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Exploring Principal Leadership in Improving Elementary Schools

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**EXPLORING PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP IN
IMPROVING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

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M.S. University of Southern Maine, 1990

A DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Southern Maine

August 2015

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Dated: August 11, 2015

**EXPLORING PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP IN
IMPROVING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

By Brian A. Porter, M.S. Ed.

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Catherine Fallona

An Abstract of the Dissertation Presented
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
(in Public Policy)
May 2015

ABSTRACT

As schools in Maine, and across the nation, are increasingly held to greater standards of accountability in terms of insuring higher levels of student academic growth and achievement, some schools are improving and some are not. Even beyond the constraints of tightening financial impositions and increasing accountability mandates, some are “defying the odds” and producing positive results. This research study sought to explore and understand the characteristics of principal leadership in improving elementary schools in Maine.

Through a qualitative study based in a phenomenological interview approach, a three-part interview process was employed with five principal participants strategically selected from sites meeting stringent screening criteria as improving schools. This afforded an opportunity to explore data across different domains in key aspects of principal leadership. Participant responses were examined individually and collectively,

looking for themes among the principal leaders, as exemplified by the characteristics of good leaders defined by research literature.

Although principals were selected from sites reflecting the diversity of elementary schools in Maine with varying characteristics of free and reduced lunch rates, grade level configurations, student enrollments, and geographic locations, findings revealed that it was the influence of the principal and their leadership approaches in terms of school climate, culture, student learning, and leadership frameworks, that made the difference.

Principals reflected authentic and transformational leadership styles, centered in collaboration and shared leadership, grounded in the importance of building internal capacity for school improvement through strong, productive relationships, honest communication, and service to others. Their leadership was influential in developing and maintaining positive school cultures through strategic and purposeful actions, energy, and persistence - resulting in transcendent levels of trust and collective ownership throughout their buildings. Principals perceived themselves as instructional leaders whose leadership mattered in terms of influencing school outcomes - manifesting through strategic hiring, supervision and evaluation practices, informing decisions using data, and intentional focus on teaching and learning. High staff accountability and district commitments toward purposeful school improvement bolstered by substantive professional development, helped drive the success of these schools. Empowering leadership teams to advance school improvement efforts was critical, thus promoting collegiality intrinsic to meaningful change. The reflections, findings, conclusions and recommendations herein are offered as inspiration to others in continuing to advance educational leadership in the best interests of teaching and learning.

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**EXPLORING PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP IN IMPROVING
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Schools, by definition, and teaching and learning by implication, are a cornerstone to promoting a civil society. Within schools, the leadership of principals serves to advance the organizational framework necessary toward achieving the greater good of educating youth toward positive and productive lives as adults.

The importance of exploring the characteristics of influential principal leadership rests in several premises.

- There is a pressing need to boost national accountability of educational prowess and competitiveness in a dynamic, emerging world market.
- Federal guidelines and legislative mandates have imposed significant needs for higher student academic achievement within the United States. More than ever in the history of education, school principals need to excel as instructional leaders.
- Additionally, the emergent role of a principal as an instructional leader is important to understand in order to increase accountability and define qualities of principal leadership that advance teaching and learning.
- Finally, little research exists on the characteristics of principal leaders and the roles they play in improving schools.

Those premises lead to the need to explore the qualities, characteristics, and nature of principal leadership in improving schools. By delving deeper and uncovering some of those aspects in demonstrably improving schools, patterns of leadership behavior and organizational strategies have been delineated, thus offering an insight for others, and a contribution to the body of knowledge around principal leadership.

The results of this study provide a greater understanding of how principals in selected improving schools in Maine view their leadership; the leadership theories they espouse; the relationship between their leadership and school culture and climate; their perception of student success; and how they employ leadership structures within their schools to advance teaching and learning. Additionally, this study offers insight for others to consider in examining their own leadership, and shifting school cultures toward an ultimate goal of improved student learning.

Problem and Rationale of the Study

Increasingly, schools are facing new and unprecedented demands to meet the future needs of an emerging society. Schools are under considerable pressure to improve, and a principal, as school leader, plays an important role in that improvement. Thus, gaining a greater understanding of the characteristics of principal leadership in schools that are improving is an educational priority.

There is a pressing need to boost national accountability in terms of educational prowess and competitiveness in a dynamic, emerging world market. Federal guidelines and legislative mandates have imposed significant needs for higher student academic achievement within the U.S. More than ever in the history of education, school principals need to excel as instructional leaders.

In current times, there are unprecedented levels of accountability demanded of schools relative to student achievement.

For approximately twenty years, the United States has framed education within an “accountability movement.” States are required to test student achievement, and are expected to demonstrate a common core of knowledge that all citizens should possess.

