The Impact of Principals' Instructional Leadership Practices on Student Achievement

in Elementary and Middle Title I Schools within a School Division in Virginia

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ABSTRACT

Principals of Title I schools have a responsibility to ensure that all students achieve so that they may graduate on time and are career and college ready (Virginia Department of Education [VDOE], 2022b). This research focused on the principals’ instructional leadership practices in elementary and middle Title I schools impacting student achievement. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within a school division in Virginia. The research question was, what are the principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within a school division in Virginia as reported by principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers?

A demographic survey of eight teachers was completed, and one-on-one interviews were conducted with two principals, one assistant principal, and two instructional coaches, and focus interviews held with eight teachers. Data on instructional leadership practices and the perceived impact on student achievement in Title I schools in one school division in Virginia were analyzed. Deductive coding was used for this purpose to determine common themes from the data. Eight major findings were discovered including seven principal instructional leadership practices and the most impactful principal instructional leadership practices. Six of the findings pertain to elementary and middle Title I schools, and two of the findings were specific to elementary Title I schools.
The research could provide current and future practitioners in elementary and middle Title I schools and school divisions with principal instructional leadership practices to help improve overall student achievement and close achievement gaps amongst student groups. Practitioners can utilize the study to assist with the professional development (PD) of Title I school principals and for developing principal preparation programs. Researchers might use the study for literature research-based strategies on instructional leadership practices and the perceived impact on student achievement in Title I schools. Whether students are learning face-to-face, blended, or virtual, these practices can be utilized by leaders of Title I schools to ensure that students achieve.
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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Principals of Title I schools have a responsibility to ensure that all students achieve so that they may graduate on time and are career and college ready. This research focused on the principals’ instructional leadership practices impacting student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools. The research question was, what are the principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within a school division in Virginia as reported by principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers? A demographic survey of eight teachers was completed, and one-on-one interviews were conducted with two principals, one assistant principal, and two instructional coaches, and focus interviews held with eight teachers. The research might benefit current and future practitioners in elementary and middle Title I schools and school divisions by providing principal instructional leadership practices to help improve overall student achievement and close achievement gaps amongst student groups. Practitioners can utilize the study to help with PD of principals or for developing principal preparation programs. This study might provide researchers with literature research-based strategies on instructional leadership practices and the perceived impact on student achievement in Title I schools.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this paper to my children, Anne Penn and Andrew. You have been my inspiration through so many journeys, including writing my dissertation and obtaining a doctorate degree. My best advice is this: Never give up. Life can be challenging and full of hard work, but there are shining lights that will guide you. I love you more than I can put into words.

I also dedicate this study to my parents who always taught me the value of education. You loved and encouraged my sister, Gail, and me unconditionally. I know that you both are looking down at this accomplishment with great joy. Thank you for all the years of sacrifice to ensure that I would be able to fulfill my dreams and conquer my hardships. I continually persevered and never gave up. Thank you both for always believing in me!

I thank my great grandfather who graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1907 and Yale University in 1912. He received the “Worth Prize,” which was given to the best Philosophy dissertation of the year. He was a principal of the graded schools in the town of Davidson, North Carolina, and was appointed president of Davenport College in Lenoir, North Carolina. He set the path for my journey long ago. Thank you for sharing your incredible outlook on education, life, and most importantly faith with me through my dad.

Finally, I wish to recognize my students. You are the reason that I do all that I do as a teacher, principal, and scholar. I believe in you, and I know that you can all be successful in your educational journeys. Keep learning. It is a life-long skill.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview and Purpose of the Study

This study focused on the principals’ instructional leadership practices impacting student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within a school division in Virginia. The research question was, what are the principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within a school division in Virginia as reported by principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers? This study has been conducted so that it can add to the existing knowledge of research-based principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools. The data analysis of the research might provide current and future practitioners in elementary and middle Title I schools and school divisions with principal instructional leadership practices to help improve overall student achievement and close achievement gaps amongst student groups. Practitioners can use the study for PD of principals or for principal preparation programs.

The dissertation is comprised of five chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction, including the overview of the study, statement of the problem, significance of the study, purpose and justification of the study, conceptual framework, and definition of terms. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature that is relevant to the research question. Chapter 3 is the methodology that was utilized to conduct the research and data analysis. Chapter 4 includes the data analysis and findings. Chapter 5 focuses on strategies for practitioners based on the findings, implications for policy, and recommendations for future researchers.
Statement of the Problem

Students of poverty experience lower levels of achievement, and Jensen (2017) stated that poverty rates in the United States have been increasing rather than decreasing. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2021) reported the following about poverty:

People and families are considered poor when they lack the economic resources necessary to experience a minimal living standard. Official U.S. Census Bureau statistics estimate that 40 million persons, 12.3% of the total population, were poor in the United States in 2017. The topic of poverty is widely considered a cause for national action because poor families often encounter material hardships and reduced well-being and because children who grow up in poor households are less likely to thrive as adults.

Repeatedly, the Title I school culture either emphasizes hopelessness and assumption that the cards are stacked against the school, or it nurtures optimism and successes with inspiring stories (Jensen, 2017). Holding high expectations for all students and teachers is incredibly important for principals serving in elementary and middle Title I schools.

There were 682 elementary, middle, and combined school-wide Title I schools for the 2020-2021 school year in Virginia; these schools “are eligible to use Title I funds for schoolwide programs that are designed to upgrade their entire educational programs for all students, particularly the lowest-achieving students” (VDOE, 2021c). School districts target Title I funds they obtain for public schools with the greatest percentages of students from low-income families (VDOE, 2021c). For the 2020-2021 school year, there were 81 elementary and middle schools targeted for support and improvement under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) based on school performance, including state assessments, for the 2018-2019 school year as
these assessments were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic for the 2019-2020 school year (VDOE, 2021a). Marzano et al. (2005) discovered in their research that “Although the difference in expected student achievement in ‘effective’ versus ‘ineffective’ schools is dramatic, the difference is even greater when we contrast ‘highly effective’ schools with ‘highly ineffective’ schools—more specifically, the top 1 percent of schools with the bottom 1 percent” (p. 4). It is the job of the elementary and middle Title I school principal to ensure that the school is highly effective so that all students achieve.

Defining principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement is just as critical now as it has been for many decades. In 1966, Coleman et al. determined the extent of segregation amongst the minority students and the majority students, the equality of educational opportunity for the groups and the relationship to student achievement at the request of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In 2021, Leithwood noted that equitable opportunities for diverse groups of students has been an issue for policy makers and practitioners across the world for decades. Providing all schools and school districts access to principals with knowledge of instructional leadership practices impacting student achievement is essential to equality of educational opportunities for student groups. Brown et al. (2017) determined in their study that although more research is needed to determine if the leadership categories influencing student success for all students found in earlier research impact success of students with low socioeconomic status, more teachers strongly agreed that the school administrator delivered the needed support in the schools with high student achievement as compared to schools with low student achievement. Future research suggestions on this topic from Owens (2016) included “conduct a case study of principals in high achieving Title I schools to observe in action the implementation of the identified skills and characteristics to gain an
understanding of how the identified skills and characteristics are manifested” (p. 106) or
“replicate this study in 5 years in the Commonwealth of Virginia to determine if the critically
essential skills and characteristics identified are consistent with the findings of this study. This
study was conducted prior to full implementation of the Every Child Succeeds Act” (p. 107).
Currently, Title I schools are expected to fully implement ESSA, hence the reason it is essential
to determine principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student
achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools at this time.

**Significance of the Study**

The research of instructional leadership has been a topic of interest for over forty years. Hallinger (2011) noted that “even as fads and fashions in leadership have waxed and waned, scholarly interest in instructional leadership has remained surprisingly consistent and strong” (p. 297). Most relevant to the topic of this research, there has been a continued focus on instructional leadership as evident through studies by scholars and practitioners throughout the years (Hallinger, 2011); however, the question in the studies has evolved from *does the school leader make an impact on student achievement to if so, how does the principal make an impact on student achievement*, which is essential to the future scholarly and practical research (Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Heck, 1998). The research might benefit scholars and practitioners as it provides more awareness of how the principal makes impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools. It included the evidence that the instructional leadership practice is impacting student achievement. Elementary and middle Title I school leaders can use the research to know how to improve overall student achievement and close achievement gaps amongst student subgroups.
While there is a plethora of research on the principal instructional leadership practices’ impact on student achievement, there are gaps in the literature. There was limited information on a collective list of principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement in Title I schools, including elementary and middle school levels and the evidence that the instructional leadership practice is impacting student achievement. The principal’s skill of selecting essential work is key for student achievement as numerous teachers and school leaders are spending time on work that does not impact student achievement and not making connections to the needs of the school (Hattie, 2015; Marzano et al., 2005). Practitioners can refer to the impact of principal instructional leadership practices on student achievement to help with the PD of veteran and new principals in elementary and middle Title I schools. There are clear gaps in the knowledge of instructional leadership and school improvement processes of assistant principals as there are an increasing number of duties and an undefined group of practices for assistant principals (Morgan, 2018). Current accountability mandates necessitate effective principal preparation (Owens, 2016). This research might also be used for principal preparation programs.

Principals of elementary and middle Title I schools must be prepared to face the state and federal accountability challenges and most importantly understand the importance of implementing the instructional leadership practices that help all teachers and staff collectively impact student achievement so that students can transition from elementary, to middle school, to high school and graduate on time, prepared to be successful in college or career. The practice of developing collective teacher efficacy impacts student achievement in schools with high poverty as indicated in research (Leithwood, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2004; McConnell & Lyon, 2020; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Okilwa & Barnett, 2018). School leaders can develop student
performance by generating conditions that lead to increased collective teacher efficacy (Leithwood, 2021; Heck & Hallinger, 2014). An effective principal practice mentioned by Leithwood et al. (2004) is to enable others to do the work. As found in McGuigan and Hoy’s (2006) study, academic optimism, which includes collective efficacy and trust is correlated with school-level academic achievement, when controlling for socioeconomic status (SES), and school leaders who create school structures and practices that teachers sense as allowing them to do their work nurture academic optimism. Four Texas successive school administrators led the school through the turnaround process while sustaining student performance through collective efficacy to ensure student achievement according to the research of Okilwa and Barnett (2018). Eells (2011) noted the following concerning collective efficacy:

At the collective level, the beliefs that teachers hold about their school’s ability to affect achievement are important to the success of that school. Intervention efforts can be directed at building efficacy, so that teachers approach their schools ready, willing, and able to be effective. (p. 129)

The school instructional leader needs knowledge and understanding of practices that help develop collective efficacy across the faculty and staff.

The school leadership’s impact on student learning and achievement has been noted by numerous researchers as located in the review and analysis of the literature. Leithwood et al. (2004) stated, “Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” (p. 5). Effective school leadership is most impactful in underperforming schools, and leadership has the greatest impact in schools where leadership is most needed (Leithwood et al., 2004). Robinson et al. (2008) discovered that the average impact of instructional leadership on student outcomes was three to four times that of
transformational leadership in their research. It is evident from past research that instructional leadership is greatly needed in schools, especially schools that have low student achievement. Discovering the instructional practices and the evidence that the instructional leadership practice is impacting student achievement in effective elementary and middle Title I schools as reported by school personnel will add to the research.

This study aligns in many ways with the research of Hattie et al. (2016). The research included 15 case studies of international schools. Each chapter includes a description of how the schools implement “visible learning” (p. 9) to ensure all their students surpass their potential for academic achievement. Numerous leaders, including principals, assistant principals, and instructional coaches are included in the case studies. Chapter 2 focuses on realizing the impact educators have on student learning and achievement. Hattie et al. stated “knowing thy impact means connecting what we do as educators with what happens to learners (p. 23). Looking at what leadership teams do, meaning the practices, to impact student achievement is essential so that school teams can adapt those practices. There are numerous descriptions of instructional practices that are utilized by the leadership teams of the 15 schools in the case studies to guarantee student success with learning (Hattie et al., 2016). Many of the practices can be found in Table 5. Although a few of the 15 case studies describe schools that include students from low-income families and how the stakeholders impacted student achievement (Hattie et al., 2016), this qualitative research focused on identifying principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools, solely, within a school division in Virginia. The findings of this study might add to the current literature to empower elementary and middle Title I principals to impact student achievement and close achievement gaps amongst student groups.
Justification of the Study

This research focused on principal instructional leadership practices of elementary and middle Title I schools that have a high percentage of students achieving, including subgroups of students according to the Virginia School Quality Profile. High-performing, high-poverty schools can lose their desired status when a new principal is appointed with little knowledge and expectations and no mission-driven viewpoint (Jensen, 2017). Jensen (2017) stated, “Successful schools do anything and everything that is needed” (p. 125). According to many researchers, principals do have an impact on student achievement (Bossert et al., 1982; Brown, 2016; Cotton, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Heck, 1992; Heck & Hallinger, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Witzers et al., 2003). Other researchers have even discovered that principals of high-poverty schools impact student achievement (Boyles, 2020; Brown et al., 2017; Edmonds, 1979; Hattie, 2015; Leithwood, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano et al., 2005; McConnell & Lyon, 2020; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Mullen & Patrick, 2000; Okilwa & Barnett, 2018; Owens, 2016; Ylimaki, 2007). More current research is needed on the impact of principals’ instructional leadership practices on student achievement in Title I schools (Bossert et al., 1982; Brown et al., 2017; Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Owens, 2016; Witzers et al., 2003). Based on the review of literature, more recent research is needed on the impact of principal instructional practices on student achievement in elementary and middle high-poverty schools. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within a school division in Virginia.
Conceptual Framework

Having a map or guide to locate answers to questions is useful even in research. According to Miles et al. (2020), a conceptual framework is “simply the current and evolving version of the researcher’s ‘map’ of the qualitative territory being investigated. As the explorer’s knowledge of the terrain improves, the map becomes more differentiated and integrated” (p. 15). Figure 1 displays the conceptual framework of the study.
The conceptual framework for the study developed through the process of reviewing the literature. The four domains included in the framework connected to the many concepts found in the literature. When reviewing and analyzing the literature, the principal instructional leadership practices, descriptions of the practices, and evidence of the impact on student achievement were located respectively. Numerous studies from the literature described principal instructional leadership practices impacting student achievement in schools (Bossert et al., 1982; Brown, 2016; Garry, 2021; Glanz, 2005; Grissom et al., 2021; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hattie et al., 2016; Heck, 1992; Heck & Hallinger, 2014; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Marzano et al., 2005; Mullen & Graves, 2000; Robinson et al., 2008; Sanzo, et al., 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Yoon, 2016). Much of the literature included descriptions of principal instructional leadership practices impacting student achievement in high-poverty schools, specifically (Boyles, 2020; Brown et al., 2017; Cotton, 2003; Edmonds, 1979; Hattie,
2015; Leithwood, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020; Leithwood et al., 2004; McConnell & Lyon, 2020; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Mullen & Patrick, 2000; Okilwa & Barnett, 2018; Owens, 2016; Ylimaki, 2007). Leithwood et al. (2004) noted the effects of successful leadership are much greater in schools that are facing educational challenges. There was little research that indicated the perceptions of the stakeholders on the impact of instructional leadership practices on student achievement in successful elementary and middle Title I schools. The review unveiled the importance of determining the perceptions of stakeholders on principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement and the evidence that demonstrates the impact of the practices on student achievement in effective elementary and middle Title I schools.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms and definitions are key to this study:

*Instructional Leader*: principal of the school, focusing on instruction. Glanz (2005) stated that the role of the instructional leader is vital to improving teaching and learning as the leader should involve teachers in instructional conversations and meaningful observations.

*Standards of Learning*: the learning standards for the state of Virginia that “establish minimum expectations for what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade or course in English, mathematics, science, history/social science and other subjects” (VDOE, 2022a).

*Student Achievement*: student learning of state standards. Hattie (2015) mentioned that numerous teachers did not make the connection amongst student achievement and their individual practices as they were not focusing on what students were saying or doing, and did not recognize the significance of learning goals and success criteria as a way of making certain that they and their students knew the purpose of learning and were able to monitor learning progress.
High-poverty schools: more than 75% of the students in the building can receive a free and reduced lunch (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] 2020).

Schoolwide Title I Schools: schools enrolling at minimum 40 percent of children from low-income families (VDOE, 2021b).

Instructional Leadership Practices: principal practices that impact student achievement. Robinson et al. (2008) studied the comparison of the effects of five groups of leadership practices on student outcomes.

Summary

Chapter 1 provided the overview and purpose of the study. In addition, the statement of the problem and significance and justification of the study were included. Key terms and definitions were stated to provide clarity to the research. The reviewed research indicated the importance of determining the perceptions of stakeholders on principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement and the evidence that demonstrates the impact of the practices on student achievement in successful elementary and middle Title I schools. Chapter 2 provides a review of relevant literature on the impact of principals’ instructional leadership practices on student achievement. While the following literature review aims to be comprehensive, it is not exhaustive due to the large amount of research conducted on this topic throughout the decades.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This research focused on the principals’ instructional leadership practices impacting student achievement. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within a school division in Virginia. The research question was, what are the principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within a school division in Virginia as reported by principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers?

The focus of this literature review was to discover the most relevant research on the impact of principals’ instructional leadership practices on student achievement in high-poverty schools. While reviewing the literature, it was determined the topic of principals’ impact on student achievement had been studied by a number of researchers over the past five decades. This led to a search for the experts on the subject to locate and review the most relevant studies and determine the impact of principal practices on student achievement in high-poverty schools. The paper is organized based on the following themes that emerged from the literature review:

- impact of federal policy on student achievement in high-poverty schools;
- evolution of the principal’s impact on student achievement in high-poverty schools;
- impact of principal practices on student achievement in high-poverty schools;
- impact of principal preparation on student achievement in high-poverty schools.

The impact of federal policy on student achievement in high-poverty schools continually emerged as a theme in the review of the literature. The studies in the review provided insight on educational and school leadership reforms, policies, and levers and the impact they have had on student achievement. There was a strong connection of the reforms, policies, and levers to the
second theme appearing in the review: the evolution of the principal’s impact on student achievement in high-poverty schools over the decades. Federal policies played a role in the development of the principal as an instructional leader through the years as found across the literature. As more educational reforms, policies and levers were developed, the principal’s impact on student achievement in high-poverty schools advanced. Rothman (2017) explained the ESSA is more expansive than the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as it contains many provisions that help states and localities recruit, prepare, and develop effective principals.

The third and most fundamental theme that emerged in the review of literature was the impact of principal practices on student achievement in high-poverty schools. Numerous principal practices impacting student achievement were discovered in the literature review. Many of the practices were effective for all schools, and others were more effective for high-poverty schools. As research-based principal practices were located, the importance of principal preparation emerged in the research; thus, the fourth theme is the impact of principal preparation on student achievement in high-poverty schools. Successful principals lead successful teachers who lead successful students. As stated by McConnell and Lyon (2020), “It is important to prepare our teachers and students to be successful; if we’re not doing that, then we shouldn’t exist, in my opinion” (p. 137). The school principal is charged with being an instructional leader, growing instructional teacher leaders who impact student achievement.

**Methods for Searching and Locating Research**

A broad search of literature began in the fall of 2019 upon determining a topic of interest for the literature review using the Virginia Tech (VT) Remote Library. In August 2020, committee chair, Dr. Carol A. Mullen, guided my understanding of literature reviews and search
of databases when using the VT Remote Library, empowering me to locate the most salient literature for my topic of interest; and she continually shared multiple studies to review throughout my research. Google Scholar was used to locate research, paying close attention to the number of times the study had been cited as that was an indication of the significance of the research study. Throughout the review process, the names of key researchers repeatedly appeared in the literature, and more relevant sources from those researchers were located, which can be found in Appendix A. The most influential researchers appearing in the review of literature are highlighted in yellow.

A search of databases in the VT Remote Library was conducted to determine the research available on the following question: What are the principal instructional leadership practices in high-poverty schools impacting student achievement? A search of the database, Education Research Complete from EBSCOhost, was performed. The search criteria and results are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Search of the Database Education Research Complete from EBSCOhost*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Criteria</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement; principal; elementary schools</td>
<td>822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement; principal; elementary schools</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full text and scholarly articles 2000 to 2020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement; principal; elementary schools</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full text and scholarly articles 2014 to 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student achievement; principal; elementary schools; practices; poverty</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full text and scholarly articles 2014 to 2020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After locating 822 results and reviewing the titles, the search criteria were refined, and the search resulted in 140 studies. A review of the abstracts of the 140 results was conducted, and pertinent studies were read, analyzed, and included in this literature review. Studies were
reviewed from 2014 through 2020 so the research that was related to the most current reform, the ESSA, could be accessed. The ESSA (2015), signed by U. S. President Obama, has the purpose of “ensuring that every child achieves” (p. 2). The abstracts of the 52 results were reviewed, and any additional relevant studies were read, analyzed, and included in this literature review.

A search of the database ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global was conducted, and the search criterion leadership was used as opposed to principal to ensure that the most significant literature was captured to review. Out of 605 results from the database, the most relevant research was located. Titles and abstracts were read to determine the studies that were significant for the literature review. Upon selection, the studies were read, analyzed in their entirety, and included in the review. The search criteria and results are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Criteria</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement</td>
<td>706,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full text</td>
<td>706,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement</td>
<td>151,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full text</td>
<td>151,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 to 2020</td>
<td>2014 to 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement; Title 1; leadership; elementary schools; Virginia; Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA; leadership practices; instructional leader; Urban; majority low-income</td>
<td>977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full text</td>
<td>977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 to 2020</td>
<td>2014 to 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement; Title 1; leadership; elementary schools; Virginia; Every Student Succeeds or ESSA; leadership practices; Instructional leader; urban; Majority low-income; and majority low socio-economic status</td>
<td>605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full text</td>
<td>605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 to 2020</td>
<td>2014 to 2020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A search of the VTWorks database was completed, and the search criteria and results follow in Table 3.
Table 3

*Search of the Database VTWorks*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Criteria</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational leadership and policy studies</td>
<td>6,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement; leadership</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement; elementary</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eighty-four titles and abstracts were reviewed to find the most significant studies to read and analyze. More salient sources were found in the references section of several of the studies.

An additional search of the EBSCOhost database was performed using the following search criteria: *principal practices* and *student achievement*, and there were 107 results that were reviewed. Specific practices were then searched on the EBSCOhost database. One search performed used the following search criteria: *data meetings*; *principal or school leaders or administrators*; *student achievement or student success or student outcomes* from 2014 to 2021. Four results were located; one article and one study were read in their entirety. Another search performed used, *collaborative meetings or collaborative planning*; *principal or school leaders or administrators*; *student achievement or student success or student outcomes* from 2014-2021. One result that was not related to the topic of research was located. A final search performed used: *formal observations or informal observations or walkthroughs or instructional rounds*; *principal or school leaders or administrators*; *student achievement or student success or student outcomes* from 2014-2021. One study was read and analyzed. Other related studies were shared by the chair, Dr. Carol A. Mullen, and a colleague for the researcher to review. A total of 11 studies were read and analyzed in their entirety.

