and for the professional growth of the teachers.

The data collected in this study will provide current and future administrators with a concentrated list of successful initiatives put in place by top performing schools in Virginia. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 discuss practices principals in Blue Ribbon awarded public elementary schools have found valuable to enhancing the instructional program of their schools.

Current and future administrators will be able to utilize practices put in place by principals at Blue Ribbon elementary schools for collaborating with teachers while collecting and analyzing student data. Instructional leadership strategies can be replicated to provide evaluations that teachers describe as useful and to ensure that student progress is monitored.

For this study on Virginia elementary principals, it was evident during the interviews principals concluded collaborating with staff to ensure student achievement was an important action taken to influence the instructional program. The various responses within the study demonstrate a plethora of methods principals can use to support collaboration. This study provides evidence that collaboration does not only come from scheduled weekly grade level meetings, but takes place daily when the principal is visible throughout the building and willing to take the steps to involve teacher input on operational and instructional decisions. It was apparent in Blue Ribbon elementary schools the importance of collaboration not only being instructionally based, but being used to build relationships with staff and add to a positive school climate. Principals and teachers both play a part in forging an effective leadership relationship (Marks & Priny, 2003).

Taking these data collected in the study, principals can meet with their school improvement teams in order to systematically plan collaboration throughout the school year. From meeting with the school improvement team, a designed a plan to create a template addressing how collaboration can be implemented throughout the school year can be established.

Evidence gathered from the research for the study on Blue Ribbon elementary school principals in Virginia indicates collaboration between administration and teachers should be implemented and monitored for the areas of, but not limited to: instruction, school climate, and professional development.

Administrators at Blue Ribbon elementary schools have provided valuable information for current and future administrators on professional development for staff. During the interview process, principals discussed numerous professional development activities for teachers and staff. Discussion on the importance of budgeting for professional development was evident in statements made by principals. Data from this study can be used by school division staff and school principals when analyzing the importance of alignment between school division professional development and school based professional development.

The practices identified in the study can be considered by principals to enhance instructional programs in public schools and raise student achievement. In addition, the study gave a greater understanding on what various instructional leadership practices school divisions and principals in Virginia value. This study provided valuable information on instructional activities implemented by top performing public elementary schools in Virginia. Data collected during the study emphasized the importance of additional research in instructional leadership practices.

Recommendations for Further Study/Research

Information gathered during the study would suggest recommendations for further study and research in the following areas:

1. Many principals reported various observation templates purchased by their school division to help administrators collect teacher observation data and provide feedback for teacher observations and evaluations. Additional research should be conducted in an effort to gather data on the possible effect these observation instruments have on teacher performance. Is there a correlation between using these instruments to collect teacher observation data and providing feedback to teachers and teacher performance? This research could analyze principals who provide feedback through scripted observation data compared to principals who use purchased software observational programs in order to collect teacher observation data to provide feedback.

2. Sixty-four percent of principals reported participating in grade level meetings once a month. Further research should be conducted indicating the possible effect that principal participation during grade level meetings with teachers has on student achievement. This research could analyze the frequency of principal participation during the planning of classroom lessons with teachers and its possible effect on student achievement and teacher performance. Additional research on this topic could be conducted through gathering data from teachers about the principal's participation during grade level planning and whether teachers feel it has an effect on student achievement or teacher performance.
3. Further research should be conducted to collect data from school division staff and school principals on the importance of alignment between school division professional development and school based professional development and its possible effect on student achievement.
4. These data show the importance of school divisions setting aside appropriated funds for school level initiated professional development based on the needs of each individual school. If the data collected showed the importance of schools developing their own professional development, the question arises: How many schools set aside money in their school accounts for professional development and how many school divisions appropriate money directed towards professional development of individual schools? Is there a correlation between the amount of money allocated for professional development and student achievement?
5. With teacher input showing to have such a powerful impact on school operations, more research should be conducted on how school divisions gather teacher input on instructional decisions. Is there a correlation between student achievement and school divisions who systematically plan to gather teacher input through surveys and committees?