Federal guidelines and legislative mandates of recent years have imposed significant needs for higher student academic achievement within the United States. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 required states to develop plans to reward and sanction schools that receive federal funding under Title 1, the portion of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 that aims to improve the academic achievement of disadvantaged students. Districts within each state were to have been held to graduated accountability levels of meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), for both their total populations and a variety of subpopulations. The ultimate goal of the legislation was 100 percent proficiency in math and reading by 2014.

Given that those NCLB accountability requirements were universally unattainable at the state and local levels, and not sensitive to the individual challenges of schools and states, especially rural ones, Maine joined 39 other states in successfully applying for flexibility through an ESEA Waiver, granted in 2013. Without that waiver, many Maine schools could have been subject to federal sanctions. With the flexibility, Maine has been allowed to focus finite federal resources on the schools most in need, with the goal of cutting in half the percentage of non-proficient students and raising the graduation rate to 90 percent at each Title I school in the state by 2019. (Title I is the federal designation for schools with high percentages of disadvantaged learners, including those that are low-income, have some minority groups, and comprise students with limited English proficiency.)

The flexibility from the federal government allows Maine to stay focused on working toward achieving high standards and accountability for schools, staff and students, working with comprehensive reforms that have been underway. As noted on its

website, Maine's Department of Education developed a plan that aims to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, and increase the quality of instruction. The plan focuses on three major areas.

- The state will continue implementation of the Maine Learning Results (with embedded Common Core State Standards), a set of high standards that will ensure students graduate ready for colleges or careers.
- The Maine DOE is working with local school districts to develop and deploy educator evaluation and support systems to be fully implemented in 2015-16. Those come under the legislation defined as LD 1858, An Act to Ensure Effective Teaching and School Leadership.
- At the heart of the state's plan is a system of differentiated recognition, accountability, and support for Maine's 360 Title I served schools. Schools will be placed in one of five categories: priority, focus, monitor, progressing and meeting. Maine's approved plan will distinguish schools not just by proficiency but also progress, thus allowing targeted support to schools most in need. Maine DOE uses existing data to create lists of schools by each category.

The waiver approval also requires that Maine DOE publish report cards for all schools, a statute met by the new Maine School Performance Grading System. Beginning with the 2012-13 school year, that accountability system for schools and educators was instituted, creating a new measure for all Maine educators. The grading system was developed to inform students, parents, taxpayers, and other vested constituencies how their schools are doing in the same manner as report cards help parents understand how

their children are doing. Similar to thirteen other states and New York City, Maine adopted an A-F school grading system.

The Maine School Performance Grading System includes components of student achievement proficiency and student growth (of all students and the bottom 25 percent) in both math and reading, given the need to measure both absolute performance, as well as student improvement over time. For elementary schools, calculations are based on the most recent data available, which are 2013-14 assessments, given to students in grades 3 through 8.

Data used in the school calculation include students who participated in the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) in the fall testing administrations of 2011 through 2013, or were assessed using the Personalized Alternate Assessment Portfolio (PAAP) in the spring of each year, and who were continuously enrolled at the school listed on their assessment results for the entire academic year (as determined by counts submitted to the department by schools in both October and April).

Because the elementary school grades take into account the growth of individual students, it takes two years of assessment data for a student to be included in the calculations. Excluded from the calculations are schools that have no or limited data, or have significantly changed school configuration. Elementary school grades are based on measures of proficiency and individual student and collective school growth, as delineated in Appendix D: Maine's School Performance Grading System.

School and state report cards are available through the Education Data Warehouse at the Maine Department of Education website, which provides multi-year, detailed information about Maine schools and districts, and allows a comparison of specific

schools to others throughout the state using a wide range of measures. For this research study, schools chosen from those who have improved at least one grade level according to this system were used as the sample sites for further exploration of principal leadership.

As previously noted, the other portions of the ESEA Waiver for Maine included emphasis on revisions of standards and educator evaluation systems, all leading to the need for greater accountability and educational leadership. The Common Core State Standards is a federal initiative that seeks to bring diverse state curricula into alignment with one another by following the principles of standards-based education reform. It has been adopted by a majority of states, thus creating more consistent standards of what all students are expected to know, and has dramatically shifted frameworks for student and state accountability. Maine has embedded those into the Maine Learning Results, with full implementation beginning with the 2014-15 school year. In conjunction with that, Smarter Balanced Assessments will measure student progress and replace the previously used NECAP Assessments. LD 1858, An Act to Ensure Effective Teaching and School Leadership, set requirements for new educator evaluation systems to be in place by the 2015-16 school year, and most districts are currently involved in developing them.

Finally, at the state level, with the passage of L.D. 1422 in 2011, an Act to Prepare Maine People for the Future Economy, beginning January 1, 2018, a diploma indicating graduation from a secondary school must be based on student demonstration of proficiency. The successful implementation of a proficiency-based education system will have profound implications at all levels and across all groups of people involved in teaching and learning, requiring existing policies to be revised and new policies to be

created. At the district and school levels, new organizational and instructional policies will be necessary to foster common understanding across multiple audiences and stakeholders, secure official support for new practices, promote the sustainability of decisions in the midst of personnel changes, and give purposeful direction to school leaders and educators. At the very core of that movement stands the principal as leader.