Most of the research for the literature review came from Education Research Complete from EBSCOhost. More relevant sources were found in the reference sections of the reviewed...
studies. Forty studies were read, analyzed, and included in the literature review, along with 20 national and state reports. The search of the ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global and VTWorks databases yielded Virginia dissertations related to the topic of interest. Two were included in the review.

**Methods Used in the Sources**

In 1998, Hallinger and Heck noted that the conceptual and methodological tools utilized in studies on instructional leadership had developed through the years, and in 2011, Hallinger stated that methodological tools on this topic had improved. In 2011, Hallinger determined that the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS), which he developed earlier, remained a valid and reliable methodological tool. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) utilized the PIMRS tool previously to measure a school leader’s instructional management practices. They concluded that “although there is some variation in the strength of the instructional management subscales, the PIMRS appears to measure reliably and validly the components of instructional management” (p. 126). The research tool determined how well the school leader manages curriculum and instruction, as well as defined personal and organizational dynamics that may be related to instructional management behaviors.

A variety of methods were utilized in the studies reviewed for this paper and are denoted in Appendix A. Seven studies included a review of research on school leadership throughout the years. The studies provided a rich insight into the impact of principal practices on student achievement throughout the many decades. There were seventeen qualitative studies included in the literature review with dates ranging from 1985 to 2021. Case studies, interviews, action research, open-ended surveys, and exploratory analysis were used respectively in the studies. One study found in the research utilized the Delphi method. Ten quantitative studies dated from
1966 to 2020 were located in the review of research. The studies utilized surveys, questionnaires, multiple measures, paired t-tests, chi-squared tests, descriptive statistics, structural equation modeling, multilevel cross-classified modeling, and correlational, regression, discriminant and factor analyses, respectively. Four studies included meta-analysis of research throughout the years, from 1978 through the early 2000’s. In a meta-analysis, Marzano et al. (2005) noted that out of over 5000 articles and studies, they located only 69 that researched the quantitative relationship between principals and student achievement.

**Synthesis of the Literature**

The initial focus of this literature review was the impact of elementary principals’ practices on student achievement in high-poverty schools and emerged to the impact of the principals’ instructional practices on student achievement in high-poverty elementary and middle Title I schools. Appendix A includes the relevant sources that were located, reviewed, and synthesized for this paper in connection to the topic. The appendix is color-coded based on the themes that emerged from the research of the literature.

**The Impact of Federal Policy on Student Achievement**

Federal policy has impacted student achievement across the last five decades. No Child Left Behind in 2001, Race to the Top in 2009, and ESSA in 2015 have placed endless pressures on public schools to grow student performance (Thornton et al., 2019). With the numerous challenges that principals are faced with daily, they are essentially asked “to be instructional leaders, to address unending mandates, and to produce immediate improvements in student achievement” (Thornton et al., 2019, p. 131). Tienken (2020) explained that through a process of “creative compliance” (p. 19), principals can discover innovative opportunities within a reform, lessening the negativity and changing the path of the reform towards a new positive direction.
There have been many opportunities within educational reforms, policies, and levers that principals have uncovered and seized to benefit student achievement in high-poverty schools, resulting in attainment of federal, state, district, and school goals as indicated in this review.

U.S. President Lyndon Baines Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) into law in 1965 (U.S. Department of Education, [USDOE], 2020). Diem and Welton (2021) noted, “ESEA’s original policy intentions were equity-focused” (p. 80). The intentions of the policy were to ensure equitable learning opportunities, but it fell short. According to the USDOE (2020), the ESEA allowed high-poverty school districts to apply for grants to obtain funding for textbooks, library books, special education hubs and college scholarships. Furthermore, the ESEA permitted states to apply for federal grants of funding so that elementary and secondary schools could make academic improvements, ensuring the most vulnerable students would receive a high-quality education (USDOE, 2020). This was the first of multiple laws enacted in the U.S. with a goal of creating a more equitable education system. Again, this was a goal that was not achieved in all states, divisions, and schools.

As time passed more laws and policies were initiated yet did not reach full implementation. In 2002, the ESEA was reauthorized, and the new law, NCLB, was passed, calling for states to put procedures in place that exposed achievement gaps among student subgroups. Although this law sent a clear message to educators, families, and policy makers that underrepresented students were not achieving as well as their peers, NCLB was exceedingly prescriptive and impractical for teachers and schools (USDOE, 2020). Not only was NCLB prescriptive while at the same time exposing inequitable opportunities (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016; USDOE, 2020) but it also revealed funding gaps. Tienken (2020) asked, “How do the intended or unintended impacts of the reform impact individuals, groups, or the educational
community as it pertains to equity, social justice, or recognition as a human being?” (p. 129). Diem and Welton (2021) noted, “NCLB used market-oriented, one-size fits all instructional reforms such as standardized testing and punitive sanctions that were immediate fixes, not solutions that would redress systemic racial inequities in public education” (p. 82). Although NCLB uncovered achievement gaps among traditionally underserved children and their peers and prompted a critical national discussion on education improvement, it was found to be too prescriptive (USDOE, 2020). Fortunately, the discussions for, and research on, school improvement and the importance of school leadership continued.

Revisions of the law began under the direction of U.S. President Obama. In 2010, he heard concerns from educators and families and began the work of revising the law, emphasizing preparation of all learners for achievement in college and career (USDOE, 2020). The reauthorized ESSA (2015), signed by Obama, has the purpose of making certain that all children achieve. Provisions through the ESSA are included under the following topics:

1. access to learning opportunities focused on higher-order thinking skills; 2. multiple measures of equity; 3. resource equity; and 4. evidence-based interventions. Each of the provisions can be leveraged by educators, researchers, policy influencers, and advocates to advance equity in education for all students. (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016, p. v)

Communities and school stakeholders can ensure that states, localities, and schools deliver high-quality, equitable, educational opportunities through the ESSA (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016). Once citizens and school stakeholders understand the opportunities and flexibility afforded to define goals, objectives, targeted interventions, and supports to make improvements in schools, they can carry out their responsibilities. These responsibilities include ensuring that states, local education agencies (LEA), and schools offer equitable opportunities to afford students with the
needed 21\textsuperscript{st}-century skills to be successful in college and career (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016). Citizens of states and localities and educational stakeholders are accountable for making certain that schools are spending federal funds appropriately to provide equitable opportunities to high-poverty students, increasing the future success of the students, primarily, as well as the nation, states, and localities. These equitable opportunities are provided by the instructional leaders of the school, the principal.

**Title I and Title II Grants**

Title I provides federal funds through grants to schools with high-poverty levels. The ESSA (2015) noted the purpose of Title I, Improving Basic Programs Operated by State and Local Educational Agencies (LEA), is “to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps” (p. 14). The ESSA approved 15 to 16.2 billion dollars each year from 2017-2020 through formula funding from Title I to assist states and school districts with school improvement programs for the lowest performing 5\% of schools, and the funds can be used to help increase the effectiveness of principals (Rothman, 2017). The states and localities in the U.S. with schools meeting this criteria have access to these funds and can use the funds to ensure principals leading high-poverty schools are effectively using research-based practices to increase student achievement. Title I, Part A provides funding to schools serving 40\% or greater of students living in poverty or schools that have obtained a school-wide eligibility waiver (VDOE, 2020a). It is the responsibility of the school principals and the local educational agencies in the state of Virginia to use Title I funds appropriately, making certain there is access to better learning opportunities for the most vulnerable students. Not only are Title I funds intended to be used to
support student achievement for all students in high-poverty schools, but they also simultaneously support efforts to close the proficiency gaps.

High-poverty schools can be defined by the number of students receiving free and reduced lunch. As indicated by the NCES in 2020, in a high-poverty school more than 75% of the students in the building can receive a free and reduced lunch, while 25% or less of students in a low-poverty school qualify for free and reduced lunch. High-poverty schools have the students that are most vulnerable. In the fall of 2017, “about 42% of students who attended city schools were in high-poverty schools, compared with 21% of students who attended town schools, 18% of students who attended suburban schools, and 15% of students who attended rural schools” (NCES, 2020). National, state and community leaders including local school boards and city councils need to understand the importance of placing the most prepared and effective school leaders in high-poverty Title I schools that serve low-income and minority students to grow student achievement and close achievement gaps. There were over 55,906 schools receiving funds from Title I during the 2015-2016 school year to assist with student learning in the U.S. (USDOE, 2020). The schools receiving those funds should have principals who understand teaching and learning.

Funding is available for personnel, including teachers and principals. An additional funding source from the federal government is Title II, which helps fund the need for development and recruitment of highly effective teachers and school leaders to increase learning opportunities and achievement for low-income and minority students. Rothman (2017) stated although evidence is available on the impact of school-level leaders on instruction and learning, policymakers have not focused much on school administrators; however, with the ESSA,
principals are noted more frequently in federal policy. The ESSA (2015) stated that Title II should do the following:

provide grants to State educational agencies and sub grants to local educational agencies to—(1) increase student achievement consistent with the challenging State academic standards; (2) improve the quality and effectiveness of teachers, principals, and other school leaders; (3) increase the number of teachers, principals, and other school leaders who are effective in improving student academic achievement in schools; and (4) provide low-income and minority students greater access to effective teachers, principals, and other school leaders. (p. 14)

While it is essential to improve the effectiveness of teachers, improving the effectiveness of principals in K-12 schools to support school improvement efforts could prove to be more cost efficient (Leithwood et al., 2004) and accessible (Rothman, 2017). Leaders with an instructional focus led the effect of individual teachers on student learning according to the research of Heck and Hallinger (2014). Offering equitable opportunities to students in low-performing, high-minority, and high-poverty schools includes recruiting and retaining high-performing principals to recruit, develop and retain high-performing teachers. School divisions should develop an equity lens and have effective principals leading schools serving underrepresented students (Grissom et al., 2021). While knowledgeable and skillful teachers support classroom improvement and create highly effective classrooms, knowledgeable and skillful principals support school improvement and sustain highly effective schools (Rothman, 2017). The ESSA approved close to 23.3 billion each year to states from 2017-2020 through formula funding from Title II Part A to increase effectiveness of teachers, school administrators, and other school leaders in low-performing schools, and states now have a greater amount of flexibility when
spending the funds (Rothman, 2017). The RAND Corporation (2017) studied the evidence found in research involving school leadership interventions to gain a stronger understanding of how to implement interventions through ESSA, determine the types of improvement strategies that are permissible, as well as provide direction to policymakers, practitioners, and those in leadership positions on best educational practices. The study indicated that school leadership could be a key lever for the school improvement process that states and local school districts are expected to implement. The Rand Corporation (2017) and Rothman (2017) explained that interventions federally funded through Title I and Title II grants should be evidence based as mandated by the ESSA. Rothman (2017) added the interventions must demonstrate a statistically significant effect on student performance or another related outcome. School principals in high-poverty schools, most importantly, need the instructional leadership knowledge that allows them to find and use evidence-based interventions that support student achievement.

**Principal Performance Standards**

The reviewed literature connected principal performance standards to student achievement. Lochmiller and Mancinelli (2019) determined how 354 elementary school administrators in Washington State modified their leadership practices to meet the new state mandates of the teacher evaluation policy. Support and coaching were utilized to help with the implementation of the new teacher evaluation initiative. The instructional observations of educators became more focused and purposeful as other staff handled non-instructional responsibilities to ensure that instructional time was protected. The application of the new policy on teacher evaluation helped build instructional leaders as the emphasis was on supporting educators with their classroom instruction (Lochmiller & Mancinelli, 2019).
Virginia principals must meet specific performance standards through the state evaluation system. Standard 5: Quality of Instruction and Educational Leadership of the Standards of Quality found in the Code of Virginia mandates that principals’ evaluations align with the performance standards found in the Board of Education’s (BOE) Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers, Administrators, and Superintendents, and the school boards’ processes for evaluating school leaders must include student achievement (Virginia Law: Code of Virginia, 2020). The Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISSLC) standards were replaced in 2015 with Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), which combined “research- and practice-based understanding of the relationship between educational leadership and student learning” (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 3). The term student learning appears 24 times in the PSELs. The standards align with the performance standards found in the Virginia Board of Education’s (VBOE) Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers, Administrators, and Superintendents (VDOE, 2020b), and both sets of standards strongly support student learning. Principals in Virginia are evaluated based on the performance of the standards displayed in Table 4.
Table 4


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Standards</th>
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</table>
| 1. **Instructional Leadership**  
The principal fosters the success of all students by facilitating the development, communication, implementation, and evaluation of a shared vision of teaching and learning that leads to student academic progress and school improvement. |
| 2. **School Climate**  
The principal fosters the success of all students by developing, advocating, and sustaining an academically rigorous, positive, and safe school climate for all stakeholders. |
| 3. **Human Resources Management**  
The principal fosters effective human resources management by assisting with selection and induction, and by supporting, evaluating, and retaining quality instructional and support personnel. |
| 4. **Organizational Management**  
The principal fosters the success of all students by supporting, managing, and overseeing the school’s organization, operation, and use of resources. |
| 5. **Communication and Community Relations**  
The principal fosters the success of all students by communicating and collaborating effectively with stakeholders. |
| 6. **Professionalism**  
The principal fosters the success of all students by demonstrating professional standards and ethics, engaging in continuous professional development, and contributing to the profession. |
| 7. **Student Academic Progress**  
The principal’s leadership results in acceptable, measurable student academic progress based on established standards. |

The term *student* appears in 6 of the 7 standards, and the terminology *success of all students* appears in 5 of the 7. All the performance standards demonstrate a connection between principals and student achievement. Standard 7 stresses the impact of the principal on adequate and quantifiable student academic progress. Principals are rated from *unsatisfactory* to *exemplary*, with *proficient* being the goal. The standards indicate the impact that principal practices can have on student achievement. To provide equitable learning opportunities for students, exemplary principals should be serving in high-poverty schools, impacting student achievement.
Evolution of the Principal’s Impact on Student Achievement

Throughout the decades, the principal’s impact on student achievement in underrepresented schools has been researched. At the request of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Coleman et al. (1966) utilized a survey to determine and report the extent of segregation amongst the minority students and the majority students, the equality of educational opportunity for the groups, and the relationship to student achievement. The results indicated the following: a segregation of the minority and majority groups; a significant difference in educational opportunities, including access to learning resources, teachers, and principals, offered to minority students as compared to majority; and a significant difference in student achievement between the two groups, with the minority students’ achievement scores lower than those of the majority (Coleman, 1968; Coleman et al., 1966). Equitable learning opportunities and equitable access for underrepresented students has been a clear ongoing issue.

There has been ongoing research to indicate the important role that school leadership plays in student achievement. In a review of studies on school leadership and student achievement beginning in the 1970s, Cotton (2003) found research focusing on schools with low-income and minority students. While earlier studies noted that principals who are administrative and instructional leaders are found in high-performing schools, more current research confirms and expands those findings (Cotton, 2003). Bossert et al. (1982) developed a structure for understanding the role a school leader plays as an instructional manager with connections among school-level variables and student learning through the review of the research on effective instructional management and the role of the school leader as an instructional manager. The study unveiled that successful schools include a climate that contributes to learning. According to Heck (1992), the findings of the respective research, and
some previous studies that concentrated on the principal and classroom practices of teachers, afforded necessary empirical support for the idea that school variables, including an administrator’s instructional leadership, predict a school’s academic performance. The research demonstrated that school leaders’ knowledge of instruction does impact how well a school performs instructionally.

The research of Marzano et al. (2005), from 1978 to 2001, indicated an average of a .25 correlation between the school administrator and student achievement, yet student achievement increased significantly in schools with highly effective principals compared to schools with highly ineffective principals. Hallinger and Heck (1998) reviewed quantitative studies on the relationship between school leadership and student achievement from 1980 to 1995 and discovered that principals indirectly impact school and student achievement. While much of the research over the past years indicated little relationship between principals and student achievement, there was still a relationship (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Marzano et al., 2005; Witzers et al., 2003). The research found in the review of literature is indicative of the need for continued research of a principal’s impact on student achievement, particularly in high-poverty schools.

Hallinger and Murphy (1985) determined that principals did actively manage curriculum and instruction regularly, which helped with Hallinger’s development of the PIMRS. The PIMRS was a questionnaire developed to assess principal instructional management activities and included an exploratory analysis of the individual and organizational factors that are related to active instructional management. The tool continued to be useful and remained valid and reliable for research on instructional management through the years (Hallinger, 2011). Although this tool
was highly effective throughout the decades, student achievement in Title I schools is a topic that still needs to be researched.

Unveiling the key principal instructional practices impacting student achievement in Title I schools in the research was a focus of this review of literature. Leithwood et al. (2020) studied four paths and the effect they had on student learning. The research tested a set of variables determining the school leadership’s impact on students referred to as “the four paths model” (Leithwood et al., 2020, p. 570). The four paths were, “rational, emotional, organizational, and family paths” (p. 572), and each included variables that are related to school leadership. It was discovered that one of the four, the rational path, had a statistically significant effect on student achievement. The variables connected to the rational path encompassed knowledge and skills of school team members regarding “curriculum, teaching, and learning” (p. 574). This specifically included “classroom instruction, academic press, disciplinary climate, and teacher's use of instructional time” (Leithwood et al., 2020, p. 574). All the variables included in the rational path, which had a substantial effect on student achievement, were connected to instruction.

There were numerous recommendations for future research throughout the review of the literature. Witzers et al. (2003) stated, “Context and intermediate factors should be taken into account in future research” (p. 416). Hallinger (2011) noted, “The PhD in educational leadership and management is just as ill as the EdD, and the field must take steps to revitalize both” (p. 299). The question in studies throughout the years has evolved from does the school leader make an impact on student achievement to if so, how does the principal make an impact on student achievement? (Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Brown et al. (2017) noted that more research is needed to conclude if the leadership categories influencing student achievement for all students found in earlier research impact student achievement of students from families
with a low socioeconomic status. It was not enough to determine if the principal impacts student achievement. The research had to focus on uncovering the practices that are utilized to impact student achievement.

**Impact of Principal Practices on Student Achievement**

It is the responsibility of the school, not the student and or family, to assure student achievement (Coleman, 1968). Effective school leaders hold themselves accountable for their school’s achievement (Cotton, 2003). Hattie (2015) stated that “High-impact instructional leaders believe that success and failure in student learning is about what they, as teachers or leaders, did or didn’t do” (p. 40). McConnell and Lyon (2020) noted, when “transforming a school,” it is of utmost importance for leaders to put the right people in the right place to do the essential work of providing students with personalized learning and opportunities for success. School leader behaviors and qualities are positively associated with student success, attitudes, and social conduct (Cotton, 2003). Nineteen of the 26 effective behaviors and qualities of effective school leaders discovered in Cotton’s (2003) research related to student achievement. Robinson et al. (2008) noted that the more educational administrators connect to teaching and learning, the higher their impact will be on student achievement. They found that instructional leadership had an effect size of .42 while transformational leadership had an effect size of .11. This is a significant difference and demonstrates the influence principals with an instructional mindset have over student achievement in schools. Transformational leaders stem from the business world and policymakers, who are attempting to “transform” schools (Hattie, 2015, p. 38). Robinson et al. (2008) found that the average impact of instructional leadership on student outcomes was three to four times that of transformational leadership; the closer principals get to the essential business of teaching and learning, the greater the chance of
positively impacting student performance. When principals are close to instruction and student learning, the researcher must ask what principal practices impact student achievement.

**Principal Practices in Schools**

The literature included numerous principal practices impacting student achievement in schools, with no criteria. The practices are shown in Table 5 and are ranked in terms of how many times they appeared in the research.

**Table 5**

*Principal Practices Impacting Student Achievement in Schools, with No Criteria*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Monitor data for student performance (Bossert et al., 1982; Handford &amp; Leithwood, 2013; Hallinger &amp; Murphy, 1985; Heck, 1992) and drive instruction (Brown, 2016; Garry, 2021; Grissom et al., 2021; Hattie et al., 2016; Hitt &amp; Tucker, 2016; Mullen &amp; Graves, 2000; Sanzo, et al., 2011; Yoon, 2016);</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Collaborate in professional learning communities (Brown, 2016; Glanz, 2005; Grissom et al., 2021; Handford &amp; Leithwood, 2013; Hattie et al., 2016; Heck, 1992; Hitt &amp; Tucker, 2016; Robinson et al., 2008; Sanzo et al., 2011);</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Establish clear school instructional goals (Bossert et al., 1982; Grissom et al., 2021; Handford &amp; Leithwood, 2013; Hallinger &amp; Murphy, 1985; Hattie et al., 2016; Hitt &amp; Tucker, 2016; Mullen &amp; Graves, 2000; Robinson et al., 2008; Sanzo et al., 2011);</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Maintain a focus on instruction (Glanz, 2005; Grissom et al., 2021; Handford &amp; Leithwood, 2013; Hattie et al., 2016; Heck &amp; Hallinger, 2014; Hitt &amp; Tucker, 2016; Mullen &amp; Graves, 2000; Sanzo et al., 2011);</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Remain present and visible (Grissom et al., 2021; Handford &amp; Leithwood, 2013; Hallinger &amp; Murphy, 1985; Hattie et al., 2016; Hitt &amp; Tucker, 2016; Marzano et al., 2005; Mullen &amp; Graves, 2000; Sanzo et al., 2011);</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Conduct instructional observations and reflective conversations (Glanz, 2005; Grissom et al., 2021; Handford &amp; Leithwood, 2013; Hattie et al., 2016; Heck, 1992; Hitt &amp; Tucker, 2016; Mullen &amp; Graves, 2000; Sanzo et al., 2011);</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Set high expectations for all (Bossert et al., 1982; Grissom et al., 2021; Hattie et al., 2016; Hitt &amp; Tucker, 2016; Mullen &amp; Graves, 2000; Robinson et al., 2008; Sanzo et al., 2011);</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Sustain a well-ordered and supportive atmosphere (Grissom et al., 2021; Handford &amp; Leithwood, 2013; Hattie et al., 2016; Hitt &amp; Tucker, 2016; Mullen &amp; Graves, 2000; Robinson et al., 2008; Sanzo et al., 2011);</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Manage and align curriculum (Brown, 2016) and instructional strategies regularly (Glanz, 2005; Grissom et al., 2021; Hallinger &amp; Murphy, 1985; Hitt &amp; Tucker, 2016; Robinson et al., 2008);</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Develop a plan of support for instruction and student learning (Glanz, 2005; Grissom et al., 2021; Hattie et al., 2016; Hitt &amp; Tucker, 2016; Mullen &amp; Graves, 2000; Sanzo et al., 2011);</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Distribute resources effectively (Bossert et al., 1982; Grissom et al., 2021; Handford &amp; Leithwood, 2013; Hattie et al., 2016; Hitt &amp; Tucker, 2016; Robinson et al., 2008);</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
12. Build trusting relationships with teachers (Grissom et al., 2021; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Hattie et al., 2016; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Mullen & Graves, 2000);

13. Involve teachers and leaders with decision making (Glanz, 2005; Grissom et al., 2021; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Mullen & Graves, 2000; Sanzo et al., 2011);

14. Supervise and evaluate faculty and staff (Grissom et al., 2021; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hattie et al., 2016; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Robinson et al., 2008);

15. Protect and maximize the instructional and learning time (Brown, 2016; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Mullen & Graves, 2000);

16. Support parent and teacher communication (Grissom et al., 2021; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Mullen & Graves, 2000);

17. Manage the budget (Brown, 2016; Grissom et al., 2021; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Hitt & Tucker, 2016);

18. Build teacher collective efficacy (Grissom et al., 2021; Heck & Hallinger, 2014; Hitt & Tucker, 2016);

19. Develop a school mission (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hattie et al., 2016; Hitt & Tucker, 2016);

20. Demonstrate openness and honesty (Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Sanzo et al., 2011).

21. Offer incentives (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hattie et al., 2016);

22. Set expectations for students to behave responsibly (Grissom et al., 2021; Mullen & Graves, 2000).

23. Facilitate development of common assessments (Brown, 2016);

24. Emphasize teaching fundamental skills (Bossert et al., 1982);

25. Support the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) (Brown, 2016);


Time on task is critical for the principal who is an instructional leader. An instructional leader’s job centers on “keeping the important thing the important thing” (McConnell & Lyon, 2020, p. 118). Using time wisely is necessary as the work of the principal, including the aforementioned principal practices, is never ending. To be a leader of learning, there are three strategies which can be utilized simultaneously to meet the challenges of time and capacity and are as follows:

1. “Clarify your personal vision and supporting ‘habits,’

2. Articulate a collective instructional leadership role,

3. Enable others to act” (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013, p. 13).
Leaders of high-achieving elementary schools seem to allocate significantly more time to instructional leadership practices than any other school leader in other settings (Heck, 1992). Archer (2004) detailed the job description of Kelly Griffith, an elementary school principal. Her daily duties include spending time conducting observations of teachers, sharing new instructional strategies, analyzing assessment data, and planning targeted PD, which will enable her teachers to grow student learners. Griffith, an administrator in Easton, Maryland, does not handle maintenance, coordination of field trips, management of the cafeteria, and supervision of transportation in the mornings and evenings. This principal’s district in Talbot County added “school managers” to each building to help principals spend more time on instruction with a goal of improving academic performance of students (Archer, 2004). Mullen (2005) noted, although principals need to be able to multitask and manage the daily operations of the school, a transformation may be occurring with the principals’ role: from “manager to instructional leader” (p. 13).

