

Principals' and Teachers' Perceptions of Elementary Turnaround Principals' Leadership  
Practices Related to Reading Achievement in One Virginia School Division

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**Abstract**

Elementary students continue to fall below proficiency levels in reading as measured by reading achievement tests (NAEP, 2019; Virginia Department of Education, 2021). In 2019, The Nation's Report Card disclosed that 37% of fourth-graders performed at or above the proficiency level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress reading assessment (NAEP, 2019). Data from these assessments show gaps exist between specific subgroups of students. These statistics present a national crisis in the reading skills of elementary students sitting in America's schools. The Wallace Foundation (2021) research indicates that principals influence student achievement data as measured by standardized tests, and the impact of an effective principal is almost as great as having an effective teacher.

The purpose of this study was to identify the leadership practices of elementary turnaround principals whose schools' reading achievement scores increased under their leadership. A basic qualitative research design was used and the study was conducted in one suburban school division in central Virginia. Two principals and four teachers were interviewed using semi-structured interviews to identify the leadership practices the principals employed as the literacy leader in the school. Interviews were coded and analyzed to identify trends and themes shared by participants.

This study's findings include four themes emerging from the principals' interviews and three themes emerging from the teachers' interviews. One major finding from 100% of participants included the use of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to help build the

professional knowledge of the teachers in understanding how to teach reading. An implication of this finding states that school leaders could develop the master schedule with established times for PLC meetings to occur during the school day. An additional finding from 100% of the participants included the principal's knowledge of the reading process as it allowed the principals to have constructive conversations with teachers around their reading instruction. An implication of this finding includes school leaders considering building their knowledge of the reading process by attending conferences or reading professional books. The data from this research study will contribute to the research of prioritizing principals' leadership actions for turnaround elementary schools.

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**General Audience Abstract**

Tamara L. Slater

Elementary students continue to read below proficiency levels. Student achievement data from standardized reading tests show the students sitting in America's schools are not meeting basic reading proficiency levels (NAEP, 2019; Virginia Department of Education, 2021); however, principals play a key role in their students' reading achievement levels in their schools. Research by The Wallace Foundation (2021) found "the effectiveness of the principal of the school is more important than the effectiveness of a single teacher" (p. xiv). Principals can have a positive impact on students' achievement in school.

This research study investigated the leadership practices used by elementary principals to turn around their schools' reading achievement data. The study was designed to investigate the perceptions of principals and teachers on the leadership practices impacting the improvement of reading achievement scores in the school. A qualitative research design with semi-structured interviews was used to gather the perceptions of the principals and teachers in one suburban school division in Virginia. These data were collected and analyzed resulting in 10 findings and 10 implications. One finding in the Instructional Practices theme indicated that implementing professional learning communities helped build principals' and teachers' professional knowledge in teaching reading. An implication of this finding could be for school divisions to provide professional learning to teachers and administrators regarding how to implement professional learning communities. The findings from the research provide principals and school division leaders with a myriad of implications that could be used to change the trajectory

of reading achievement scores in schools. One limitation of the study was the sample size of participants. A suggestion for future research would be to increase the sample size of the participants in the study.

## **Dedications**

Dedicated to my Mom and Dad who always told me I could do whatever I put my mind to. Remember when I came home from school and wanted to drop out of Kindergarten because my teacher was making me write my full name? Thank you for letting me march to the beat of my own drums.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In the past 25 years, principals have witnessed transformations to educational leadership due to changes emerging from accountability reforms enacted by policymakers (Day et al., 2016). The common thread across government educational reforms has been an increased emphasis on student achievement and accountability through evaluation and assessments (Day et al., 2016). Federal education policy has enacted accountability measures beginning with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2000, Race to the Top in 2009, and reauthorization of The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 2017, and now called The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). “This emphasis on high-stakes school accountability in all these policies has made student achievement the goal of school improvement efforts, creating a cultural norm and expectation among school leaders that all students can learn” (Grissom et al., 2021, p. 35). These changing policy landscapes of education have necessitated a recalibration in how principals serve in their roles as administrators by becoming instructional leaders and by clearing the path toward improving student achievement (Grissom et al., 2015).

The actions of principals have been widely studied to understand the practices used by successful principals. Historically, principals have served as building managers, carrying out the daily operations of managing a school (Gulcan, 2012). Due to the accountability measures placed on schools, principals’ roles have shifted, redesigning expectations for what school leaders need to know and do (Grissom et al., 2015). Grissom et al. (2015) reported,

The expectations have required a deeper understanding of effective instruction, an increased focus on observing instruction and giving feedback, and a focus on student achievement, including attention to the achievement of students of color, students from

low-income families, students with special education needs, and English language learners.  
(p. 76)

These expectations have required principals to add instructional leadership to their principal duties.

Principals serving as instructional leaders did not eliminate their role in serving as transformational leaders. “Transformational leadership consists of four behavioral clusters that include setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and improving the instructional programs” (Kruger & Scheerens, 2012, p. 121). Hallinger’s (2003) research found that principals serving as transformational leaders supported changes in instructional practices. Scheerens (2012) found transformational leadership behaviors such as vision building and modeling had positive indirect effects on student achievement. Based on Hallinger’s and Scheerens’ findings, principals’ use of transformational leadership behaviors had an impact on student achievement.

As instructional leaders, principals’ knowledge of quality reading instruction is important in order to support teachers’ instructional practices. Mora-Whitehurst (2013) reports principals’ knowledge of reading instruction enables them to influence the school’s reading program. In 2000, The National Reading Panel identified five essential components of effective reading instruction that are critical for reading success: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). In addition to the five essential components identified by the National Reading Panel, Allington (2014) found that children need to read and write in volume every day. Allington stated, “Long overlooked, reading volume is actually central to the development of reading proficiencies, especially in the development of fluent reading proficiency” (p. 62). Principals’ knowledge of high-quality reading instruction is important in leading teaching and learning.

While principals serve as instructional leaders, research by Seashore-Louis et al. (2010) found a strong correlation between collaborative leadership and student achievement. “Principals who establish learning-centered climates model curiosity and vulnerability, signaling to others that they do not have all of the answers but are eager to learn” (International Literacy Association, 2019, p. 3). When principals create conditions for collective learning and action among staff members, the results create a culture of dynamic teams of teachers who learn together. Principals craft a learning culture in the school and model serving as the lead learner.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) only 38% of Virginia fourth grade public school students performed at or above the proficient level in reading in 2019 (NAEP, 2019). Comparatively, only 43% of Virginia fourth grade public school students performed at or above the proficient level in reading in 2017. While these percentages are not considerably different, these data show the decline in reading proficiency in just two years for fourth-grade students in the Commonwealth of Virginia. National Assessment of Educational Progress is the largest national assessment that measures what students in the United States know and can do in a variety of subject areas. Assessment results are reported in percentages at three achievement levels: NAEP Basic, NAEP Proficient, NAEP Advanced. Students performing at or above the NAEP Proficiency level are demonstrating solid academic performance in that subject matter. The NAEP (2019) disaggregated data for reading in student subgroups for the Commonwealth of Virginia are listed below:

- Black students had an average score that was 24 points lower than that of White students in 2019.

- Hispanic students had an average score that was 21 points lower than that of White students in 2019.
- Male students had an average score that was six points lower than female students.
- Students who qualified for the National School Lunch Program had an average score that was 28 points lower than students who did not qualify for the National School Lunch Program.

These data show that 62% of fourth-grade students in Virginia are not meeting the proficiency level in reading (NAEP, 2019).

Student achievement in the Commonwealth of Virginia is measured by the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. The Virginia SOL establish minimum expectations for what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade in reading. The SOL tests measure the success of students in meeting the Virginia Board of Education’s expectations for learning and achievement. Students in grades 3 through end-of-course English take reading achievement SOL tests. The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) has set 75% as the minimum percentage of students in the school who must receive at least a passing score at the pass proficient level. The pass proficient level is defined by a score between 400–499 (VDOE, 2021).

**Table 1**

*SOL Reading Pass Rates in the Commonwealth of Virginia*

Grade Level	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Grade 3	75	72	71
Grade 4	79	76	75
Grade 5	81	80	78



These data show that students' achievement scores in reading are declining as measured by standardized reading tests. The decline of NAEP scores from 2017 to 2019, combined with the decline of reading SOL scores from 2016-2019, highlights the need for an improvement in the area of reading, therefore the problem this study addressed was the decline of reading proficiency levels for elementary students in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

### **Significance of the Study**

Educators have witnessed changes by educational policymakers to raise academic achievement levels for all students through various school reforms over the past 25 years (Day et al., 2015). Almost all these government reforms have been centered around accountability and performance, accompanied by an increasing emphasis on evaluation and assessment (Day et al., 2016). The reshaping of these educational policies has culminated in the need for educational leaders, specifically school principals, to redesign their leadership styles to positively impact school culture, organization, and through these, the quality of teaching and learning and student achievement (Day et al., 2016). The leadership of the principal is an important factor in influencing the success of the school.

The most commonly researched leadership models that have resulted in successfully improving student outcomes are instructional and transformational (Day et al., 2016). Marks and Printy (2003) found that transformational leadership behaviors were a prerequisite for the shared instructional leadership behaviors. This research also found that combining transformational leadership behaviors with instructional leadership behaviors produces significantly higher-achieving schools. Robinson et al. (2008) reported that student outcomes were 3 to 4 times higher when transformational leadership behaviors were combined with instructional leadership

behaviors. According to DuFour and Marzano (2011), research supports that powerful school leadership, led by the principal, has a positive effect on student achievement.

Reading achievement has been a focus in educational reform since the accountability measures were put in place by policymakers (Allington & Gabriel, 2012). “Every child a reader has been the goal of instruction, education research, and reform for at least three decades” (Allington & Gabriel, 2012, p. 3). According to Allington and Gabriel, few students in the United States receive high-quality reading instruction. Allington (2011) stated that 66% of students in the United States have reading skills that are below level which prevents them from adequately doing grade-level work. Allington stated that schools should structure their teaching around high-quality reading instruction beginning with the first day of school so NAEP scores will be positively impacted by this in five years. Research indicated (Slade, 2020) that high-quality reading and writing instruction in the first few years of school can close achievement gaps and set the foundation for long-term success. Research by Fletcher et al. (2011) stated that the school principal plays an important role in whole-school literacy reform.

Literature focused on principals’ leadership in developing learning-centered climates exists; however, a review of the literature disclosed that there is little research on principals as literacy leaders. The literature does not contain information on how principals gain knowledge of the best practices in literacy. Ippolito and Fisher (2019) state that less is known about how principals can best do this work, given principals’ variability in their instructional backgrounds. Additionally, the literature review showed the absence of the application and use of transformational leadership behaviors and instructional leadership behaviors combined with literacy leadership to support student achievement, therefore the significance of this study was to research the leadership practices principals used to turnaround SOL reading achievement scores.

## **Purpose and Justification of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify the leadership practices that principals used to lead turnaround elementary schools that resulted in an increase reading achievement scores. As reading achievement scores decline, effective principals are proactive and responsive to the reading data. The research was conducted at elementary schools with principals who led a turnaround school by increasing the overall proficiency and growth in reading achievement. The information gained in this study could contribute to the knowledge base of prioritizing essential leadership actions for literacy leadership. Additionally, this insight can inform district administrators on how to best support current turnaround principals.

## **Research Questions**

The questions for this research study were as follows:

1. What do elementary principals identify as the leadership practices they use to lead a turnaround elementary school to increase reading achievement scores?
2. What do elementary teachers identify as the leadership practices principals use to lead a turnaround elementary school to increase reading achievement scores?

## **Overview of the Study**

The researcher conducted a basic qualitative research study utilizing a researcher-constructed interview to examine the leadership practices principals used in successful turnaround schools as measured by student reading achievement. The researcher utilized a semi-structured format during the interview process. Semi-structured interviews provided flexibility in conversation, allowing participants to elaborate on key points as desired, as well as opportunities for clarification and elaboration beyond the questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interview questions center around the types of leadership practices principals use to positively impact

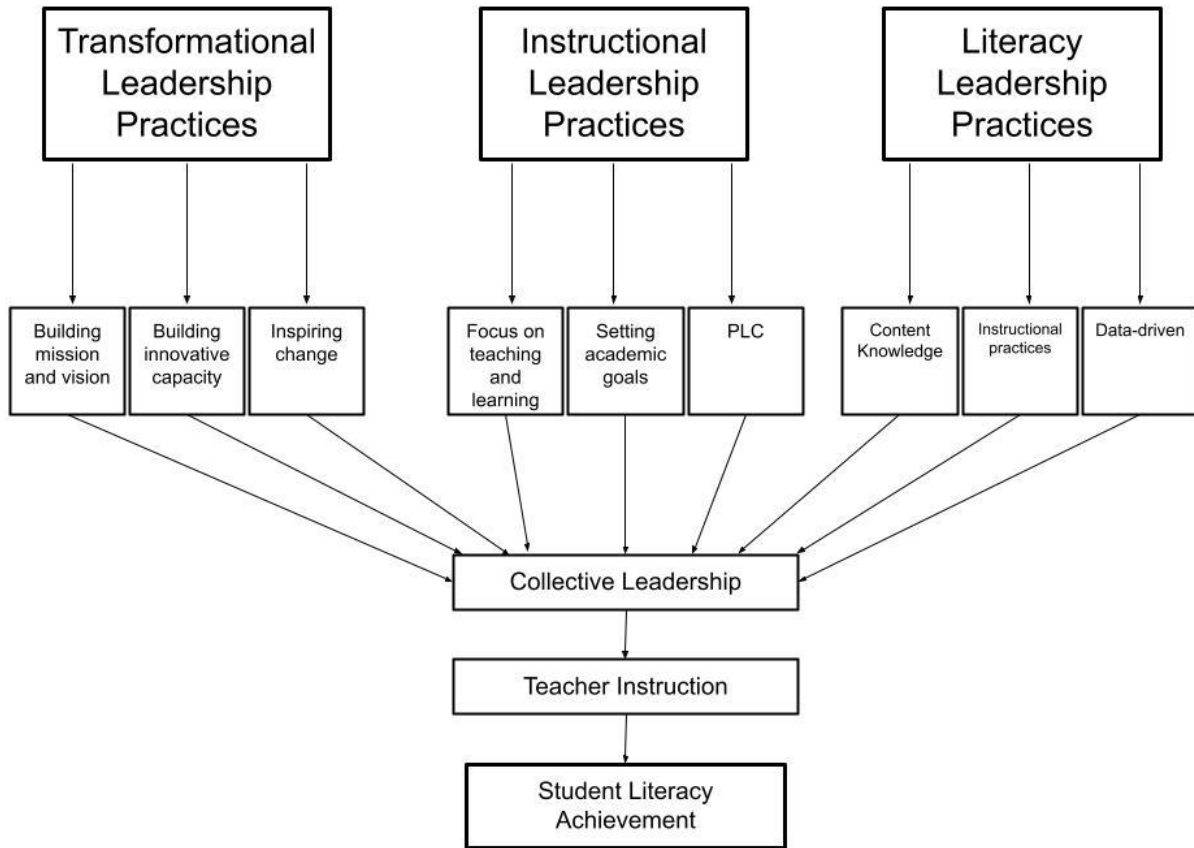
reading SOL scores. Common interview topics included instruction in the literacy classroom and the types of instructional leadership behaviors used in leading instruction in the school. The research will contribute to the knowledge and development of school principals' leadership to build collective leadership practices to impact student reading achievement on state tests. Hollenbeck and Rieckoff (2014) asserted that the school principal plays an important role in schoolwide literacy reform through a direct connection between a principal's actions and student achievement.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study, Figure 1, provides an overview of the leadership practices illustrated in the research that impact student achievement. Transformational leadership, instructional leadership, and literacy leadership serve as the overarching leadership practices that principals use when leading a school. Under each leadership practice are examples that principals use in their principalship. Horng et al. (2010) found that effective principals influence a variety of school outcomes including student achievement, articulating the school's vision, and the development of structures to support teaching and learning. Examples of transformational leadership practices include building the school's mission and vision, building innovative capacity among school staff, and inspiring change. Principals also serve as instructional leaders, focusing on teaching and learning, setting academic goals, and leading PLC meetings. Principals serving as literacy leaders are knowledgeable about reading, instructional practices used in literacy instruction, and are data-driven. Collectively, these practices lead to shared leadership and teacher instruction, which impacts student literacy achievement.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework: The Impact of Literacy Leadership on Student Outcomes*



**Definition of Terms**

Key terms used in this paper are defined to provide a common frame of reference for readers.