Within the educational reforms that aim to boost our sense of national and state accountability in term of educational prowess and competitiveness in an emerging world market, we find schools and their leadership at the center of this cataclysmic shift. With this in mind, understanding the qualities and conditions of principal leadership and how they play out in improving schools, surfaces as an important research problem.

In the current era of high-stakes accountability and policy contexts, principals are charged with broad, systemic responsibilities that include: creating and sustaining a competitive school in terms of education markets, empowering others to make significant decisions, providing instructional guidance, developing and implementing strategic school improvement plans, and creating systems of distributed leadership to advance organizational goals (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004.) In that way, principals influence student learning in large part by motivating teachers and encouraging professional community - the help and guidance the teachers give one another - to improve their pedagogy (Leithwood, et al. 2004.) That influence is important to understand in the context of improving schools.

Principal leadership in terms of organizational influence can be framed in terms of value-added models relative to the principals' use of time as connected to positive student

outcomes, positive parent assessment of the school, and high degrees of teacher satisfaction (Hornig, et al., 2009). There is also evidence that principals matter, bringing a sense of value-added toward more efficacious levels of instruction and learning, particularly in high-poverty schools, thus enhancing overall organizational productivity (Branch, et al., 2012 & 2009). Importantly, there are numerous contributory factors to the effectiveness of principals, as leaders, in terms of their role in impacting students. Those include numerous contextual and external forces that are both controllable, such as wage increases (Lavy, 2008; Billger, 2007), and less controllable factors, such as state policy or legislative mandates, like NCLB, or those resulting from outside economic forces (Hallinger, et al. 1995; Branch, et al. 2012, 2009).

Characteristics of principal leadership in improving schools are also important to consider. Leadership style may have a positive impact on job satisfaction (Bhatti, et al., 2012) and leadership influence may not be as much about possessing special personality traits as it is about leadership actions within the organization and what the leader is able to accomplish (Andersen, 2005). It is important for leaders to have the ability to communicate appropriately and motivate others within the change process, especially given the critical nature of a changing global economy (Gilley, et al., 2008). Effective leaders must focus on enhancing or changing their mental models, thus creating a framework of transformative learning in their own experience, then extended as part of their leadership construct (Johnson, 2008).

The relationship between principal leadership and school culture and climate in improving schools is a key factor in school improvement. As an extension of a principal's leadership, efficient and efficacious middle level leadership structures have a strong

bearing on the organizational commitment and school culture (Hulpia et al. 2010). School leaders need to articulate their organizational vision and be vigilant about motivating their followers, and a culture must exist in the school that supports this degree of mid-level leadership Angelle (2010). (Mascall, Leithwood, Straus, & Sacks, 2008) found that planned forms of distributed leadership in schools tend to lead to a greater sense of teachers' academic optimism and can affect teacher capacity (Kaniuka, 2012).

Equally important are perceptions of principals about student success. Studies investigating the impact of principals and their teacher-leadership frameworks relative to perceived student success are scarce in the literature. Distributed leadership structures may build the academic capacity of schools and act as a means to improve student learning (Robinson, 2008). Providing teachers with structural opportunities and skills to focus on improving classroom instruction and student learning may produce significant achievement gains (Saunders, Goldenberg, & Gallimore (2009). School leadership influences student learning, and must be considered in the context of a wide range of variables connected to teaching and learning (Leithwood, Patten & Jantzi, 2010),

Organizational structures used by principals to advance teaching and learning are important in school improvement efforts and may be considered as an extension of a principal's leadership style. Considerable research has been conducted on leadership organizational frameworks employed by the principal as school leader. In this context, "leadership should be distributed throughout the school rather than vested in one position" (Lashway, 2003). Distributed leadership can be framed in a larger construct that "incorporates leadership, instructional improvement, and organizational change," (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001) and often plays a key role in advancing

educational reform and instructional improvement (Elmore, 2000). From a systemic perspective, distributed leadership is transformative in nature, leading to positive organizational outcomes and student learning (Harris & Spillane (2008) and Spillane, et al. (2001). Distributed leadership is often viewed through the lens of the professional learning community (PLC) framework (Richmond & Manokore, 2010). Additionally, the relationship between trust and the development of distributed leadership within an organization is crucial, as is trust in administrative leadership (Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy and Louis, 2007.)

Although many leadership constructs are evident, the potential for shared leadership in schools is largely untested (Lindahl, 2008). The notion of shared leadership capacity expands the idea that there are many ways to think about the traditional role of the principal (Grub & Flessa, 2006). Educational leadership may also be understood and studied as a collaborative phenomenon, and defined in terms of attributes that may be studied within a variety of settings and organizational challenges (Jappinen, 2012). Collective school leadership based in major school reform efforts creates the foundation for a greater degree of success within and across the leadership roles of principal and the structures they employ (Camburn, Rowen, & Taylor (2003).