Creating systems and routines and growing a highly qualified faculty and staff are imperative for principals to continue the laser focus on instruction. McConnell and Lyon (2020) stated that school leaders must be strategic and constantly keep the focus on the purpose, which is instruction. To help with this strategic focus, highly effective school administrators constantly develop the capacities of educators and systems (Thornton et al., 2019). Glanz (2005) stated, although compiling reports, engaging with parents, and writing proposals are important, remember to attend to urgent concerns. Paying attention to the role of instructional leader is paramount to improving teaching and learning. Engage teachers in instructional dialogue and meaningful supervision (not evaluation). (p. 24)
Although the review of literature led to the research on the principal practices impacting student achievement, there was a need to determine what practices are impactful in high-poverty schools.

**Principal Practices in High-Poverty Schools**

Over the many decades, research has continued on what is needed to ensure student achievement for the most vulnerable of students, including those who are economically disadvantaged. According to McGuigan and Hoy (2006), “Since the Coleman Report (1966), educational researchers have tried to identify school properties that make a difference in student achievement and overcome the negative influence of low socioeconomic status” (p. 203). Gieselmann (2009) found that the only predictor variable demonstrating impact on student achievement was lower socioeconomic status. While the research indicated minor but significant effects of principal practices on student achievement in schools, current research shows that the effects of successful leadership are greater in schools that are facing educational challenges (Leithwood et al., 2004). Mullen and Patrick (2000) determined the importance of effective practitioners in at-risk schools. The principal realized that it was critical to facilitate school improvement on behalf of each child; hence the principal was referred to as a “reform catalyst and child activist” (p. 236). The review of literature indicated many principal practices impacting student achievement in high-poverty schools. The practices, shown in Table 6, are ranked in terms of their frequency in the research.

**Table 6**

**Principal Practices Impacting Student Achievement in High-poverty Schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Build trusting relationships (Leithwood, 2021; McConnell &amp; Lyon, 2020; McGuigan &amp; Hoy, 2006; Mullen &amp; Patrick, 2000; Okilwa &amp; Barnett, 2018; Ylimaki, 2007) between students, parents, and school staff (Boyles, 2020; Brown et al., 2017);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Develop an environment of high expectations (Edmonds, 1979; Hattie, 2015; Leithwood, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2004; McConnell &amp; Lyon, 2020; Okilwa &amp; Barnett, 2018; Owens, 2016);</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Collaborate professionally (Hattie, 2015; Okilwa & Barnett, 2018) and understand the fundamentals of professional learning communities (Brown et al., 2017; Leithwood, 2021; McConnell & Lyon, 2020);
4. Build teacher collective efficacy (Leithwood, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2004; McConnell & Lyon, 2020; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Okilwa & Barnett, 2018);
5. Monitor data effectively to drive instruction (Leithwood, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020; Leithwood et al., 2004; McConnell & Lyon, 2020; Okilwa & Barnett, 2018);
6. Develop and implement a purposeful school improvement plan (Leithwood et al., 2004) and process (Leithwood, 2021; McConnell & Lyon, 2020; Ylimaki, 2007);
7. Distribute leadership (Okilwa & Barnett, 2018) and build capacity (Leithwood, 2021; McConnell & Lyon, 2020; Ylimaki, 2007);
8. Be a role model for hard work (Leithwood, 2021; McConnell & Lyon, 2020; Okilwa & Barnett, 2018; Owens, 2016);
9. Provide support as needed (Brown et al., 2017; Hattie, 2015; Leithwood, 2021; McConnell & Lyon, 2020);
10. Establish clear goals (Leithwood, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020; Leithwood et al., 2004; McConnell & Lyon, 2020);
11. Focus on a solid school vision (Brown et al., 2017) and develop a mission (Leithwood, 2021; McConnell & Lyon, 2020);
12. Hold self (Cotton, 2003) and others accountable (Leithwood, 2021; McConnell & Lyon, 2020);
13. Unveil strengths and growth opportunities (Leithwood, 2021; McConnell & Lyon, 2020; Okilwa & Barnett, 2018);
14. Depend on and create support systems (Leithwood, 2021; McConnell & Lyon, 2020; Mullen & Patrick, 2000);
15. Communicate effectively with all school stakeholders (Leithwood, 2021; McConnell & Lyon, 2020; Owens, 2016);
16. Create school structures and practices (Leithwood, 2021; McConnell & Lyon, 2020; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006);
17. Manage and align curriculum and instruction regularly (Leithwood, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020; McConnell & Lyon, 2020);
18. Initiate staff changes (McConnell & Lyon, 2020; Mullen & Patrick, 2000);
19. Discontinue programs that do not work (Hattie, 2015; McConnell & Lyon, 2020);
20. Determine the teachers who make the most impact on student achievement and create PD opportunities to build the impact (Hattie, 2015; McConnell & Lyon, 2020);
21. Individualize PD (Leithwood et al., 2020; McConnell & Lyon, 2020);
22. Conduct instructional rounds (McConnell & Lyon, 2020) or walkthroughs with teachers (Leithwood, 2021);
23. Protect and maximize instructional and learning time (Leithwood, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020);
24. Understand the written, taught, and assessed curriculum (Leithwood, 2021; Owens, 2016);
25. Involve teachers and leaders with decision making (Leithwood, 2021; McConnell & Lyon, 2020);
26. Recruit, develop, and retain highly qualified teachers and leaders (Leithwood, 2021; McConnell & Lyon, 2020);
27. Distribute resources effectively (Leithwood et al., 2020) and equitably (Leithwood, 2021);
28. Sustain a well-ordered and supportive atmosphere (Leithwood, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020);
29. Stress student achievement (Owens, 2016);
30. View trials as opportunities for growth (Okilwa & Barnett, 2018);
31. “Create rituals of visibility and relationship” (Mullen & Patrick, 2000, p. 244);
32. Emphasize vertical alignment of curriculum standards (McConnell & Lyon, 2020);
33. Remain resilient (McConnell & Lyon, 2020);
34. Create mentors and coaches to grow school leaders (McConnell & Lyon, 2020);
35. Develop student ownership of learning (Leithwood et al., 2020);
36. Generate a safe, empathetic, and positive learning environment (Owens, 2016);
37. Promote use of technology to enhance face-to-face learning (Leithwood et al., 2020).

A strong principal using instructional practices is essential to high-poverty schools that are underperforming. There are no known cases of struggling schools improving without a strong principal (Leithwood et al., 2004). The following were the key principal practices impacting student achievement in schools found in the review of literature:

- Monitor data for student performance;
- Collaborate in professional learning communities;
- Establish clear school instructional goals;
- Maintain a focus on instruction;
- Remain present and visible;
- Conduct instructional observations and reflective conversations.

The following were the key principal practices impacting student achievement in high-poverty schools found in the literature:

- Build trusting relationships;
- Develop an environment of high expectations;
- Collaborate professionally;
- Build teacher collective efficacy;
- Monitor data effectively to drive instruction.

The two common principal practices between the general schools and high-poverty schools were monitoring data and collaborating professionally. The literature on principal practices in high-poverty schools appeared to have more references to using data to drive instruction.
Impact of Principal Preparation on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools

The literature reviewed revealed the impact of principal preparation on student achievement in high-poverty schools. Leithwood et al. (2004) stated,

Efforts to improve their recruitment, training, evaluation and ongoing development should be considered highly cost-effective approaches to successful school improvement. These efforts will be increasingly productive as research provides us with more robust understandings of how successful leaders make sense of and productively respond to both external policy initiatives and local needs and priorities, and of how those practices seep into the fabric of the education system, improving its overall quality and substantially adding value to our students’ learning. (p. 70)

In Morgan’s (2018) study of assistant principals’ self-efficacy and principal practices, areas of strengths were facilitating collaborative learning conditions and efficacy regarding family and community involvement; however, there were clear proficiency gaps in the areas of instructional leadership and the school improvement processes. The study showed an increasing number of duties and an undefined group of practices for assistant principals (Morgan, 2018). Considering that many times an individual serving as an assistant principal is preparing to be a principal, this study indicates the importance of developing assistant principals to be instructional leaders who can impact student achievement in high-poverty schools. Research indicated that gains in leadership behaviors pre-program and post are statistically significant (Gray & Lewis, 2013). It was emphasized that the authentic practice of school leadership practices would allow new school administrators to grow knowledge and skills to support student achievement (Gray & Lewis, 2013). The findings from five innovative principal preparation programs are listed below:

1) Influence teacher feelings of efficacy, motivation, and satisfaction;
2) establish the organizational and cultural conditions that foster a positive environment for teaching and learning;

3) promote professional collaboration;

4) promote and support the instructional abilities and professional development of teachers;

5) focus resources and organizational systems toward the development, support, and assessment of teaching and learning, and;

6) enlist the involvement and support of parents and community stakeholders. (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012, p. 43)

All the findings from these principal preparation programs align with the principal practices impacting student achievement that were located in the literature review. Ylimaki (2007) explored instructional leadership methods to increase student achievement in four U.S. elementary schools, comprised of a diverse and disadvantaged group of students. It was noted that all four schools demonstrated an increase in student achievement as well as met the success standard determined by U.S. policy. Two of the schools had principals with experience in school improvement and shared instructional leadership to build capacity and were trusted by their respective teams, while two of the schools had new principals who were persistent, yet still needed more time to develop as instructional leaders. Considering that there are federal funds through Title II to prepare principals to impact student achievement in high-poverty schools, states and localities are responsible for distributing the funds appropriately and equitably (ESSA, 2015). High-poverty schools and divisions can use these funds to develop principals into highly qualified leaders capable of using research-based instructional practices to impact student achievement.
State Accreditation System

Virginia has a detailed accreditation system. A year before the ESSA (2015) was signed, the VDOE (2014) announced that the percentage of schools making full state accreditation decreased for a second consecutive year due to the increasing effect of more rigorous standards and assessments effective beginning in 2011. This was an indicator of the need for highly qualified principals in high-poverty schools to provide equitable learning opportunities. In 2019, the VDOE reported in a news release, *Accreditation Ratings Shine Light on School Progress and Needs: 92% of Virginia Public Schools Earn Accredited Rating*, that schools were being assessed using the following rating scale:

- “Level One: Meets or exceeds state standard or sufficient improvement
- Level Two: Near state standard or sufficient improvement
- Level Three: Below state standard”

The news release included Table 7, Table 8, and Table 9 which demonstrate results for accreditation ratings for schools across the state of Virginia.

Table 7

**VDOE (2019) Academic Achievement Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Schools at Level One</th>
<th>Schools at Level Two</th>
<th>Schools at Level Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>1,689</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>1,769</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>1,649</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8

**VDOE (2019) Achievement Gaps Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Schools at Level One</th>
<th>Schools at Level Two</th>
<th>Schools at Level Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>975</td>
<td>719</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>1,406</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9

**VDOE (2019) Student Engagement and Outcomes Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Schools at Level One</th>
<th>Schools at Level Two</th>
<th>Schools at Level Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chronic Absenteeism</td>
<td>1,663</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout Rate (High Schools)</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation &amp; Completion (High Schools)</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The accreditation ratings reported by the VDOE also show that schools are making progress in reducing chronic absenteeism, but that declines in performance on state reading tests — especially among Black and economically disadvantaged students — have resulted in an increase in the number of schools that will receive state assistance to address achievement gaps in English (VDOE, 2019).

The VDOE report demonstrates the importance of defining the most impactful principal instructional practices on student achievement in Title I schools in Virginia.

**Growth Mindset**

Reforms, policies, and levers have driven the numerous studies on the impact of school leadership practices on student achievement in high-poverty schools throughout the decades. Thornton et al. (2019) noted that, “Hope and a unitary focus on student achievement will not result in long-term school reform” (p. 137). Hope is not a research-based strategy. In 1979, Edmonds stated the need for a strong principal in high-poverty schools. As noted in the Tables 7, 8, and 9, the need for strong principals and strong educators using best practices still exists in Virginia to improve student achievement and to close the achievement gaps amongst students. It starts with a “growth mindset” (Dweck, 2006) of principals, especially those serving in high-poverty schools, that all students can learn and succeed. “Growth mindset” involves stretching oneself and being resilient when challenged with learning. With a “growth mindset” as opposed
to a “fixed mindset,” students, teachers, and school leaders can achieve targeted goals (Dweck, 2006). Payne (2008) declared,

Educators can be a huge gift to students living in poverty. In many instances, education is the tool that gives a child life choices. A teacher or administrator who establishes mutual respect, cares enough to make sure a student knows how to survive school, and gives that student the necessary skills is providing a gift that will keep affecting lives from one generation to the next. Never has it been more important to give students living in poverty this gift. (p. 52)

Giving students living in poverty access to a highly qualified teacher and principal who believe that students who are underperforming have not achieved “yet” is vital. It is of utmost importance that the instructional practices of principals of highly effective Title I schools be discovered through research. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within a school division in Virginia. The research question was, what are the principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within a school division in Virginia as reported by principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers?

Summary

Chapter 2 provided a review of relevant literature on the impact of principals’ instructional leadership practices on student achievement. The following themes emerged in the research: impact of federal policy on student achievement in high-poverty schools, evolution of the principal’s impact on student achievement in high-poverty schools, impact of principal practices on student achievement in high-poverty schools, and impact of principal preparation on
student achievement in high-poverty schools. The review of literature revealed the importance of determining the perceptions of stakeholders on principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement and the evidence that demonstrates the impact of the practices on student achievement in effective elementary and middle Title I schools. Chapter 3 provides a description of the methodology of the study.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Purpose of the Study

The research focused on the principals’ instructional leadership practices impacting student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools in one Virginian school division. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within a school division in Virginia. The research question was, what are the principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within a school division in Virginia as reported by principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers? The research can provide principals in elementary and middle Title I schools with an inclusive list and descriptions of the principal instructional leadership practices to help improve overall student achievement and lessen achievement gaps amongst student groups, and the study might be used for PD of principals in school divisions or for principal preparation programs at the university level.

Researcher’s Professional Background and Assumptions

This research stemmed from my work as a teacher and principal in high-poverty schools. I have served as a principal of three elementary Title I schools and currently serve as a principal of a Title I middle school. My interest in school improvement led me to my work as a successful turnaround principal of a Title I elementary school. When I arrived on the first day of school, it had a 38% pass rate in math and a 41% in English. At that time, the school was identified as a “priority school” per the federal government. Within three years, the instructional team moved the school out of priority status and to full accreditation. As the researcher, I assumed that the
time school principals spend on instructional leadership practices each day definitely impacts student achievement in high-poverty Title I schools.

Understanding that the research was strongly connected to my work as a former elementary principal of a Title I school with students achieving and currently my work as a Title I middle school principal working to ensure student achievement, a peer debriefer, who has a doctorate degree in school leadership, and I continually monitored my assumptions throughout the research. Member checking strategies were used to increase confidence in data interpretations as each participant was asked to verify the transcription for accuracy. The assumptions were based on the practitioner perspective as opposed to the scholarly perspective. My goal as a scholar was to determine what principal instructional leadership practices impact student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within in a school division in Virginia. My motivation for the study was that I would be able to share the practices that impact student achievement with other school leaders.

**Interpretive Research Framework**

The researcher was working from the pragmatism interpretive framework. Per Creswell and Poth (2018), the pragmatism framework focuses on the “outcomes of the research - the actions, situations, and consequences of inquiry” and researches a real-world problem (p. 26). Interviews were used to determine the answer to the research question, what are the principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within in a school division in Virginia as reported by principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers? According to Creswell & Poth (2018),
In practice, the individual using this worldview uses multiple methods of data collection to best answer the research question, employs multiple sources of data collection, focuses on practical implications of the research, and emphasizes the importance of conducting research that best addresses the research problem. (p. 27)

The researcher scheduled 45-minute interviews (one-on-one and focus group) through the online platform Zoom to allow for open-ended questions to be asked about principal instructional leadership practices impacting student achievement in an elementary and middle Title I school.

**Research Question**

The research question was, what are the principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within a school division in Virginia as reported by principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers?

**Research Design**

The research design for the study was a qualitative case study. Qualitative research design is utilized when a topic like the impact of principals’ instructional leadership practices on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools needs to be explored (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative case study research design was selected for this study to explore and gain a rich understanding of principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within a school division in Virginia and the evidence of the impact as there was limited information on a collective list of these practices at the middle school and elementary level. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), case study researchers study authentic cases in real time to ensure the most accurate data are collected; for this reason, the researcher studied the perspectives of stakeholders who are currently at two
successful Title I schools within a school division in Virginia to help determine the most accurate principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement, based on experiences.

The study utilized a demographic survey and one-on-one and focus group interviews. A survey was used to determine demographic data on participants and to purposefully select lead teacher participants for interviews. Scheduled 45-minute interviews were conducted to identify perspectives from principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and lead teachers from an elementary and middle Title I school on principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement and the evidence that the instructional leadership practice is impacting student achievement. The researcher selected the school division, the schools, and participants, conducted the survey and interviews, and completed the data analysis for the study. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools and the evidence that the instructional leadership practice is impacting student achievement.

**School District Setting**

The schools selected were within a school division in Virginia which all the schools are accredited by the state and performing at level one or level two on school quality indicators according to the VDOE school quality report card (2021d). A description of the two levels are as follows: “LEVEL ONE: Meets or exceeds standard or sufficient improvement LEVEL TWO: Near standard or making sufficient improvement” (VDOE, 2021e). Elementary and middle schools are evaluated on the following indicators:

Overall proficiency and growth in English reading/writing achievement (including progress of English learners toward English-language proficiency); Overall proficiency
and growth in mathematics; Overall proficiency in science; English achievement gaps among student groups; Mathematics achievement gaps among student groups;

Absenteeism. (VDOE, 2021e)

The researcher wanted to include a division with schools that include students who are achieving according to the state and federal government.

The researcher sought to include a division with schools that were considered high-poverty schools. The selected school division for the study participates in the Community Eligibility Provision ([CEP], VDOE, 2020c). According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA): Food and Nutrition Service, the CEP is a non-pricing meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas. CEP allows the nation’s highest poverty schools and districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without collecting household applications. Instead, schools that adopt CEP are reimbursed using a formula based on the percentage of students categorically eligible for free meals based on their participation in other specific means-tested programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. (USDA, 2021)

Two Title I school-wide schools (VDOE, 2021c) were selected for the study. These schools are “eligible to use Title I funds for school-wide programs that are designed to upgrade their entire educational programs for all students, particularly the lowest-achieving students” (VDOE, 2021b). The elementary school has grades kindergarten through five, and the middle school has grades six through eight. The district and schools were selected as research indicates that schools with students who live in poverty experience challenges with student achievement. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the schools in the study are displayed in Table 10.
Table 10

Criteria for the Division and Schools Included in the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion criteria:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title I (VDOE, 2021b); located in southwest Virginia;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all schools accredited by the state;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>performing at level one or level two on school quality indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>according to the Virginia School Quality Profile (VDOE, 2021d);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participates in the CEP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion criteria:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title I school-wide schools;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school grades kindergarten through five and middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grades, grades six through eight;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accredited by the state;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>performing at level one or level two on school quality indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>according to the Virginia School Quality Profile (VDOE, 2021d);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participate in the CEP.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant Sample

The participants were selected utilizing purposeful sampling because it can “purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 158). The participants were purposefully selected from two Title one schools within a school division in Virginia. Teachers were purposefully selected from survey data based on background and experiences to represent a varied sample to the extent possible using the following: number of years teaching, current and former grade levels, current and former subjects, race, gender, age, and levels of education. The teacher participants included teachers who teach grades three, four, five, six, seven, or eight and English, math, science, and/or history for at least three years at selected school. Table 11 includes the selection criteria for participation in the teacher survey (Appendix B).
Table 11

Selection Criteria for Participation in the Teacher Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Inclusion Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Currently teach grades three, four, five, six, seven, or eight for at least three years at selected school; currently teach English, math, science, and/or history for at least three years at selected school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selection criteria for participation in the interviews are included in Table 12. Teacher participants in the interviews were selected by the researcher based on the inclusion criteria found in Table 11 to include a diverse population and their willingness to participate. Principal, assistant principal, and instructional coach participants were purposefully selected using the inclusion criteria found in Table 12. Assistant principals and instructional coaches who have been assistant principals and instructional coaches for at least one year at selected school and principals who have been principals of selected school for at least three years were included.