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Appendix A
Interview Protocol

Instructional Leadership Interview Protocol for Blue Ribbon Elementary School Administrators

Below you will find questions that will be asked during our upcoming interview. Questions have been created in an effort to gather quantitative and qualitative data. You may wish to look over and answer these questions prior to the interview.

Directions: For the quantitative items, please choose one of the following instructional activities principals perform that may promote the instructional program in the school. If you do something different there is a space for an alternative action to be listed. For qualitative items, space has been provided for feedback.

Category: Supervising Good Instruction and Providing Feedback to Teachers

Item 1 (Qualitative) –Teacher Observation and Supervising Instruction

How do you collect teacher observation data for feedback while conducting formal classroom observations?

Item 2 (Qualitative)-Feedback for Teachers

How is feedback provided to teachers after a formal classroom observation?

Item 3 (Qualitative)-Teacher Observation and Supervising Instruction

How do you collect teacher observation data for feedback while performing walk-through observations?

Item 4 (Quantitative)-Duration of Walk-through Observations

Which of the following best represents the amount of time you spend in a classroom during a walk-through observation?

	On average, I spend more than 15 minutes in a classroom during a walk-through observation
	On average, I spend 5-10 minutes in a classroom during a walk-through observation.
	On average, I spend less than 5 minutes in a classroom during a walk-through observation.

Alternative _____

Item 5 (Quantitative) -Frequency of Walk-through Observations

Which of the following best represents the time spent on classroom observations?

	On average, I conduct walk-through observations of approximately 50% of classroom teachers once a week.
	On average, I conduct walk-through observations of approximately 75% classroom teachers once a week.
	On average, I conduct walk-through observations of 100% of classroom teachers once a week.

Alternative _____

Item 6 (Qualitative) –Classroom Environment

What actions as an administrator do you perform to ensure that a positive school environment is created in all classrooms to support a strong instructional setting?

Item 7 (Quantitative)-Visibility

Which of the following items represents on average where you spend more time supervising instruction?

	On average, I spend more time being visible in classrooms supervising instruction in grades K-2.
	On average, I spend more time being visible in classrooms supervising instruction in grades 3-5 (grades in which SOL tests are administered).
	On average, my time is divided equally for grades K-5 being visible in classrooms supervising instruction.

Alternative _____

Category: Collaborating With Staff and Analyzing Student Data

Item 8 (Qualitative)-Analyzing Student Data

What actions as an administrator do you perform to collaborate with teachers and staff to analyze student assessment data to make instructional decisions?

Item 9 (Quantitative)-Professional Learning Communities

Which of the following best represents the time spent in grade level meetings with teachers?

	On average, I take part in weekly grade level meetings every week to discuss student learning and instructional issues.
	On average, I meet with each grade level bi-weekly to discuss student learning and instructional issues.
	On average, I meet with grade levels once a month to discuss student learning and instructional issues.

Alternative _____

Category: Professional Development

Item 10 (Qualitative) –Planning and Implementation of Professional Development

What actions do you take as an administrator to systematically plan for professional development?

Item 11 (Qualitative) –Informational Data

How many years did you serve consecutively at your school prior to receiving the Blue Ribbon Award? If you were not the principal during the application process for the Blue Ribbon Award, are there any continuing instructional programs implemented that you believe attributes to the school’s success?

Thanks for your feedback and your participation!

Appendix B
Email Script to Elementary Principals

Date

Name of Principal

Name of School

Address

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear (Principal),

I am writing to request permission to interview you as a participant in a study on Blue Ribbon Awarded Virginia Public Elementary Schools. I am currently enrolled in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. I am in the process of writing a dissertation to obtain a Doctorate of Education. The study is entitled, *Instructional Leadership Practices Principals Use In Blue Ribbon Awarded Public Elementary Schools In Virginia*.