Overall, little research exists on the characteristics of principal leaders and the roles they play in improving schools. Despite the numerous theories and models of leadership within educational settings, there is surprisingly little evidence as to how leadership plays out in schools that are actually improving. As a preface to a large meta-analysis of 69 studies conducted from 1978 to 2001, Robert Marzano noted the lack of leadership practice based on a “clear, well-articulated body of research spanning

decades” (Marzano et al., 2005). That brought to the fore the lack of quantitative research linking school leadership and student academic achievement. Additionally, there is conflicting evidence resulting from research supporting the importance of “effective school leadership in creating conditions for effective schooling” (Dufour & Marzano, 2011.)

There is great pressure for schools to improve, and as noted, research suggests that the school leader plays an important role in a school’s improvement. That is especially important to consider in the context of demonstrably improving schools. More than ever before, accountability systems are the reality of education today, making the need to understand leadership within the context of improving schools is significant.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to explore and understand the characteristics of principal leadership within the context of improving elementary schools in Maine. As schools in Maine, and across the nation, are increasingly held to greater standards of accountability in terms of insuring higher levels of student academic growth and achievement, there are some schools that are improving and some that are not. Even beyond the constraints of tightening financial impositions and increasing federal and state accountability mandates, some schools are defying the odds and producing positive results. This research has helped to shed some light on principal leadership within selected improving schools, and offers insight into the ways in which those leaders exemplify the characteristics of good leaders as previously identified in the research on principal leadership.

Research Questions

The following overarching research question served as the basis for this study: what characteristics of good leaders do principals in selected improving elementary schools in Maine exemplify? Specifically, the following four characteristics of principal leadership in improving elementary schools in Maine were examined:

- What are the leadership theories and approaches of principals in selected improving elementary schools in Maine?
- How do those principals view the relationship between their leadership and the school's climate and culture?
- How do those principals perceive student success?
- What leadership and organizational structures do those principals use? How did they develop and integrate them into the larger school cultures?

Significance of the Study

Study of a selected group of principals in demonstrably improving elementary schools in Maine deepens understanding of the characteristics of principal leadership in the context of schools where student achievement levels are increasing. Understanding the characteristics of the principals' theories of leadership, as well as their perceptions of their leadership on the school's climate and culture, their perspective on student success and finally, the leadership structures they employ, may offer a greater understanding and framework for others to consider in shifting school cultures toward an ultimate goal of improved student learning.

Additionally, obtaining a greater understanding of principal leadership within improving elementary schools has implications for public policy development and

implementation. Of late, leadership development has figured largely as a focus at the federal policy level. That is exemplified by federal School Improvement Grants awarded to qualifying low performing schools under President Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, whereby prescriptive models for school improvement can be utilized. Highlighted within that context is the "turnaround model," that dramatically shifts school personnel, including the principal, in order to transform school operational logistics, cultures, and overall student performance. External funding sources are targeted toward the growth and development of school leaders, especially those within improving schools. Thus, the importance and need of understanding the qualities of effective principal leadership within improving schools presents as a unique area of necessary study. Within that context, policy implications related to improving school leadership at the principal level in lower performing schools are significant in terms of school productivity and organizational accountability.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this research study was to explore and understand the characteristics of principal leadership in selected improving elementary schools in Maine, thus shedding light on what conditions of leadership are present within those schools. It was thus important to gain a greater understanding of the relevant research available in the literature regarding the attributes and connections of principal leadership to leadership models, theories and philosophical approaches, as well as the leadership structures principals employ, and perceptions of principal leadership on a school's culture, climate and student success.

Leadership Defined and Described

In considering how principals in improving elementary schools viewed influential leadership, it's important to measure their leadership perspectives against the backdrop of established leadership models, theories, and philosophical approaches. Those were useful in offering a lens through which specific interview studies of principal leadership could be analyzed and compared.

As a concept, leadership is broadly defined and described, as it is complex and multifaceted. In the purest sense, leadership can be defined as “the position as a leader of a group or organization, and the power or ability to lead other people” (Merriam-Webster, 2012). Leadership has also been described as a “a process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task.” (Wikipedia, 2014.)

Throughout the literature, there were many ways to conceptualize leadership. Generally, those offered a perspective viewing leadership as the focus of group processes, combinations of special traits or characteristics that individuals may possess, or in terms of power relationships that exist between leaders and followers. Northouse offered a concise description that defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2012, p.5). Within most definitions of leadership, the concept of power and coercion seemed to be linked to the influence a leader may have over a given group, both in terms of personal (referent and expert) and positional power (legitimate, reward, and coercive) (Northouse, 2012.)