Table 12

Selection Criteria for Participation in the Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Inclusion Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Completed the teacher survey and were willing to participate in the interview. Currently principal, assistant principal, or instructional coach at selected school; Principal participants must have been principal of selected school for at least three years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals, assistant principals, and instructional coaches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the two principals, two assistant principals, two instructional coaches, and twenty teachers contacted, two principals, one assistant principal, two instructional coaches, and eight teachers agreed to participate (13 out of 26/50% response rate). As originally proposed, the research included one-on-one interviews for each of the two principal participants and two focus
group interviews for teachers, including an elementary group and a middle school group. The proposed research included a focus group consisting of the assistant principal and instructional coach from the elementary school and a focus group consisting of the assistant principal and instructional coach from the middle school. Due to scheduling conflicts on the behalf of the participants, the researcher had to conduct one-on-one interviews for the middle school assistant principal (P3), the elementary instructional coach (P4), and the middle school instructional coach (P5). The elementary school assistant principal did not participate because of work schedules. Prior to the survey and the interviews, the participants had access to the information sheet to participate in the research study (Appendix C) and (Appendix D) respectively.

**Limitations/Delimitations**

There were limitations of the study. The limitations were imposed by the researcher to make the study more manageable, hence delimitations. The size of the population sample was pandemic induced. Data were collected from fewer participants than ideal due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study was limited to principal practices within a school division in Virginia, while not including practices of principals in other parts of Virginia, parts of the United States, or parts of the world, another imposed limitation. Only the principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches and selected teachers’ voices were heard, limiting voices from other stakeholders. The interview protocol included questions for participants to provide an inclusive list of principal instructional leadership practices in 45-minute scheduled one-on-one or focus group interviews on Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic, limiting the time that interviewees have to respond. These were all imposed limitations, therefore delimitations.
**Data Collection Procedures**

An email (Appendix E) was sent to the superintendent and or director of human resources with a brief greeting, description of the purpose of the study, and request to interview the principals (one-on-one), assistant principals and instructional coaches (focus groups); and survey (online) teachers grade three, four, five, six, seven and eight, English, math, science, and/or history teachers of two schools to purposefully select teacher participants to participate in focus group interviews upon approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) #21-459 on June 7, 2021. Emails (Appendices F and G) were sent to the two principals with a brief greeting, description of the purpose of the study, request to participate in the study, and request to forward emails to other potential participants upon approval of the superintendent or director of human resources respectively. Upon the principal’s approval, the principal sent the email to the teachers (Appendix H) which included a survey link to a Qualtrics survey and a request to participate in the demographic survey (Appendix B). The survey included the invitation to participate in the focus group interviews. The principal sent an email (Appendix I) to the assistant principal and instructional coach to request participation in the focus group interviews.

Prior to data collection, approval from the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) through the IRB, #21-459, was obtained on June 7, 2021. CITI training on Social and Behavioral Research was completed (Appendix J). A survey (Appendix B) through Qualtrics was sent to and completed by eight teachers teaching grades three, four, five, six, seven, eight, English, math, science, and/or history of the two schools to determine demographic data and purposefully select teachers to participate in focus group interviews. Data from the demographic surveys were uploaded from Qualtrics and saved in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet on the researcher’s VT Google drive with each respondent receiving a numerical identification code.
Data were collected through scheduled 45-minute, one-on-one interviews for principals, an assistant principal, and instructional coaches and 45-minute focus group interviews for teachers through the online platform, Zoom, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews were recorded and features in Zoom provided automated interview transcriptions and audio/visual recordings. Handwritten notes were taken in addition to recordings and transcriptions to be utilized in data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These notes were securely stored by the researcher in a locked office. Information was organized in files and saved on the researchers’ Virginia Tech shared Google drive. Microsoft Excel was used to help organize and categorize the transcribed responses from the interviews. Each column was labeled with an interview question and each row labeled with a participant number. Interview responses were entered in respective columns.

**Instrument Design and Validation**

The first step in preparing an instrument for data collection is generating an adequate, valid, detailed, and effective instrument. The procedures for organizing and conducting interviews for the study were aligned to the interview procedures suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018) found in Table 13.

**Table 13**

*Interview Procedures Aligned to Creswell and Poth (2018)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creswell and Poth (2018)</th>
<th>Aligned Procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Determine the research questions that will be answered by interviewees.</td>
<td>The research question was developed from the findings in the scholarly research articles, located in the review of literature. The question was reviewed, framed, phrased, and reworded with Dr. Mullen, committee chair and expert researcher. Interviewees included principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and purposefully selected teachers based on experiences and backgrounds; working in a state accredited Title I elementary or middle school at level one or two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify interviewees who can best answer these questions based on a purposeful sampling procedure.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Distinguish the type of interview by determining what mode is practical and what interactions will net the most useful information to answer research questions.

Collect data using adequate recording procedures when conducting one-on-one or focus group interviews.

Design and use an interview protocol, or interview guide.

Refine the interview questions and the procedures through pilot testing.

Locate a distraction-free place for conducting the interviews.

Obtain consent from the interviewees to participate in the study by having them complete a consent form approved by the human relations review board.

Follow good interview procedures.

Decide transcription logistics ahead of time. (p. 165)

according to the Virginia school quality profiles (VDOE, 2021d); participating in CEP; located in a school district within rural southwest Virginia.

45-minute, one-on-one and focus group interviews were scheduled to allow for a clearer and deeper understanding of the questions and responses.

The interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed through the online platform, Zoom. Handwritten notes were taken in addition to recordings and transcriptions and utilized in data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The interview question was reviewed, framed, phrased, and reworded with Dr. Mullen, committee chair and expert researcher. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix K. The protocol was refined through a practice run with an individual who was a former teacher, coach, and principal.

The interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed through the online platform, Zoom. The researcher used the online Zoom platform from an office with no distractions. The interviewee selected the location that was distraction-free to use Zoom.

The consent form for the survey and interview (Appendix C) and (Appendix D) was used upon approval by the HRPP through the IRB (IRB #21-459, approved on June 7, 2021).

Good interview procedures were followed which include remain within the study limits reviewed, utilize the protocol to guide the questions, conclude the interview within the time indicated, be respectful and considerate, and offer limited questions and advice. (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed through the online platform, Zoom. Handwritten notes were taken in addition to recordings and transcriptions to be utilized in data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An Excel spreadsheet was stored on a Google drive with each interviewee’s name and numerical code. The recordings and transcripts were verified by interview participants prior to data analysis.

**Interview Protocol**

A consistent interview protocol was used for all participants in the study. Appendix K shows the interview questions for principals and interview questions for assistant principals,
The interview questions which were reviewed, framed, phrased, and reworded with Dr. Mullen, committee chair and expert researcher, helped address the research question, what are the principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within a school division in Virginia as reported by principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers?

The first interview question was asked with the second and third question following until all practices were shared and described by the interviewee(s). After all practices were shared by the interviewee(s), the third and fourth questions were asked by the researcher to determine the evidence that the instructional leadership practice impacts student achievement and to identify the most impactful practices. The interview protocol was vetted through a practice run with an individual who was a former teacher, coach, and principal.

Confidential and Ethical Treatment of the Data

Steps were taken to ensure confidential and ethical treatment of the data. All data, including consent forms, survey data, recordings, transcriptions, coding data, and identifiable data on Excel spreadsheet, was securely stored on the researcher’s VT Google drive. To protect privacy, a numerical code was assigned to each participant. Member checking strategies were used to increase confidence in data interpretations as each participant was asked to verify the Zoom transcription for accuracy. Each participant in the survey and or interview was provided with the VT Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study without consent (Appendices C and D) prior to the survey and or interview. If the participant volunteered to be in the study, the participant could have withdrawn at any time without any consequences. In addition, the participant could have refused to answer any questions and remained in the study.
Data Analysis

The data analysis was completed by following Creswell and Poth’s (2018) data analysis spiral process. The first loop of the data analysis spiral included managing and organizing the data, described earlier through the data collection process. The second loop of the data analysis spiral was comprised of reading and memoing emergent ideas. Transcripts were read and recordings heard in their entirety numerous times. Memos or short expressions, concepts or ideas were documented and filed with transcriptions and recordings. The reading and memoing helped develop a sense of the data prior to coding. The next loop of the data analysis spiral contained describing and classifying codes into themes. Deductive codes, key words from the research question (e.g., student achievement, principal, leadership, instructional practice, evidence, impact) and search terms to find the literature (e.g., student achievement, principal, leadership, leader, practice, poverty, and socio-economic status), were developed. Although the codes were developed prior to the data analysis, a priori codes, additional codes emerged throughout the data analysis. The codes were color-coded, and the frequency of each code from the data was recorded. Key words, phrases and sentences around the codes were color-coded. The color-coded data were used to locate emerging themes and patterns. After the data were analyzed, an independent reader, with a doctorate degree in school leadership, reviewed the compiled data set. The final loop of the data analysis spiral included developing interpretations and representing and visualizing the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data were interpreted through connections of codes, color-coded phrases and sentences, themes, and patterns from the transcriptions, research questions, and the reviewed literature. The interpretations led to summaries of findings with supporting evidence from participant interview responses to answer the research question. Interpretations of data were represented through tables and figures. Conclusions and
generalizations were made from the findings, and suggestions for scholars and practitioners and implications for theory, action and policy are included in this study. Figure 2 displays the data analysis processes.

**Figure 2**

*Overview of Qualitative Data Analysis Processes*

*Note: With written permission, this figure was adapted from Boyles’ (2020) Figure 3.1.*

Interview data analysis followed Creswell and Poth’s (2018) processes:

- Create and organize data files;
- Read through text, make margin notes, and form initial codes;
- Describe the case and its context;
- Use categorical aggregation to establish themes or patterns;
• Use direct interpretation and develop naturalistic generalizations of what was “learned.”

(p. 199)

Summary

Chapter 3 provided an overview of the research design, setting, participants, data collection, and data analysis. The methods included a survey and interviews as sources of data collection. The survey provided demographic data on the teacher participants and allowed the researcher to purposefully select teachers for the interviews. One-on-one and focus group interviews afforded participants the opportunity to share principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within a school division in Virginia. Interviews with participants were recorded and transcribed through an online platform, Zoom. Deductive coding was utilized to analyze the data collected from the interviews to determine common themes, consisting of terms from the literature review and research question. Chapter 4 includes the data analysis and findings of the research.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within a school division in Virginia. The research question was, what are the principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within a school division in Virginia as reported by principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers? Two principals, one assistant principal, two instructional coaches, and eight teachers participated.

A demographic survey was used to determine demographic data on participants and to purposefully select lead teacher participants for interviews. Results from the demographic survey are displayed in Table 14. Three elementary teachers and five middle school teachers completed the survey and participated in the interviews, representing varied demographics as displayed in Table 14.

Table 14

Demographic Survey of Teacher Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years Taught</th>
<th>Grade Levels Taught</th>
<th>Subjects Taught</th>
<th>Years at Grade Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White, Black, or African American</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>0-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>K-8</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>0-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>11-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>6-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>3-8</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>11-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>K-8</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>0-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic or Latino Black or African American</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>11-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>0-5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 15 lists the instructional practices that impact student achievement the participants shared during the interviews. There were 13 participants in the participant pool. Five participants were elementary participants, including a principal, an instructional coach, and three teachers. Eight participants were middle school participants, including a principal, an assistant principal, an instructional coach, and five teachers. Three practices were noted by all 13 participants. Common themes from the interviews of principals, assistant principal, instructional coaches, and teacher participants interviewed were developed, including collaborative planning (13 out of 13); informal and or formal observations with feedback or coaching (13 out of 13); data meetings (13 out of 13); transparency and visibility (9 out of 13, including all teacher participants and the elementary school instructional coach); providing PD (7 out of 13, including all middle school teacher participants, the middle school assistant principal, and the elementary school instructional coach); building relationships with students, families, faculty, and staff (3 out of 13, including all elementary school teacher participants); allocating and making available instructional resources aligned to the state standards in a timely manner (3 out of 13, including all elementary school teacher participants); promoting innovative instruction and learning (3 out of 13, including all elementary school teacher participants); building a culture of positive culture (2 out of 13, including the middle school principal and the middle school instructional coach); and building a culture of high expectations (2 out of 13, including the middle school principal and the middle school assistant principal) as evidenced by student performance data and observational data. Four additional instructional leadership practices impacting student achievement were evidenced by student performance data and observational data: implementing restorative justice (1 out of 13, including the middle school assistant principal), continuous school improvement and monitoring (1 out of 13, including the elementary school instructional
coach), increasing the volume of reading (1 out of 13, including the elementary school
instructional coach), and providing intervention and enrichment opportunities in the master
schedule (1 out of 13, including the middle school instructional coach).

**Table 15**

*Instructional Practices that Impact Student Achievement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices</th>
<th>1 Elementary Principal (P1)</th>
<th>2 Middle School Principal (P2)</th>
<th>3 Middle School Assistant Principal (P3)</th>
<th>4 Elementary Instructional Coach (P4)</th>
<th>5 Middle School Instructional Coach (P5)</th>
<th>6 Elementary Teachers (P6-P8)</th>
<th>7 Middle School Teachers (P9-P13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Collaborative Planning</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Informal Observations with Feedback or Coaching</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Data Meetings</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Transparency and Visibility</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Professional Development</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Relationship Building</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Instructional Resources</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Innovative Instruction and Learning</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Culture of Positive Behavior</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Culture of High Expectation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Restorative Justice</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 School Improvement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Volume of Reading</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Intervention and Enrichment (IE) Opportunities</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The current chapter displays the findings for each interview question. The findings will be
presented and followed by aligned responses from interviewees to support the claim. Participant
quotes have been edited to remove repeated words that do not impact the context of the interview or conversational spacers such as *you know, um, and like* to improve readability. Two principals from an elementary school and middle school, one assistant principal from a middle school, two instructional coaches from an elementary school and middle school, and two focus groups of teachers from an elementary school and middle school shared instructional leadership practices used by the principal that impact student achievement. All participants were from Title I schools.

**Findings**

Three questions were continually asked during the interview, and the responses were used to develop findings.

Q1: What instructional leadership practices do you (the principal) or the principal use that impact student achievement?

Q2: Describe the instructional leadership practice.

Q3: What evidence do you have that the instructional leadership practice is impacting student achievement?

**Finding 1**

Collaborative planning is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools as evidenced by student performance and observational data.

**Analysis to Support Finding 1.** Collaborative planning is an instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement at both the elementary and middle school (13 out of 13) according to the elementary principal (participant 1/P1), the middle school principal (P2), the middle school assistant principal (P3), the elementary instructional coach (P4), the middle school instructional coach (P5), the elementary teachers (P6-P8), and the middle school teachers (P9-
Professional learning communities are a commonly used strategy for creating and growing collaboration amongst teachers (Grissom et al., 2021). Numerous researchers noted the principal practice of professional collaboration and its impact on student achievement in schools (Brown, 2016; Glanz, 2005; Grissom et al., 2021; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Hattie et al., 2016; Heck, 1992; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Robinson et al., 2008; Sanzo et al., 2011). Hattie (2015), Leithwood (2021), and Okilwa and Barnett (2018) identified the principal practice of professional collaboration and its impact on student achievement in high-poverty schools.

The elementary principal (P1), the middle school assistant principal (P3), the elementary instructional coach (P4), and the middle school instructional coach (P5), stated that the principal holds collaborative planning meetings weekly with the teachers, instructional coach, and assistant principal at the school. The elementary instructional coach (P4) said that many times the special education teachers and sometimes various specialists attend. The elementary principal (P1) and the elementary instructional coach (P4) indicated that math and reading are held separately, while the middle school assistant principal (P3) mentioned that the schedule is set up so that teachers of the same subject and grade can meet jointly and discuss what was completed the prior week and what will be completed during the upcoming week. The middle school assistant principal (P3) discussed that throughout the pandemic and virtual learning, the principal had all grade levels for each subject meeting together, which was helpful with vertical planning and articulation across grade levels. The middle school teachers (P9-P13) indicated, since the pandemic, in addition to the meetings, they have been submitting plans online for the school leaders to view.

The collaborative planning process at both elementary and middle school are comparable. The process includes looking at the curriculum framework for the standard or standards to be
taught, locating the aligned VDOE resources, and practicing the delivery of instruction. The elementary principal (P1), the middle school assistant principal (P3), the elementary instructional coach, the middle school instructional coach (P5), and the middle school teachers (P9-P13), stressed the use of the Virginia curriculum framework in the collaborative planning. The elementary principal (P1) and the elementary instructional coach (P4) explained that the principal has the planning team use resources from the VDOE as according to the elementary principal (P1) the resources are aligned to the Virginia curriculum framework and that ensures the teachers are meeting all parts of the curriculum framework, including the rigor of the standards. The elementary principal (P1) and the middle school instructional coach (P5) noted that the team also looks at pacing in these meetings. The elementary teachers (P6-P8) reported that the planning allows the teachers the time to talk as a team about strategies and materials needed for instruction. They noted that the veteran teachers share what has been working and what has not, and the principal participates by suggesting instructional resources and strategies. The middle school assistant principal (P3) reported that the principal has teachers walk through the standards from the Virginia curriculum framework and activities that will help students master the standards. Activities include writing, cross-curricular opportunities, hands-on labs or activities, and assessments, such as exit tickets or questioning.

The middle school instructional coach (P5) and the middle school teachers (P9-P13) stressed the end goal: what does the curriculum framework say that the students need to do to be successful with the standard or standards? The middle school instructional coach (P5) described the lesson plan process, including the backward planning model that the principal uses. Teachers share their aligned assessment, including the skills that they are teaching for that unit or the nine weeks. The assessment is built first so that there is the understanding of what needs to be taught.
Secondly, the teachers map out the lesson plans, including “I can” statements and modeling, analyzing, partner practice, and independent practice (MAPP). There is a final component of checking for understanding. She reported that the principal's role is to monitor the planning to guarantee that the teachers are using and aligning to the curriculum framework. The middle school instructional coach (P5) and the elementary teachers (P6-P8) noted that the principal is progress monitoring as the teachers’ progress monitor the students.

According to the study, practicing instruction in collaborative planning helps the principal know that lessons are clearly delivered. The elementary principal (P1), the middle school principal (P2), and the elementary instructional coach (P4) noted that collaborative planning is used for practicing the delivery of math and English lessons to guarantee clarity of the instructional delivery. The middle school principal (P2) stated, “We use our collaborative planning mainly for practicing lessons.” The middle school principal (P2) said that the middle school teachers practice delivering the VDOE’s math instructional plans (MIP) and the continuous English instructional plans (CEIP) to check for clarity, and if the lesson is not clear, they go back through it. The middle school teachers (P9-P13) explained that they teach lessons during collaborative planning for the principal to see if the lesson aligns with the verbs in the standards found in the curriculum framework and that the teachers understand what they are teaching and what the students should be learning. The elementary principal (P1) said that she even becomes the student at the meeting so that the teachers can practice with the resources, for example, the math manipulatives.

The elementary instructional coach (P4) explained that the teachers bring all the resources to be used for English instruction, including reading materials that have been pre-read. She discussed the planning process for a reading lesson on drawing conclusions. First, the team
looks at what is included in the English curriculum framework for drawing conclusions. Next, they look at the text and ensure that it is appropriate for teaching that skill. Finally, the team describes how they will teach drawing conclusions to make certain everybody has clarity prior to the delivery of the lesson.

The middle school assistant principal (P3) said the principal utilizes the planning time to provide the instructional team with a preview of what to expect during walkthroughs. She also indicated the collaborative planning is a PD opportunity with no cost. The elementary teachers (P6-P8) and the middle school teachers (P9-P13) noted that the planning time helps with accountability as the principal can have the teachers review the plans to see if teachers are doing what they need to at the appropriate cognitive level to meet the needs of the students.

Table 16 displays the evidence of the impact of collaborative planning on student achievement. Classroom formative assessments (10 out of 13), state SOL tests (8 out of 13), and overall student performance data (6 out of 13) were noted the most as evidence that impacts collaborative planning on student achievement. The elementary teachers (P6-8) and middle school teachers (P9-13) reported two particular types of student performance data, classroom formative assessments and state SOL tests, as evidence of the impact of collaborative planning on student achievement. The two principals (P1 and P2) and the two instructional coaches (P4 and P5) identified classroom observational data (4 out of 13) as evidence of the impact of collaborative planning on student achievement. There were 12 pieces of evidence associated with student performance and one with classroom observations as displayed in Table 16. Formative assessments were mentioned by 10 of the 13 participants and state SOL tests were stated by 8 of the 13 participants. All participants mentioned student performance data or some type of student performance data as evidence of the impact of this principal practice.
Table 16

*Evidence of the Impact of Collaborative Planning on Student Achievement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>1 Elementary Principal (P1)</th>
<th>2 Middle School Principal (P2)</th>
<th>3 Middle School Assistant Principal (P3)</th>
<th>4 Elementary Instructional Coach (P4)</th>
<th>5 Middle School Instructional Coach (P5)</th>
<th>6 Elementary Teachers (P6-P8)</th>
<th>7 Middle School Teachers (P9-P13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Formative Assessments (Classroom)</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Student Performance Data</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Classroom Observational Data</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Benchmark Test</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Checklists</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Common Assessments</td>
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<td>10 Summative Assessments</td>
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<td>11 School Student Growth Assessments</td>
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<td>12 Student Voice</td>
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<td>13 Discipline Data/Student Engagement</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Collaborative planning is an instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement at both the elementary and middle school as evidenced by student performance and observational data.

**Finding 2**

Informal observations with feedback or coaching is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools as evidenced
by student performance and observational data.

**Analysis to Support Finding 2.** Informal observations with feedback or coaching is an instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement at both the elementary and middle school (13 out of 13) according to the elementary principal (P1), the middle school principal (P2), the middle school assistant principal (P3), the elementary instructional coach (P4), the middle school instructional coach (P5), the elementary teachers (P6-P8), and the middle school teachers (P9-P13). Based on the research from the literature review, many researchers stated that conducting instructional observations and having reflective conversations is a principal practice that impacts student achievement (Glanz, 2005; Grissom et al., 2021; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Hattie et al., 2016; Heck, 1992; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Mullen & Graves, 2000; Sanzo et al., 2011). McConnell and Lyon (2020) indicated that conducting instructional rounds with teachers is a principal practice impacting student achievement in high-poverty schools, and Leithwood (2021) determined that classroom walkthroughs by the principal impact student outcomes in high-poverty schools. The middle school assistant principal (P3) explained that walkthroughs are informal observations with feedback. The elementary principal (P1) reported the importance of following up with collaborative planning meetings through formal and informal observations, including walkthroughs, to make certain that there is clarity in the lesson delivery. The middle school assistant principal (P3) and the elementary instructional coach (P4) said that the principal is keeping a finger on “the pulse” of the instruction during walkthroughs.

The elementary instructional coach (P4) reported that the walkthroughs include a team of people that observe, compare notes and develop a plan of next steps to support teachers. The comparison of notes is referred to as *inter-rater reliability* and is useful to determine if all
observers are capturing the same information. Inter-rater reliability is the extent to which two or more raters (or observers, coders, examiners) agree (Lange, 2011). The elementary principal (P1) and the middle school assistant principal (P3) reported that the walkthroughs provide the principal with individual observation data or collective grade-level or school observation data. She stated that this allows the principal to determine individual, grade-level, or school strengths and weaknesses; it helps the principal to know collectively how the school is performing.