The study is about instructional leadership practices principals implement in Blue Ribbon Awarded Virginia public elementary schools, with a focus on schools receiving this award in the last three years. You will be asked to participate in an interview consisting of 11 questions (4 survey questions to collect numerical data and 7 open ended questions). The interview questions are attached to this email. These questions will focus on supervising good instruction and providing feedback to teachers, collaborating with staff and analyzing student data, and planning professional development. No school time will be taken in the completion of the interview. A potential benefit of the study is: Data collected will provide current and future administrators with a concentrated list of successful initiatives put in place by top performing schools in Virginia, consisting of instructional strategies and practices implemented by principals in Blue Ribbon schools. The practices identified in the study can be used by principals for replication to enhance instructional programs in public schools and raise student achievement.

Your agreement to allow me to conduct the interview will constitute the following:

- Your identity will be protected. No participant will be identified in the final report. Original data will be destroyed after research is completed.
- In order to protect confidentiality of participants, neither the school nor the school district will be identified in the final report.
- Information gathered during the course of the study will be analyzed and the findings may contribute to published research reports and presentations.
- There are no foreseeable inconveniences or risks involved in participating in the study.
- A copy of the study will be provided to your school division upon completion of this study. The final report will contain a summary of all of the interviews and will not identify specific schools, principals, or school divisions in order to preserve confidentiality.
- There will be no compensation for participants in this study.

If you agree, please reply to this e-mail acknowledging your consent as a participant. Once I receive your reply and consent form, I will schedule a time to be interviewed. Verbal consent will be obtained at the beginning of the interview.

Your approval to conduct this interview is greatly appreciated. Please do not hesitate to contact me, I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have.

Sincerely,

Ben Boone, Researcher

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

bboone5@vt.edu

cc: Glen Earthman, Dissertation Committee Chair

Appendix C

Telephone Script to Elementary Principals

Telephone Script Requesting Permission to Interview

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Good Afternoon Principal _____,

I am calling to request permission to interview you as a participant in a study on Blue Ribbon Awarded Virginia Public Elementary Schools. As a principal myself, I realize how busy your daily schedule is throughout the week. It is my hope to conduct an interview that aligns with your schedule. I have recently emailed requesting permission to interview and attached the interview protocol so that you may have an estimate of how long the interview will last and have a chance to review questions in an effort to save time during the interview. I am currently enrolled in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. I am in the process of writing a dissertation to obtain a Doctorate of Education. The study is entitled, *Instructional Leadership Practices Principals Use In Blue Ribbon Awarded Public Elementary Schools In Virginia*.

The study is about instructional leadership practices principals implement in Blue Ribbon Awarded Virginia public elementary schools, with a focus on schools receiving this award in the last three years. You will be asked to participate in an interview consisting of 11 questions (4 survey questions to collect numerical data and 7 open ended questions). The interview questions are attached to this email. These questions will focus on supervising good instruction and providing feedback to teachers, collaborating with staff and analyzing student data, and planning professional development. No school time will be taken in the completion of the interview. A potential benefit of the study is: Data collected will provide current and future administrators with a concentrated list of successful initiatives put in place by top performing schools in Virginia, consisting of instructional strategies and practices implemented by principals in Blue Ribbon schools. The practices identified in the study can be used by principals for replication to enhance instructional programs in public schools and raise student achievement.

Your agreement to allow me to conduct the interview will constitute the following:

- Your identity will be protected. No participant will be identified in the final report. Original data will be destroyed after research is completed.
- In order to protect confidentiality of participants, neither the school nor the school district will be identified in the final report.
- Information gathered during the course of the study will be analyzed and the findings may contribute to published research reports and presentations.
- There are no foreseeable inconveniences or risks involved in participating in the study.
- A copy of the study will be provided to your school division upon completion of this study. The final report will contain a summary of all of the interviews and will not identify specific schools, principals, or school divisions in order to preserve confidentiality.
- There will be no compensation for participants in this study.

If you agree, please reply to this e-mail acknowledging your consent as a participant. Once I receive your reply and consent form, I will schedule a time to be interviewed. Verbal consent will be obtained at the beginning of the interview.

Your approval to conduct this interview is greatly appreciated. Please do not hesitate to contact me, I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have.