Leadership Theories and Approaches to Leadership

Many leadership theorists have contributed to foundational aspects of defined leadership styles and approaches, all of which help shape and inform the diversity of leadership within educational and business settings. From an educational perspective, that is important not only for organizational efficiency, but also because of the perceived impact of principal leadership relative to influencing teaching and learning.

Overall, a variety of leadership theories and approaches offer a framework for considering leadership as a process of influencing others to achieve a common goal. Some approaches consider trait, skills, style, while theories include institutional leadership, contingency, path-goal, and leader-member-exchange. Broader conceptual umbrellas of leadership comprise transformational, servant, authentic, team leadership, and a psychodynamic approach to leadership (Northouse, 2012.) (Those are summarized

in Table 1: *An Overview of Leadership Approaches and Theories*, at the end of this section.)

The trait approach originated from leadership theory, and suggests that certain people are born with special traits that make them great leaders. It is premised around a universal or unique set of traits that can be identified and quantified. Through numerous studies, many traits have been shown to contribute to leadership: intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability. Additionally, traits identified from the *five-factor personality model* include: “extroversion, conscientiousness, openness, low neuroticism, and agreeableness.” Overall, the trait approach concerns itself with which traits certain leaders exhibit, and how they manifest in a given organization (Northouse, 2012, pp. 19-42).

Similar to the trait approach, the skills approach is a leader-centered perspective that emphasizes leader competencies. Typical manifestations of it are found in the *three-skill approach* and the *skills model of leadership*. In the three-skill approach, leadership depends on three personal skills: technical, human, and conceptual. The importance of each varies according to the particular management level considered. In the skills model approach, five components of effective leader performance are delineated and quantified: competencies, individual attributes, leadership outcomes, career experiences, and environmental influences. The model provides a more complex mapping of how skills relate to the manifestation of effective leadership (Northouse, 2012, pp. 43-74).

The style approach emphasizes what leaders do rather than who leaders are. In that framework, leaders engage in two primary types of behaviors: task behaviors and

relationship behaviors. The approach centers on how leaders combine those two types of behaviors to influence others. Overall, the approach provides a framework for assessing leadership in a broad way through two important dimensions: task and relationship (Northouse, 2012, pp. 75-98).

Situational leadership focuses on the leader in situations, emphasizing that different situations call for different kinds of leadership. The theory is associated with the work of Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard (1996, 2001). It is based on the underlying principle that a leader adapts leadership behavior to the “maturity” of the followers, based on their willingness and ability to perform specific tasks. Four delineated leadership styles match “high and low” willingness and ability to perform tasks (Northouse, 2012, pp. 99-122).

Contingency theory is a leader-match theory, meaning that it matches leaders to appropriate situations. The essence of the model is an assumption that the effectiveness of a leader depends on how well the leader’s style fits the context. Effective leadership is contingent upon matching a leader’s style to the right setting. The theory provides a framework for effectively matching leader’s style (task or relationship motivated) to given situations (leader-member relations, task structure, and position power). Overall, contingency theory represents a shift in leadership research to focusing on the overall contextual match of a leader and situational demands (Northouse, 2012, pp. 123-136).

Path-goal theory focuses on how leaders motivate subordinates to accomplish designated goals. The primary goal of the theory is to maximize employee performance and satisfaction by focusing on employee motivation, by stressing the relationship

between a leader's style and the characteristics and work setting of subordinates. The underlying assumption is that subordinates will be motivated if they think they are capable of performing their work, that their efforts will have valuable outcomes and the payoff for their work will be worthwhile. A leader matches a leadership style to the subordinate's motivational needs by choosing behaviors that complement or supplement what is missing in the work setting. In short, it's the leader's responsibility to help subordinates meet their goals by directing, guiding and coaching them along the way (Northouse, 2012, pp. 137-160).

Leader-member exchange theory centers on leadership as a process that is based on the interactions between leaders and followers, thus focusing on relationships as "dyad linkages." Within the theory, there is a pivotal shift in assumption that differences might exist between the leader and the leader's followers. Overall, it uses a descriptive approach to explain how leaders use some subordinates (in-group members) more than others (out-group members) to effectively accomplish organizational goals (Northouse, 2012, pp. 161-184).

Transformational leadership is used to describe a wide range of leadership that gives attention to the "charismatic and affective" elements of leadership. Concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards and long-term goals, that kind of leadership is a process that changes and transforms people, rather than simply improving them. It considers assessing followers' motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings, thus moving them to accomplish more than what is expected of them. It incorporates charismatic and visionary leadership. Overall, transformational leadership is

concerned with the process of how leaders are able to inspire followers to accomplish great things. Transformational leaders are regarded as change agents and role models who create organizational vision and empower others to meet higher standards, thus giving greater meaning to organizational life (Northouse, 2012, pp. 185-218).