According to the middle school assistant principal (P3), the elementary school instructional coach (P4), and the middle school instructional coach (P5), the walkthroughs are conducted every day. The elementary principal (P1) said that walkthroughs with feedback are conducted frequently and are targeted based on needs in certain challenging areas or subjects or needs that are observed by the assistant principal, instructional coach, teachers, or the principal. She reported that walkthroughs are conducted to observe what the instruction looks like followed by individual or grade-level feedback. The middle school assistant principal (P3) noted the principal intends to observe every classroom daily. She said that the principal monitors at the beginning of the day, throughout transitions, and at the conclusion of the day by observing the hallways, student work, and anchor charts. The elementary school teachers (P6-P8) reported that the principal is in classrooms a lot. The middle school instructional coach (P5) stated that the walkthrough practice is effective with consistency.

The elementary principal (P1), the middle school principal (P2), the middle school assistant principal (P3), the middle school instructional coach (P5), the elementary teachers (P6-P8), and the middle school teachers (P9-P13) stated that feedback is provided to teachers after the walkthroughs or instructional rounds are conducted. While describing a school in one of the case studies, Hattie et al. (2016) noted, a “school’s professional learning communities and its
habits of coaching, observations, walkthroughs, and debriefing conversations provide structured contexts in which professionals can give and receive feedback” (p. 134). The middle school assistant principal (P3) mentioned that if the principal observes an awesome strategy, the principal can make a note and send it out in a memorandum, or if the principal observes something that is not effective, the principal can email the teacher and ask to meet at the end of the day or to speak with the teacher immediately. The middle school instructional coach (P5) emphasized that the teachers are provided feedback immediately and observed again a second time to check for understanding of any provided support. The middle school principal (P2) mentioned that coaching within the classroom is provided after the instructional rounds or walkthroughs if the teacher needs more support. During the walkthroughs, the elementary principal (P1) noted that she determines if the lesson has clarity or if the teacher or grade level needs to practice more in collaborative planning. She reported that the observational data help to drive and guarantee that the focus is accurate during collaborative planning; therefore, the feedback is delivered at that time. The elementary principal (P1) said that she has informal conversations with teachers to remind them of the importance of alignment to standards and teacher clarity within instruction. The elementary instructional coach (P4) noted that the practice enables the principal to build relationships with teachers. The middle school teachers (P9-P13) explained that a teacher learns a lot from the observations with feedback because without them, there would be no teacher growth, reflection, or discussions. The middle school teachers (P9-P13) noted that this practice of walkthroughs with feedback is individualized; the feedback is “more personal.” It was stressed that the feedback was “legit feedback” with no personal feelings of the observers included.

According to one of the middle school teachers (P9-P13), walkthroughs are as follows:
They also do the drop in [observations] which typically [are]…unexpected. You are not really ready for it…Those [observations] are usually the ones where you…get a lot heavier feedback. They [help] your instruction because at that point you were not able to prepare, you were not able to…put all the fluff and stuff in your lesson…[Many times] that is where things kind of tend to fall apart just a little bit; but at least…the leadership can see how you handle those situations and then provide you feedback.

The middle school teachers (P9-P13) stated that the practice has teachers constantly reassessing how to approach situations if the students or observers are not understanding the lesson. It was said that the leaders explain their reasoning for the feedback. The middle school teachers (P9-P13) described the walkthroughs that include the whole central office: “Fortunately, COVID has fixed that, with too many people” in the room observing. Many times, with too many observers, the students’ demeanor changes. In those cases, the walkthrough does not provide the true picture.

The middle school principal (P2) reported that walkthroughs and instructional rounds with feedback are used to make sure the instruction is aligned to the level of rigor of the standard in the curriculum framework. She noted that as a principal and because of the pandemic, she felt that she had not done this practice justice. The middle school principal (P2) said that the principal monitored the alignment of the instruction to the rigor of the standards found in the curriculum framework by visiting classrooms. She noted that this was especially true for math instruction this year after the pandemic, and teachers have to be reminded to start at the grade-level standard.

The middle school principal (P3) reported that the walkthrough lasts close to five minutes. Some of the “look-fors” during the walkthroughs are as follows:
• Are the students seated or up engaged in active learning;
• Is the learning objective posted;
• What is the relationship between the student and the teacher;
• Are the students working as the teacher is monitoring or helping someone individually or in a small group;
• Is the teacher lecturing or modeling as the learners are taking notes and listening;
• Is the teacher using gradual release and are the students completing partner work or independent work;
• Are the students presenting their work as the teacher is collecting data;
• What are the teacher and learner actions?

The elementary instructional coach (P4) said that the principal attends collaborative planning meetings to help determine what the instructional team should observe during classroom instruction. The principal has the instructional team in classrooms to check for certain things such as an “I can” statement or student engagement according to the middle school instructional coach (P5). She reported the principal has the team determine “look-fors” at the beginning of the week so that the team can identify good examples and bad examples and provide support as needed. The middle school assistant principal (P3) noted that during the virtual learning, some teachers forgot to post the learning objective, or it was on a PowerPoint in a Zoom session.

The elementary school principal (P1) stressed that walkthroughs are not part of the three required, annual, formal observations. The elementary teachers (P6-P8) reported that the walkthroughs are not formal observations with a formal evaluation: “she's just there” supporting. The middle school assistant principal (P3) described formal observations as confidential and
conducted twice or three times or more annually if required. She explained that the formal observations include many components, pre and post conferences, planning and alignment of lessons to the state standards, data, family contact, stakeholder relationships, extra-curricular events, and student engagement. The middle school teachers (P9-P13) stated that they have formal observations which are pre-planned, and that is when the teachers put on the “best Sunday dress” and put the “best foot forward.”

A teacher from the middle school teacher focus group (P9-P13) reported the following regarding observations by the leadership team with feedback: “As a new teacher that was scary for me, but it was humbling, because you know when you're in your classroom you think that you're doing everything the way it needs to be done.” The teacher noted that although the observations were scary and humbling, the feedback allowed for professional growth.

Table 17 shows the evidence of the impact of informal observations with feedback or coaching. The middle school participants, including the middle school principal (P2), the middle school assistant principal (P3), the middle school coach (P5), and the middle school teachers (P9-13) noted that observational data (11 out of 13) and student performance data (9 out of 13) are evidence that the informal observations impact student achievement. The elementary teachers (P6-8) stated that only observational data while the elementary coach (P4) reported only student performance data as evidence that the informal observations impact student achievement. The elementary principal listed grade-level class assessments and checklists, and the middle school teachers indicated state SOL tests as evidence of the impact of informal observations with feedback or coaching on student achievement; all three of these pieces of evidence are types of student performance data. According to the interview responses, observational data were noted the most as evidence of the impact of informal observations on student achievement.
Table 17

Evidence of the Impact of Informal Observations with Feedback or Coaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>1 Elementary Principal</th>
<th>2 Middle School Principal</th>
<th>3 Middle School Assistant Principal</th>
<th>4 Elementary Instructional Coach</th>
<th>5 Middle School Instructional Coach</th>
<th>6 Elementary Teachers</th>
<th>7 Middle School Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observational Feedback</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Performance Data</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade-Level Class Assessments</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>State SOL Tests</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checklists</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Informal observations with feedback or coaching is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools as evidenced by student performance and observational data.

Finding 3

Data meetings is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools as evidenced by student performance data.

Analysis to Support Finding 3. Data meetings is an instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement at the elementary and middle school (13 out of 13) according to the elementary principal (P1), the middle school principal (P2), the middle school assistant principal (P3), the elementary instructional coach (P4), the middle school instructional coach (P5), the elementary school teachers (P6-P8), and the middle school teachers (P9-P13). Many researchers stated that monitoring data for student performance (Bossert et al., 1982; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Heck, 1992) and using data to drive instruction (Brown, 2016; Garry, 2021; Grissom et al., 2021; Hattie et al., 2016; Hitt & Tucker, 2016;
Mullen & Graves, 2000; Sanzo et al., 2011; Yoon, 2016) are essential principal practices impacting student achievement in schools. Other researchers noted that principals monitoring data effectively to drive instruction impacts student achievement in high-poverty schools (Leithwood, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020; Leithwood et al., 2004; McConnell & Lyon, 2020; Okilwa & Barnett, 2018). Teachers discuss student performance, discover, and solve students’ learning needs, refine pedagogical skills, and receive PD in data meetings. For these reasons, it is critical that principals are present (Garry, 2021).

The elementary principal (P1) and the middle school teachers (P9-P13) indicated that the teams use student performance data at the data planning meetings to make certain that the needs of all the students are met. The middle school assistant principal (P3) reported that data meetings include teachers of the same grade level and subject. The elementary principal (P1) reported that data meetings included using student performance data such as checklists to help drive planning for instruction to meet the needs of students. The elementary teachers (P6-P8) gave a specific example of using student performance data as they noted that after administering a unit test, for example on the math Standard 4.1, the principal has them convene as a team during the collaborative planning time to analyze the data with the instructional coach. The elementary principal (P1) stated that the team had frequent conversations in the data collaborative meetings to answer, “who needs what, how do you know who needs what, do you know where they are.” Similarly, the middle school principal (P2) said that in data meetings teachers use the data to drive their instruction and answer the following: which students need which skills and which skills need to be spiraled back into the instruction and or re-taught. The middle school assistant principal (P3) mentioned that data meetings are the times that the team can gain strategies that work.
Data to be analyzed and used for instruction are collected on charts. The middle school teachers (P9-P13) indicated that every teacher has to be responsible for the data. The middle school principal (P2) and the middle school assistant principal (P3) reported the teachers use charts in the data meetings; the middle school assistant principal (P3), stated that they now use electronic charts for each standard. The middle school teachers (P9-P13) expressed that the collection method has changed from year to year, from live charts to electronic spreadsheets. The middle school principal (P2) noted that she has teachers continually keep data charts to show where the students are with specific skills each week at data meetings; the teacher demonstrates how students have collectively and individually grown with certain skills. She explained that she asks the teachers to track individual student performance data and group performance data. Likewise, the middle school assistant principal (P3) shared that the principal has the teachers analyze and discuss the data by class, student groups, and individuals.

The participants described the importance of the use of data and the data meetings. The middle school assistant principal (P3) stated as the instructional leader, the principal helps determine if adjustments in instruction and next steps are needed based on data. The elementary instructional coach (P4) shared that the principal watches the data during formal assessments and performs her own data analysis prior to meeting with the team. At the meeting, the team discusses the data, and she asks for next steps as the teachers are held accountable for the students’ learning. The middle school teachers (P9-P13) emphasized the data define the skills to re-teach and re-test. The elementary instructional coach (P4) stated that the SOL scores in the spring of each year demonstrated that the teachers were using formative assessments throughout the year, re-teaching and remediating any areas of need because the students performed well. The elementary teachers (P6-P8) reported that the principal currently has them using the new state
SOL growth assessments, and analyzing the Student Detail by Question (SDBQ) and attempting to tweak precisely where the students are to identify what is necessary to do to fill the gaps. The elementary principal (P1) stated that the conversations in the data meetings help drive PD and support for teachers.

Data for meetings is collected continually according to the interview responses. The middle school instructional coach (P5) reported that the expectation from the principal is that the teachers collect the data each day. According to the middle school principal (P2) the teacher lets “data drive” instruction by the minute; if the data indicate that the students are not learning and mastering the standard, the teacher stops, regroups and reteaches, and if the students are learning and mastering the standards, they continue. Similarly, the elementary school teachers (P6-P8) noted that the principal has them analyze classroom data continually, not just diagnostic but formative assessments to drive small-group instruction and remediation.

Data meetings occur frequently throughout the year as noted by the middle school participants. The middle school principal (P2) said that the data meetings are planned throughout the year, and they do not just occur at benchmarks. The middle school instructional coach (P5) noted that the principal has the team progress monitor bi-weekly to determine how students are performing individually, particularly in reading and math courses. Teachers from state-tested areas collect and analyze data from assessments one week, and the team analyzes the data from a particular subject the next week. The middle school principal (P2) reported that the meetings are held weekly, and the team analyzes the growth of skills or lack thereof. For example, a teacher’s group of students may have begun with a 60% pass rate on Standard 6.1, and by the following week when the teacher comes to the data meeting, the pass rate may have increased to an 80% due to the teacher spiraling the skill back into the lessons. The middle school assistant principal
(P3) described the meetings in the same way, stating that the principal asks how the students performed with a certain skill and whether the students did better the following week(s) once skills were spiraled back into lessons. The middle school principal (P2) reported that many times if the data indicate a 90% or 80% pass rate on one skill, the team is assured that many student groups are passing as well, such as English language learners (ELL) and students with disabilities (SWD). The middle school teachers (P9-P13) stated that they track student data, analyze student growth with skills, and have continual conversations on how to use the data to drive instruction so students achieve.

According to the interview responses of the two principals, COVID-19 impacted student performance data. Due to learning loss, the middle school principal (P2) noted that the teachers bring data to data meetings and collaborative planning meetings to monitor data, specifically in math. The elementary principal explained that although there has been learning loss during the pandemic and student performance is currently average, she feels that with consistency the data will return to what it was pre-COVID-19, when the school was experiencing high levels of student achievement, according to the state reports.

Hattie et al. (2016) explained that a school in one of the reported case studies has implemented systems and processes to support the use of observational and student performance data:

- The leaders do frequent walkthroughs in classrooms, offering feedback and support to staff;
- Leaders and teachers monitor multiple sources of data. Data discussions are held with grade-level teams and individuals;
- Individual student needs are discussed in Response to Intervention (RTI)
meetings, with solution strategies being discussed and offered to the teacher for implementation in the classroom;

- Individual student needs are discussed in Response to Intervention (RTI) meetings, with solution strategies being discussed and offered to the teacher for implementation in the classroom;

- Grade-level team leaders report weekly to administration regarding progress and outcomes from their planning sessions. (p. 228)

In addition to the principal, assistant principal, instructional coach, and teachers tracking data and using it to drive instruction, some participants (7 of 13) stated the students track data. The middle school principal (P2), the middle school assistant principal (P3), and the middle school teachers (P9-P13) expressed how the teachers are even supporting students with tracking their individual data. The middle school teachers (P9-P13) expressed that this helps with student motivation as the students try a little harder and actually dig deep. The students discuss their instructional needs and become truly purposeful with their learning. The middle school teachers reported that students sometimes come out of the classroom and exclaim, “Hey this is what I learned today and let me show you or tell you how to do something.” The teachers said that “[the students] get really excited about their learning, and they want to prove it to you.” They described this as self-monitoring as the students know their score and work to improve or grow.

Table 18 displays the evidence that data meetings impact student achievement. The middle school principal (P2), the middle school assistant principal (P3), the elementary instructional coach (P4), the middle school instructional coach (P5), the elementary teachers (P6-P8), and the middle school teachers (P9-P13) reported student performance data (12 out of 13) as evidence that data meetings impact student achievement. The elementary principal (P1) listed
specific student performance data that impact student achievement, including grade-level assessments, weekly assessments, and division assessments, while the elementary instructional coach (P4) noted two particular student performance data that impact student achievement: formative assessments and state SOL tests. The middle school instructional coach (P5) said that data charts and spreadsheets are evidence of the impact of data meetings on student achievement. Student performance data were noted by most participants as evidence of the impact of data meetings.

**Table 18**

*Evidence of the Impact of Data Meetings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>1 Elementary Principal</th>
<th>2 Middle School Principal</th>
<th>3 Middle School Assistant Principal</th>
<th>4 Elementary Instructional Coach</th>
<th>5 Middle School Instructional Coach</th>
<th>6 Elementary Teachers</th>
<th>7 Middle School Teachers</th>
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<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

Data meetings is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools as evidenced by student performance data.

**Finding 4**

Transparency and visibility is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools as evidenced by student
performance data and observational data.

**Analysis to Support Finding 4.** The elementary school instructional coach (P4), the elementary school teachers (P6-P8), and the middle school teachers (P9-P13) reported being transparent and visible daily as an instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement (9 out of 13). 69% of the participants considered the practice of being transparent and visible daily as a principal practice that impacts student achievement. Many researchers determined that remaining present and visible is a principal practice that impacts student achievement in schools (Grissom et al., 2021; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hattie et al., 2016; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Marzano et al., 2005; Mullen & Graves, 2000; Sanzo et al., 2011). Sanzo et al. (2011) stated that teachers saw the principal as an active and engaging participant in the classroom.

According to Mullen and Patrick (2000), the principal of a high-poverty, underperforming school “brings high visibility to the work of being an instructional leader through her conception and practice of the role” (p. 245). The elementary school instructional coach (P4) said that the principal is in classrooms and visible every day. The elementary school teachers (P6-P8) described the principal practicing visibility through sending out school memos each week, sharing pictures of instruction from a variety of classrooms to let all know what others are doing, and always being present in classrooms. They noted that this practice is helpful and keeps the team unified. The middle school teachers (P9-P13) described the principal’s practice of transparency including the following: a checklist of evidence to be looked for during observations, the conversations after observations, the open-door policy which allows teachers to pop in and talk about instruction for the day, the opportunities to bounce ideas off of one another, especially the principal, and the ability to continue teaching with a little extra in the “bucket.”
The elementary and middle school teachers responded slightly different than the elementary coach when asked this third question regarding evidence of the impact of the practice on student achievement. The elementary school teachers (P6-P8) and the middle school teachers (P9-P13) reported that observational data were evidence that the instructional leadership practice of being visible and transparent impacts student achievement, while the elementary school instructional coach (P4) noted student performance and observational data as evidence the practice impacts student achievement. Transparency and visibility is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools as evidenced by student performance data and observational data.

**Finding 5**

Professional development is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools as evidenced by student performance data and observational data.

**Analysis to Support Finding 5.** The middle school assistant principal (P3), the elementary instructional coach (P4), and the middle school teachers (P9-P13) reported that providing PD is an instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement (7 out of 13). 54% of the participants agreed the practice impacts student achievement. Researchers from the literature review stated the importance of determining the teachers who make the most impact on student achievement in high-poverty schools and creating PD opportunities to build the impact (Hattie, 2015; McConnell & Lyon, 2020). Leithwood (2021) and McConnell and Lyon (2020) noted the importance of individualizing the PD. Brown et al. (2017) and McConnell and Lyon (2020) explained the impact of the principals’ knowledge of professional learning communities on student achievement in high-poverty schools. According to Mombourquette and
Bedard (2014), a principal stated, “Expectation of teachers and principals working in isolation are gone. How we structure learning teams, PD, etc. is all focused on the professional learning of our teachers/principals and student learning” (p. 68).

The middle school assistant principal (P3) stated that the principal shares current best practices using Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) strategies with all faculty and staff through articles and book studies, and the practices become “look-fors” during walkthroughs and instructional rounds. She said that PD is based on teachers’ needs found in observational and student performance data. The middle school assistant principal (P3) reported that the principal models best practices, such as putting the faculty and staff handbook, PD videos, and a class page on Canvas, an online learning management system. In addition, the middle school assistant principal (P3) explained that the principal models assessing teachers, collecting data through teacher observations, providing feedback to teachers, and adjusting PD as she wants teachers to assess students, collect student performance data, provide feedback to students, and adjust instruction to improve students' learning. The middle school assistant principal (P3) said that the principal has teachers model lesson delivery for PD. She also stated the principal exhibits that she is a learner as she participates in PD. This practice also helps her to know what the “look-fors” are for observations.

Similarly to the reports of the middle school assistant principal (P3), the elementary instructional coach (P4) reported that the principal provides job-embedded instructional coaching and development of the leadership team. It was noted that she coaches teachers as she does not just observe when she is in classrooms; she actually provides job-embedded coaching on the spot, and the teachers positively perceive her as a colleague. The elementary instructional coach (P4) said that the principal makes a daily practice of targeting teachers that need extra support
based on student performance data. After the coaching, there is a difference in the data, according to the elementary instructional coach (P4).

The middle school teachers (P9-P13) reported that the principal provided PD on new instructional strategies to use in the classroom from outside partners. One of the partners worked with the teachers on using open-ended questions with students providing evidence for answers as opposed to multiple choice. The middle school teachers (P9-P13) explained that the principal had teachers continually have a plan for learning, including attending PD seminars on a variety of topics or pursuing a higher degree.

The middle school assistant principal (P3), the elementary instructional coach (P4), and the middle school teachers (P9-P13) stated student performance data as evidence that the principal practice of providing PD impacts student achievement. The middle school assistant principal (P3) reported the student performance data include the following: attendance, benchmark assessments, state SOL scores, and PBIS data, while the middle school teachers (P9-P13) said the student performance data include formative and summative assessment data. The middle school assistant principal (P3) and the elementary instructional coach (P4) included observational data as evidence that the practice of providing PD impacts student achievement. The middle school assistant principal noted, the observational data include both formal and informal observations. Professional development is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools as evidenced by student performance data and observational data.

**Finding 6**

Building relationships is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student
achievement in elementary Title I schools as evidenced by student attendance data, family communication data, and observational data.

**Analysis to Support Finding 6.** The elementary teachers (P6-P8) noted that a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement is building relationships with students, families, faculty, and staff (3 out of 13; 3 out of 5 elementary school participants). Building trusting relationships (McConnell & Lyon, 2020; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Mullen & Patrick, 2000; Okilwa & Barnett, 2018; Ylimaki, 2007) between students, parents, and school staff (Boyles, 2020; Brown et al., 2017; Leithwood, 2021) was a key principal practice impacting student achievement in high-poverty schools found in the literature. This practice was noted by more researchers in the review of literature than other principal practices impacting student achievement in high-poverty schools. The elementary teachers (P6-P8) shared that the principal is “hands-on” with students as she is “nine times out of 10” in the hallways. It was stated, “They know her.” The elementary teachers (P6-P8) said that the students feel comfortable around the principal and they strive to impress her: “It is more often than not, [the students] are going to see her for a good reason versus a bad reason.” Mullen and Patrick (2000) noted that the principal in their study used the morning greeting time to “reinforce positive thinking, the readiness to learn, and the children’s trust that she will work on their behalf” (p. 244).

Supporting parent and teacher communication is a principal practice impacting student achievement in schools found in the research (Grissom et al., 2021; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Mullen & Graves, 2000). According to the elementary teachers (P6-P8), the principal communicates with parents and families through an online, school communication platform, and has a 98% participation rate. They reported that she utilizes the
platform to post pictures of various events at the school. Boyles (2020) stated, principals want to make the school a welcoming place for all parents and families.

Building trusting relationships with teachers (Grissom et al., 2021; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Hattie et al., 2016; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Mullen & Graves, 2000) is a principal practice that impacts student achievement in schools. As the middle school teachers (P9-P13) noted that the principal has an open-door policy when practicing transparency and visibility, the elementary teachers (P6-P8) said the principal builds relationships through an open-door policy. According to the elementary teachers (P6-P8), an example of the principal building relationships with teachers is as follows: her willingness to help teachers during the pandemic by teaching a class as opposed to splitting the class amongst several classrooms or disrupting the school schedule by having a “special” teacher, such as gym or music, teach. The elementary teachers (P6-P8) described her as approachable, open-minded, and helpful; this leads to stronger relationships.