*Accountability* refers to the management of diverse expectations generated within and outside of the organization (Skedsmo & Huber, 2019).

*Achievement gaps* are the “Difference in academic performance between student groups” (VDOE, 2015).

*Instructional Leadership* refers to leadership that affects student learning when it is targeted at improving instruction and student achievement (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2012).

*Literacy* is “The ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, compute, and communicate using visual, audible, and digital materials across disciplines and in any context. Over time, literacy has been applied to a wide range of activities and appears as computer literacy, math literacy, or dietary literacy; in such contexts, it refers to basic knowledge of rather than to anything specific to reading and writing” (International Literacy Association, 2021).

*Literacy practices* are the “Diverse forms of interacting with text that enable individuals to accomplish a range of purposes and attain personal benefits in ways that are shaped by cultural contexts and language structures” (International Literacy Association, 2021).

*Transformational Leadership* is a leadership style that focuses on the organization’s capacity to innovate (Hallinger, 2003). Transformational leaders develop the capacity of others to increase the school’s capacity to continuously improve.

*Turnaround school* is a low-performing school that produces gains in student achievement within a short period of time (The Wallace Foundation, 2021).

## **Limitations**

The findings of this qualitative study were affected by certain limitations. The first limitation was due to participation by the principals and teachers in the study. There were only 2 principals and 4 teachers who participated; therefore, only their perceptions were considered. The second limitation was the accuracy of the responses by the teachers during the interview. Teachers may not fully understand the leadership practices the principal put in place to positively impact the reading achievement scores; therefore, their responses may be general in nature. Additionally, their dissatisfaction with the practices the principal used may influence their

responses. The third limitation is the principals' responses. The principals' responses may represent an idealistic scenario instead of the current reality in the school.

### **Delimitations**

A delimitation is a boundary placed on the study. The first delimitation of the study was that it was limited to elementary schools in one suburban PK-12 school division in Virginia; thus, the results may not be generalizable to other schools across the nation. The second delimitation was that the study was restricted to turnaround schools that had increased student reading achievement scores.

### **Organization of the Study**

Chapter 1 provides the overview to the study. This includes the purpose statement, the study's significance, research questions, and conceptual framework. The literature review is found in chapter 2 and includes related prior research on transformational leadership, instructional leadership, educational reforms centered on school accountability, collective leadership, and literacy. Chapter 3 presents the methodology, the research design, the instrumentation, and the data analysis. In Chapter 4, the researcher shares the data analysis. Chapter 5 includes the major findings, implications of the findings, a discussion of how the results fit into the context of the relevant body of literature, and suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Educational leaders are facing one of the most rigorous student accountability and standards movements in United States history (Day et al., 2016). From No Child Left Behind (NCLB) to Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), calls for educational reform have permeated through every facet of the educational system. In an era of high-stakes testing, there has been an increased level of school accountability that principals and school administrators must face (Day et al., 2016). As a result, school leaders are continuously searching for ways to improve student achievement across all demographic backgrounds so they can successfully meet the demands and goals set by federal and state government requirements.

Current research by The Wallace Foundation (2020) has provided consistent evidence that demonstrates the positive influence principals have on student achievement. Research by The Wallace Foundation (2020) stated, “For improving the school as a whole, therefore, the effectiveness of the principal is more important than the effectiveness of any single teacher” (p. 40). A principal’s leadership is a critical component of a school’s success. Principals can no longer function as school managers, simply carrying out the day-to-day operations of the school. Additionally, principals work to create a school culture that engages teachers, students, parents, and the community in building an effective organization. Principals are leaders of learning who develop teachers’ instructional practices to be effective and meet all students’ needs. As a result, the principal emerges as the key player in school reform, using transformational leadership and instructional leadership to lead the movement toward a high functioning academic school.

At the elementary level, one component of student achievement is in the area of literacy. “Literacy is defined as the ability, confidence, and willingness to engage with language to acquire, construct, and communicate meaning in all aspects of daily life” (Zemelman et al., 2012,



p. 3). In schools, literacy skills are taught primarily through language arts, which include reading, writing, listening, speaking, and thinking. Gambrell et al. (2015) reported literacy includes three reciprocal processes of communicating: speaking/listening, reading/writing, and viewing/representing. Administrators help teachers understand what good literacy instruction means, from lesson planning to instructional delivery to assessments.

### **Educational Reform: Age of Accountability**

The landscape of education has changed since 2001 from educational policymakers' efforts to raise levels of achievement for all students through a variety of school reforms (Day et al., 2016). Central to the government reforms put on school systems is an increased emphasis on accountability and performance. Over the years, government reforms have taken on different goals, some based on political agendas, others due to the motivations of reformers. Sunderman (2010) reported that in order to receive federal funding, states had to develop and implement policies to comply with new legal and reform requirements.

Enacted by President George W. Bush in 2001, NCLB ushered in standards-based testing reforms (Oleszewski, et al., 2012). Yearly monitoring of student achievement in reading, mathematics, science, and social studies was required of school systems with 100% attainment of goals by 2014. The NCLB Act of 2001 set demanding accountability standards for states' education systems with measurable Adequate Yearly Progress as a way to improve student achievement and reform elementary and secondary education programs in the United States (Linn et al., 2002). "The Act required that all children have an opportunity to obtain a high-quality education, and reach proficiency on state academic achievement standards-based state assessments" (Simpson et al., 2004, p. 68). One of the proficiency requirements of NCLB was closing the achievement gaps between high- and low- performing students from disadvantaged

groups and minority populations (Simpson et al., 2004). No Child Left Behind was developed to ensure school divisions monitor student achievement data.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 mandated that students with disabilities receive individualized instruction in the least restrictive environment (Lynch, 2012). Additionally, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act authorized the implementation of the Response to Intervention framework in 2004 (Hamilton, 2010). Response to Intervention is a multi-tiered approach that helps schools make academic decisions to best serve the needs of students. The Response to Intervention framework that schools develop helps school staff monitor student achievement through frequent use of data from assessments. Tier one is the foundational layer that encompasses high-quality instruction and universal screening for all students in the general education setting. Multiple data points are analyzed from classroom instruction and universal screening to monitor students' acquisition of skills. Students who are not successful with tier one instruction receive additional assistance in meeting academic goals through intervention instruction in tier two. Tier two instruction includes smaller groups of students, more intense instruction, and continued progress monitoring of student achievement. Students who cannot meet grade-level requirements in tier two move to tier three, the final layer in the Response to Intervention process. Tier three instruction is individualized and targets skill deficits with the most qualified person to deliver the intervention. At any point in this process, a comprehensive evaluation of the student's skills and abilities may occur to determine whether an individualized education plan is necessary through special education. Hamilton (2010) reported that using this system monitors student progress in reaching grade-level standards.

In 2009, The American Reinvestment and Recovery Act allocated approximately \$90 billion for education aimed at stimulating K-12 education reform with the Race to the Top

initiative (Martin & Lazaro, 2011). This initiative created a federal competition among states intended to spur innovative reforms in state and local district education. States who competed for the grant money earned points for executing educational policies that included performance-based evaluations for teachers and principals intended to measure educator effectiveness. Participation in Race to the Top required states to adopt common standards and assessment measures through the Common Core State Standards Initiative. The Common Core initiative developed one set of standards for curriculum development and instruction (Howell, 2015). Howell reported that the goal of the standards initiative was to provide educators with consistent, rigorous knowledge-based skills needed to prepare students for college and career readiness.

The legislation known as ESSA is the most recent educational reform movement by the U.S. Department of Education. As the reauthorization of NCLB, ESSA provides federal funding for K-12 schools and represents the nation's commitment to equal educational opportunities for all students (Young et al., 2017). Young et al. report "ESSA has two primary goals; to require states to realign their curriculum and education programs with college and career readiness, and to focus on equity by providing resources to disadvantaged populations" (p. 22). The act provides new opportunities for school systems to use federal funds for the development of school principals and other school administrators. The intent of ESSA was designed to provide equitable outcomes for all students.

These policy reforms of education have culminated in a dynamic and changing profile of school leadership (Day et al., 2016). The principal's job changed dramatically beginning in 2001 with NCLB, and ESSA has continued to increase the pressure and responsibility of school principals. These educational reforms required principals to focus on curriculum, assessments, and on student achievement. According to Hamilton (2010), the role of the principal is critical in

maximizing the impact on student achievement. The political pressure of accountability requires principals to not only manage the school building but to improve instruction and increase student achievement for all students, especially those in disadvantaged populations. This increased accountability and responsibility has been a major factor in the changing roles of principals and has recast the school principal as the primary change agent of school reform. School leaders today must possess more than just managerial skills in order to achieve the organizational goals of the school system; they must possess effective leadership characteristics (Gulcan, 2012). The school reform movement rests on the shoulders of the school principal.

### **Characteristics of Effective Principals**

A study by Seashore-Louis, Dretzke et al., (2010) concluded that principal leadership is a critical component of an effective school. Harris et al. (2006) found that school leadership is the second most important factor in predicting student achievement, second only to classroom teaching. Research by Seashore-Louis, Leithwood et al. (2010) found that a principal's leadership represents almost 25% of a school's achievement. Their research showed that principal leadership can have a strong, positive effect on student learning. Research by Branch et al. (2013) showed that effective principals increase the achievement levels of students in one school year. "Our results indicate that highly effective principals raise the achievement of a typical student in their schools by between two and seven months of learning in a single school year; ineffective principals lower achievement by the same amount" (Branch et al., 2013, p. 2). Principals play a key role in impacting student achievement.

Horng et al. (2010) reported, "Effective principals influence a variety of school outcomes which include student achievement, ability to identify and articulate school vision and goals, effective allocation of resources, and the development of structures to support teaching and

learning” (p. 37). Researchers from The Wallace Foundation (2013) suggested that an effective principal’s leadership approach is based on five key skills. The key skills are listed below:

- Shaping a vision of academic success for all students based on high standards
- Creating a climate hospitable to education so that safety, a cooperative spirit, and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail
- Cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their parts in realizing the school vision
- Improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students learn to their utmost
- Managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement (The Wallace Foundation, 2013, p. 6)

The first key practice of an effective principal includes shaping a vision of academic success for all students. The Wallace Foundation (2013) stated that effective school leaders establish and communicate a schoolwide vision of commitment to high expectations for all students. Developing a shared vision around high standards and success for all students, not just those who are college-bound, is an essential part of school leadership.

Creating a climate of cooperation and collaboration, shared responsibility and safety is the second key skill. As described by The Wallace Foundation (2013), a healthy school climate is supportive, instruction-focused, welcoming, and professional. This climate also includes engaging parents and the community, working together to make an impact on student achievement.

The third component of The Wallace Foundation’s research (2013) included cultivating leadership in others. Principals who distribute leadership to others in the school community

produce students who yield higher achievement scores. “A central part of being a great leader is cultivating leadership in others” (The Wallace Foundation, 2013, p. 11). Collaborative leadership can play a positive role in schools.

Improving instruction is the fourth key skill of effective principals. “Effective principals work relentlessly to improve achievement by focusing on the quality of instruction” (The Wallace Foundation, 2013, p. 11). The Wallace Foundation’s research showed that effective principals emphasize research-based strategies to improve teaching and learning, and they encourage teachers to engage in professional learning opportunities. Principals spend time in classrooms and participate in frequent conversations with teachers around instruction and data, using classroom observations as opportunities to help teachers grow in their instructional skills. In contrast, low-scoring principals approach classroom observations as a task that needs to be completed for the day, giving little to no feedback to teachers afterward.

Managing people, data, and processes round out the final skills The Wallace Foundation (2013) found in effective principals. Effective principals use an understanding of their school’s systems and accountability measures to develop schoolwide plans. They use data to build capacity around instructional practices and to promote collaborative inquiry among teachers.

Research confirms that without a skilled principal leading the way, there is little chance of creating and sustaining an enriching learning environment (Krasnoff, 2015, p. 7). “Research has clearly shown that the principal is a key ingredient in the performance of the school, especially if that school enrolls a large number of low-performing and/or poor and minority students” (Krasnoff, 2015, p.7). The Wallace Foundation’s (2013) research supported the assertion that the goals of educational improvement would be difficult to attain without effective school leadership.

## **Educational Leadership Theories**

Results from a study by Day et al. (2016) found the most common leadership approaches in educational organizations that have been successful in improving student outcomes are transformational leadership and instructional leadership. Supporting the results from Day et al. (2016), Hallinger (2003) stated, “Although a variety of conceptual models have been employed over the past 25 years of research into educational leadership, two major approaches have predominated: instructional leadership and transformational leadership” (p. 330). These models emphasize the leadership used by administrators to improve educational outcomes. Hallinger’s research found that the accountability movement which began in the 1990s resulted in investigating the principal’s behaviors and practices in order to examine the principal’s leadership style. Nir and Hameiri (2014) stated a principal is influential to the success of a school and the principal’s style of leadership contributes to the quality of a school’s performance.

### **Transformational Leadership**

Burns' (1978) groundbreaking work defined transformational leadership as leadership focused on change compared to another common leadership type, transactional, which focused on maintaining the status quo. Hallinger (2003) stated that transformational leadership is focused on building innovative capacity within the organization to define its purpose and to support changes in instructional practices. Transformational leadership emphasizes building vision and mission, creating a positive culture, and inspiring change through motivation. Moolenaar and Slegers (2015) suggested that transformational leaders build shared beliefs among constituents to achieve school goals. Kouzes and Posner (2012) stated that transformational leadership refers to leadership skills in principals who transform the school during improvement phases. Transformational leaders are focused on change and develop the capacity of others (Fullan,

2014). Using transformational leadership, principals create conditions to inspire all school members to work toward school improvement (Yang, 2014). Transformational leadership behaviors are important for principals to use in leading their school.

Leithwood (1994) provided an initial conceptualization of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership was an effective style of leadership to approach the restructuring of schools. Research on transformational leadership identified six leadership dimensions:

- Building school vision and goals
- Providing intellectual stimulation
- Offering individualized support
- Symbolizing professional practices and values
- Demonstrating high-performance expectations
- Developing structures to foster participation in school decision making (Leithwood, 1994, p. 38)

“The dimensions of leadership allow transformational leaders to shape a positive organizational culture by fostering collaboration and contributing to organizational effectiveness” (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 376). Using these six dimensions of leadership, principals seek to raise participants’ levels of commitment and to develop the collective capacity of the organization’s members.

In contrast, Yang (2014) found that principals who have transformational leadership qualities can be faced with challenges. Principals may be ignorant about problems that exist in the school, or they may not fully understand the roots of the problems. Another challenge Yang found in his research is the difficulty principals have analyzing relationships between problems. This has implications on attempting to solve the problem. Developing transformational



leadership is a process that takes time. Yang found that the process of transformational leadership is divided into three stages, which require time to develop. Transformational leadership improvement is based on building a shared vision, sharing power, and gaining credence among the school community. This improvement is contingent on the school community buying into the ideas (Yang, 2014). Despite these challenges, Yang found principals' transformational leadership is important to school improvement. Marks and Printy (2003) shared that even in transformational cultures where teachers contribute to leadership, principals have a central role in focusing on instruction. "When principals who are transformational leaders accept their instructional role and exercise it in collaboration with teachers, they practice an integrated form of leadership" (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 376). Transformational leadership is an appropriate style to address making changes in a school.