Sincerely,

Ben Boone, Researcher

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

bboone5@vt.edu

cc: Glen Earthman, Dissertation Committee Chair

Appendix D
Informed Consent

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

Title of Project:

*Instructional Leadership Practices Principals Use In Blue Ribbon Awarded Public
Elementary Schools In Virginia.*

Investigator(s): Ben Boone bboone5@vt.edu

Name E-mail / Phone number _____
Name E-mail / Phone number _____

I. Purpose of this Research Project

The study is about instructional leadership practices principals implement in Blue Ribbon Awarded Virginia public elementary schools, with a focus on schools receiving this award in the last three years. The study will be published and used in a dissertation. No school time will be taken in the completion of the interview. A potential benefit of the study is: Data collected will provide current and future administrators with a concentrated list of successful initiatives put in place by top performing schools in Virginia, consisting of instructional strategies and practices implemented by principals in Blue Ribbon schools. The practices identified in the study can be used by principals for replication to enhance instructional programs in public schools and raise student achievement.

II. Procedures

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview consisting of 11 questions (4 survey questions to collect numerical data and 7 open ended questions). The interview questions are attached to this email. These questions will focus on supervising good instruction and providing feedback to teachers, collaborating with staff and analyzing student data, and planning professional development. The interview will be conducted over the phone or if you prefer, over an internet video chat. The interview will be audio-recorded.

III. Risks

Due to only 13 public elementary schools receiving the Blue Ribbon Award in the past three years, there is a possibility you could be identified according to the demographic information provided through the public record in the Blue Ribbon application that was submitted.

IV. Benefits

No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate. Potential benefits of this study are:

Data collected will provide current and future administrators with a concentrated list of successful initiatives put in place by top performing schools in Virginia, consisting of instructional strategies and practices implemented by principals in Blue Ribbon schools

The practices identified in the study can be used by principals for replication to enhance instructional programs in public schools and raise student achievement.

Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board Project No. 16-1029 Approved January 3, 2017 to January 2, 2018

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

At no time will the researchers release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent. Your identity will be protected as you will not be identified in the final report. For example, participants will be labeled as “Principal A”. Any identification of participants will be kept on a password protected computer that is separate from data that is coded. Original data will be destroyed after research is completed. Neither your school nor your school district will be identified in the final report. Participation in the study is voluntary. Should you decide to withdraw permission after the study begins, you may notify the researcher of your decision. A copy of the researcher’s report will be available to your school division upon completion of this study.

The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study’s data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

VI. Compensation

There will be no compensation for your participation in this study.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

It is important for you to know that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any questions that you choose or respond to what is being asked of you without penalty.

Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a subject should not continue as a subject.

Should you withdraw or otherwise discontinue participation, you will be compensated for the portion of the project completed in accordance with the Compensation section of this document.

VIII. Questions or Concerns

Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact one of the research investigators whose contact information is included at the beginning of this document.

Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board Project No. 16-1029 Approved January 3, 2017 to January 2, 2018

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study’s conduct or your rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at moored@vt.edu or (540) 231-4991.

IX. Subject's Consent

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

_____ Date _____ Subject signature
_____ Subject printed name

(Note: each subject must be provided a copy of this form. In addition, the IRB office may stamp its approval on the consent document(s) you submit and return the stamped version to you for use in consenting subjects; therefore, ensure each consent document you submit is ready to be read and signed by subjects.)

Appendix E
IRB Approval

Office of Research Compliance Institutional Review Board North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech 300 Turner Street NW Blacksburg, Virginia 24061 540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959 email irb@vt.edu website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 4, 2017
TO: Glen I Earthman, Benjamin Daniel Boone
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)
PROTOCOL TITLE: Instructional Leadership Practices Principals Use In Blue Ribbon Awarded Public Elementary Schools In Virginia

IRB NUMBER: 16-1029

Effective January 3, 2017, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

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

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at: <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 5,6,7 Protocol Approval Date: January 3, 2017 Protocol Expiration Date: January 2, 2018 Continuing Review Due Date*: December 19, 2017 *Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this

requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

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

* Date this proposal number was compared, assessed as not requiring comparison, or comparison information was revised.

If this IRB protocol is to cover any other grant proposals, please contact the IRB office (irbadmin@vt.edu) immediately.