The elementary teachers (P6-8) stated “her door is constantly covered with student drawings and student notes [that say, for example.] ‘I love you.’” They shared that the students come to school regularly due to the strong relationships built with the principal. When students attend, they get the needed classroom instruction to succeed. Also, as mentioned in the interview responses, the teachers feel comfortable openly communicating with the principal as she has built relationships with them; therefore, they can ask her for anything needed to help students achieve. The elementary teachers (P6-P8) stated that the principal always supports the faculty and staff with professional needs. Building relationships is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary Title I schools as evidenced by student attendance data, family communication data, and observational data.
Finding 7

Allocating and making available instructional resources aligned to the state standards in a timely manner is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary Title I schools as evidenced by student performance data and observational data.

Analysis to Support Finding 7. A principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement according to the elementary teachers (P6-P8) is allocating and making available instructional resources aligned to the state standards in a timely manner (3 out of 13; 3 out of 5 elementary school participants). Distributing resources effectively is a principal practice that impacts student achievement in schools found in the review of literature (Bossert et al., 1982; Grissom et al., 2021; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Hattie et al., 2016; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Robinson et al., 2008). Leithwood (2021) and Leithwood et al. (2020) determined that principals who distribute resources effectively impact student achievement in high-poverty schools. The elementary teachers (P6-P8) reported that the principal locates and provides math manipulatives and resources that are needed to deliver the lessons found in the VDOE’s MIPs or a specific text that is needed for a reading lesson to make certain students succeed with learning. She ensures that the teachers have support from other instructional leaders as sometimes teachers need to learn how to use an instructional resource, such as a math manipulative. The elementary teachers (P6-P8) said that the students are exposed to more hands on and authentic learning, because the principal provides a variety of resources and support with those resources.

The elementary teachers (P6-8) stated that the student performance data indicate that the instructional leadership practice of allocating and making available needed instructional resources to the teachers is evidence that the practice is impacting student achievement: “There is a connection….because [the students] had the materials…that they could manipulate in front of
them, [the students were] able to learn the subject better, and therefore, perform better on their assessments.” Observational data, including manipulatives in the lessons, connects to the student performance data, including better results on the assessments. Allocating and making available instructional resources aligned to the state standards in a timely manner is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary Title I schools as evidenced by student performance data and observational data.

Question 4 was asked during the interviews, and the responses were used to develop the final finding. Interview question 4: *Out of the identified instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement, please describe which, if any, are more impactful on student achievement than the others and explain the reasons why they are or they are not?*

**Finding 8**

Collaborative planning, data meetings, and informal observations with feedback or coaching are the most impactful principal instructional leadership practices in Title I schools.

**Analysis to Support Finding 8.** Collaborative planning (11 out of 13), data meetings (11 out of 13), and informal observations with feedback or coaching (9 out of 13) are the most impactful instructional leadership practices. The elementary principal (P1) noted collaborative planning as the most impactful on student achievement as the practice guarantees that there is “a group of people to ensure that we are checking the framework and ensuring our plans match that [framework] at one point in time.” The middle school principal (P2) said that building a culture of high expectations is the most impactful instructional leadership practice. She reported, “If you believe in your kids, and you have high expectations, you are going to... put some practices in place” to make certain the instructional team is not allowing the students to “fall through the cracks.” The middle school assistant principal (P3) noted that monitoring data in meetings is the
most impactful instructional leadership practice. She said, “No decision can be made without the data.” The elementary coach (P4) stated:

   It is sort of like a cycle. In collaborative planning, everybody is on the same page and we know exactly what is going to happen in that following week…Then the principal can be in the classroom doing the instructional walkthroughs, and she knows exactly what should be occurring because she was at collaborative planning…She knows….there is clarity [in the lesson delivery]…I think that I have seen that [these two practices] have the most impact on student achievement. And then following that is looking at the data and talking about…what is the next step.

The middle school instructional coach (P5) reported that the curriculum alignment and progress monitoring of all data are the most impactful instructional leadership practices. She mentioned that:

   the most important [practices] would be making sure that the curriculum and lesson plans are aligned, and progress monitoring the data to see because if [teachers] are not teaching what is supposed to be taught then the students are not going to get it.

The middle school principal stressed that having plans aligned to the curriculum framework and monitoring student data also called “progress monitoring” are essential to student achievement.

The elementary teachers (P6-8) noted no instructional leadership practices are more impactful than others. They reported the following: “There is no one [practice] that is above the others…if you take any [practice]…out, it is going to negatively affect [student achievement].” The middle school teachers (P9-13) agreed with the elementary teachers (P6-8) and the elementary coach (P4) that there are no instructional leadership practices more impactful on student achievement than other practices. The middle school teachers (P9-13) claimed all the
practices are “interwoven with each other to make sure students are succeeding.” Collaborative planning, data meetings, and informal observations with feedback or coaching are the most impactful principal instructional leadership practices in Title I schools.

Question 5 was asked at the conclusion of the interviews to provide the interviewees time to share information that would add to the research. Interview question 5: *Is there anything else that you can tell me that would add to this study?* Each participant had additional information to add to the research, excluding the elementary principal (P1). The middle school principal (P2) added:

It is frustrating when [all the practices] are not coming together, whether it is the collaborative piece or the alignment piece, and we are not seeing kids growing. It is just frustrating, but we work through those issues as leaders, and we keep changing, depending on the data…To see our kids being successful, it just makes us feel…proud and motivated about what we have done. It is not about us; it is about these kids.

The middle school assistant principal (P3) stated the importance of the Title I instructional leader’s understanding of the school setting, the community, the students' families, and the faculty to implement great instructional practices. The elementary coach (P4) noted that reviewing lesson plans is not impactful because a teacher can write a beautiful lesson plan and have terrible delivery or a person could have terrible writing skills, or just writing of a lesson plan but you walk into their classroom and it is beautiful. So very often I found that the time spent looking at lesson plans could be better spent in classrooms.

She said that it is important for the Title I principal know what is going on in every classroom each day. The middle school instructional coach (P5) said that presently instruction and learning
are challenging for instructional leaders due to the pandemic. She was not as concerned with reading as the skills spiral when students move forward, but she had a greater concern for math and science and making certain teachers close any gaps in learning. The elementary teachers (P6-P8) reported that, “Administrators are a key role in the environment of the building…The administrators make or break the morale, the atmosphere.” Without a good learning environment, students will struggle to succeed. The middle school teachers explained how helpful the state growth assessments will be this year that follows virtual learning. This final question provided the interviewees’ time to share additional information they believed would add to the research.

**Data Points**

Additional principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement with evidence of impact were shared throughout the interviews. Less than 50 percent reported these as practices that impact student achievement. Therefore, these are not findings but data points.

**Data Point 1**

Providing access to innovative instruction and learning is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary Title I schools as evidenced by student performance data.

The elementary teachers (P9-P13) stated that providing access to innovative instruction and learning is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement (3 out of 13; 3 out of 5 elementary school participants). There is a need for research on this principal instructional leadership practice and its impact on student achievement as no research was located in the review of literature. The elementary teachers (P9-P13) noted the principal
supported the acquisition of a mobile cooking lab for the school as she values the importance of the students having access to applied math and science through cooking. The elementary teachers (P9-P13) reported the principal constantly supported learning during the pandemic through the following:

- Attended Zoom sessions with students and teachers supporting the morning meetings and learning for one to two hours;
- Shared effective instructional strategies that she observed;
- Debriefed with teachers on instructional strategies that worked based on observations and made suggestions on how to improve instruction;
- Became a “purchasing power” for virtual instructional resources;
- Remained open to new ideas and helped teachers feel safe when trying new instructional strategies.

The elementary teachers (P6-P8) stated that since the students have been exposed to hands-on learning, projects, MIPs from the VDOE, and other innovative instruction and learning, student performance data have improved; therefore, student performance data are the evidence that the instructional leadership practice is impacting student achievement. They noted that there has been a significant increase in assessment scores: Looking at “data from the years before we [provided innovative instruction and learning]…[to more current data], there has been a significant increase in scores.” Providing access to innovative instruction and learning is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary Title I schools as evidenced by student performance data.

*Data Point 2*

Building a culture of positive behavior is a principal instructional leadership practice that
impacts student achievement in Title I middle schools as evidenced by student performance and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) data.

The middle school principal (P2) and the middle school instructional coach (P5) both noted that an instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement is building a culture of positive behavior (2 out of 13; 2 out of 7 middle school participants). The middle school principal (P2) stated that the school-wide and grade level team goals and incentives through PBIS help motivate students. She explained that this practice helps build relationships and the culture. The middle school principal (P2) said the instructional leader must put the PBIS or Virginia Tiered Systems of Support (VTSS) practice in place as it is essential to instruction. PBIS is a “nationally-recognized approach to support positive academic and behavioral outcomes for all students. In Virginia schools, PBIS is the behavioral component of the VTSS” (VDOE, 2021f). The Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports is a “data-informed decision making framework for establishing the academic, behavioral and social-emotional supports needed for a school to be an effective learning environment for all students” (VDOE, 2021g). The middle school principal reported that this year 6th graders had not been at school face to face since grade 4, making this practice critical as the school had to establish structures.

The middle school instructional coach (P5) described the practice of building a culture of positive behavior as building a positive classroom and school culture. The middle school assistant principal (P3) and the middle school instructional coach (P5) claimed a school without expectations and rules impacts student achievement and teacher success. Setting expectations for students to behave responsibly is a principal practice that impacts student achievement in schools as seen in the review of literature (Grissom et al., 2021; Mullen & Graves, 2000).

When principals keep schools safe, students have a greater opportunity to succeed with
academics. Owens (2016) stated that generating a safe, empathetic, and positive learning environment is a principal practice that impacts student achievement in high-poverty schools. Sustaining a well-ordered and supportive atmosphere is a principal practice that impacts student achievement in high-poverty schools according to research found in the review of literature (Leithwood, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020). The middle school instructional coach (P5) noted that when the principal builds a culture where all students, teachers, and families feel safe, students come to school ready to learn and gain the needed skills to achieve. She added that the PBIS model includes set lesson plans for teachers to utilize in the classrooms to help build this positive culture and keep schools safe.

The evidence that the instructional leadership practice of building a culture of positive behavior is impacting student achievement is student performance data and PBIS data. According to the middle school principal,

We put some structures in place for [the students], and worked with them…the PBIS team…set some goals…and incentives…I have not [seen] any fights and pushes and scuffles… We are hoping we addressed [inappropriate behaviors] so that we can move on with our instruction. The middle school instructional coach (P5) noted that through the practice of building a culture of positive behavior, students are behaving in class and therefore, achieving in academics. Building a culture of positive behavior is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in Title I middle schools as evidenced by student performance and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) data.

**Data Point 3**

Building a culture of high expectations is a principal instructional leadership practice that
impacts student achievement in Title I middle schools as evidenced by student performance data.

The middle school principal (P2) stated that she builds a culture of high expectations to impact student achievement. According to the research of Sanzo et al. (2011), principals were firm in their intentions about the importance of being clear with teachers about decisions and expectations for student achievement as well as teacher quality. With clear expectations for student performance, especially for “marginalized students,” principals can utilize data to meet those expectations (Grissom et al., 2021, p. 76). The middle school principal indicated that if expectations are high, students, as well as teachers, will rise to the expectations, and teachers need to hold high expectations. The middle school principal (P2) noted that she had to guarantee that the team believes in students, and that students are capable of learning and reaching high levels. She indicated that without those beliefs, it is difficult to move ahead with instruction and student achievement. She communicates those high expectations for all stakeholders, including everybody who works at the school. Similarly, the literature indicated that setting high expectations for all impacts student achievement in schools (Bossert et al., 1982; Grissom et al., 2021; Hattie et al., 2016; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Mullen & Graves, 2000; Robinson et al., 2008; Sanzo et al., 2011), while developing an environment of high expectations impacts student achievement in high-poverty schools (Edmonds, 1979; Hattie, 2015; Leithwood, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2004; McConnell & Lyon, 2020; Okilwa & Barnett, 2018; Owens, 2016).

The middle school assistant principal (P3) noted that the principal encourages a team that does not give up on students with behaviors or academics. The middle school principal (P2) mentioned “growth mindset and just believing in our kids” at the conclusion of the interview. She said some students may not be performing where they should be “yet.” Although, the middle school principal (P3) did not specifically mention “growth mindset” as an instructional
leadership practice that impacts student achievement either, she described the high expectations of the instructional team, which comes from the instructional leader, as not giving up when a student is not successful. The student or students have not mastered a behavior or academic skill “yet.”

The middle school principal (P2) stated that the student performance data indicate that the instructional leadership practice of building a culture of high expectations is impacting student achievement. When teachers believe in students, the students perform at higher levels. Building a culture of high expectations is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in Title I middle schools as evidenced by student performance data.

Data Point 4

Implementing restorative justice is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in Title I middle schools as evidenced by student performance data.

The middle school assistant principal (P3) stated the following as she explained the principal instructional leadership practice of implementing restorative justice and its impact on student achievement:

In the event the students do not meet the expectation…say [to the student]…this was not the preferred or appropriate action. Let me model for you. Let me remind you of what is the expectation and allow you to feel confident to re-enter the learning environment without feeling bad for the action that you made.

DeMatthews et al. (2017) revealed that while not every principal connected their practices with the theory of ‘restorative justice’ (p. 544), each of the principals in the study looked for ways to
decrease student suspensions by asking students to work towards amending the misbehavior, as opposed to implementing a punishment or suspension, while mending relationships. Through the implementation of restorative justice, the middle school assistant principal (P3) said that the students, families, and teachers can see that the students are not bad people but instead make bad choices sometimes. She stressed the importance of the leader respecting and valuing students through this practice. Consequently, teachers and students value what a strong leader values.

The middle school assistant principal reported that the evidence that the instructional leadership practice is impacting student achievement is tied to instruction. The evidence is student performance data as when a student re-enters the learning environment after making a bad behavior choice, he or she is able to receive instruction and therefore, master learning standards. Implementing restorative justice is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in Title I middle schools as evidenced by student performance data.

**Data Point 5**

Continuous school improvement planning and monitoring is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary Title I schools as evidenced by student performance data and observational data.

The elementary instructional coach (P4) shared that facilitating the continuous school improvement planning and monitoring is an instructional leadership practice that the principal uses to impact student achievement, and she provided details of the meetings. Developing and implementing a purposeful school improvement plan (Leithwood et al., 2004) and process (Leithwood, 2021, McConnell & Lyon, 2020; Ylimaki, 2007) is an instructional leadership practice that the principal uses to impact student achievement in high-poverty schools according to the reviewed literature. The meetings include grade-level team and other instructional leaders
such as the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) teacher who really supports the science, and the reading specialists. This is a time that the school team reviews the school improvement plan to make sure that the team is “on track.” The team monitors the goals and practices and adjusts the plan as needed. Communication was mentioned as a vital part of school improvement. A strength of the principal is the ability to communicate well and to empower the team leaders to communicate well.

The elementary instructional coach (P4) reported that the evidence that the instructional leadership practice is impacting student achievement is student performance data and observational data. This data are monitored by the members of the continuous school improvement plan; if practices are not impacting student achievement, next steps are developed. Continuous school improvement planning and monitoring is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary Title I schools as evidenced by student performance data and observational data.

**Data Point 6**

Increasing the volume of reading is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary Title I schools as evidenced by student performance data and observational data.

The elementary instructional coach (P4) stated that increasing the volume of reading across the school is an instructional leadership practice of the principal that impacts student achievement. It was noted by the elementary instructional coach (P4) that the principal used funds to purchase a “book vending machine,” and it has helped her promote the volume of reading with students, faculty, and staff: “It is commonplace that everybody is reading something all the time.” The elementary instructional coach (P4) shared, the principal frequently
communicates what she is reading to the students, and the students will ask her what she is reading if they are not aware. “Students always have books,” according to the elementary instructional coach (P4). There is a need for research on this principal instructional leadership practice and its impact on student achievement as no research was located in the review of literature.

The elementary instructional coach stated that the evidence the instructional leadership practice of increasing the volume of reading is impacting student achievement is student performance data; it is evident in the reading scores for the state test. The more a student reads, the better reader he or she becomes. Increasing the volume of reading is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary Title I schools as evidenced by student performance data and observational data.

*Data Point 7*

Providing intervention and enrichment opportunities in the master schedule is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in Title I middle schools as evidenced by lesson plans, observational data, and student performance data.

The middle school instructional coach (P5) said, providing intervention and enrichment opportunities in the master schedule is another principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement. She shared that this 45-minute to one hour time allows students the opportunity to learn skills they have not yet mastered or “front load” skills missed during the pandemic needed for on-grade level tier one instruction. Although the middle school principal (P2) did not name this as a specific principal instructional leadership practice, she also noted the importance of building these learning opportunities into the schedule to ensure students receive instruction on gap skills prior to on-grade level tier one instruction. The middle school principal
(P2) stressed that her team was attempting to address the gap skills prior to receiving tier one instruction through the Intervention/Enrichment (IE) time built into the master schedule. Tier one instruction is instruction delivered to all students in a classroom. This year, during the IE time, she has teachers utilizing the VDOE bridging documents and a program to build skills prior to tier one instruction. Both the middle school instructional coach (P5) and the middle school principal (P2) stated that this time has been helpful for students to build missing math content from the pandemic. There is a need for research on this principal instructional leadership practice and its impact on student achievement as no research was located in the review of literature.

The middle school coach (P5) reported that lesson plans and observational and student performance data are the evidence that the instructional leadership practice of providing intervention and enrichment opportunities in the master schedule is impacting student achievement. Although this practice was utilized pre-COVID 19, this year the practice is impacting student achievement as noted in the lesson plans and observational and student performance data; the front loading of prerequisite skills prior to tier one instruction is essential. Providing intervention and enrichment opportunities in the master schedule is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in Title I middle schools as evidenced by lesson plans, observational data, and student performance data.

**Summary**

The responses from the participants demonstrated some similar perspectives on the principal instructional leadership practices and their impact on student achievement. All participants reported collaborative planning, informal observations with feedback or coaching, and data meetings as principal instructional leadership practices impacting student achievement. Most participants noted the principal instructional leadership practice of being transparent and
visible impacts student achievement. Most also said that the principal instructional leadership practice of providing PD impacts student achievement. Three of the elementary participants out of 5 elementary participants listed building relationships and allocating and making available instructional resources as principal instructional leadership practices impacting student achievement. The majority of the participants stated collaborative planning, informal observations with feedback or coaching, and data meetings as the most impactful practices.

There were additional data points found in the research. Although all of the elementary teachers reported providing access to innovative instruction and learning as principal instructional leadership practices impacting student achievement, there was no literature located in the review on the practice. Some of the middle school participants added building a culture of positive behavior as a principal instructional leadership practice impacting student achievement, including the middle school principal (P2) and the middle school instructional coach (P5); and some of the middle school participants described building a culture of high expectations as a principal instructional leadership practice impacting student achievement, including the middle school principal (P2) and the middle school assistant principal (P3). The middle school assistant principal (P3) also noted implementing restorative justice, which relates to a culture of positive behavior and a culture of high expectation. The middle school instructional coach said that providing intervention and enrichment opportunities in the master schedule is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement. The elementary instructional coach reported that the principal instructional leadership practice of continuous school improvement planning and the practice of monitoring and increasing the volume of reading impact student achievement. The data analysis was based on responses of the interview questions and helped to unveil emerging themes in the data. Chapter 4 included the data analysis and all
findings. Chapter 5 focuses on the five major findings, implications for policy and practitioners, and recommendations for future researchers.
Chapter 5: Discussion of the Major Findings and Implications

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within a school division in Virginia. The research question was, what are the principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools within a school division in Virginia as reported by principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers? The research addressed a gap in the literature as it reports the principal instructional leadership practices for elementary and middle Title I schools, the descriptions of those practices, and the evidence that the practices are impactful. Chapter 5 includes review and discussion of the five major findings, practitioner and policy implications, and recommendations for future research.

Review of Major Findings

A finding in this research is considered major if over 50 percent of the participants responded in the same way. Findings one through five are major findings as over 50 percent of the elementary and middle school participants noted that the respective practices are impactful. Finding eight is considered a major finding as over 50 percent of the elementary and middle school participants reported the three practices, including collaborative planning, data meetings, and informal observations with feedback or coaching, as the most impactful practices. Findings six and seven are major findings as over 50 percent of the elementary participants stated that the respective practices are impactful. All of the major findings align with specific research found in the review and analysis of the literature.
1. Collaborative planning is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools as evidenced by student performance and observational data.

2. Informal observations with feedback or coaching is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools as evidenced by student performance and observational data.

3. Data meetings is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools as evidenced by student performance data.

4. Transparency and visibility is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools as evidenced by student performance data and observational data.

5. Providing PD is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary and middle Title I schools as evidenced by student performance data and observational data.

6. Building relationships is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary Title I schools as evidenced by student attendance data, family communication data, and observational data.

7. Allocating and making available instructional resources aligned to the state standards in a timely manner is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary Title I schools as evidenced by student performance data and observational data.
Collaborative planning, data meetings, and informal observations with feedback or coaching are the most impactful principal instructional leadership practices in elementary and middle Title I schools.

**Discussion of the Major Findings**

The principals, assistant principal, instructional coaches, and teachers in this study worked in Title I schools that are accredited by the state. The responses to the open-ended questions from the interviews provided data that helped shape the researcher’s findings. The findings can provide principals of elementary and middle Title I schools with instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement and close achievement gaps amongst student groups.

This study confirmed that collaborative planning, informal observations with feedback or coaching, and data meetings are instructional leadership practices that are most impactful on student achievement as evidenced by student performance and observational data. The practices were compared to a cycle, and it was determined that the principal cannot just use one practice without the other. Figure 3 highlights the three key principal instructional leadership practices impacting student achievement in Title I elementary and middle schools as evidenced by student performance data and observational data.
The findings showed that the principal participates in the collaborative planning weekly to know what to look for during informal observations; the principal conducts informal observations to gather observational data to help provide effective feedback and coaching, and the principal analyzes student performance data at data meetings to indicate whether the lessons delivered to students were clear and aligned to state standards. Participant responses suggested that all three of these principal instructional practices, collaborative planning, informal observations with feedback and coaching, and data meetings, collectively impact student achievement including student performance and observational data, in Title I schools. This demonstrates the significance of the practices being implemented with fidelity by principals, especially those serving the most vulnerable students.

The middle school principal (P2) stated the following, which summarizes all key
principal instructional practices and the impact on student achievement:

I could point to a number of [teachers] that we have seen just a tremendous difference, in their [lesson] delivery, as well as planning... Once we have had a chance to observe, give feedback, and coach... [We look at] their data at the end of the year and during the school year to see how the teachers grow as we... provided support and feedback based on... instructional rounds and walkthroughs... It is motivational [when we observe] and everything is aligned [and] clear, and [the team] is monitoring, collecting data, students are self–monitoring, and you know, it is a good day. It is motivational to teachers when you give them that feedback... We see them become great teachers.