### **Instructional Leadership**

Instructional leadership is described as the behaviors demonstrated by principals that involve the planning, evaluation, coordination, and improvement of teaching and learning (Robinson, 2010). Initial conceptions of instructional leadership focused on the principal as the only instructional leader in the school. "By most accounts, the concept of instructional leadership emerged in the 1970s, when researchers began to study so-called *effective schools*—high poverty schools that were performing better than expected—and noted a common feature: Leaders focused on instruction....principals were instructional leaders" (Goodwin, 2019, p. 82). "Instructional leadership, developed during the effective schools movement of the 1980s, viewed the principal as the primary source of educational expertise" (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 372). In an effort to standardize effective instruction, the principal's role was to supervise classrooms, to

monitor student progress, and to coordinate curriculum. The roles and responsibilities of the school administrators have changed throughout the years. Kafka (2009) reported,

Being an effective building manager used to be good enough. For the past century, principals mostly were expected to comply with district-level edicts, address personnel issues, order supplies, balance program budgets, keep hallways and playgrounds safe, put out fires that threatened tranquil public relations, and make sure that busing and meal services were operating smoothly. And principals still need to do all those things. But now they must do more. (p. 319)

However, critics regarded this form of instructional leadership as overbearing and controlling, giving teachers little incentive to take an active role in improving schooling. “If teachers are committed and competent, traditional forms of instructional leadership are not appropriate in improving instruction” (Sergiovanni, 1991, p. 38). Hallinger (2005) reported that a new form of leadership was emerging. “This emphasis on instructional leadership was driven in large part by the effective schools’ movement of the 1970s and 1980s and has since been renewed because of increasing demands that school leaders be held accountable for student performance” (Hallinger, 2005, p. 2). Hallinger reported the focus on leadership development was born from the leadership academies of the 1980s in which instructional leadership was a focus strand. Murphy (1990) noted that principals practiced a conventional form of leadership by focusing “on four sets of activities: (a) developing the school mission and goals, (b) coordinating, monitoring, and evaluating curriculum and assessment, (c) promoting a culture for learning, and (d) creating a supportive work environment” (p. 223). Updating the traditional profile of instructional leadership, Marzano et al. (2005) conducted a meta-analysis on 70 empirical studies that identified 21 types of behavior called “responsibilities” as having a

positive correlation with student achievement. They found that effective principals recognize quality instruction because they are knowledgeable about the curriculum and can provide feedback to teachers to support teaching and learning in the classroom setting. “The instructional leader should ensure a learning environment that is orderly, serious, and focused on high but achievable academic goals” (Hoy & Hoy, 2013, p. 3).

Hallinger (2005) defined the role of instructional leader as someone who triangulates the school’s mission, fosters the positive school learning climate, and supervises the instructional programs. Horng and Loeb (2010) found awareness of instructional leadership led to changes in principal preparation programs. “Many new principal preparation and development programs emphasize the role of principals as instructional leaders” (Horng & Loeb, 2010, p. 66).

“Successful school leaders are no longer just building managers but are instructional leaders, focused on teaching, learning, and student achievement” (Neumerski, 2012, p. 318). School administrators’ roles are changing from managers to instructional leaders.

Significant changes in state policies made the need to prepare school leaders who can collect, analyze, use, and communicate data effectively to help teachers improve their practice, increase student achievement, and facilitate the continuous improvement of the school learning environment a program priority. (Vogel et al., 2014, p. 224)

Research conducted by MacNeill et al. (2003) also supports the concept of instructional leadership, but additionally, shows the need for the principal to be a pedagogical leader. “A pedagogically oriented approach to the principalship is essential” (MacNeill et al., 2003, p. 16).

According to MacNeill et al., pedagogical leadership is illustrated by the following:

- Commitment to a shared vision and sense of mission about student learning
- Application of expert knowledge about student learning and development

- Engagement and empowerment of teachers
- Creation and sharing of knowledge throughout the school
- Application of a re-culturing approach towards school improvement
- Emphasis on pedagogic rather than administrative functions by the principal (p.16)

Principals play a critical role in supporting teaching and learning (Ippolito & Fisher, 2019). “School leaders know that one of their most important responsibilities is to guide instruction so that all students develop rich literacies” (Ippolito & Fisher, 2019, p. 51). “The term instructional leader suggests a good deal of expertise in teaching and learning across grades and subjects, with the principal guiding professional learning work, acting as a decision-maker on curriculum issues, and coaching classroom teachers” (Ippolito & Fisher, 2019, p. 52). Principals, serving as instructional leaders, focus on promoting instruction in schools. “They’re [principals] 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. 37). Hattie found student learning is the priority of effective instructional leaders. “They [principals] relentlessly search out and interrogate evidence of that learning” (Hattie, 2015, p. 37). Hattie’s study found the effects gained by principals as instructional leaders yielded an effect size of  $d = .66$ , and the effect size of a transformational leadership role yielded an effect size of  $d = .36$  (Hattie, 2009). Instructional leaders focus on the work that impacts student learning. “Stated differently, the research now supports what practitioners have known for decades: powerful school leadership on the part of the principal has a positive effect on student achievement” (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, p. 48). The impact of the principal’s instructional leadership benefits student learning and student achievement.

As the terms instructional leadership and effective principals have become synonymous, models of instructional leadership began to develop in order to make tangible what effective principals do (Searby et al., 2016). Based on their comprehensive research study on instructional leadership, Seashore-Louis, Leithwood et al. (2010) found that exemplary principals developed a positive instructional climate and exhibited constructive instructional actions. Instructional climate describes the steps that principals take to create a culture in the building that promotes professional learning (Seashore-Louis, Leithwood et al., 2010). Instructional actions describe the ways in which principals interact with teachers regarding their instructional practices (Seashore-Louis, Leithwood, et al., 2010). In The Wallace Foundation's research on effective schools, Seashore-Louis, Leithwood, et al. (2010) reported actions that principals take fall into two categories; instructional climate which is defined as the steps principals take to create the culture in the school, and instructional actions, which is defined as the explicit steps that principals take to engage teachers in their own professional growth. Seashore-Louis, Leithwood et al. (2010) developed that research based on four core principal actions:

- a) Setting directions which consists of four practices: building a shared vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, creating high performance expectations, and communicating the direction. Collectively, it is intended to establish a focus on the work of members in an organization.
- b) Developing people which includes providing individualized support and consideration, offering intellectual stimulation, and modeling appropriate values and practices. These dispositions should build the capacity of the individuals in the organization so that they develop a sense of belonging and mastery.

- c) Redesigning the organization which contains four practices: building collaborative cultures, restructuring the organization to support collaboration, building productive relationships with families and communities, and connecting the school to the wider community. These are intended to create conditions for increased motivation and collective efficacy.
- d) Managing the instructional programs which include staffing the program, providing instructional support, monitoring school activity, buffering staff from distractions to their work, and aligning resources. This category has a specific focus on teaching and learning (p. 8-9).

Additionally, research by Fancera and Bliss (2011) stated that instructional leaders model instructional strategies by granting teachers time to observe colleagues who have high levels of self-efficacy and high-achieving students. “Research consistently finds that a high degree of trust between administrators and teachers is an essential ingredient in making successful schools tick” (Anrig, 2015, p. 32). “Effective principals recognized that improvement must be grounded in continuing efforts to build trust across the school community” (Anrig, 2015, p. 32). A continuous model of improvement requires trust between administrators and teachers.

### **Comprehensive Literacy Instruction**

In broad terms, “literacy is defined as the ability to engage with language to acquire, construct, and communicate meaning with and from others in daily life” (Zemelman et al., 2012, p. 3). Making and expressing meaning using language is a constructed system of communication influenced by society and one’s culture. The International Literacy Association (2019) defined literacy as, “The ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, compute, and communicate using visual, audible, and digital materials across disciplines and in any context” (p. 2). Gambrell

et al. (2015) stated evidence-based literacy practices include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Their research also stated that literacy instruction should be systematic, sequenced, and focused on students' strengths and needs using materials that are engaging and relevant to students' needs while continuously monitoring student achievement. In its 2019 Position Statement, the International Literacy Association advocated for excellent literacy instruction for all children through knowledgeable and qualified teachers and other literacy professionals, including principals.

In schools, most literacy acquisition is taught during the content subject of language arts. Gambrell et al. (2015) stated that comprehensive literacy instruction encompasses three reciprocal modes of communicating in which to build both expressive and receptive skills: speaking/listening, reading/writing, and viewing/representing. "In order for students to become independent, instruction should be provided to each student in his or her zone of proximal development" (Gambrell et al., 2015, p. 22). This allows students to be supported in moving from the unknown to the known with their literacy skills. Comprehensive literacy instruction involves appropriately targeted guided and individual instruction, as well as whole-class instruction. "Instruction that involves a gradual release of responsibility moves students toward continual improvement as literate beings who communicate effectively" (Gambrell et al., 2015, p. 22). Through their research, Gambrell et al. (2015) presented 10 evidenced-based best practices for comprehensive literacy instruction:

1. Create a classroom culture that nurtures literacy motivation by integrating choice, collaboration, and relevance into literacy tasks.
2. Provide students with scaffolded instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary to support the development of deep comprehension.

3. Provide students with opportunities to engage with texts across a wide range of narrative and informational genres.
4. Provide students with opportunities to engage in close reading for deep comprehension.
5. Provide students with literacy instruction using appropriately leveled texts to support the reading of increasingly complex materials.
6. Teach literacy within and across all content areas for authentic purposes.
7. Balance teacher-led and student-led discussions.
8. Use formative and summative assessments that reflect the complex and dynamic nature of literacy.
9. Promote literacy independence by providing time for self-selected reading and writing.
10. Integrate technologies that link and expand concepts and modes of communication (p.14).

These practices are based on a broad view of the reading and writing processes. Gambrell et al. (2015) stated that this broad view of the reading and writing processes should be characterized by meaningful literacy practices.

Routman (2018) stated that the goal of teaching reading is to help students become readers. Zemelman et al. (2012) identified best practices in teaching reading with a focus on meaning, reading aloud, interactions with print, reading volumes of text, phonics instruction, choice, vocabulary development, and wide reading. Zemelman et al. found that teachers need to increase effective reading practices such as reading good literature aloud to students, creating



more time for independent reading, giving students choice in their own reading materials, focusing on comprehension instruction, and teacher modeling of his own reading processes.

Reading opens opportunities for students to communicate in various ways, including speaking and writing (International Literacy Association, 2019). “Reading is seen by many as an essential ingredient in learning to write” (International Literacy Association, 2019, p. 3). Writing contributes to meaning-making, the application of phonics instruction, and enhances students’ comprehension. Zemelman et al. (2012) identified qualities of best practices in teaching writing. These instructional practices include writing for real purposes and audiences, giving students choice on their writing topics, guiding students through the writing process, modeling the craft of writing, and providing a space for students to share their writing with others. Reading and writing are reciprocal processes that contribute to literacy acquisition.

Despite what educators know about comprehensive literacy instruction, Gambrell et al. (2015) stated, “There is considerable evidence that a sizeable gap exists in literacy achievement between minority and nonminority students, economically disadvantaged students as compared to students from richer families, English language learners as compared to native English-speaking students, and students receiving special education services versus students in general education classrooms” (p. 143). Gambrell et al. stated, “National and international reports of achievement continue to reveal concerns about the literacy performance of U.S. students” (p. 143). Additionally, the NAEP long-term trend reports show 54% of students in Grades 8 and 12 performed at the basic level for writing in 2012 (NAEP, 2019). The same report showed that students in grade 4 had no significant increase in reading achievement between 2008 and 2012. The NAEP (2019) reported that 34% of fourth-grade students in the nation are performing at or above the NAEP Proficiency Level in reading achievement. These data reflect the challenges

teachers face in today's classrooms as well as the importance of providing evidence-based literacy instruction for all students.

### **Literacy Leadership Behaviors**

In their literacy leadership brief, the International Literacy Association (2019) indicated principals leading a learning culture produce a higher impact on student achievement when a culture of collective leadership and shared responsibility is present. "Reform and improvement efforts work best when principals collaborate with staff to develop collective agreements that are valued, visible, and provide direction to all members of the school community" (International Literacy Association, 2019, p. 3). Principals who establish learning-centered schools model engagement, vulnerability, and literacy learning, communicating to others that they do not have all the answers, but are eager to learn. "Principals are responsible for setting high literacy expectations and engaging colleagues in reflective conversations about instructional practices and student learning" (International Literacy Association, 2019, p. 3). In the literacy leadership brief, the authors made the plea that every child has the right to a literate life, one that allows him to read and write for a variety of purposes. This can be accomplished when principals enlist the collaboration and commitment of all stakeholders. "Processes that foster collective action are an important first step to improving student performance because individuals with different strengths and loyalties are united around a shared purpose" (International Literacy Association, 2019, p. 3). Research suggests that principals who embrace a collaborative leadership approach with staff develop shared agreements and definitions of literacy expectations and student performance goals.

Greenleaf et al. (2018) found "there has been a shift toward viewing effective literacy leadership as distributed and the charge to improve literacy learning as the shared responsibility

of collaborative teams” (p. 105). It is no longer the single responsibility of the principal to drive the efforts of improved literacy achievement in schools. Knox et al. (in press) stated, “This engagement will require ongoing capacity building among stakeholders at all levels as they collaborate in cycles of shared inquiry, evidence building, implementation, and refinement of new goals and approaches” (Knox, in press, as cited in Greenleaf et al., 2018, p. 105). Greenleaf et al. used fractals as a metaphor for collective leadership, stating “...fractals are by nature generative, recursive, and iterative constructs” (p. 105). Literacy learning and building system-wide capacity mirror the generative process due to the relationships between all stakeholders. Recursive and iterative patterns define the nature by which literacy practice and improvement should be distributed at all levels. “Rather than simply implementing a particular literacy program, leading literacy change requires distributed action on many levels in complex and interactive systems” (Greenleaf et al., 2018, p. 108). Collaborative leadership benefits teaching and learning.

Research by the International Literacy Association (2019) showed the principalship is no longer seen in the position of commander, but as a learner with the stakeholders who share the desire and responsibility of improving student outcomes. Collective leadership becomes more impactful as all stakeholders engage in cycles of shared inquiry through the PLC process. This way, stakeholders can work horizontally and vertically within the school to transform and sustain practices geared toward student achievement. “When principals foster community and equity among staff members, increased commitment toward initiatives occurs” (International Literacy Association, 2019, p. 3). Principals making a commitment to collaborative leadership leads to investment from teachers, parents, and community members, but most importantly, to the benefit of students’ literacy achievement.

## Collective Leadership

Principals cannot work alone for school-wide improvement (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). “Effective principals will not attempt to do it alone” (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, p. 48). “If principals want to improve student achievement in their schools, rather than focus on the individual inspection of *teaching*, they must focus on the collective analysis of evidence of student *learning*” (DuFour & Mattos, 2013, p. 36). “When more people are involved in leadership in a school, it’s easier to bring about change because there’s a broader base to support change efforts” (Stewart, 2013, p. 51). Leading this collective efficacy in schools is the role of the principal, who creates the structures needed for stakeholders who are connected by a shared vision and purpose to develop school-wide improvement. “Principals are the lead learners and chief architects of culture and instructional programs at their schools” (International Literacy Association, 2019, p. 12). Principals benefit from a collaborative team approach to impact student achievement.

In a report on principal leadership, Seashore-Louis et al. (2010) found a strong relationship between collaborative leadership and effective schools. The report identified collective leadership as a factor in schools that showed increases in learning outcomes. Seashore-Louis et al. stated, “The higher performance of these schools might be explained as a consequence of the greater access they have to collective knowledge and wisdom embedded within their communities” (p. 35). The report concluded, “When principals and teachers share leadership, teachers’ working relationships with one another are stronger and student achievement is higher” (Seashore-Louis, Leithwood et al., 2010, p. 282). Collaborative leadership benefits principals, teachers, and school communities.

In a case study done by Ezzani (2020) on principal and teacher instructional leadership, findings showed that a culture of shared decision-making between principals and teachers led to a responsive schooling environment. Ezzani states, “Findings suggested that problems of practice are solved when educators engage in a continuous culture of learning through authentic dialogue focused on student data with an eye on equity” (p. 63). Ezzani’s case study provided an example of how principals can build the capacity for leadership in teachers and also develop them to be instructional leaders. Ezzani’s (2020) research concluded with seven recommendations for collective principal and teacher instructional leadership:

- Utilize qualitative and quantitative data-informed decision making as the foundation for professional learning.
- Seek support from the school division to make time for weekly professional learning communities.
- Model instructional leadership skills for teachers such as instructional alignment of lessons and assessments.
- Utilize responsive teaching to differentiate student learning.
- Empower students in goal setting and help them become agents of their own learning through collaboration and student-led conferences.
- Engage parents in understanding how principals and teachers work together as an instructional team for the benefit of their students.
- Establish school-wide, grade level, teacher, and student goals and celebrate successes (Ezzani, 2020, p. 578).