Servant leadership emerged from the work of Greenleaf, and focuses on a central dynamic of nurturing those within an organization. The theory includes many critical skills such as: understanding the personal needs of those in the organization, mitigating conflicts, stewardship of the resources, skill development, and being an effective listener. Although not fully embraced as a true model, the theory provides key components of many other leadership theories (Northouse, 2012, pp. 219-252).

Authentic leadership is one of the newest approaches to leadership, and describes a leadership that is transparent, morally grounded, and responsive to people's needs and values. There is no single accepted definition of authentic leadership. It is conceptualized in three domains or perspectives: interpersonal, intrapersonal, and developmental. Each of those focuses on different aspects of a leader's personal growth and collective journey together with the leader's followers. Two practical approaches to authentic leadership help to quantify its utility. One is the use of the "authentic action wheel" to address what is really going on in a situation and determine the best course of action in a given situation. Six components of this model (meaning, mission, power, existence, structure, and resources) correspond to human interactions that must be addressed in any proposed initiative. This model helps guide the leader in working with staff by understanding each component and relevance to staff work. The second is a model that identifies five basic

dimensions of authentic leadership and corresponding behavioral characteristics individuals need to develop in order to become authentic leaders. Researchers have identified four major components of authentic leadership: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency. Additionally, a leader's positive psychological capacities, moral reasoning, and critical life events influence authentic leadership (Northouse, 2012, pp. 253-286).

The team leadership model provides a framework in which to study systemic factors that contribute to a group's outcomes or effectiveness, thus providing a mental road map to help leaders or team members diagnose team problems and take appropriate actions to correct them. In that construct, team leaders act in the role of monitoring and improving the groups' effectiveness (Northouse, 2012, pp. 287-318).

Instructional leadership has become a common theme over the last two decades, yet is not clearly defined. Various listings of characteristics evolve with the theme, each with connections to various theorists involved. Loosely defined, the concept provides for the principal as leader, vested more with the instructional and professional development aspects of a school setting, not on traditional managerial tasks associated with administrative roles. The need to understand characteristics of a principal's leadership in that capacity is a critically important.

Finally, the psychodynamic approach consists of different ways of looking at leadership. With that approach, personality is the underlying fundamental concept and personality types are emphasized, with evidence suggesting that certain types are better suited to particular leadership positions. A psychodynamic perspective stresses the

importance of leaders becoming aware of their own personality types, as well as those of their followers. The primary aim is to raise awareness of leaders and followers to their own personality types and implications of those types on work and relationships.

Determining types is done through various introspective instruments. In that context, the approach involves participation of both leaders and followers, as all must understand each other and work together within this milieu (Northouse, 2012, pp. 319-348).

Intrinsically, the conditions for leadership, leadership structures, as well as the attributes of leadership vary across numerous educational and business settings. As an additional backdrop, many leadership theorists have helped shape and inform the diversity of leadership within educational settings. Covey (1989) surfaced in education for his work in identifying seven behaviors that generate positive results in a variety of situations. Elmore (2003) promotes a perspective on leadership that combines the instructional leadership capacity of the principal with that of a distributed leadership framework within the institution, thus decentralizing the leadership functions so they are not solely vested with the principal. Fullan (2001) is known for his contributions to leadership in terms of new ways to think about change. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) emphasize the need to adapt leadership behavior to the requirements of the situation. Spillane and his colleagues (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2003) focus their attention on the concept of distributed leadership.

These broad definitions and descriptions provide an overview of leadership approaches, and are summarized in the following Table 1: *An Overview of Leadership Approaches and Theories*.

Table 1			
<i>An Overview of Leadership Approaches and Theories</i>			
Approach or Theory	Year of Origin	Originator	Descriptor
Trait Approach	1948	Stogdill, Bass, Jago	Based on innate traits within an individual
Skills Approach	1955	Katz, Mumford & colleagues	Leader-centered approach that emphasizes personal competencies
Style Approach	1940's	Blake & Mouton	Emphasizes behavior of the leader; focuses on what leaders do and how they act / includes actions of leaders to subordinates in efforts to reach a goal; distinguish between task and relationship behaviors
Situational Approach	1970	Hersey & Blanchard	Prescriptive approach that suggests leadership effectiveness varies across different organizational settings and tasks; provides model for how leaders behave relative to behaviors of followers; defines four styles
Contingency Theory	1960	Fiedler	Focused on matching leader style to fit the setting; concerned with styles and situations
Path-Goal Theory	1970's	Evans, House & colleagues	Contingency approach to leadership that motivates subordinates to be productive and satisfied with their work; leader selects best fit style of leadership;
Leader-Member Exchange Theory	1980's	Dansereau, Graen, & Haga	Addresses leadership as a process centered on interactions between leaders and followers.
Transformational Leadership	1978	Downton, James MacGregor Burns, Bass	Encompassing approach to leadership: stresses the need for leaders to adapt to the needs and motives of followers and act as change agents; process that changes and transforms people; focus on charismatic and affective elements
Servant Leadership	1970	Greenleaf	Paradoxical approach to leadership; emphasizes that leaders should be attentive to the needs of followers, empower them, and help them develop human capacities
Authentic Leadership	1978/ 1990 / 2005	Burns, Bass, Avolio, Chan	Leadership that is transparent, morally grounded, and responsive to people's needs and values; No single definition, speaks to an evolution of leadership that is transformational in nature
Team Leadership	2011 / 2000	Levi, McGrath, Porter	Team leadership model provides framework to study systematic factors contributing to a group's outcome
Psychodynamic Approach	2001 / 2011 / 2006/ 1981	Berens, Gabriel, Kets deVries, Maccoby	Raises awareness of leaders and followers to their own personality types and the implications of those on work and relationships