The current research found that a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement as evidenced by student performance and observational data, is being transparent and visible daily similar to the findings of Patrick and Mullen (2000). The current findings indicated that the practice of being visible included being present in classrooms daily, sending out weekly memos, and sharing pictures of instruction, while the practice of transparency included a list of evidence to be observed during informal classroom walkthroughs, the dialogues after observations, the open-door policy of the principal, and the opportunities to share ideas with other educators, mainly the principal. The practice of being transparent and visible allows students, teachers, staff, and families to see the principal as an instructional leader.

Providing PD is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement as evidenced by student performance and observational data identified through the research. This study indicated that the data helped drive the teachers’ PD and many times is targeted based on individual needs. Most importantly, the participant responses demonstrated that the principal either provided the PD or participated with teachers, which helps the principal
monitor the implementation of the PD. This practice allows the principal to model best instructional practices for teachers; therefore, many times the principal becomes the instructor and the teachers become the learners.

Participant responses from the current research supported that building relationships with students, families, faculty, and staff is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary Title I schools as evidenced by student attendance data, family communication data, and observational data. Although student achievement data were not mentioned as evidence of the impact of this principal practice, students and teachers that have relationships with the principal attend school regularly according to the participants’ responses. If students and teachers are at school, students have greater opportunities to learn and achieve. This research demonstrated that the principal communicates frequently with families through technology so that they are well informed of school events to learn more about their child’s education and the many ways they can provide support. The interview responses are indicative that the principal openly communicates with students, families, faculty, and staff to impact student achievement.

The current study confirmed that allocating and making available instructional resources aligned to the state standards in a timely manner is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement in elementary Title I schools as evidenced by student performance data and observational data. Participant responses indicated that the principal provided aligned math manipulatives and text as needed to enhance instruction and student learning. When needed, there are human resources provided to support the effective use of the instructional resources. This principal instructional leadership practice provides more opportunities for hands-on and authentic learning according to the research. Providing access to
innovative instruction and learning is a principal instructional leadership practice that impacts student achievement as evidenced by student performance data.

**Practitioner Implications**

Elementary and middle school principals of Title I schools might consider the findings of this study when determining effective principal instructional leadership practices to implement. School divisions can consider the findings when supporting and or developing principals regarding effective principal instructional leadership practices to implement. Colleges and universities might consider the findings of this study for principal preparation programs and educational leadership programs. Title I principals should:

1. Attend collaborative planning meetings weekly to support teachers by ensuring lessons are aligned to the curriculum standards and providing opportunities for teachers to practice the delivery of the lesson, including any manipulatives.

2. Continually conduct informal observations and provide feedback and job-embedded coaching as needed. The informal observations will allow the principals to monitor what has been discussed and practiced in collaborative planning.

3. Attend data meetings to provide support to teachers as they analyze and monitor student performance data. If the student performance data indicate students are not achieving, the principal, assistant principal, instructional coach, and teachers should develop next steps, including the cycle of collaborative planning, informal observations with feedback and job-embedded coaching, and data meetings.

4. Remain transparent and visible in collaborative and data meetings and informal observations, including feedback and coaching.

5. Provide job-embedded and individualized PD.
6. Build relationships with students, families, faculty, and staff (elementary Title I school principal).

7. Provide instructional resources aligned to the state standards in a timely manner (elementary Title I school principal).

Policy Implications

The Department of Education, the VDOE, and local school boards should ensure that the most highly effective principals are leading Title I elementary and middle schools. Principals with a proven record of implementation of the practices found in this study should lead schools with the most vulnerable populations. Principal preparation programs should include PD on the principal instructional leadership practices described in the research. Aspiring Title I principals should be required to intern under Title I principals with a record of success.

Suggestions for Future Research

1. The study could be extended by interviewing more Title I principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers within Virginia on the most impactful instructional leadership practices and the evidence of their perceived impact to include further responses to the data set. Additional participants could lead to a more expansive set of responses. This data would assist practitioners and scholars on the topic of principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement in Title I schools.

2. The study could be adapted using both Distinguished Title I elementary and middle schools and Non-Distinguished Title I elementary and middle schools to investigate whether the findings are consistent across the schools.

3. The study could be adapted using both Title I elementary and middle schools and elementary and middle schools that are not Title I to investigate whether the findings are
consistent across the schools.

4. Future research could be conducted on the particular findings of this study. Each finding could be researched in depth to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement in Title I schools.

5. Future research could be completed on the impact of principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement in Title I schools pre-COVID, during COVID, and post-COVID.

Conclusions

Although the major principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement found in the study are aligned to the principal instructional leadership practices located in the literature reviewed, this research provides practitioners and scholars with current principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement in Title I elementary schools and middle schools. The research is extremely timely due to the high percentages of principal and teacher turnover. Whether students are learning face-to-face, blended, or virtual, these practices can be utilized by leaders of schoolwide Title I schools to ensure that students achieve and move onto the high school level, graduate on-time, and are prepared for college and career.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Literature Review Table

This appendix includes the most relevant research from the search and review of the literature to determine the impact of principals’ instructional leadership practices on student achievement in Title I schools. The appendix is color-coded based on the main themes that emerged throughout the review. Yellow specifies the research focused on the impact of federal policy on student achievement in high-poverty schools. Purple indicates the studies related to the evolution of the principal’s impact on student achievement in high-poverty schools. Green denotes that the studies connected to the impact of principal practices on student achievement in high-poverty schools. Brown signifies that the research focused on the impact of principal preparation on student achievement in high-poverty schools. Two sub-topics of the impact of principal practices on student achievement in high-poverty schools emerged and are color coded: Blue denotes that the research centered around the impact of principal practices on student achievement in any school, not specifically a high-poverty or low-poverty school, and red denotes that the studies focused on the impact of low socioeconomic status or minority students on student achievement.
### Literature Review of the Impact of Principals’ Instructional Leadership Practices on Student Achievement in Title I Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s) and Year</th>
<th>Purpose of Study</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Findings and/or Implications</th>
<th>Themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bossert et al. (1982)</td>
<td>Effective instructional management is studied, particularly the role of the school leader as an instructional manager.</td>
<td>Review of the literature and research</td>
<td>Through the review of the research on effective instructional management and the role of the school leader as an instructional manager, Bossert et al. (1982) developed a structure for understanding the role a school leader plays as an instructional manager. Connections among school-level variables and individual learning are suggested. Successful schools include the following: A climate that contributes to learning; emphasis on teaching basic skills; expectation of educators that all students can succeed; and a system of clear instructional goals for monitoring and evaluating student performance. The school leaders are aware of the learning challenges in classrooms and distribute the resources effectively.</td>
<td>Evolution of the Principal’s Impact on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools</td>
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The research denotes that more information is needed on what a school leader does to impact student learning.

Boyles (2020)  What family engagement strategies do elementary principals use, and how do they strengthen school-family partnerships in high-poverty schools within one rural Appalachian region? Sub Questions. 1. What family engagement strategies do principals use in Title I elementary schools within rural Appalachia? Why do they think the strategies are helpful in improving school achievement? 2. What family engagement strategies do principals wish they could implement in Title I elementary schools within rural Appalachia? What may be currently preventing them from implementing these strategies within their schools? Why do these principals think the strategies could be helpful in improving school achievement? Qualitative interviews of 6 principals

Faculty and staff related to school achievement.

Strategies:
- Address students’ basic needs;
- Provide welcoming school climate;
- Re-evaluate holding events after school and transportation needs;
- Continue with and grow traditional activities;
- Use sign-in sheets for monitoring tool;
- Include non-faculty and staff members’ input on the school plan.

“Student achievement will improve if trusting relationships are formed between students, parents, and school staff” (Boyles, 2020, p. 16).

Impact of Principal Practices on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Principal Supports</th>
<th>Impact of Principal Practices on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools</th>
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<tr>
<td>Brown (2016)</td>
<td>What supports did the elementary principal in this high-achieving school implement to increase student achievement (Brown, 2016, p. 102)?</td>
<td>Qualitative case study, interviews of principal and teachers</td>
<td>“Curriculum being aligned to the standards, data-driven instruction efforts, the development of common assessments, professional learning communities, parent teacher organization facilitation, TRIBES Behavior Program, budgeting, and a schedule that allowed for uninterrupted instruction” (p. 101).</td>
<td>Impact of Principal Strategies on Student Achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brown, Bynum, &amp; Beziat (2017)</td>
<td>Do categories used in previous research, pertaining to the principal’s indirect influence on student achievement for all students, influence the achievement of low-income students? If they do, are some categories more important to leadership for low-income students than others (Brown et al., p. 69)?</td>
<td>Quantitative survey method</td>
<td>Although more research is needed to determine if the leadership categories influencing student success for all students found in earlier research impact success of students with low socioeconomic status, more teachers strongly agreed that the school administrator delivered the needed support in the schools with high student achievement as compared to schools with low student achievement. The teachers from high-</td>
<td>Impact of Principal Practices on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools</td>
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</table>
performing schools trusted the school administrator and were confident that the administrator understood the essentials of professional learning communities, with an emphasis on a solid school vision as compared to teachers from low-performing schools. Discrepancy in student achievement in the grade 12 average African American and the grade 12 average White demonstrates the lack of equitable opportunity.

The implication as explained by Coleman (1968), is that the responsibility to ensure student achievement falls to the educational institution, not the student and his or her family.

**Coleman**, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld, & York (1966) To determine the extent of segregation amongst the minority students and the majority students, the equality of educational opportunity for the groups and the relationship to student achievement at the request of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Quantitative Survey Descriptive Statistics

There is a segregation of the two groups, minority and majority. Evidence of a significant difference in educational opportunities, including learning resources and human resources, offered to minority students as compared to majority is in the report. The average minority
is more impacted by educational opportunities compared to the average majority. Student achievement between the two groups is significantly different, as the minority students' achievement scores are lower than those of the majority.

Cook-Harvey, Darling-Hammond, Lam, Mercer, & Roc (2016) Provides details of the equity implications of the ESSA and proposes strategies which the federal government, states, localities, and schools can optimize to improve equitable opportunities specifically for the students historically underserved.

The ESSA must ensure that the communities and school stakeholders can ensure that states, localities, and schools deliver high-quality, equitable, educational opportunities that afford students with the needed 21st-century skills to be successful in college and career.

Provisions through the ESSA are included in the following main areas: (1) access to learning opportunities; (2) multiple measures of equity; (3) resource equity; and (4) evidence-based interventions. Each of the provisions can be leveraged to improve educational opportunities for all students.
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<td></td>
<td>Found research focusing on schools with low-income and minority students; earlier studies from the 1970s to early 1980s indicate that principals who are administrative and instructional leaders are found in high-performing schools and more current research confirms and expands those findings.</td>
<td>School leader behaviors and qualities are positively associated with student success, attitudes, and social conduct. Effective behaviors and qualities are shared. 19 of the 26 behaviors and qualities of effective school leaders related to student achievement. Effective school leaders hold themselves accountable for the school’s achievement.</td>
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<td>Evolution of the Principal’s Impact on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools</td>
<td>Impact of Principal Strategies on Student Achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Davis &amp; Darling-Hammond (2012)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Describe 5 pioneering principal preparation programs-context, structures, and results</strong></td>
<td><strong>Qualitative: case studies, cross-case analysis</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1) Influence teacher feelings of efficacy, motivation, and satisfaction,</td>
<td>Impact of Principal Preparation on Student</td>
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<td>2) establish the organizational and cultural conditions that foster a positive</td>
<td>Achievement in High-Poverty Schools</td>
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<td></td>
<td>environment for teaching and learning,</td>
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<td>3) promote professional collaboration,</td>
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<td>4) promote and support the instructional abilities and professional development</td>
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<td></td>
<td>of teachers,</td>
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<td>5) focus resources and organizational systems toward the development, support,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>and assessment of teaching and learning, and</td>
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<td>6) enlist the involvement and support of parents and community stakeholders</td>
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<td>(Davis &amp; Darling-Hammond, 2012, p. 43).</td>
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<td><strong>Dweck (2006)</strong></td>
<td>To explain the psychology that demonstrates the power of an individual’s belief.</td>
<td>ND</td>
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<td><strong>Edmonds (1979)</strong></td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Garry (2021)</strong></td>
<td>To study data practices in schools.</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gieselmann (2009)</strong></td>
<td>“What were the significant predictors of student achievement measured by the state assessment” (Gieselmann, 2009, p. 19)?</td>
<td>Quantitative: multiple regression with 9 predictor variables, non-experimental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Glanz (2005)</strong></td>
<td>To study instructional leadership at the secondary level and action research through case studies.</td>
<td>Qualitative: action research, case studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author/Year</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
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<td>Gray &amp; Lewis (2013)</td>
<td>Purpose-To define the restructured instructional leadership program at the University of South Alabama and to assess its effectiveness in preparing prospective school administrators to become instructional leaders</td>
<td>Quantitative: multiple measures including paired t-test; 6 cohorts participated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grissom et al., (2021)</td>
<td>Synthesis of research on school leadership and the impact on students and schools, over twenty years</td>
<td>Synthesis review-2 decades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallinger (2011)</td>
<td>A study of the use of Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) and the methodology development found in doctoral studies of educational leadership over 3 decades</td>
<td>Literature review-3 decades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>Hallinger &amp; Heck (1998)</td>
<td>Review of research on the relationship between school leadership and student achievement from 1980 to 1995</td>
<td>Literature review of over 40 quantitative studies. The results from the reviewed studies indicate that principals indirectly impact school and student achievement. Although the indirect effect is minor, it is statistically significant and important. The question in the studies has evolved from not only does the school leader make an impact on student achievement but if so, how does the principal make an impact on student achievement, which is essential to the future research of scholars and practitioners. The conceptual and methodological tools utilized by researchers have developed throughout the research.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hallinger &amp; Murphy (1985)</td>
<td>Purpose-To try to create an instrument for measuring a school leader’s instructional management practices, to determine how well the school leaders manage curriculum and instruction, as well as define personal and organizational dynamics that may be related to Qualitative: questionnaire developed to assess principal instructional management activities; exploratory analysis of the individual and organizational factors that are related to active instructional management</td>
<td>The results of the study indicate that principals do actively manage curriculum and instruction regularly, which does not align with previous studies. The Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) originally developed by Hallinger is useful for</td>
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<td>Evolution of the Principal’s Impact on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools</td>
<td>Impact of Principal Strategies on Student Achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hallinger &amp; Murphy (2013)</strong></td>
<td>instructional management behaviors. The article discusses the challenges of principals to unveil the time and capacity required to be a leader for learning.</td>
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<td>4. “Clarify your personal vision and supporting ‘habits,’” 5. Articulate a collective instructional leadership role, 6. Enable others to act” (Hallinger &amp; Murphy, 2013, p.13).</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Handford &amp; Leithwood (2013)</strong></th>
<th>To determine leadership practices that the faculty sees as symbols of trustworthiness on behalf of the principal.</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
<th>Proficient, consistent, reliable, honest, and respectful.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hattie (2015)</strong></td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>Impact of effective instructional leaders on student achievement: the ability to seek evidence of learning (equitable).</td>
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<td>John Hattie (2015), stated that “High-impact instructional leaders believe that success and failure in student learning is about what they, as teachers</td>
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<td><strong>Impact of Low Socioeconomic Status on Student Achievement</strong></td>
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<td>Impact of Principal Practices on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hattie, Masters, &amp; Birch (2016)</strong></td>
<td>To determine how schools ensure student achievement.</td>
<td>Qualitative-International Case Studies</td>
<td>Impact of “Visible Learning” Case studies of 15 schools in the following countries: Australia, USA, Hong Kong, UK, Sweden, New Zealand, and Norway. The studies illustrate “Visible Learning” schools as they ensure all their students surpass their potential for academic achievement.</td>
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<td><strong>Heck (1992)</strong></td>
<td>1-What are the most important instructional leadership predictors of school achievement? 2-To what extent do the instructional leadership profiles of new principals in consistently high- and low-achieving schools tend to mirror the norms for principal behavior in each type of school (Heck, 1992, p. 22)?</td>
<td>Quantitative: California public schools were selected if performing above or below comparative band for three successive years on California Assessment Program (CAP); random sample of teachers and principals; Quantitative questionnaire and discriminant analysis</td>
<td>1-extent of time principals conduct classroom observations, encouraging instructional conversations, and stressing the use of assessment results for making improvements 2-Although limited due to small sampling, there was not a difference in new principals’ practices and others. The findings of this study and previous studies that have concentrated on the principal and classroom practices of teachers afford necessary empirical support for the idea that school variables, including the school administrator’s instructional</td>
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<p>|  |  |  | Impact of Principal Strategies on Student Achievement |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Impact of Principal Strategies on Student Achievement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heck &amp; Hallinger (2014)</td>
<td>Discover the “paths” through which leadership impacts student learning at school and classroom level.</td>
<td>The leader’s impact on student learning was fully determined by the condition of the school’s instructional atmosphere. The results showed that the classroom-related “paths” studied directly impacted student achievement in mathematics. Leaders with an instructional focus led to the effect of individual teachers on student learning. School leaders can develop student performance by generating conditions that lead to increased collective teacher efficacy.</td>
<td>Impact of Principal Strategies on Student Achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hitt &amp; Tucker (2016)</td>
<td>Review of literature-2000 to 2014</td>
<td>Found 28 key leadership practices impacting student achievement.</td>
<td>Impact of Principal Strategies on Student Achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leithwood (2021)</td>
<td>Review of research on instructional leadership practices to improve equitable opportunities.</td>
<td>Identified effective leadership practices.</td>
<td>Impact of Principal Practices on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Researchers from the Universities of Minnesota and Toronto study the existing evidence and make recommendations to educators, policymakers and all people concerned about supporting successful schools.


Study current research

School leadership is second in effectiveness to instructional delivery on student achievement. Effective leadership is most impactful in underperforming schools. Leadership has the greatest impact in schools where leadership is most needed. While the research demonstrates little but significant effects of principal actions on student achievement in schools, current research reveals effects of successful leadership are significantly greater in schools that are facing educational challenges.

Principal practices:
Set high expectations, create an intentional school improvement plan, monitor data, set clear goals, enable others to do the work, and evaluate and support faculty and staff through PD.

Principal preparation: “Efforts to improve their recruitment, training, evaluation and ongoing development should be considered highly cost-effective approaches to

| Impact of Principal Practices on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools |
| Impact of Low Socioeconomic Status on Student Achievement |
| Impact of Principal Preparation on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools |
successful school improvement. These efforts will be increasingly productive as research provides us with more robust understandings of how successful leaders make sense of and productively respond to both external policy initiatives and local needs and priorities, and of how those practices seep into the fabric of the education system, improving its overall quality and substantially adding value to our students’ learning” (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Questions: “1. What is the contribution to student achievement of variables populating each of the four paths and which variables make the greatest contribution? 2. What is the contribution to student achievement of each of the four paths, in aggregate, and which path(s), in aggregate, make the greatest contribution? 3. What are the direct and indirect effects of school leadership on student achievement and which

Quantitative: surveys “Confirmatory factor analysis, regression analysis, and structural equation modeling were used to analyze the data” (Leithwood et al., 2020, p. 570)

Four paths, “rational, emotions, organizational, and family paths” (Leithwood et al., 2020, p. 572)

The “rational path” was the only path with a statistically significant effect on student achievement. Variables connected to this path include knowledge and skills of school team members regarding “curriculum, teaching, and learning” (Leithwood et al., 2020, p. 574).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leithwood et al. (2020)</td>
<td>Features of leaders’ schools and communities offer the greatest leverage for their school improvement efforts?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lochmiller &amp; Mancinelli (2019)</td>
<td>To determine how elementary administrators in Washington State modified their leadership practices to meet the new state mandates of the teacher evaluation policy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meta-Analysis</td>
<td>The average of the research is a .25 correlation between school administrator and student achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified content analysis of open-ended survey responses</td>
<td>Instructional observations of teachers became more focused and purposeful; other staff handled non-instructional tasks to ensure that their instructional time was protected; and support and coaching were utilized to help with the implementation of the new teacher evaluation initiative. The application of the new policy on teacher evaluation helped build instructional leaders as the emphasis was on supporting educators with their classroom instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of Federal Policy on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools</td>
<td>Over time if the principal is highly effective, the student achievement increases significantly. If the principal is ineffective, there is a .25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
correlation between the school administrator and student achievement.

“Although the difference in expected student achievement in “effective” versus ‘ineffective’ schools is dramatic, the difference is even greater when we contrast ‘highly effective’ schools with ‘highly ineffective’ schools—more specifically, the top 1 percent of schools with the bottom 1 percent” (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 4).

Remaining present and visible as a principal impacts student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005).

### McConnell & Lyon (2020)

ND

ND

Strategies to transform a school.

### McGuigan & Hoy (2006)

To examine the construct of academic optimism; to support the proposition that academic optimism influences the academic success of schools, regardless of socioeconomic status (SES); and to demonstrate that principal leadership, as manifested by the creation of collective efficacy and trust, is correlated with school-level academic achievement, when controlling for SES, and school leaders who create school structures and practices that teachers sense as allowing them to do their work effectively.

Quantitative: correlation, regression, and factor analyses

Academic optimism, which includes collective efficacy and trust, is correlated with school-level academic achievement, when controlling for SES, and school leaders who create school structures and practices that teachers sense as allowing them to do their work effectively.

Impact of Principal Practices on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools
of school structures and processes that enable teachers’ work, is related to a culture of academic optimism (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006, p. 204-205).

| Mombourquette & Bedard (2014) | Qualitative | Findings: four instructional leadership practices including “collaboration between school and district-level leadership in setting the direction of leadership for learning; development of a shared expertise in the use of evidence about student learning; provision of professional development that is job-embedded and based on school needs; and the alignment of practices to support student learning” (Mombourquette & Bedard, 2014, p. 61). *similar to findings in U.S. studies. |
| Morgan (2018) | Quantitative: survey, descriptive statistics, paired t-tests, and chi-square tests | Strengths in the area of facilitating collaborative learning conditions and efficacy surrounding family and community involvement; there are clear gaps in the instructional leadership and school improvement processes of APs that need attention; an increasing |

Impact of Principal Strategies on Student Achievement

Impact of Principal Preparation on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Study Objective</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morgan (2018)</td>
<td>Investigate differences among APs’ self-efficacy and practice based on contextual factors (Morgan, 2018, p.2)</td>
<td>Number of duties and an undefined group of practices for APs.</td>
<td>The study indicated that new principals perceived they spend the majority of their time overseeing instruction compared to other job responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mullen (2005)</td>
<td>To identify what principals do to effectively perform their job.</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Impact of Principal Strategies on Student Achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mullen &amp; Graves (2000)</td>
<td>To examine strategies to improve schools through “democratic accountability” in a middle school (Mullen &amp; Graves, 2000, p. 478).</td>
<td>Qualitative: case study</td>
<td>The stakeholders expressed key areas of school improvement that had occurred during the principal’s tenure: student and teacher responsibility and discipline; effective school experiences for students; good communication amongst all school members; modeling of a solid work ethic; greater expectations for students, teachers, and staff; support for faculty such as protection of instructional time; improved family contact and participation; and school leaders’ school pride. The principal worked as a catalyst to develop a team that could collectively improve the school and its Impact of Principal Strategies on Student Achievement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
current resources (human resources, materials, and facilities). Faculty and staff began to believe in the possibility for a better change as they experienced improvement in multiple areas.