Principals build the structures and culture for collective leadership and partnerships in a school. Sweeney and Mausbach (2019) reported that the principal isn’t the only leader in a

school; instructional coaches, teacher leaders, and assistant principals support a principal's goals for instructional improvement. "When a team of individuals shares the belief that through their unified efforts they can overcome challenges and produce intended results, groups *are* more effective" (Doonoho et al., 2018, p. 40). When school teams believe in their collective efforts, student outcomes are positively impacted. "When educators share a sense of collective efficacy, school cultures tend to be characterized by beliefs that reflect high expectations for student success" (Doonoho et al., 2018, p. 41). Fancera and Bliss (2011) found "collective teacher efficacy and instructional leadership were both positively related to school improvement" (p. 67). DeWitt's (2019) research provided a process to develop collective efficacy in a school. DeWitt stated that the work begins by co-constructing a goal with the team of educators who are responsible for implementing the goal. Next, DeWitt stated team members work collaboratively to examine and test solutions to the goal and to examine evidence of impact. If these strategies do not meet the identified goal, the collective efficacy process necessitates refining the ideas and trying again. When collective efficacy is present in a school, educators come together to problem-solve for student achievement. Doonoho et al. (2018) reported that the teachers' beliefs about the ability of the school as a whole have a positive correlation to student achievement across all areas of the school day. "By promoting a culture of collaboration focused on knowing thy collective impact, leaders have the potential to support school improvement in ways that positively influence teachers' collective efficacy beliefs and thus promote student achievement" (Doonoho et al., 2018, p. 43). School leaders can create an environment of collective efficacy through building school culture.

## **Professional Learning Communities**

DuFour and Mattos (2013) found that the process of groups working together in a professional learning community has the greatest impact on transforming instruction and improving student achievement. “The most powerful strategy for improving both teaching and learning, however, is not by micromanaging instruction but by creating the collaborative culture and collective responsibility of a professional learning community (PLC)” (DuFour & Mattos, 2013, p. 3). Anrig (2015) found that leadership focused on cultivating a learning community among parents, teachers, and community members fostered shared responsibility for the school’s improvement in test scores.

The powerful collaboration that characterizes professional learning communities is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. Teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement. (DuFour, 2004, p. 8)

A PLC engages itself as a collaborative team with a collective vision and shared leadership for implementing the strategies to improve students’ literacy achievement. “Working together to improve student achievement becomes the routine work of everyone in the school” (DuFour, 2004, p. 8). “Authentic PLCs spend the lion’s share of their time discussing and deciding the best way to teach concept X” (Venables, 2019, p. 37). Collaborative PLC teams work together to improve teaching and learning.

DuFour (2004) identified three big ideas which represent the core principles of PLCs. The first big idea is ensuring that students learn. This idea puts the focus on student learning, instead of on teaching. DuFour stated, “This simple shift- from a focus on teaching to a focus on

learning- has profound implications for schools” (p. 6). With this idea, teachers focus on identifying the practices that have been successful in helping all students achieve at high levels. “This big idea requires teachers to work together to identify answers to three crucial questions that drive the work of the PLC: (1) what do we want students to learn? (2) how will we know when each student has learned it? (3) how will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning” (DuFour, 2004, p. 7). In order to answer these questions, teachers must work collaboratively to build systematic strategies to focus on student learning. “If students experience difficulties in learning, the PLC develops a timely, strategic intervention to ensure the struggling students get help immediately” (DuFour, 2004, p. 7). These components of ensuring students learn put the focus on the students instead of on teaching.

The second big idea that grounds the work of a PLC is developing a culture of collaboration (DuFour, 2004). “Educators who are building a professional learning community recognize that they must work together to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all” (DuFour, 2004, p. 8). The result is developing structures that promote a collaborative culture. “In collaborative cultures, teachers exercise creative leadership together and take responsibility for helping all students learn” (Kohm & Nance, 2009, p. 67). Research by Kohm and Nance found that collaborative cultures increase a staff’s capacity to improve instruction. Their research shows that when teachers have opportunities to collaborate, creative thinking increases, and cynicism decreases. In collaborative cultures:

- Teachers support each other’s efforts to improve instruction.
- Teachers take responsibility for solving problems and accept the consequences of their actions.
- Teachers share ideas and ideas blossom, developing synergistic relationships.



- Teachers evaluate new ideas based on their shared goals that focus on student learning (p. 68).

Research by MacNeil et al. (2009) found that school cultures that focus on collaboration have better motivated teachers. They found that schools seeking to improve student performance should focus on the school's culture and on building relationships among the staff, students, and parents. DuFour's (2004) research found that when teachers work in teams and engage in ongoing cycles of questions that promote team learning while removing barriers to success, the result is high levels of student achievement.

The third big idea in the core work of a PLC is a focus on results (DuFour, 2004). This big idea is grounded in using data as a catalyst for improvement. Teachers in a PLC welcome data and use it as indicators of progress. Teams of teachers in a PLC build formative assessments to monitor each student's learning in order to create a plan that ensures students who struggle get more time and support for learning (DuFour & Mattos, 2013, p. 38). This allows teachers to focus on continuous improvement and results for students. Venable's (2019) research showed that with collaborative analysis of student artifacts, teachers can make data-driven decisions and determine if the student learned the concepts from the unit.

In this culture of collective responsibility and PLC work, the principal is seen as a member of the team. Principals flatten the hierarchy of leadership to become part of the learning team. "A highly effective principal will look for ways to align the process to a culture of collective responsibility for learner-focused outcomes" (DuFour & Mattos, 2013, p. 6). Teachers are experiencing the culture of collective learning within their teams and grade levels and with the administration.

Though these walls still exist in pockets of American public education, and in disturbingly disproportionate frequency in high schools, initiatives to break down isolation and boost collaboration- such as teacher teams, common planning periods, and PLCs- have become the norm most everywhere I am asked to visit. (Venable, 2019, p. 38)

“This transformation from a culture of isolation to a culture of collaboration will not occur in a school, however, without the effective leadership of the principal” (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, p. 63). A focus on learning is one of the intended outcomes of a PLC. “At a strategic level, the most critical responsibility for a focus on learning is to articulate, protect, and promote a tight, districtwide expectation that learning, not teaching, is the fundamental purpose of the school” (Van Clay et al., 2011, p. 29). Collaboration is key to impacting student learning.

### **Summary of Literature**

Reading and writing are reciprocal processes that support each other to make logical connections in literacy acquisition for students (Routman, 2018). Routman (2018) stated, “You can’t be a writer without being a reader, and extensive reading enhances reading comprehension and writing” (p. 169). Literacy and language skills are important for students to acquire in their school experiences. Providing comprehensive literacy instruction in today’s diverse classrooms requires teachers to be responsive to the individual needs of all learners (Gambrell et al., 2015). Moving students toward gathering life-long literacy skills is the goal of literacy instruction.

The principal is expected to impact student achievement in order to meet the demands of the federal and state accountability movements and initiatives. Improving student achievement requires strong leadership, using educational leadership theories, and knowledge of effective instructional practices. The literature presented in this review identifies the types of educational

leadership theories and instructional practices that are found to be effective. What is lacking in the literature is the application and use of the leadership theories combined with literacy leadership to support student achievement. Additionally, the literature does not contain information on how principals gain knowledge on best practices in literacy, nor does it contain information on the types of assigned activities that would benefit principals in becoming literacy leaders in their school buildings.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the leadership practices principals used to lead turnaround elementary schools to increase reading achievement scores. Principals' leadership practices are essential in efforts to improve schools and student learning (Grissom et al., 2021). A principal's leadership is more important than the effectiveness of a single teacher for the school. Principals and teachers were interviewed to identify perceptions of the principal's leadership practices on the successful turnaround of reading achievement scores as measured by the reading SOL achievement tests. The data from this study will contribute to the knowledge base of prioritizing essential leadership actions for literacy leadership.

### **Research Questions**

The questions for this research study were as follows:

1. What do elementary principals identify as the leadership practices they use to lead a turnaround school to increase reading achievement scores?
2. What do elementary teachers identify as the leadership practices principals use to lead a turnaround school to increase reading achievement scores?

### **Research Design – Methodology**

In order to identify the leadership practices that principals used to successfully lead turnaround elementary schools in increasing reading achievement scores, the research design methodology of this investigation entailed a basic qualitative research design. The purpose of qualitative research is to describe, understand, and interpret a situation through a constructivist approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research is conducted in an effort to understand how people make sense of their worlds, to describe how people interpret their experiences, and

to construct the meaning they attribute to their experiences.

This study was conducted in two phases. The first phase consisted of teacher interviews in order to gain their perspectives of the practices the principal used in leading the school to higher reading achievement scores. An interview protocol consisting of one question was used to collect qualitative data from each participating teacher. The questions were constructed to allow for open-ended responses. The second phase involved individual interviews with the principals of each school using an interview protocol consisting of one question. All interviews were recorded using the Zoom platform which transcribed the responses.

### **Research Design/Justification**

A basic qualitative research study was conducted to gather the necessary data for the study. Basic qualitative research is the most common type of interpretive study. The design is centered around a social constructivism perspective. Constructivism relies on the participants' interpretations of the situation being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data were collected through a researcher's interviews, observations, and document analysis. Data were analyzed to identify recurring patterns or trends, and interpretation was based on the researcher's perspective and the data collected.

The research study included open-ended questions, which is a central tenant to a basic qualitative research design. Open-ended questions allowed the respondents to construct reality with their social world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The open-ended questions in my interview allowed me to gain the respondents' perceptions of the principals' practices that supported the turnaround of the reading achievement scores in the selected elementary schools. The open-ended questions allowed the participants to elaborate on their responses and enabled the researcher to probe with clarifying questions to ensure a full understanding of the construction of

meaning and respondents' experiences. Basic qualitative research enabled the researcher to identify recurring patterns that characterize the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This was important because it permitted the researcher to identify the recurring leadership practices that principals used to successfully turn around reading achievement scores. The primary goal of a basic qualitative study is to discover how meaning is constructed and how to interpret these meanings.

### **Needed Data**

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. A research interview is a process in which the researcher and participants will engage in a conversation related to the research study. The semi-structured interview allows for a more conversational tone with flexibility for the researcher to ask clarifying questions. The researcher wanted to learn more about the leadership practices and behaviors of successful turnaround principals in relation to reading achievement scores. Interviews were conducted with principals and teachers to understand their perspectives on the leadership practices used to increase reading achievement scores. Since the researcher cannot observe the leadership practices that principals used in the past, interviewing principals and teachers enabled the researcher to gather the data to understand the behaviors the principals used to increase reading achievement scores. The data collected allowed the researcher to align these findings with transformational, instructional, and literacy leadership practices.

### **Site/Sample Selection**

This study was conducted in one central Virginia school division. A purposeful sampling method was used to choose the site. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated, "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 96). Criterion-based

sampling required the researcher to decide which attributes of the sample were important to the study. Then, the researcher sought participants who met the criteria for the study. The criteria for this study were schools who did not meet accreditation standards through the VDOE, but now have successfully turned around their reading achievement scores and are accredited. This site was selected because two elementary schools were in warning with the VDOE due to their SOL reading achievement scores. In the years from 2014-2016, both schools successfully increased their achievement scores on the reading SOL test in two years and came out of warning with the VDOE.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The researcher completed the required CITI training for Social and Behavioral Research (Appendix A). After the successful completion of the prospectus defense, the researcher sought the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix B) to conduct the study. Upon receiving IRB approval, the researcher wrote a letter to each participant asking for permission to interview him or her (Appendix C). A copy of the interview questions (Appendix D), along with a statement of consent (Appendix E), was shared with participants before the actual interview, and participants were polled for convenient interview time choices.

The research involved virtual, one on one semi-structured interviews with elementary principals and teachers. The semi-structured interview format allows for a conversational tone and allows the researcher to ask clarifying questions if necessary. Participants received the questions before the interviews. Participants were asked to describe their perspectives of the leadership practices used by the principal to increase reading achievement scores. Pseudonyms were given to each participant who agreed to participate in the study.

## **Data Gathering Procedures**

Individual interviews with participants were conducted via Zoom, a web conferencing technology tool. Zoom enabled the researcher to conduct synchronous interviews and allowed the researcher to build rapport with participants, an important characteristic of qualitative interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Zoom allowed the researcher to video record and transcribe the interviews ensuring that responses were not misinterpreted. Consent to record the interviews using Zoom was obtained from the participants prior to the interviews. The researcher also audio recorded the interviews using a small tape recorder in case of internet connectivity issues.

The researcher provided the interview questions to the participants prior to conducting the interviews. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher made the transcriptions available to the participants to solicit feedback, which Merriam and Tisdell (2016) referred to as respondent validation. The purpose of respondent validation is to verify the intent and accuracy of responses by the participants.

## **Instrument Design**

The interview instrument was designed by the researcher. The interview questions were a mix of more and less structured interview questions to follow the semi-structured interview format (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Semi-structured interviews enabled the questions to be used flexibly. The researcher designed the interview questions around the researcher's two research questions. Table 2 displays the research questions and the interview questions.



**Table 2**

*Alignment of Research Questions to Interview Questions*

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
	<i>Principal Interviews</i>
1. What do elementary principals identify as the leadership practices they use to lead a turnaround school to increase reading achievement scores?	Describe the practices you put in place that made an impact on turning around the SOL reading achievement scores in your school.
	<i>Teacher Interviews</i>
2. What do elementary teachers identify as the leadership practices principals use to lead a turnaround school to increase reading achievement scores?	What practices did your principal put into place that made an impact on turning around the SOL reading achievement scores in your school?

Additionally, the interview questions were aligned with the researcher’s conceptual framework. The interview questions were developed to understand the leadership practices that principals use to successfully lead turnaround elementary schools to increase reading achievement scores. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated the way in which questions are worded is important. Questions need to be asked in familiar language, similar to the respondent’s worldview, free from technical jargon. This will improve the quality of data obtained during the interview. The interview questions for each research question were developed based on Merriam and Tisdell’s suggestion that open-ended questions led to more robust answers as the interviewee’s answers would not be confined by the question. The interview questions were vetted and validated by principals and teachers in the researcher’s school division, which was not used as a sample site in the study. The researcher met face to face with three principals and four teachers and asked the research questions to ensure reliability and validity to the process and the

research questions. Suggestions from the teachers and principals assisted the researcher to make revisions as needed.

### **Instrument Validation and Reliability**

Qualitative researchers are concerned with the data's trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Trustworthiness concerns are related to reliability and validity in qualitative research. Merriam and Tisdell stated, "Validity and reliability are addressed in the way data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted and the way in which findings are presented" (p. 238). Internal validity focuses on whether the research matches reality and how people have made meaning, or how they understand certain processes. Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p. 213) share questions researchers should ask to ensure validity: "1) How congruent are the findings with reality? 2) Do the findings capture what is really there? and 3) Are the investigators observing or measuring what they think they are measuring"?

Reliability refers to the degree to which research findings can be reproduced under the same conditions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016); however, in social sciences, reliability is questionable because human behavior is not static, nor is what they experience, therefore "replication of a qualitative study will not yield the same results" (p. 215). Notwithstanding, Merriam and Tisdell state, "This does not discredit the results of a particular study and there can be numerous interpretations of the same data" (p. 215).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested the use of triangulation to strengthen internal validity and reliability. The researcher kept a reflexive journal with details about the process and steps the researcher took throughout the research study. Another strategy to ensure validity and reliability was member checks where the researcher took the analysis back to several of the participants to ask their interpretation. Respondents should be able to recognize their perspective

in their interpretation of the data. Harding (2019) suggested after writing the findings, researchers should go back and read through the data again to look for evidence that does not fit with their explanation.

The instrument used in this study was vetted by three principals and four teachers who were not included in the site sample. The researcher met with each educator one on one in a private setting and the research questions were asked while the researcher took notes. Opportunities for feedback were given to each educator through discussion. Feedback was carefully considered and changes to questions were made as necessary. Attempts were made to provide the most reliable instrument possible, considering potential limitations and delimitations to the study.

### **Data Treatment**

The researcher assigned a pseudonym to each participant to maintain anonymity. Principals were assigned P1 and P2 as the identifying notation. Similarly, teachers were assigned T1-1, T2-1, etc. as an identifying notation. Additionally, school divisions where the research was conducted received a pseudonym. The researcher created a comprehensive inventory of the entire data set which was stored on the researcher's password-protected personal computer.