Principal Leadership, Organizational Benefits and Outcomes to Staff and the School

Intrinsic to the theoretical bases from which principals in improving schools operate, their perceptions of the relationship between their leadership influence and the schools' climate and culture surfaced as an important key question to explore in this study. Considerable research has been conducted on the importance of principal leadership and organizational influence with the staff and the school. Within that context, organizational benefits of principal leadership include: charismatic leadership and teacher quality, impacts of autocratic and democratic leadership on job satisfaction, teacher perceptions of leadership, and principal performance in implementing change and driving innovation in organizations.

The Wallace Foundation offered several significant reports relative to principal leadership and success in schools, noting that although a range of leadership patterns exists, “the principal remains the central source of leadership influence” (Wallace Foundation, 2013.) Furthermore, the principal's role as instructional leader is said to entail five key responsibilities:

- Shaping a vision of academic success for all students, one based on high standards
- Creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail
- Cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their parts realizing the school vision
- Improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn to their utmost

- Managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement.

With regard to organizational benefits, several areas of leadership influence have been noted in terms of teaching and learning. Generally, there is a strong sense of “value-added” to principals’ use of time directed toward the organizational aspects of schools, relative to positive student outcomes, including higher student achievement, positive parent assessment of a school, and high degrees of teacher satisfaction (Hornig, et. al. 2009). There is also evidence suggesting that principals matter both to student achievement, and mitigating effective teacher turnover toward more efficacious levels of instruction and learning, particularly in high-poverty schools, thus enhancing overall organizational productivity (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2012 & 2009).

Charismatic leadership has long been held, both anecdotally and empirically, to have connections to the effectiveness and influence of principals. Research suggests that charismatic leadership is more effective in increasing group performance than in increasing individual performance (DeGroot, Kiker, & Cross, 2000).

Research also has shown that leadership style may have a positive impact on job satisfaction (Bhatti, Shaikh, Hashmi, & Shaikh, 2012). Overall, people like to work in a free atmosphere where they can share and exchange their views without fear of retribution. That creates a greater sense of ownership that gives employees satisfaction, and has important implications to principals creating “win-win” situations, thus maximizing staff productivity. Additionally, leadership influence in organizations is not as much about possessing special personality traits, as it is about actions within the organization, and what the leader is able to accomplish (Andersen, 2005).

In order to enhance change-effectiveness skills within an organization, and drive innovations, there is benefit in identifying leaders with specific understandings and skills (including the ability to communicate appropriately and motivate others) in working within the change process, especially given the critical nature of a changing global economy (Gilley, Dixon & Gilley, 2008). Influential leaders must focus on enhancing or changing their mental models, thus creating a framework of transformative learning in their own experiences, then extending the same as part of their leadership construct (Johnson, 2008). Principals having those requisite skills and leadership frameworks offer a significant comparative advantage in the transformation of schooling, thus preparing students for an increasingly global economy.

Organizational Commitment and School Culture

Exploring the relationship between principal leadership, their perceived influence, and related leadership structures employed as part of their approach, appeared to have a strong bearing on organizational commitment and school culture.

Research revealed that teachers' organizational commitment is directly related to their perceptions concerning the cooperation of the leadership team and the support received from the team. In general, teachers feel committed to a school if it is led by a leadership team working cooperatively, one where all teachers feel supported. Leadership teams are effective when characterized by group cohesion, clear roles, and a strong sense of goal orientation – all of which are clearly communicated to the teachers. Leadership teams should be created with members who have professional skills, and team members should work collaboratively and communicate openly towards one another and the teachers. Intrinsically, principal leaders need to articulate their organizational visions, and

remain vigilant about motivating their followers. A culture must exist in a school that supports a high degree of mid-level leadership, one in which teachers participate in school decisionmaking, where their opinions and ideas are acknowledged and valued, and may result in concrete actions seen by the staff to benefit the school's larger goals (Hulpia, Devos & VanKeer, 2010), (Hulpia & Devos, 2010), & (Hulpia, Devos & VanKeer, 2011).