Mullen & Patrick (2000) Define how an academically at-risk school confronting a state takeover met the challenge. Qualitative case study of leadership of an at-risk elementary urban school; the principal was shadowed. Eight strategies were discovered that related to the school climate, and the study revealed the importance of effective practitioners in an at-risk school. The principal was referred to as a “reform catalyst and child activist” (Mullen & Patrick, 2000, p. 236).

Strategies include:
1. Apply a Philosophy of Discipline and Management;
2. Rely on and Develop Support Systems;
3. Precipitate Staff Changes;
4. Create Rituals of Visibility and Relationship;
5. Apply Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs” Model;

Impact of Principal Practices on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools
6. Design New Educational and Remedial Programs;
7. Implement Teacher Development Standards;

Okilwa & Barnett (2018) To explore how four Texas successive school administrators read and reacted to a high-poverty elementary school context and how they led the school through the turnaround process while sustaining student performance.

Qualitative: semi-structured interviews

The four principals were capable of measuring the strengths and challenges of the respective community and school context; considered the challenges as opportunities for growth; displayed several of the problem-solving characteristics of skillful and experienced principals. Evidence of the following with first 2 administrators: Collaboration; effective use of data; relationship building; trust; modeling hard work; collective efficacy to ensure student achievement; high expectations communicated with all stakeholders; shared leadership. Evidence of following with second 2 leaders:

Impact of Principal Practices on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Research Question(s)</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Key Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owens (2016)</td>
<td>What specific leadership skills would an expert panel identify as critically essential for principals leading high-poverty schools to high achievement? 2. What specific characteristics would an expert panel identify as critically essential for principals leading high-poverty schools to high achievement? 3. What questions would an expert panel pose to prospective principal candidates, to glean the extent to which they may embody identified skills and characteristics (Owens, 2016, p. 32)?</td>
<td>Delphi method</td>
<td>Highly effective leaders of Title I schools: set high expectations; understand curriculum, instruction, and assessments; instructional resource; engage in difficult conversations with school stakeholders; monitor instruction with clear feedback; collaborative; manager of time with intentional focus on teaching and learning; positive relationships; good at decision-making; strong knowledge of students living in poverty; school improvement; data; positive school climate; role model; student achievement emphasis; rigorous instruction; chief instructional leader; trustworthy; knows what is going on in school; protects instructional time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robinson, Lloyd, &amp; Rowe (2008)</td>
<td>To study the relative influence of a variety of leadership styles on instructional leadership on student outcomes was three to four times that of Impact of Principal Strategies on Student Achievement</td>
<td>Meta-analysis: Analysis of results from 27 research studies of the relationship between leadership and impact of principal strategies on student achievement</td>
<td>The average impact of instructional leadership on student outcomes was three to four times that of Impact of Principal Strategies on Student Achievement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
students’ academic and nonacademic performance. Analysis results from 12 research studies of the impact of 5 sets of principal practices on student performance.

Both of the analyses of the various types of leadership indicated the same conclusion—the closer principals get to the essential business of teaching and learning, the greater chance of positively impacting student performance. 5 sets of practices:

“Establishing goals and expectations; resourcing strategically; planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; promoting and participating in teacher learning and development, and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment” (Robinson et al., 2008, p. 635)

Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton (2011) To explore the best school leadership practices of school principals in middle schools with high accountability systems in place.

Qualitative Findings: shared leadership; participating in PD; focus on instruction; and being transparent and trustworthy.

Impact of Principal Strategies on Student Achievement

Tschannen-Moran & Gareis (2015) Discover the relationships between faculty trust in the school leader, principal leadership practices, school

Quantitative: correlational and regression analyses 64 schools in two districts-all levels

Faculty trust in the administrator is correlated directly to student achievement; faculty trust is correlated to components of

Impact of Principal Strategies on Student Achievement
environment, and student achievement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Research Question/Method</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Witzers, Bosker, &amp; Kruger (2003)</td>
<td>Does school leadership matter in relation to student achievement as many studies have differed on results?</td>
<td>Quantitative meta-analysis to evaluate the effect size of educational leadership on student achievement amongst multinational studies from 1986 to 1996. Although the effect size is small, there is a relationship between school leadership and student achievement. “Context and intermediate factors should be taken into account in future research” (Witzers et al., 2003, p. 416).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ylimaki (2007)</td>
<td>Exploration to determine instructional leadership methods to increase student achievement in four U.S. elementary schools, comprised of a diverse and disadvantaged group of students.</td>
<td>Qualitative: case studies. Although all four schools demonstrated an increase in student achievement meeting the success standard determined by U.S. policy, two of the four schools had principals with experience in school improvement and shared instructional leadership to build capacity and were trusted by their respective teams, while the other 2 schools had new principals, who still needed time to develop but were fortunately persistent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoon (2016)</td>
<td>To study the relationships amongst principals’ data-driven practices, faculty buy-in, and student outcomes in executing the Comprehensive School Reform programs.</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ND-Not determined

Impact of Federal Policy on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools

Evolution of the Principal’s Impact on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools

Impact of Principal Practices on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools

Impact of Principal Preparation on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools

Impact of Principal Strategies on Student Achievement

Impact of Low Socioeconomic Status on Student Achievement
Appendix B: Teacher Demographic Survey

Teacher Demographic Survey

Principal Instructional Leadership Practices Impacting Student Achievement

The purpose of this study is to identify the principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in Title I schools in one school division in Virginia as reported by school personnel (principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers).

Completing this survey will help me collect demographic data to purposefully select teachers to interview who represent a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Please answer the following demographic survey questions if you are 18 and older and are willing to participate in the study. (Obtain consent using information sheet at beginning of the online survey. If the participant selects I Agree, the participant will continue with the survey. If the participant selects I Do Not Agree, the participant will exit the survey.)

Please answer the following demographic survey questions.

1. Are you 18 years or older and willing to participate in the following demographic survey?
   A. Yes
   B. No

2. Current Grade Level:
   A. 3
   B. 4
   C. 5
   D. 6
   E. 7
   F. 8

3. Current Subject(s):
   A. English
   B. Math
   C. Science
   D. History
   E. Combination of two or more
   F. Not applicable

4. Level of Education:
   A. Bachelor
   B. Master
   C. Educational Specialist
D. Doctorate
E. Other

5. Age range:
   A. 29 or younger
   B. 30-39
   C. 40-49
   D. 50-59
   E. 60-69
   F. 70 or greater

6. Gender:
   A. Male
   B. Female

7. Race and or Ethnicity (Select all that apply):
   A. Black or African American
   B. Asian or Asian American
   C. White or Caucasian
   D. Hispanic or Latino
   E. American Indian
   F. Alaska Native
   G. Other

8. Number of years teaching in all:
   A. 0-5
   B. 6-10
   C. 11-15
   D. 16-20
   E. 21-25
   F. 26-30
   G. 31 or greater

9. Grade levels taught:
   A. K-2
   B. 3-5
   C. 6-8
   D. 10-12
   E. Other

10. Subjects taught:
    A. English
    B. Math
    C. Science
    D. History
    E. Combination of two or more
F. Other

11. Number of years in current position:
   A. 0-5
   B. 6-10
   C. 11-15
   D. 16-20
   E. 21-25
   F. 26-30
   G. 31 or greater

Thank you for your participation in the survey. Please provide your name, school, and email if you are willing to participate in a 45-minute focus group interview for this study. Each interview will be conducted, audio and video recorded, and transcribed through the online platform, Zoom. If willing, you will be contacted through email to schedule the 45-minute focus group interview.

Name: ______________________________________________________________

School: _____________________________________________________________

Email: _____________________________________________________________
Appendix C: Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study-Survey

Principal Investigator: Dr. Carol A. Mullen, PhD
IRB# and Title of Study: 21-459 The Impact of Principals’ Instructional Leadership Practices on Student Achievement in Title I Schools in a Virginian Division

You are invited to participate in a research study. This form includes information about the study and contact information if you have any questions.

I am a doctoral candidate in the Virginia Tech Educational Leadership Program at Virginia Tech, and I am conducting this research as part of my coursework.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will complete a survey and interview. As part of the study, you will be asked to participate in a 10-minute demographic online survey to purposefully select participants for focus groups with varied backgrounds and experiences, and asked to participate in a scheduled 45-minute interview (focus group) through the online platform, Zoom. As part of the interviews, you will be asked to answer open ended questions about principal instructional leadership practices impacting student achievement in a Title I school. The interviews will be audio and video recorded and transcribed through Zoom. Handwritten notes by the researcher will be taken in addition to recordings and transcriptions to be utilized in data analysis.

The study should take approximately 55 minutes of your time (10 minutes for the survey and 45 minutes for the interview).

We do not anticipate any risks from completing this study.

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don’t want to answer and remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

We will do our best to protect the confidentiality of the information we gather from you, but we cannot guarantee 100% confidentiality.

Any survey or interview data collected during this research study will be kept confidential by the researchers. The researchers will give each survey participant a numerical code to protect the privacy of the participant. Your interview will be audio and
video recorded and transcribed using Zoom. The researchers will code the transcripts using the numerical codes for participants. The recordings will be uploaded to a secure password-protected computer in the researcher’s office. The researchers will maintain a list that includes a key to the codes. Recordings will be destroyed after the data collection process has been completed. The master key and the transcriptions will be stored for three years after the study has been completed and then destroyed.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher, Judy S. Cox or the Principal Investigator, Dr. Carol A. Mullen, PhD. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact the Virginia Tech HRPP Office.

Please print out a copy of this information sheet for your records.
Appendix D: Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study-Interview

Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study

Principal Investigator: Dr. Carol A. Mullen, PhD
IRB# and Title of Study: 21-459 and The Impact of Principals’ Instructional Leadership Practices on Student Achievement in Title I Schools in a Virginian Division

You are invited to participate in a research study. This form includes information about the study and contact information if you have any questions.

I am a doctoral candidate in the Virginia Tech Educational Leadership Program at Virginia Tech, and I am conducting this research as part of my course work.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will complete an interview. As part of the study, you will be asked to participate in a scheduled 45-minute interview (one-on-one for principal interviews, focus group for assistant principal and instructional coach interviews and focus group for teacher interviews) through the online platform, Zoom. You will be asked to answer open ended questions about principal instructional leadership practices impacting student achievement in a Title I school. The interviews will be audio and video recorded and transcribed through Zoom. Handwritten notes by the researcher will be taken in addition to recordings and transcriptions to be utilized in data analysis.

The study should take approximately 45 minutes of your time.

We do not anticipate any risks from completing this study.

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don’t want to answer and remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

We will do our best to protect the confidentiality of the information we gather from you, but we cannot guarantee 100% confidentiality.

Any data collected during this research study will be kept confidential by the researchers. Your interview will be audio and video recorded and transcribed using Zoom. The researchers will code the transcripts using numerical codes for participants. The recordings will be uploaded to a secure password-protected computer in the researcher’s
office. The researchers will maintain a list that includes a key to the code. Recordings will be destroyed after the data collection process has been completed. The master key and the transcriptions will be stored for three years after the study has been completed and then destroyed.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher, Judy S. Cox or the Principal Investigator, Dr. Carol A. Mullen, PhD at You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact the Virginia Tech HRPP Office.

Please print out a copy of this information sheet for your records.
Appendix E: Request for Superintendent or Director of Human Resources
Permission Email

Subject Line: Request to Conduct Study

Dear Superintendent or Director of Human Resources:

Greetings! I am a doctoral candidate in the Virginia Tech Educational Leadership Program under the supervision of my advisor and committee chair Dr. Carol A. Mullen. I am sending this email to ask if you would approve my current research on principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement in Title I schools in one school division in Virginia within your division (IRB # 21-459, approved on June 7, 2021). The purpose of this study is to identify the principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in Title I schools in one school division in Virginia as reported by school personnel (principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers). I am using a qualitative research design for the methodology of the study as it will provide me with a rich understanding of the principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement as described by school personnel.

May I receive your permission for the following: to interview the principals (one-on-one) and assistant principals and instructional coaches (focus groups); and survey (online) the grade three, four, five, six, seven and eight, English, math, science and or history teachers of [anonymous Middle School] to purposefully select teachers to participate in focus group interviews? These two schools fit the selection criteria for my study. Based on data from the Virginia Department of Education, the two schools participate in the Community Eligibility Provision; are schoolwide Title I schools; and are accredited by the state, performing at level one or level two on school quality indicators, according to the Virginia School Quality Profiles. I have developed an interview protocol to use when interviewing participants to collect data for this study. The interview questions were guided by a broad review of the literature on the topic.

The data collected from the participants will be confidential as the participants, schools, and school division will not be identified. The results of the study will be analyzed and shared with you and the participants upon request. Participation is voluntary and greatly appreciated.

My practical goal for this study is to improve student achievement through principal instructional leadership practices in Title I schools. These practices may be used as a resource when planning professional development for veteran principals of Title I schools and induction programs for new principals of Title I schools and may be used for principal preparation programs. Thank you in advance for your consideration of my request. I look forward to hearing from you. My contact information appears in this letter.

Respectfully,

Judy S. Cox, terminal degree
Doctoral candidate
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Appendix F: Email to Principal of Elementary School

Subject Line: Request to Forward Emails to Potential Participants in the Research and Consent to Participate in the Research

Dear Principal:

Greetings! I am a doctoral candidate in the Virginia Tech Educational Leadership Program under the supervision of my advisor and committee chair Dr. Carol A. Mullen. I am sending this email to ask the following: would you participate in my current research on principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement (IRB # 21-459, approved on June 7, 2021); and would you help me forward emails to other potential participants in the study that are located in your building. I have been given permission by the division leadership to conduct this research. The purpose of this study is to identify the principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in Title I schools in one school division in Virginia as reported by school personnel (principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers).

I am asking for your help with the data collection. Would you be willing to do the following: participate in a 45-minute, one-on-one interview; forward an email to the assistant principal and instructional coach; and forward an email to the teachers who currently teach and have taught for at least three years the following grades and subjects at the school: three, four, or five and English, math, science, and or history? The email to the assistant principals and instructional coaches will include a greeting, purpose of the study, and a request to participate in a 45-minute focus group interview. The email to the teachers will include a greeting, purpose of the study, and a request to participate in a demographic survey that will be used to purposefully select a variety of participants for the teacher focus group interviews. I have developed an interview protocol to use when interviewing participants to collect data for this study. The interview questions were guided by a broad review of the literature on the topic. Each interview will be conducted, audio and video recorded, and transcribed through the online platform, Zoom.

The data collected from the participants will be confidential as the participants, schools, and school division will not be identified. The results of the study will be analyzed and shared with the participants upon request. Participation is voluntary and greatly appreciated.

My practical goal for this study is to improve student achievement through principal instructional leadership practices in Title I schools. These practices may be used as a resource when planning professional development for veteran principals of Title I schools and induction programs for new principals of Title I schools and may be used for principal preparation programs. Please respond to this email if you are willing to participate in the one-on-one interview and forward the emails to the individuals listed above. Thank you in advance for your consideration of my request. I look forward to hearing from you. My contact information appears in this letter.

Respectfully,
Judy S. Cox, terminal degree
Doctoral candidate
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Please complete the following and return the statement, name, school, and email if you are 18 or older and interested in participating in a 45-minute, one-on-one interview for this study and are willing to forward the emails to potential participants within the school. Each interview will be conducted, audio and video recorded, and transcribed through the online platform, Zoom.

I am interested in participating in a 45-minute, one-on-one interview for the study on principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement and can forward the emails to potential participants within the school.

Name: ______________________________________________________________

School: ______________________________________________________________

Email: ______________________________________________________________
Appendix G: Email to Principal of Middle School

Subject Line: Request to Forward Emails to Potential Participants in the Research and Consent to Participate in the Research

Dear Principal:

Greetings! I am a doctoral candidate in the Virginia Tech Educational Leadership Program under the supervision of my advisor and committee chair Dr. Carol A. Mullen. I am sending this email to ask the following: would you participate in my current research on principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement (IRB # 21-459, approved on June 7, 2021); and would you help me forward emails to other potential participants in the study that are located in your building. I have been given permission by the division leadership to conduct this research. The purpose of this study is to identify the principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in Title I schools in one school division in Virginia as reported by school personnel (principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers).

I am asking for your help with the data collection. Would you be willing to do the following: participate in a 45-minute, one-on-one interview; forward an email to the assistant principal and instructional coach; and forward an email to the teachers who currently teach and have taught for at least three years the following grades and subjects at the school: six, seven, or eight and English, math, science, and or history? The email to the assistant principals and instructional coaches will include a greeting, purpose of the study, and a request to participate in a 45-minute focus group interview. The email to the teachers will include a greeting, purpose of the study, and a request to participate in a demographic survey that will be used to purposefully select a variety of participants for the teacher focus group interviews. I have developed an interview protocol to use when interviewing participants to collect data for this study. The interview questions were guided by a broad review of the literature on the topic. Each interview will be conducted, audio and video recorded, and transcribed through the online platform, Zoom.

The data collected from the participants will be confidential as the participants, schools, and school division will not be identified. The results of the study will be analyzed and shared with the participants upon request. Participation is voluntary and greatly appreciated.

My practical goal for this study is to improve student achievement through principal instructional leadership practices in Title I schools. These practices may be used as a resource when planning professional development for veteran principals of Title I schools and induction programs for new principals of Title I schools and may be used for principal preparation programs. Please respond to this email if you are willing to participate in the one-on-one interview and forward the emails to the individuals listed above. Thank you in advance for your consideration of my request. I look forward to hearing from you. My contact information appears in this letter.

Respectfully,
Judy S. Cox, terminal degree  
Doctoral candidate  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University 

Please complete the following and return the statement, name, school, and email if you are 18 or older and interested in participating in a 45-minute, one-on-one interview for this study and are willing to forward the emails to potential participants within the school. Each interview will be conducted, audio and video recorded, and transcribed through the online platform, Zoom.

I am interested in participating in a 45-minute, one-on-one interview for the study on principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement and can forward the emails to potential participants within the school.

Name: ______________________________________________________________

School: ______________________________________________________________

Email: _______________________________
Appendix H: Email to Teachers to Participate in the Demographic Survey

Subject Line: Request to Participate in the Demographic Survey

Dear Educator:

Greetings! My name is Judy Cox, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Educational Leadership Program under the supervision of my advisor and committee chair Dr. Carol A. Mullen. I am sending this email to ask if you would participate in my current research on principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement in Title I schools in one school division in Virginia (IRB # 21-459, approved on June 7, 2021). I have been given permission by the division leadership to conduct this research. The purpose of this study is to identify the principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in Title I schools in one school division in Virginia as reported by school personnel (principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers).

This research may be used as a resource for current and future scholars and current and future practitioners when planning professional development for veteran principals of Title I schools, induction programs for new principals of Title I schools, and principal preparation programs. If you are 18 or older and willing to participate, please click on the demographic survey link, complete, and submit.

The results of the study will be analyzed and shared with the participants upon request. Participation is voluntary, yet greatly appreciated. Thank you in advance for your consideration in participation in this research.

Respectfully,

Judy S. Cox, terminal degree
Doctoral candidate
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Appendix I: Email to Assistant Principal and Instructional Coach Requesting Participation in the Interview

Subject Line: Request and Consent to Participate in the Research

Dear Educator:

Greetings! My name is Judy Cox, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Educational Leadership Program under the supervision of my advisor and committee chair Dr. Carol A. Mullen. I am sending this email to ask if you would participate in my current research on principal instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement in Title I schools in one school division in Virginia through scheduled 45-minute focus group interviews (IRB # 21-459, approved on June 7, 2021). I have been given permission by the division leadership to conduct this research. The purpose of this study is to identify the principal instructional leadership practices and their perceived impact on student achievement in Title I schools in one school division in Virginia as reported by school personnel (principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers).

This research may be used as a resource for current and future scholars and current and future practitioners when planning professional development for veteran principals of Title I schools, induction programs for new principals of Title I schools, and principal preparation programs. Each interview will be conducted, audio and video recorded, and transcribed through the online platform, Zoom.

If you are willing to participate, I will schedule the 45-minute focus group interview. The results of the study will be analyzed and shared with the participants upon request. Participation is voluntary, yet greatly appreciated. Please contact me if you are interested in learning more about this research. Thank you in advance for your consideration of participation in this research. I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Judy S. Cox, terminal degree
Doctoral candidate
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Appendix J: CITI

This is to certify that:

Judy Cox

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

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

Under requirements set by:

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech)
Appendix K: Interview Protocols

Consistent interview protocols will be used for all interview participants in the proposed study. There are three open-ended questions which follow the same framework format. There is one main question which asks the interviewee to identify an instructional leadership practice utilized by the principal that impacts student achievement, with two-follow up questions. This cycle of questions will continue during the interview process until all practices are revealed. Probing questions may be used if needed such as but not limited to, can you tell me more about that practice. The fourth question will unveil if there are instructional leadership practices that are more impactful on student achievement and the reasons why they are or why they are not. The final question will allow the interviewees to share any additional information that would add value to the study. Both of the interview protocols are the same, yet they vary based on the stakeholder group for whom I am interviewing.

Interview Protocol for Principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What instructional leadership practices do you use that impact student achievement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As each practice is noted, I will ask at least two follow-up questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please describe the instructional leadership practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What evidence do you have that the instructional leadership practice is impacting student achievement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of the identified instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement, please describe which, if any, are more impactful on student achievement than the others and explain the reasons why they are or why they are not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there anything else that you can tell me that would add to this study?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Interview Protocol for Assistant Principals, Instructional Coaches, and Lead Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What instructional leadership practices do you use that impact student achievement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As each practice is noted, I will ask at least two follow-up questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please describe the instructional leadership practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What evidence do you have that the instructional leadership practice is impacting student achievement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of the identified instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement, please describe which, if any, are more impactful on student achievement than the others and explain the reasons why they are or why they are not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there anything else that you can tell me that would add to this study?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
teachers). The recorded and transcribed Zoom interview will be sent to each participant for verification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What instructional leadership practices does the principal use that impact student achievement? As each practice is noted, I will ask at least two follow-up questions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please describe the instructional leadership practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What evidence do you have that the instructional leadership practice is impacting student achievement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of the identified instructional leadership practices that impact student achievement, please describe which, if any, are more impactful on student achievement than the others. Explain why they are or are not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there anything else you can tell me that would add to this study?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>