### **Data Management**

The researcher used the Zoom platform to conduct individual interviews. Zoom provided a transcription of each interview and was stored on the researcher's personal computer, which is password protected. The researcher also used a small tape recorder as a backup to the Zoom meeting. The data was saved electronically by the researcher including a stored USB drive, tape recording, and the researcher's password-protected personal computer. The USB drive and the tape recording were stored in a locked desk in the researcher's home. The researcher's Virginia

Tech Google Drive managed electronic folders with stored data. A Google Sheets spreadsheet was created with each participant's responses aligned to the interview questions. This permitted the researcher to filter data to sort and filter responses. As indicated in the IRB protocol, the researcher will keep all data and analyses for three years after the study and the dissertation defense have been completed. Electronic data and electronic consent forms will be destroyed through overwrite data software.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

The goal of data analysis was to make meaning of what the participants stated during the interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Basically, data analysis is the process used to answer the research questions posed in the study. Data analysis is a complex process that requires the researcher to use inductive and deductive reasoning between description and interpretation of the data. These meanings compose the findings of the study.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested analyzing the data simultaneously while collecting it. After the first interview, the researcher read the transcriptions, field notes, and documents, making annotations in the margins. When the interviews were completed, the researcher used the qualitative results to look for trends and make conclusions about the leadership practices principals used to lead a turnaround elementary school in reading achievement. Open coding was used with the first set of interview transcripts which allowed the researcher to use any phrase or word that was useful data. The researcher assigned codes to pieces of data in order to construct categories. Constructing categories or themes allowed the researcher to organize and construct key findings.

## **Timeline**

After the successful completion of the prospectus defense, Virginia Tech IRB paperwork was submitted. Upon receiving IRB approval, the researcher contacted the elementary principals and elementary teachers via a letter (Appendix C) in August to create the interview appointments. Principal and teacher interviews were conducted in September through November 2021. The analysis of the data was completed by the end of January 2022.

## **Summary of Methodology**

This research study utilized a basic qualitative design to gather the perspectives of the research participants. The interview instrument was designed by the researcher and validated by the researcher's administrators in the school division where the researcher works. Data was gathered from principals and teachers regarding the leadership practices used by principals in successful turnaround elementary schools using the interview protocol developed by the researcher. Interviews were conducted through Zoom which created a transcription of the interview. The researcher looked for common themes during the coding process. The data were stored in multiple locations using several different pieces of technology. Throughout the study, steps were taken to validate the study and to protect the confidentiality of participants. The results of the data received are analyzed and discussed in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4: Analysis of Data

In 2019, the Nation's Report Card reported only 38% of students in fourth grade in the United States performed at or above the proficient level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP; 2019) reading assessment. Additionally, 43% of students in fourth grade in Virginia's public schools performed at or above the proficient level in reading in 2017. The Scholastic's (2019) *Kids and Family Reading Report* revealed 31% of students from ages 6-17 years old viewed themselves as a fluent reader. In this same report, 19% of nine-year-old students report reading books for pleasure as extremely important. These data show a crisis in reading. A large portion of students in schools do not read at grade level proficiently, nor do they view themselves as readers.

Due to changes in educational policy, the principalship requires principals to be more than building managers (Gulcan, 2012). The principal is now considered an instructional leader, influencing student achievement by creating a positive learning environment, monitoring student achievement data, observing and evaluating teachers, and supporting teachers' implementation of instructional resources (Dhuey & Smith, 2014). Dhuey and Smith stated, "An elementary principal's role in influencing quality reading instruction measures high in impacting a child's educational experience" (p. 22).

The purpose of this study was to identify the leadership practices that principals used to lead turnaround elementary schools to increase reading achievement scores. As reading achievement scores decline, effective principals are proactive and responsive to the reading data. This study included semi-structured interviews conducted over Zoom with two principals and four teachers from elementary schools in a suburban school district in central Virginia.

## **Study Results**

To explore the leadership practices of elementary turnaround principals, the methodology of this study was a qualitative, phenomenological design. The experiences of principals and teachers were researched and analyzed. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated, “to get at the essence or basic underlying structure of the meaning of an experience, the phenomenological interview is the primary method of data collection” (p. 27). This approach allowed the researcher to describe, interpret, and understand the multiple perspectives of educators from turnaround schools.

The researcher developed interview questions to answer the following research questions:

1. What do elementary principals identify as the leadership practices they use to lead a turnaround school to increase reading achievement scores?
2. What do elementary teachers identify as the leadership practices principals use to lead a turnaround school to increase reading achievement scores?

## **Data Analysis**

The interviews were conducted through the researcher’s password-protected Virginia Tech Zoom account. After transcription, the data were organized and coded into themes which were also stored on the researcher’s password-protected Virginia Tech Google Drive, which was accessible only to the researcher. Participant responses were organized by question allowing for thorough data analysis after the interviews were completed. The researcher began “the process of data analysis by identifying segments of the data that were specific responses to the research questions” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 32). The researcher open-coded each transcript by writing “notes, comments, observations, and queries in the margins” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 32). The researcher also consulted her reflexive journal’s notes kept during the research process. The units of data were organized by research questions and broken down by the

interview questions. The analysis of data (Creswell et al., 2013) was conducted by analyzing and coding with the purpose of identifying themes that may present findings related to leadership practices of principals in turnaround schools. The use of bold text helped to highlight statements that allowed the researcher to pay attention to “recurring regularities in the data and to assign the units into themes or categories” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 203). In order to identify the categories, the researcher used the study’s purpose, the literature review, and the meanings made by the study participants. The goals of the researcher were “to arrive at structural descriptions” (p. 227) of the participants’ experiences and to identify the “underlying and precipitating factors” (p. 227) that describe participants’ experiences so interpretations could be made based on the research questions of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Participant Codes**

Codes were assigned to participants and schools when coding and reviewing the themes of the data to maintain confidentiality. Codes were assigned to represent the following:

- P1 refers to Principal 1 at Elementary School 1 (ES1)
- P2 refers to Principal 2 at Elementary School 2 (ES2)
- T1-1 refers to Teacher 1
- T1-2 refers to Teacher 2
- T2-1 refers to Teacher 3
- T2-2 refers to Teacher 4

P1 was a principal for nine years before being named principal at ES1. ES1 was in its third year as a focus school with the VDOE when P1 became the principal at ES1. He was the principal at ES1 for two years. When P1 left the school, the SOL reading achievement scores increased by 11 points in the two years he was principal and the school was no longer a focus



school with the VDOE. Teacher 1-1 and Teacher 1-2 were teachers at ES1 with P1. Teacher 1-1 was a fourth-grade teacher during the time she was at ES1. Teacher 1-2 was a fifth-grade teacher during the time she was at ES1.

P2 was the principal at ES 2 for two years. ES2 was in its third year as a focus school with the VDOE when P2 became the principal. Standards of Learning reading achievement scores increased by nine points while P2 was the principal at ES2. This gain allowed them to no longer be a focus school with the VDOE. Teacher 2-1 and Teacher 2-2 were teachers in the elementary school with Principal 2 (P2). Teacher 2-1 was a third-grade teacher at ES2 with P2. Teacher 2-2 was a reading coach at ES2.

### **Research Question 1**

**What do elementary principals identify as the leadership practices they used to lead a turnaround school to increase reading achievement scores?** The following interview question corresponds to Research Question 1: Describe the practices you put in place that made an impact on turning around the SOL reading achievement scores in your school.

Four themes emerged from the principals' responses to Interview Question 1. The identified themes were:

- Culture and Climate
- Discipline and Behavior
- Instructional Practices
- Monitoring and Accountability

### *Culture and Climate: Theme 1 of 4 from Principals' Responses*

Principal 1 (P1) reported building the school's culture and climate through a variety of practices. P1 communicated that when he came to the school, he conducted multiple faculty meetings and parent meetings where he shared the school's achievement rates from previous years' reading SOL scores. P1 reported he built a sense of urgency by being honest and transparent about the school's data and where the school ranked in the county and in the state. He stated that he asked parents to trust him because "there's going to be certain things that we're going to change in our processes and procedures" (P1, 1171-172). He stated during the interview, "what we tried to do too is not lower the expectation level because of what you got going on at home" (P1, 1281). P1 reported that he established high expectations for all kids, regardless of where they lived or what their home situation looked like.

Additionally, to build the culture and climate in the building, P1 reported that he changed the expectations for the level of respect in the school. He reported that he expected respect to be reciprocated between teachers and parents and between teachers and students. He stated, "Changing the expectation, changing their respect level, changing, and not just the respect level teachers were giving kids, but the respect level that parents were giving teachers" (P1, 1286). P1 shared that building respect for students and teachers was an integral part of building the culture in the school.

Finally, P1 reported that he shared clear expectations for his vision of the school with teachers. He stated his vision was for the students with the highest need to be in the smallest group with the most experienced teacher. "I worked with them for an extensive amount of time explaining what my vision was" (P, 155). P1 described his vision as student-centered; keeping the focus on student achievement drove all the decisions made in the school.

P2 reported that she also shared clear expectations of her vision for the school. She indicated that she made commitments to continuous professional learning through PLCs. She developed a professional learning calendar of the focus for professional learning every week. P2 stated she “put in writing why we are doing something because those helped to establish our core commitments” (P2, /58). P2 reported that she balanced building culture while establishing good curricular practices.

P2 reported that developing a standardized communication and organizational process helped teachers understand the expectations of them and of how the school will operate. “Developing a process for communication helped every teacher know the expectations” (P2, /87). P2 shared the current reality of the data with the teachers, including the data with student reporting categories. Finally, P2 shared that she built teacher leadership. She stated that “when you grow a teacher, you grow a leader” (P2, /124). P2’s clear expectations contributed to building a positive learning culture in the school building. Table 3 displays the leadership practices relating to the culture and climate theme mentioned by principal participants.

**Table 3***Research Question 1 – Culture and Climate Theme with Corresponding Principal Responses*

<b>Data Unit</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>
Establish high expectations for all students	X	
Developed a standardized communication process		X
Shared clear expectations of principal’s vision	X	X
Established reciprocal respect	X	
Built a sense of urgency	X	
Built teacher leadership and collective efficacy		X
Built culture while establishing good curricular practices		X
Shared current data	X	X

*Discipline and Behavior: Theme 2 of 4 from Principals’ Responses*

The second theme that emerged from Research Question 1 was discipline and behavior. P1 reported that the year before he came to the school, the former administration had suspended 45 students in one year. During his first year as principal, P1 shared that his goal was to build relationships with troubled students. He indicated that building relationships with students helped the students to trust him. P1 stated, “I built really great relationships with so many kids there. I would sit down and we talked for 10 minutes, a lot of times they just had something at home that was just, something that they were just stressed about or something, and if we would talk and then they would be good” (P1, 1232-234). After his first year as principal, P1 shared that he only needed to suspend five students throughout the year, and at the end of his second year at the school, only one student needed a suspension. P1 also described that student behaviors decreased when they experienced a consistent schedule and structure in the classroom, which he described as, “Just making sure there was structure in the classrooms so students knew exactly what they

were being asked to do and for how long they needed to do something” (P1, 1102-103).

Additionally, P1 described getting students to school as important. He indicated that if students aren’t in school, they can’t learn, so by building relationships with students, they wanted to come to school.

Similar to P1, P2 shared that she focused on discipline when she first came to the school as principal. She developed a process for discipline which decreased the number of student suspensions during the year. P2 implemented the Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) program, which she believed gave structure to expectations for student behaviors. For example, using the PBIS program, the school redefined voice levels in the building by using 0, 1, 2, 3 indicators for voice levels. She stated, “Modeling the behaviors and expectations by teachers helped the students see and understand how they should be interacting in the classroom” (P2, 152). P2 described that the teachers embraced the PBIS program as they were ready for a change to decrease the number of behavior issues and the number of suspensions. For a summary of the responses relating to the leadership practices in the discipline and behavior theme refer to Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Research Question 1 – Discipline and Behavior Theme with Corresponding Principal Responses*

<b>Data Unit</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>
Built relationships with troubled students	X	
Got students to school every day	X	
Focused on discipline	X	X
Reduced the number of suspensions	X	X
Implemented PBIS program		X
Developed a process for discipline		X

### ***Instructional Practices: Theme 3 of 4 from Principals' Responses***

The third theme that emerged from the principals' interviews was instructional practices. P1 reported that he required teachers in the school to develop a deep understanding of the state reading standards. He shared that teachers followed the standards and developed multiple approaches to teaching the standards so the instruction was accessible to all students. P1 expressed that teachers developed differentiated lessons that focused on specific skill areas of the standards, so the learning the students were doing was appropriate to their skill level. He shared that the skill from the whole group was the skill taught in the small group, but it was differentiated to the students' skill level. P1 stated, "The work the students were doing was appropriate for their skill level, like teachers developed three or four different cause and effect lessons so the teachers were teaching students where they were in their learning" (P1, 150). P1 shared that adhering to state standards for instruction was a large part of the school's success in transforming student achievement scores.

P1 reported that he became knowledgeable about the reading process. He shared that he met with reading experts at a local university so he could understand a state assessment that students in grades Kindergarten through second grade are required to take in the Commonwealth of Virginia. P1 stated that in order for him to be one of the instructional leaders in the school, he had to be knowledgeable about the reading process so he could better understand the state standards for reading. He reported he wanted to have instructional conversations with the teachers in the school so he had to build his knowledge around the data from reading assessments. He also reported that a close family member is a reading specialist, so he would ask that person questions to build his knowledge to support struggling readers in the school. P1 stated, "Once I began to understand (the reading process), I began to help our teachers

understand it, and then we started in Kindergarten developing groups after the PALS test” (P1, /344-345). P1 recounted that understanding the reading process helped him lead the building in making positive instructional changes that impacted student achievement.

Another leadership practice that P1 used was small group instruction. He created instructional groups with small numbers of students. Students with the highest learning needs were placed in a small group and were taught by the most experienced, qualified teachers. Special education teachers, reading specialists, and English teachers of second languages (ESOL) taught students whose deficits matched the teachers’ instructional expertise area. P1 communicated, “Thinking about it pretty simply, the students with the highest need should be in the small group with the most experienced teacher, so students received a very personalized level of instruction” (P1, /56). P1 reported that some students joined three or four small groups for their instruction throughout the day.

In addition to small group instruction, teachers worked closely with the school’s reading coach. P1 noted that he put in a process for instructional coaching to occur during grade-level meetings and PLC meetings. P1 shared that teachers were continuously learning about reading practices in their PLC meetings. The reading coach incorporated professional learning while simultaneously reviewing student data so teachers developed their instructional expertise around reading instruction during grade-level PLC meetings. The reading coach helped teachers develop differentiated lessons around the standard so teachers instructed the students at their skill level. The reading coach worked in the classrooms with the teachers during small group time. P1 recounted, “We really focused on setting the master schedule so that we could fine-tune when our specialists and coaches could be in the classrooms with teachers and students” (P1, /58-59). P1 also reported that the reading coach helped teachers develop activities that students could do

when they were working independently while the teacher was with other students in a small group setting. P1 shared that the classroom teachers gained valuable knowledge from working with the reading coach in the classroom and during PLC time.

Similarly, P2 put in a process for literacy coaching during grade-level PLC meetings and grade-level planning meetings. Working together, the school's reading coach and P2 developed a professional learning calendar that set the tone for the meetings so teachers could come prepared with their students' data. Teachers attended weekly meetings with the reading coach where the focus was on understanding the state standards and planning lessons using the standards and core curriculum. P2 stated, "We developed a process for understanding the standards, what they look like and sound like in a classroom, and maintained a commitment to teaching the power standards" (P2, 117-18). During their PLC meetings, teachers and the reading coach looked at benchmark and formative assessment data which allowed teachers to set goals for where they needed to instruct their students and what the students needed to be able to do to move forward in their learning. P2 shared that the school got rid of commercially published reading programs and built teacher capacity and teacher collective efficacy through continuous professional learning about strong core instruction during their PLC meetings and during coaching sessions. "By maintaining a commitment to continuous professional learning, teachers knew their grade-level standards which allowed them to develop lessons around the power standards which led to student achievement" (P2, 122). P2 communicated that the PLC meetings with the reading coach helped teachers build their instructional knowledge to develop a deep understanding of the core curriculum.

P2 said that because teachers' capacity to understand and design lessons around the standards was built, this allowed them to differentiate instruction to meet the varied needs of



students in the classroom. She reported that teachers differentiated and targeted instruction to meet the learning needs of all students. This allowed P2 to build inclusive classrooms for special education students to stay in the general education setting for instruction. P2 expressed, “Through differentiated instruction, all students, including the students in special education, had their learning needs met” (P2, 138). P2 articulated that because teachers’ instructional capacity was strengthened, students’ varied learning needs were met through the core curriculum.

P2 also reported that becoming knowledgeable about the reading process helped her. She shared that she attended all the PLC meetings and grade-level planning meetings with the reading coach so that she could learn alongside the teachers. P2 stated that understanding good curricular practices helped her to become one of the literacy leaders in the school. P2 expressed, “Learning about the state reading standards and how those should be taught in the classroom helped me to know what to look for when doing classroom observations and having conversations with teachers around their students’ data during data meetings” (P2, 164). P2 added that doing her own professional reading contributed to her knowledge base of the reading process. For a summary of the responses relating to leadership practices in the instructional practices theme refer to Table 5.

**Table 5***Research Question 1 – Instructional Practices Theme with Corresponding Principal Responses*

<b>Data Unit</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>
Adherence to teaching state standards	X	X
Differentiated instruction	X	X
Built knowledge about reading process	X	X
Small group instruction	X	
Process for instructional coaching	X	X
Implemented PLC meetings	X	X

***Monitoring and Accountability: Theme 4 of 4 from Principals' Responses***

The final theme to emerge from the principal responses to Research Question 1 is monitoring and accountability. P1 reported that he developed a very specific master instructional schedule for the school with time allocations for whole group instruction and small group instruction for each teacher. P1 said, "...ultimately, the master schedule drove everything. We got to a point where everyone just depended on that master schedule so much" (P1, 189, 97). He stated that the master schedule staggered whole group instruction and small group instruction so support teachers such as reading specialists, the reading coach, ESOL teachers, and Special Education teachers could push into each classroom to work with students and support the teacher when appropriate. P1 stated that teachers were required to stay on time with their schedule because the support teachers would transition in and out of the classroom during that specific time. P1 shared, "I want my reading teacher, my special education teachers, my ESOL teacher, I want those people in the room, doing the instruction" (P1, 187). P1 reported that developing a cohesive master schedule was part of what supported strong instruction by the teachers.

Another leadership practice that P1 reported under the theme of monitoring and

accountability was continuously monitoring student data, including reporting category student groups such as special education, African-American, and English language learners. He stated that they looked at student performance data during their weekly PLC meetings. P1 shared that he developed data spreadsheets that helped teachers understand their students' performance data so they could use it to impact their planning and instruction of lessons. P1 reported, "...it was really a lot of late nights, a lot of long hours, a lot of digging through spreadsheets and, but it was awesome" (P1, /213). P1 attributed monitoring student data as one leadership practice he used to support the success of turning around the reading SOL scores in the school.

In the same way that P1 built a specific master schedule, P2 also built a specific master schedule but for a different purpose. P2 reported that she built her master schedule with planning time allocated for teachers to meet with the reading coach and the reading specialists. "During this time," P2 communicated, "teachers would meet weekly with the reading experts to unpack standards, write learning intentions and success criteria, look at student performance data, and create lessons for whole group and small group instruction" (P2, /48). P2 stated that developing a master schedule with planning time built in so teachers could get weekly support from the reading coach and reading specialists was crucial to building teacher capacity for instructional purposes.

P2 reported that she and her reading team had regular data meetings with teachers. Teachers were expected to come to the data meetings prepared to discuss their student performance data and if teachers were not prepared, she would shut the meeting down. She indicated that this helped teachers understand the importance of progress monitoring of student achievement and using that information to make future instructional decisions. "We held true to looking at our current reality of what the data was showing us," P2 recounted (P2, /56). P2 said

that continuously monitoring data, including student reporting categories, is one practice she implemented that made an impact on student achievement. Table 6 provides the leadership practices relating to the monitoring and accountability theme mentioned by principal participants.

**Table 6**

*Research Question 1 – Monitoring and Accountability Theme with Corresponding Principal Responses*

<b>Data Unit</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>
Developed a cohesive master schedule	X	X
Whole/small group time allocation in schedule	X	
Specialized teachers pushing into classroom	X	
Monitoring student data	X	X
Planning time with reading experts		X

**Research Question 2**

**What do elementary teachers identify as the leadership practices principals used to lead a turnaround school to increase reading achievement scores?** The following interview question corresponds to Research Question 2: What practices did your principal put into place that made an impact on turning around the SOL reading achievement scores in your school?

Three themes emerged from the teachers’ responses to Interview Question 1. The identified themes were:

- Culture and Climate
- Instructional Practices
- Monitoring and Accountability

### *Culture and Climate: Theme 1 of 3 from Teachers' Responses*

Teacher 1-1 (T1-1) and Teacher 1-2 (T1-2) reported P1 used a variety of practices to build the school's culture and climate. Both T1-1 and T1-2 shared that when P1 came to the school, he built a sense of urgency by showing the staff the school's current student achievement data. Through looking at the current data, teachers knew that changes in the school were needed. T1-1 communicated that P1 shared his vision for the school and shared with the teachers why changes were necessary. T1-1 stated, "P1 came into our first faculty meeting and said that it does not matter that we are a Title One school, what our percent of ESOL numbers are, this is our school, these are the numbers that we have to look at, look at where we are" (T1-1, /58). T1-1 and T1-2 articulated that by P1 building a sense of urgency by showing the data and explaining his vision for the school, it helped in changing the school's culture.

A second practice that T1-1 reported that P1 used to change the school's culture was he recognized the hard work that teachers were putting into their classrooms, into their planning, and into their instruction. She said that P1 often gave verbal affirmations to teachers when he saw them putting extra time and effort into their classroom practices. She stated, "P1 would give a verbal affirmation of hey, I see what you're doing, I see your kids, I see the growth happening, I see it in a spreadsheet, but I see it in the hallway, I see it in the cafeteria, I see the change developing" (T1-1, /76). T1-1 expressed that P1 was constantly recognizing the improvements happening which helped to set a positive climate in the school and a positive belief in the teachers.

T1-2 reported that P1 was a strong relationship builder with teachers, students, and families. T1-2 shared that by building relationships, the climate in the building shifted from negative to positive. T1-2 described how P1 would eat lunch in the cafeteria with the students so

he could talk with them and get to know them better. She shared how P1 would also be outside in the morning when parents dropped their children off at school and he would chat with parents so he could establish a positive relationship with them. T1-2 stated that P1 was a well-loved principal. T1-2 said, “We loved that man and probably any of us would have done anything for him” (T1-2, /37). Through building positive relationships, T1-2 reported that P1 changed the culture in the school, which resulted in teachers and students wanting to be there.

Additionally, T1-1 and T1-2 communicated that P1 was not a micromanager of how teachers operated in the school. She reported that P1 honored teachers’ time in the building by ensuring their time was spent on valuable practices like planning instruction and not sitting in faculty meetings. T1-2 shared that if the information could be communicated in an email, he would put it in an email instead of having faculty meetings so teachers could spend more time planning lessons or looking at student data. She noted that P1 trusted the teachers to make the best use of their time, which resulted in teachers’ appreciation for P1’s vision and culture-building practices.

Similar to T1-1 and T1-2, Teacher 2-1 (T2-1) and Teacher 2-2 (T2-2) reported that building the school’s culture and climate was a practice used by P2 in turning around the SOL reading achievement scores at the school. Teachers 2-1 and 2-2 shared that P2 established a clear vision for the school. T2-1 reported that P2 shared her vision of the school from the first day she began as the principal, which included a sense of urgency to make changes in the way the school operated. T2-1 also said that P2 put structures in place to ensure the focus was on teaching and learning. T2-1 stated, “P2 developed a clear communication process so everyone knew what the expectations were. That helped teachers know what her expectations were and how we were

expected to operate in the building” (T2-1, 140). Establishing a clear vision for the school was one leadership practice P2 used to help build a positive culture and climate in the building.

T2-2 shared that P2’s vision for the school included getting teacher input when making decisions that impacted the school. T2-2 communicated that P2 developed the leadership team to include teacher leaders so their input could be included with decision-making. T2-2 reported, “P2 involved teachers and got their input and contributions with decision making” (T2-2, 147). T2-2 expressed that getting teachers involved helped them to trust P2 and the other members of the leadership team. Table 7 provides the leadership practices relating to the culture and climate theme as shared by teacher participants.

**Table 7**

*Research Question 2 – Culture and Climate Theme with Corresponding Teacher Responses*

<b>Data Unit</b>	<b>T1-1</b>	<b>T1-2</b>	<b>T2-1</b>	<b>T2-2</b>
Built a sense of urgency	X	X	X	X
Verbal recognitions to teachers	X			
Build relationships with teachers/students		X		
Honored teachers’ time	X	X		
Developed a standardized communication and organizational process			X	
Shared clear expectations of principal’s vision	X	X	X	X
Built teacher leadership with decision making				X
Shared student data	X			X

***Instructional Practices: Theme 2 of 3 from Teachers’ Responses***

The second theme to emerge from Research Question 2 was instructional practices. T1-1 and T1-2 shared that P1’s focus was on core instruction in the classroom. T1-1 stated that P1 had a strong focus on core instruction and shared with the teaching staff that it needed to improve in

order to improve student achievement scores. T1-1 stated, “He [P1] developed a master schedule with a lot of small group instruction time embedded in it, along with whole group instruction, and independent practice time for students. Teachers knew their core instruction really mattered” (T1-1, 156). T1-2 also expressed that P1 had a focus on core instruction. She communicated, “[P1] developed a master schedule that laid out all our instructional blocks so that we didn’t neglect any area of language arts because he knew the importance of how everything worked together in language arts” (T1-2, 126). T1-1 and T1-2 described P1’s strong focus on the core classroom instruction to make an impact on student reading achievement data.

A second instructional practice used by P1 and reported by T1-1 and T1-2 was focusing on core instruction through alignment to the state standards. Both T1-1 and T1-2 stated that teachers were required to unpack the standards, design instruction using the standards, and use assessments that appropriately assessed the state standards. They reported that their language arts lessons were developed by aligning the lesson’s learning intentions and success criteria to the grade-level standards. T1-1 stated, “P1 told us in a faculty meeting that we have to tighten our core instruction up, everything has to be standards aligned” (T1-1, 162). T1-2 added, “The coaches and reading specialists helped us to understand the standards so we knew exactly what we had to teach, and P1 would come into our classrooms and look for that” (T1-2, 1103). An alignment to state standards for language arts was one instructional practice reported by T1-1 and T1-2 that helped the school turn around the reading SOL achievement scores.

T1-1 and T1-2 recounted the professional learning that took place during PLC meetings and staff meetings. They stated that P1 focused all PLC meetings and staff meetings on learning more about the reading process and how to teach reading. T1-1 stated, “We did have a lot of professional learning on what a good guided reading group looks like depending on where the



reader was” (T1-1, *l26*). Both teachers shared that many PLC meetings were centered around a variety of instructional methods for teaching reading.

Small group instruction was another practice put into place by P1 as expressed by T1-1 and T1-2. Both teachers shared that P1 designed the master schedule so there was ample time for small group instruction to occur. T1-1 and T1-2 reported that small group instruction was conducted by classroom teachers, but also by the support people in the school, such as the reading specialists, special education teachers, ESOL teachers, and instructional assistants. T1-2 stated, “The support people were able to coach and support student learning so they would push into the classrooms and do intervention groups with the students” (T1-2, *l44*). T1-1 and T1-2 expressed that P1 required small group instruction to occur daily and P1 embedded the small group times into the master schedule.

The last leadership practice put into place by P1 as reported by T1-1 and T1-2 was building his own knowledge on the reading process and the developmental stages of reading. T1-1 stated, “He [P1] was right there doing all the learning with us during our PLC meetings” (T1-1, *l27*). T1-2 added, “P1 was constantly asking questions about what reading should look like during small group time. He liked to learn so he knew what to look for during instructional walkthroughs” (T1-2, *l55*). Through building his own professional knowledge on reading, T1-1 and T1-2 stated that this helped P1 be one of the instructional leaders in the school.

T2-1 and T2-2 reported that P2 used many of the same instructional practices to make an impact on turning around the SOL reading achievement scores in their school. Beginning with a focus on core instruction and adherence to the state standards, T2-1 and T2-2 recounted that P2 required standards to be unpacked and understood by all teachers. They stated that P2 held a strong focus on requiring teachers to align their instruction and assessments to the content of the

standards. Teacher 2-1 stated, “P2 was big on a guaranteed and viable curriculum and you will hear her say that time and time again, and we did, we stuck to exactly what the state put out what were the standards we would unpack the standards, unpack those verbs, and so we were always making sure that our learning intentions, our success criteria, our procedures, and our assessments for our students aligned with those standards because then you know you knew that you are meeting the needs of your students” (T2-1, /100-102). T2-1 and T2-2 described an adherence to the standards for their core reading instruction as required by P2 helped to change the reading achievement scores for their school.

Professional learning was another leadership practice that P2 implemented in the school as detailed by T2-1 and T2-2. Both teachers reported that during PLC meetings, teachers learned how to differentiate instruction to be responsive to their students’ needs. T2-1 described, “P2 was very dedicated to ensuring that all of our PLC, all of our staff, all of our faculty meeting, any type of staff development was geared towards reading needs in our building” (T2-1, /40-41). T2-2 stated, “During the PLC meetings, we discussed different methods of teaching reading and differentiation of instruction” (T2-2, /18). T2-2 also reported that P2 required teachers to participate in professional learning around running reading records and how to use that information. T2-1 and T2-2 shared that P2 viewed professional learning as vital for teachers to grow as professionals.

T2-1 and T2-2 communicated that P2 required small reading group time every day during teachers’ reading blocks. They recounted that P2 required teachers to create small reading groups with fewer students in each group if students were not reading on grade level. T2-2 stated, “The small group lesson plan framework made the biggest impact for our students” (T2-2, /59). T2-1 stated, “We would dive into our lovely guided reading book to plan lessons to support the needs

of our students” (T2-1, /79-80). Both T2-1 and T2-2 recounted that P2 held firm with teachers implementing small group reading instruction every day.

Finally, T2-1 and T2-2 shared that P2 was knowledgeable about the reading process and reading development. T2-1 stated, “My principal [P2] was an avid reader and can literally quote things she read about the reading process” (T2-1, /51-52). Additionally, T2-2 recalled, “Having a knowledgeable administrator in reading and reading development made an impact in the school” (T2-2, /13). Both teachers described P2’s commitment to knowing and understanding the reading process. For a summary of the responses relating to the instructional practices theme reported by teachers, refer to Table 8.

**Table 8**

*Research Question 2 – Instructional Practices Theme with Corresponding Teacher Responses*

<b>Data Unit</b>	<b>T1-1</b>	<b>T1-2</b>	<b>T2-1</b>	<b>T2-2</b>
Core instruction focus	X	X	X	X
Alignment to state standards for instruction	X	X	X	X
Professional learning during PLC meetings	X	X	X	X
Small group instruction	X	X	X	X
Knowledgeable about the reading process	X	X	X	X

***Monitoring and Accountability: Theme 3 of 3 from Teachers’ Responses***

The third theme that emerged from the teacher interviews to Research Question 2 was monitoring and accountability. T1-1 and T1-2 described the instructional master schedule that P1 developed for the school. T1-1 stated, “One thing he started with was the master schedule and the master schedule looked very different from what the school is used to. It specifically laid out our whole group instructional time, which was 20 to 25 minutes depending on the grade level and then our specific three guided reading group times, and so they were already in the master

schedule so if there were support staff that were working, such as special education teachers or Title One specialists that were working in your classrooms, they already knew what that schedule looks like and how and when that support was going to occur” (T1-1, 118-21). T1-2 added, “One of the things he also did school-wide was we all, we had a master schedule and we had to stick to that schedule” (T1-2, 150). T1-1 and T1-2 recounted the master schedule that P1 created as an important leadership practice which helped change the SOL reading achievement data because it delineated whole group and small group instructional times to ensure students received the appropriate reading instruction they needed.

A second leadership practice that P1 implemented was a continuous focus on data, as reported by T1-1 and T1-2. T1-1 articulated that P1 was transparent with the data. T1-1 stated, “P1 showed real data, real numbers and he told us, we have to be real or not in order to move forward” (T1-1, 157). T1-2 added, “P1 kept his own eye on the data, he had his own spreadsheets, he knew what was going on, when the kids took their tests, he had his own spreadsheets and he knew what was going on with every kid at every grade level” (T1-2, 157-59). T1-1 and T1-2 also shared that P1 created data walls with student data for each grade level. They reported that this helped all teachers see the data, monitor it, and know exactly where students were in their reading development. T1-1 and T1-2 expressed P1’s continuous monitoring of student data made an impact on turning around the SOL reading achievement scores for the school.

The third leadership practice reported by T1-1 and T1-2 was P1’s use of the literacy experts in the school. They shared that teachers planned their weekly lessons with the reading coaches and reading specialists in the school. T1-1 and T1-2 stated that during the weekly planning, the literacy experts helped teachers to unpack the standards, design their lessons with

strong whole group and small group instruction, and better understand the reading behaviors their students needed. T1-1 stated, “Whether they were an emergent reader or a fluent reader, we had our reading specialist and the whole support team really working on what that instruction looks like for our students. He (P1) structured our support differently than it was previously, for example, we had three reading specialists assigned to us as a school, and one reading specialist took Kindergarten through grade one, another specialist took grades two and three, and the last one had grades four and five to support” (T1-1, *l27-28*). T1-2 added, “Our lesson plans were so much stronger because of the weekly support we had from the reading team and P1 made that happen with the master schedule” (T1-2, *l36*). T1-1 and T1-2 reported the support P1 put in place from the reading team helped them design their lessons to meet the needs of the students.

The final practice that P1 put into place according to T1-1 and T1-2 was scheduled reading assessments, specifically running reading records. Both teachers shared that P1 developed a specific timeline for teachers to take running reading records on their students depending on whether they were meeting grade-level reading expectations or not. T1-1 stated, “And we were assessing the beginning of the year, middle of the year, end of the year, and we had a scheduled running record. If your kids were so many levels below grade level, you would assess every week, and if they were a little bit on grade level, it could be every other week or every three weeks. And if they were above, it could be once a month that you did a running record and we tracked that was put into spreadsheets and recorded” (T1-1, *l48-50*). By requiring a specific timeline for reading assessments, T1-1 and T1-2 reported that helped P1 know the data and know students’ performance in reading.

Similar to P1, T2-1 and T2-2 stated that P2 also required teachers to give reading assessments to students at specific times. They shared that P2 required students who were

reading below grade level to take four running records a month, students who were reading on grade level to take two running records a month, and students who were reading above grade level to take one running record a month. T2-1 reported that this helped them to know their students as readers. She stated, “We were very good at keeping track of our running records, keeping track of our data so that we would know where our students were and where they were going” (T2-1, 145). T2-1 and T2-2 detailed that the structured timeline that P2 required was a practice that helped lead to the school’s success.

P2 put in a process for instructional support from the reading coaches and reading specialists as reported by T2-1 and T2-2. They described the weekly support from the reading team during grade-level planning meetings. P2 ensured that teachers attended the meetings to get help on learning how they could support their students with guided reading instruction, T2-1 and T2-2 shared. T2-1 stated, “We were able to meet with our reading coaches weekly and our reading specialist and be able to determine what common assessments to give and have meaningful conversations about best equitable practices for our students” (T2-1, 141-42). T2-2, who was a reading coach in the school at the time, reported that P2 held a strong commitment to teachers planning with the reading team members.

A third practice in the monitoring and accountability theme that T2-1 and T2-2 reported that P2 implemented was a weekly look at student data. Both teachers articulated that P2 used student performance data to inform the next steps in instruction. They shared that P2 used data charts to track student progress. T2-2 said, “We took a weekly look at data from teachers to monitor meeting the reading goals for students” (T2-2, 138). T2-1 stated, “It [data charts] allowed me to always keep my students and their needs in the forefront, and that helped us a lot” (T2-1,

193). As reported by T2-1 and T2-2, P2 maintaining a focus on student data was a leadership practice that made an impact on the student data.

Finally, T2-1 and T2-2 stated that P2 required the reading coaches, reading specialists, and the administrators to observe reading instruction and give feedback to teachers. They stated that this helped the literacy experts and administrators to monitor implementation of the state standards, to monitor student learning, and to coach teachers in the classroom during instruction. T2-1 expressed that P2 believed in a team approach to changing the instructional practices in classrooms. Table 9 displays the leadership practices relating to the monitoring and accountability theme mentioned by teacher participants.

**Table 9**

*Research Question 2 – Monitoring and Accountability Theme with Corresponding Teacher Responses*

<b>Data Unit</b>	<b>T1-1</b>	<b>T1-2</b>	<b>T2-1</b>	<b>T2-2</b>
Developing specific master schedule	X	X		
Weekly focus on student data	X	X	X	X
Lesson planning with reading team	X	X	X	X
Formal schedule for reading assessments	X	X	X	X
Observations in the classroom			X	X

**Collective Responses of Principals and Teachers by Theme**

During the interviews, the principals and teachers described the leadership practices that were used to turn around the SOL reading achievement scores in the schools. The themes that emerged from principals were Culture and Climate, Discipline and Behavior, Instructional Practices, and Monitoring and Accountability. The themes that emerged from teachers were

Culture and Climate, Instructional Practices, and Monitoring and Accountability. The themes that were common to both are discussed in this section with accompanying tables.

***Culture and Climate Theme: Collective Responses***

The leadership practices and the corresponding frequency in the Culture and Climate theme are listed in Table 10. As indicated in Table 10, the majority of participants reported establishing a clear vision of expectations and building a sense of urgency were leadership practices with high-frequency indications. Sharing student data was another practice used by principals with a high-frequency indication in this research study. Both principals and teachers reported these leadership practices that made an impact on turning around the SOL reading achievement scores in the school.

**Table 10**

*Frequency of Leadership Practices Under Culture and Climate Theme (N = 6)*

<b>Leadership Practices</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Establish high expectations for all students	1
Developed a standardized communication and organizational progress	2
Shared clear expectations of principal’s vision	6
Established reciprocal respect	1
Built a sense of urgency	5
Built teacher leadership	2
Built culture and climate while establishing good curricular practices	1
Shared student data	4
Verbal recognition to teachers	1
Built relationships with teachers/students	2
Honored teachers’ time	2



### ***Instructional Practices Theme: Collective Responses***

As seen in Table 11, three leadership practices were aligned between principals and teachers in the theme of instructional practices. All participants reported adherence to teaching the state standards, the principal building own knowledge of the reading process, and implementing PLC meetings with 100% alignment. Two other leadership practices were reported by the majority of respondents: core instruction focus and small group instruction. These leadership practices received high frequency by the majority of the participants in the study.

**Table 11**

*Frequency of Leadership Practices Under Instructional Practices Theme (N = 6)*

<b>Leadership Practices</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Adherence to teaching state standards	6
Differentiated instruction	2
Built knowledge about the reading process	6
Core instruction focus	4
Small group instruction	5
Process for instructional coaching	2
Implemented PLC meetings	6

### ***Monitoring and Accountability Theme: Collective Responses***

As indicated in table 12, four leadership practices emerged from the majority of the participants in the monitoring and accountability theme. Developing a specific master schedule, weekly focus on student data, planning time with the reading team, and developing a formal schedule for reading assessments received high-frequency marks from participants.

**Table 12***Frequency of Leadership Practices Under Monitoring and Accountability Theme (N = 6)*

<b>Leadership Practices</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Developed a specific master schedule	4
Whole/small group time allocation in schedule	1
Specialized teachers pushing into the classroom	1
Weekly focus on student data	6
Planning time with reading team	5
Formal schedule for reading assessments	4
Observations in the classroom	3

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to identify the leadership practices that principals used to lead turnaround elementary schools to increase SOL reading achievement scores. The research study was conducted in two phases, with two principal interviews and four teacher interviews. The research methodology used a basic qualitative research design in which the experiences of principals and teachers were researched through semi-structured interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed via the researcher’s Virginia Tech Zoom account.

Two research questions were used to guide the study:

1. What do elementary principals identify as the leadership practices they used to lead a turnaround school to increase reading achievement scores?
2. What do elementary teachers identify as the leadership practices principals used to lead a turnaround school to increase reading achievement scores?

The data collected and analyzed from Research Question 1 showed that four themes emerged. The themes were culture and climate, instructional practices, discipline and behavior,

and monitoring and accountability. The data collected and analyzed from Research Question 2 showed that three themes emerged. The themes were culture and climate, instructional practices, and monitoring and accountability. The data from both research questions show that when the principals built structures for how the school will operate, it made a positive impact on student achievement. These include a structured master schedule, structures in place to positively impact behavior, structures of support for planning lessons, structures for instructional support from specialty teachers, and structures for monitoring student data on a regular basis. The data also show that when principals set expectations in the building, it had a positive impact on teaching and learning. These expectations include establishing the school's vision, the frequency of meeting students in small groups, adherence to teaching the state standards within the core curriculum, participation in PLC meetings, using reading assessments on a regular basis to monitor student learning, and setting expectations for student and teacher dispositions.

## Chapter 5: Findings and Implications

In this qualitative study, the researcher examined the perceptions of two elementary principals and four elementary teachers regarding the leadership practices the principals used to turn around the SOL reading achievement scores in the school. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. Interviews were recorded and transcribed using Virginia Tech's Zoom platform. The participants were chosen because their schools turned around the SOL reading achievement scores in two years or fewer. The study was designed to answer two research questions:

1. What do elementary principals identify as the leadership practices they used to lead a turnaround school to increase reading achievement scores?
2. What do elementary teachers identify as the leadership practices principals used to lead a turnaround school to increase reading achievement scores?

This chapter will serve to share the findings, implications, conclusions, and recommendations for additional research studies.

### Summary of Findings

After analysis of the data, 10 findings were identified. These findings, their associated data points, and supporting research follow each finding.

#### *Finding 1*

**Principals and teachers indicated when the principals shared clear expectations of their vision, teachers understood and implemented the expectations in their classrooms.**

Table 9 in the Climate and Culture theme shows 100% of the participants indicated that when principals shared clear expectations of their vision, teachers understood the expectations and consistently implemented the expectations in their classrooms. Principals reported they shared

their vision for the school with all stakeholders: parents, teachers, and school division administrators. They reported setting clear expectations for how the school will operate regarding instruction, teacher dispositions, student behaviors, and procedural operations such as meetings and data charts. P1 stated, “I was just completely honest with the faculty about what my expectations were for instruction, teacher and student interactions, and how the school operated as a whole” (P1, 1165). The principals reported that the expectations set operational standards which were clear, student-focused, and learning-centered. Teachers shared that they were receptive to operating with clear expectations. They reported the principal’s vision and expectations helped them to establish instructional routines in their classrooms and data collection routines from assessments. Teachers shared clear expectations and helped to set the culture and climate of the school.

Results from this finding are supported by The Wallace Foundation (2013). This research stated, “An effective principal’s leadership approach is based on five key skills: shaping a vision of academic success for all students based on high standards, creating a climate hospitable to education so that safety, a cooperative spirit, and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail, cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their parts in realizing the school vision, improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students learn to their utmost, and managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement” (p. 4). Additionally, Leithwood (1994) identified building school vision and goals as one of the six dimensions in transformational leadership. Leithwood’s dimensions allow principals to raise participants’ level of commitment and to develop the collective capacity of the organization’s members.

## *Finding 2*

**Principals and teachers indicated that showing current student achievement data created a sense of urgency.** Table 10 in the Climate and Culture theme shows 83% of the participants indicated that the principal built a sense of urgency. Table 10 in the same theme displays 67% of the participants indicated that showing current student achievement data created a sense of urgency. Principals reported they were honest and transparent about their school's current student data and where the school ranked among other schools in the county and in the state. P2 shared, "I showed the current reality of the data, including our reporting categories" (P2, 168). The principals shared that by creating a sense of urgency, all stakeholders understood why the changes were necessary for how the school operated. Teachers reported that they accepted the changes the principals established in the school because they saw the current reality of the data and they were ready for changes. By responding to this sense of urgency, teachers shared that they worked harder to change what their students' data were showing.

This finding aligns with previous research from Hattie (2015). Hattie reported principals are concerned with the teachers' impact on student learning. Research from Vogel et al. (2014) reported significant changes in state policies made the need to prepare school leaders who can collect, analyze, use, and communicate data effectively to help teachers improve their practice, increase student achievement, and facilitate the continuous improvement of the school learning environment a priority. Additionally, The Wallace Foundation (2013) reported that one of the key skills of effective principals is managing people, data, and processes. Encompassed within this key skill is using data to build capacity about instructional practices.

### ***Finding 3***

**Principals indicated a focus on school-wide discipline and reducing the number of student suspensions kept students in classrooms.** Table 4 in the Discipline and Behavior theme indicates that 100% of the principals indicated a focus on school-wide discipline and reducing the number of student suspensions. Both principals shared this was their first focus when coming to their schools. P1 shared that students can't learn if they are not in school. P1 indicated that building relationships with troubled students allowed them to trust him. P1 reported a 90% decrease in suspensions in his first year. P2 indicated that she implemented the PBIS program in her school. P2 stated, "We worked hard to get student discipline into perspective" (P2, /29). Both principals reported that by building consistent routines, schedules, and structures in their schools, expectations were established for students. They reported that the structures and routines helped to decrease the number of discipline problems which decreased the number of suspensions in the school.

This finding in the Discipline and Behavior theme aligns with previous research. The Wallace Foundation (2013) reported, "One of the key skills of principals is to create a climate hospitable to education so that safety, a cooperative spirit, and other foundations of positive interaction prevail" (p. 8). This research supports creating a climate of cooperation and collaboration and a shared responsibility for safety. Additionally, The Wallace Foundation shared that effective principals guide their practice toward building a productive school climate.

### ***Finding 4***

**Principals and teachers indicated a focus on core reading instruction with adherence to teaching the state standards allowed them to align their reading instruction to state standards.** Table 11 in the Instructional Practices theme shows 100% of the participants

indicated adhering to teaching the state standards. Table 11 in the same theme shows 67% of the participants indicated a focus on core instruction. Both P1 and P2 required teachers to develop a deep understanding of the state reading standards by unpacking the standards in order to understand the essential components of the standards with members of the school's reading team. P2 stated, "We developed a process for understanding the standards, what they look like and sound like in a classroom, and maintained a commitment to teaching the power standards" (P2, 117-18). Teachers in both schools reported their principals expected teachers to plan their lessons around the reading standards, teach the standards in their classrooms, and develop assessments around the standards, which produced alignment to the core reading curriculum. Teachers shared that members of the reading teams helped them to understand the standards so they knew exactly what they had to teach, and the principals would come into the classrooms to observe that instruction.

Research by Ippolito and Fisher (2019) suggested it is critical for school leaders to help guide instruction. "School leaders know that one of their most important responsibilities is to guide instruction so that all students develop rich literacies" (Ippolito & Fisher, 2019, p. 51). In support of Finding 4, The International Literacy Association (2019) advocated for excellent literacy instruction for all children through knowledgeable and qualified teachers and other literacy professionals, including principals.

### ***Finding 5***

**Principals and teachers indicated that small group instruction allowed them to differentiate instruction for students' needs.** Table 11 in the Instructional Practices theme shows 83% of the participants indicated that by implementing small group instruction, teachers could differentiate their reading instruction to meet the varied needs of all the students in their



classrooms. P1 shared that creating instructional groups with small numbers of students made an impact on student learning. He stated that specialty teachers, such as special education teachers and reading specialists, taught students whose deficits matched the teachers' instructional expertise area. One hundred percent of the teachers in the study indicated that small group instruction made an impact on student achievement. They shared that their principals required daily small reading group time during the reading blocks. T1-2 communicated, "We were expected to do small group instruction every day, no matter what, but after a few months, we saw that it was making a big impact for our students" (T1-2, /55). Teachers recounted that the small group lesson framework made a big impact on increasing the reading levels of the students.

Research by Gambrell et al. (2015) supported the use of comprehensive literacy instruction with appropriately targeted guided and individual instruction, as well as whole-class instruction. Their research also indicated that literacy instruction should be systematic, sequenced, and focused on students' strengths and needs using materials that are engaging and relevant to students' needs. Routman's (2018) research stated the goal of teaching reading is to help students become readers.

### ***Finding 6***

**Principals and teachers indicated that implementing PLC meetings helped build their professional knowledge in teaching reading.** One hundred percent of the participants indicated PLC meetings helped build their professional knowledge in teaching reading, as shown in Table 12. Both principals indicated that the PLC meetings were crucial for teachers to support their professional learning on teaching reading. They shared that the members of the reading team designed professional learning sessions for teachers to help them understand the developmental process of reading and to understand how to differentiate instruction to meet the

varied needs of students. The principals said the PLC meetings became important in the day to day operations of the school. Teachers in both schools embraced the professional learning that occurred in PLC meetings. T1-1 stated, “We did have a lot of professional learning on what a good guided reading group looks like depending on where the reader was” (T1-1, /26). All the teachers shared that the PLC meetings were vital in helping them learn more about teaching reading and teaching to the needs of their students.

Research that supports the use of PLC meetings was confirmed by DuFour and Mattos (2013). Their research found that the process of groups of people working together in a PLC has the greatest impact on transforming instruction and improving student achievement. Research by Kohm and Nance (2009) found that collaborative cultures build professional knowledge which increases a staff’s capacity to improve instruction. DuFour (2004) reported, “When teachers work together in teams engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions, deep team learning occurs” (p. 9). This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement.

### ***Finding 7***

**Principals and teachers indicated the principal’s knowledge about the reading process made an impact on student achievement scores.** Support for this finding can be found in Table 11 in the instructional practice theme. The data show 100% of the participants indicated their principals’ knowledge about the reading process made an impact on student achievement scores. Both principals reported that by building their knowledge of the reading process, they were better able to have instructional conversations with teachers. P1 reported, “I wanted to know everything about this (reading) assessment, so I learned what concept of word meant and learned the best ways to teach letters and sounds to kids” (P1, /340). They stated this also helped them when doing observations in the classrooms because they were more knowledgeable about

the developmental reading process. Both principals shared that understanding the reading process and the state standards for reading helped them become one of the literacy leaders in the school. The teachers of both elementary schools reported that having a knowledgeable administrator learning along the way with the teachers made an impact on teaching and learning.

These findings align with research conducted by the International Literacy Association (2019). The research stated that principals leading a learning culture produce a higher impact on student achievement when a culture of collective leadership and shared responsibility is present. “Principals are responsible for setting high literacy expectations and engaging colleagues in reflective conversations about instructional practices and student learning” (International Literacy Association, 2019, p. 3). Principals as literacy leaders can positively impact student achievement.

### ***Finding 8***

**Principals and teachers indicated that a master schedule with allocated time for push-in intervention and instructional coaching from specialty teachers supported classroom instruction.** As confirmed in Table 12 in the monitoring and accountability theme, 67% of the participants indicated developing a specific master schedule allowed specialty teachers to support classroom instruction. P1 and P2 shared that the master schedule was important to establishing structures for instructional support. P1 stated, “I want my reading teacher, my special education teachers, my ESOL teacher, I want those people in the room, doing the instruction” (P1, /87). Both principals reported developing a master schedule with planning and instructional support was crucial to building teacher capacity for instructional purposes. Responses by teachers from ES1 support this finding. They shared the master schedule was

important to follow because of the support staff coming into the classrooms to work with students or help teachers with instruction.

These findings align with research from DuFour and Mattos (2013). Their research stated that principals benefit from a collaborative team approach to impact student achievement. Sweeney and Mausbach (2019) reported that the principal isn't the only leader in a school; instructional coaches, teacher leaders, and assistant principals support a principal's goals for instructional improvement. Additionally, DeWitt's (2019) research stated that team members work collaboratively to co-construct goals for teaching and learning.

### ***Finding 9***

**Principals and teachers indicated that creating a formal schedule for administering reading assessments allowed them to focus weekly on student performance data.** Table 12 in the theme of monitoring and accountability shows that 67% of the participants indicated that creating a formal schedule for teachers to administer reading assessments with students made an impact in planning future reading instruction. Table 12 in the same theme shows that 100% of the participants indicated that monitoring student data from reading assessments each week made an impact in planning future reading instruction. Both principals reported that continuously monitoring student data from reading assessments was critical during their PLC meetings. The formal schedule for reading assessments was a structure that helped principals and teachers keep track of what standards were taught and when they were assessed, and to monitor the data from the assessments. P2 stated, "We held true to looking at our current reality of what the data was showing us" (P2, 156). One hundred percent of the teachers stated that monitoring student data on a weekly basis made their instruction more effective because it allowed them to know which

students were meeting our reading goals. T2-1 stated, “It (data charts) allowed me to always keep my students and their needs in the forefront of, and that helped us a lot” (T2-1, 193).

This finding aligns with research from Gambrell et al. (2015). Their research supported the use of “formative and summative assessments that reflect the complex and dynamic nature of literacy” (p. 14). Venable’s (2019) research showed that with collaborative analysis of student artifacts, teachers can make data-driven decisions and determine if the student learned the concepts from the unit. Finally, The Wallace Foundation (2013) reported that one of the key skills of effective principals is managing people, data, and processes. Encompassed within the key skill is using data to build capacity about instructional practices.

### ***Finding 10***

**Principals and teachers indicated weekly planning with members of the reading team made a positive impact on their reading instruction.** Table 13 in the monitoring and accountability theme shows that 83% of the participants indicated that establishing weekly planning time for teachers to plan lessons with members of the reading team made an impact on their reading instruction. P2 reported that she built her master schedule with planning time allocated for teachers to meet with the reading coach and the reading specialists. P2 communicated, “During this time, teachers would meet weekly with the reading experts to unpack standards, write learning intentions and success criteria, look at student performance data, and create lessons for whole group and small group instruction (P2, 148). All teachers in the study reported that weekly planning with members of the reading team was impactful for them. Teachers shared that working with the reading team helped them to understand the standards, plan lessons around the standards, and differentiate instruction for all students. T1-2 stated, “Our lesson plans were so much stronger because of the weekly support we had from the reading team

and P1 made that happen with the master schedule” (T1-2, 136). All teachers in the study reported the support from their reading teams was beneficial for making them stronger reading teachers.

This finding aligns with research from Greenleaf et al. (2018) who stated, “There has been a shift toward viewing effective literacy leadership as distributed and the charge to improve literacy learning as the shared responsibility of collaborative teams” (p. 105). Additionally, research from the International Literacy Association (2019) stated, “Processes that foster collective action are an important first step to improving student performance because individuals with different strengths and loyalties are united around a shared purpose” (p. 3).

### **Implications of Findings**

Following a review of the findings in this research, several implications for principals were identified. Elementary principals who wish to turn around the reading SOL achievement scores in their schools can apply the implications. Those implications are noted with brief explanations.

#### ***Implication 1***

**Principals could consider developing and defining their vision detailing specific expectations for instructional practices, student discipline, and monitoring student data and sharing that information with teachers.** Principal and teacher responses to the interview suggest that when the principal clearly defined the expectations of his vision, teachers understood how they should operate in their classroom with regards to instructional practices, student discipline, and gathering and monitoring student data. When principals share their vision, expectations for teachers and students are made clear. Detailing these expectations in writing in a teacher handbook may help. This implication is associated with Finding 1.

### ***Implication 2***

**Principals could consider building a sense of urgency by showing the current student achievement data to establish the need for making changes in how the school operates.** Interview responses from the principals and teachers in the study indicated that when they investigated the current student achievement data, a sense of urgency was established. The respondents reported that the sense of urgency is what laid the foundation for understanding the need to make changes. This implication is associated with Finding 2.

### ***Implication 3***

**School divisions could help schools by providing disaggregated trend data by reporting categories, grade-level, and other relevant measures for each impacting factor, including attendance and state or common assessments.** Since principals have many day-to-day tasks they need to attend to, school divisions could help by providing relevant data for schools. School divisions could provide disaggregated trend data which may help school leaders understand the school's data more thoroughly and save the principal's time. These implications are associated with Finding 2.

### ***Implication 4***

**Principals could consider alternatives to suspensions by establishing a school-wide program that focuses on positive behavior interventions for students such as the PBIS program.** This implication, associated with Finding 3, revealed that school leaders could establish programs that focus on positive behavior for students. Principals could consider programs like PBIS which helps establish expectations and adult support for positive student behaviors. Research from The Wallace Foundation (2013) reported that when principals create hospitable climates, positive interactions prevail in the school.

### ***Implication 5***

**Principals could monitor the instruction of the state standards by observing reading lessons and looking for alignment of the state standards in the teachers' lessons.** Principals could be in classrooms during reading instruction to observe teachers using the state reading standards in their lessons. Principals' and teachers' responses to the interview questions indicated adherence to teaching the state reading standards aligned their instruction to state standards and to expectations by the principal. Principals could create a weekly schedule to ensure they are observing reading lessons in all teachers' classrooms. This implication is associated with Finding 4.

### ***Implication 6***

**School divisions could provide professional learning to teachers and administrators around unpacking and understanding the standards, understanding associated reading curriculum, effective ways to identify and share administrators' vision, and PLC implementation during professional learning sessions.** Research from DuFour and Marzano (2011) stated that principals cannot work alone for school-wide improvement. School division leaders in central office roles could offer professional learning sessions to school administrators to assist them with the various implementations. The professional development offered by the school division could be offered multiple times and at multiple levels for principals who are in varying stages of developing their vision. This implication is associated with Findings 1, 4, and 6.

### ***Implication 7***

**School administrators could support the implementation of small group instruction by developing the master schedule to include small group reading instruction and**



**providing the resources required to implement the small group instruction.** School leadership could support teachers with implementing small group reading instruction by providing the necessary materials for the teachers. These materials could include leveled books, writing journals, or magnetic letters. Principals, with help from school division administrators, could embed small group instruction into the school's master schedule for teachers to follow. This implication supports Finding 5.

### ***Implication 8***

**School leaders could consider developing their own literacy knowledge by attending related conferences, participating in book clubs, or through school division-level professional learning.** Research suggests that a principal's literacy knowledge is important in supporting reading instruction in a school. School leaders could build their knowledge of the reading process through local or state reading conferences, reading professional books, or by attending professional learning sessions. The International Literacy Association (2019) reported that principals could build their literacy knowledge by engaging in collaborative discussions with other professionals. This implication supports Finding 7.

### ***Implication 9***

**School leaders could develop a master schedule to create time for specialty teachers to push in to each classroom to provide students with intervention services, create time for instructional coaching in the classroom, establish weekly collaborative planning sessions between teachers and members of the reading team, and set times for PLC meetings to occur.** Principals could develop the master schedule so specialty teachers could be in the classrooms providing differentiated instruction to students. These specialty teachers could include special education teachers, reading specialists, ESOL teachers, or reading resource

teachers. Reading coaches could also be in classrooms providing instructional support to the classroom teachers. One hundred percent of the study's participants indicated that PLC meetings were beneficial in building their professional knowledge in teaching reading. Principals could create a master schedule with PLC meetings embedded in the master schedule so the meetings occur on a regular basis. This may also help the school's reading team members to be present at the PLC meetings. Eighty-three percent of the participants indicated that establishing weekly planning time with lesson planning with members of the reading team made an impact on their reading instruction. This implication supports Findings 6, 8, and 10.

### ***Implication 10***

**School leaders could create a formal schedule for teachers to administer reading assessments with students coupled with a formal schedule for monitoring student reading performance data.** With a formal schedule, teachers could know when to administer the reading assessments with students. The formal schedule could specify dates for the administration of the reading assessments, and could also specify the dates for monitoring of the assessment data. The monitoring of the student performance data could occur during data meetings or PLC meetings. This implication supports Finding 9.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The purpose of this study was to identify the leadership practices that principals used to lead turnaround elementary schools to increase reading SOL achievement scores. The study was limited to two elementary schools in a suburban school division in central Virginia. Two principals and four teachers were interviewed as part of this study. Future studies could expand the sample size to include more principals and more teachers in order to gather additional perceptions of the leadership practices used by the principals.

Future studies could focus on or expand to schools in urban or rural settings. This may offer different leadership practices used by principals other than the practices found in this study. Different types of site settings could influence the leadership practices of principals as they work to change the reading SOL achievement scores in their schools.

Finally, a researcher could consider a study that focuses on the leadership practices of principals that impact one subgroup of students, such as English Speakers of Other Languages or African-American students with their reading SOL achievement scores. Principals may use different leadership practices depending on student populations. A study such as this may yield different findings and results with a more narrowed student population.

### **Summary of Findings and Implications**

Chapter 5 provides a summary and discussion of the findings, implications for each of the findings, research data that supports the findings, and suggestions for future research. In summary, the study indicated that certain leadership practices used by elementary principals can turn around the reading SOL achievement scores in elementary schools, as shown in this study. The findings from both research questions show that when the principals built structures for how the school will operate, it made a positive impact on student achievement. These include a structured master schedule, structures in place to positively impact behavior, structures of support for planning lessons, structures for instructional support from specialty teachers, and structures for monitoring student data on a regular basis. The findings also show that when principals set expectations in the building, it had a positive impact on teaching and learning. These expectations include establishing the school's vision, the frequency of meeting students in small groups, adherence to teaching the state standards within the core curriculum, participation in PLC meetings, using reading assessments on a regular basis to monitor student learning, and

setting expectations for student and teacher dispositions. Additionally, both principals' and teachers' perceptions show that the principal's knowledge of the reading process is a contributing factor to the students' reading achievement scores.

## **Reflections**

The process of my dissertation has been interesting during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data collection and participation took longer than expected as all educators have more on their plates than in a normal year. The data collection began in August 2021 and I conducted the last interview in November 2021. The principals and teachers shared with me that they enjoyed participating in the interviews as it allowed them to reflect back on the process of getting the school out of warning with the VDOE. They also shared with me that the process of getting the school out of warning was hard, time-consuming, and frustrating at times, but they stated that it was worth it and they are glad they went through the process. This allowed me to have positive conversations about the practices implemented in the building.

The ability to conduct this research has helped me as a division leader in a school system. It confirmed much of what I already knew, but the findings enhanced and provided deeper clarification on my previous knowledge. I hope the findings and implications from this study will help principals and school divisions to create specific action steps if they are looking to increase the reading achievement scores in their schools.

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# Appendix A

## CITI Certificate



Completion Date 29-Aug-2020  
Expiration Date 29-Aug-2023  
Record ID 38121933

This is to certify that:

**Tamara Slater**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

**Social & Behavioral Research** (Curriculum Group)  
**Social & Behavioral Research** (Course Learner Group)  
**1 - Basic Course** (Stage)

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TransCelerate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).

Under requirements set by:

**Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech)**



Verify at [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w6f952d85-c619-410b-9f1a-6110c8baa1ad-38121933](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w6f952d85-c619-410b-9f1a-6110c8baa1ad-38121933)

# Appendix B

## IRB Approval



Division of Scholarly Integrity and  
Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board  
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)  
300 Turner Street NW  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-3732  
irb@vt.edu  
<http://www.research.vt.edu/sirc/hrpp>

### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** August 9, 2021  
**TO:** Carol S Cash, Tamara Lee Slater  
**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572)  
**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Elementary Turnaround Principals' Leadership Practices Related to Reading Achievement  
**IRB NUMBER:** 21-642

Effective August 9, 2021, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category (ies) 2(ii).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit an amendment to the HRPP for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

### PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(ii)**  
Protocol Determination Date: **August 9, 2021**

### ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

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



## Appendix C

### Permission to Interview Letter to Participants

Dear,

My name is Tami Slater and I am a doctoral student at Virginia Tech in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program. I am conducting research to understand the leadership practices principals use to turn around reading SOL scores at the elementary level. My intention is to capture the leadership practices you used to positively impact the reading SOL scores while you were the principal at XXX Elementary School. To do this, I would appreciate the opportunity to interview you and two teachers from the school. The interview should last about 20 minutes and will be recorded via Zoom for transcription purposes. Participants will use pseudonyms during the interview and will not identify any demographic or work location.

I have attached the interview questions for you. I am happy to answer any questions you may have through email or phone call.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participation in my study. Please let me know if you are able to participate.

Thank you,

Tami Slater

## **Appendix D**

### **Interview Questions**

#### **Interview Questions - Principal**

1. Describe the practices you put in place that made an impact on turning around the SOL reading achievement scores in your school?

#### **Interview Question - Teacher**

1. What practices did your principal put into place that made an impact on turning around the SOL reading achievement scores in your school?

## **Appendix E**

### **Interview Consent Script**

I'd like to thank you once again for being willing to participate in an interview with me for my research study. As I have mentioned to you before, I am interested in understanding the leadership practices principals used to turn around reading SOL scores at the elementary level.

Your responses will remain anonymous, so please change your name in this Zoom meeting to \_\_\_\_\_. This interview should take no more than 20 minutes. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with a question, just let me know. We can stop at any time.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Do I have your permission to audio record this interview for transcription purposes only? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No