Research has found that influential principal leadership is supported by specific organizational structures (such as leadership and grade-level team meetings) within a school, and is enhanced by teacher expertise. Trust is a key factor that strengthens the culture of an organization, allowing a sense of shared purpose, mutual goals, power sharing and mutual support (Angelle (2010).

Planned forms of distributed leadership in schools also tend to lead to a greater sense of teachers' academic optimism, as exemplified by their trust among colleagues and in school leaders, their sense of self and collective efficacy (ability to have a positive impact on student learning), and a greater sense of organizational citizenship as shown in a high degree of "altruism, civic virtue, voice and courtesy" with one another. (Mascall, Leithwood, Straus, & Sacks, 2008).

Lastly, leadership can affect teacher capacity (Kaniuka, 2012). Through the development of mastery experiences, teachers can increase their overall sense of efficacy to student performance, as well as their ability to impact the same. A principal, as school leader, may play an important role in influencing the climate and culture of the educational community with which he or she serves. A principal's perception of that influence will be an important aspect to discern through the work of this study.

Principal Leadership, Organizational Benefits, and Outcomes to Students

A principal's perception of student success manifests in several areas of the literature reviewed. Those include perspectives of the principal relative to organizational benefits and outcomes with students, as well as perceived influences on student achievement, and the greater school culture with regard to academic performance. In this research, the perceived impact of leadership on students in terms of student supports, student achievement and graduation rates surfaced as critical components to consider.

Principal time use and school effectiveness have often been thought of as causally linked, but this has not been extensively examined in the literature. In one of the first conducted large-scale observational studies of principals' time-use, Horng, Klasik & Loeb (2009) examined the relationship between the time principals spend on different types of activities and school outcomes, including student achievement, teacher and parent assessments of the school, and teacher satisfaction. In general, Horng, et al. concluded that principal time spent on organizational management activities was associated positively with each of those aspects. Principal time spent on day-to-day instructional activities was marginally, or not at all, related to improvements in student performance, and often appeared to have a negative relationship with regard to teacher and parent assessments. This research further suggested that a single focus on "principals as instructional leaders" may be detrimental if it "forsakes the important role of principals, as organizational leaders."

Relative to organizational benefits, several areas of influence were connected to students and staff, especially in terms of teaching and learning. There is evidence that principals matter, bringing a sense of "value-added," toward more efficacious levels of

pedagogy and student learning, particularly in high-poverty schools, thus enhancing overall organizational productivity (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2012 & 2009).

Importantly, numerous contributory factors have been shown relative to the influence of the principal and perceived impact on students. Those include a variety of contextual and external factors that are controllable, such as wage increases (Lavy, 2008; Billger, 2007), and less controllable, such as state policy or legislative mandates, or those resulting from outside economic forces (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Branch, et al. 2012, 2009).

Those points helped to reinforce the implications that principals are intrinsically accountable for their hiring, retention and other management decisions relative to student achievement, and thus mitigating the impacts of external forces, and enhancing school effectiveness. In order for the school principal, acting as an agent for students, to see strong incentives, performance must be rewarded and principals subject to increased accountability should receive higher salaries if they manage their schools well (Billger, 2007). Research has shown that principal experience matters in determining high school outcomes, such as student achievement and graduation rates, and that it may take time for principals to realize their full effect at a school (Coelli & Green, 2012). There are also implications for the short-term versus long-term gain one might consider from optimizing administrative placement over time, important in the case of improving schools. Taking that notion further, evidence shows that isolating the most effective principals and allocating them optimally between schools can have a significant and positive effect on student achievement (Dhuey & Smith, 2011). From those studies, there are implications

for identifying the best principals and continuing research to learn more about the attributes that make them so effective.

Influence on Student Achievement and School Culture

Throughout the literature, studies cited that principal leadership and by extension, their models of distributed leadership, have strong connections to organizational commitment and school culture. Defining characteristics of effective mid-level leaders offered implications for cultivating and sustaining leadership within educational settings. The interchange and juxtaposition of the principal as leader and his or her leadership structures employed within that milieu of leadership is critically important to understand. That said, studies that investigated the connections of principal and distributed leadership within schools to student academic achievement were relatively scarce in the literature.

Studies have shown support for the idea that distributed leadership builds the academic capacity of schools and consequently, acts as a means to improving student learning outcomes (Robinson, 2008). That implies the need to distribute effective leadership practices, and to create a sustained focus on strategies aimed at teaching and learning.

Research has shown that providing teachers with structural opportunities and skills to focus more frequently on improving classroom instruction and student learning may produce significant achievement gains (Saunders, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 2009). Additionally, stable, school-based settings, distributed leadership, and explicit protocols are key to effective teacher teams. Research evidence seems to support that learning teams can help close achievement gaps with students, and are sustained by continued attention to professional learning and development.

In considering how school leadership influences student learning, there has been support for the idea that a larger construct is helpful in framing leadership influence relative to student achievement (Leithwood, Patten & Jantzi, 2010). Many variables and attributes are present in the interplay of teaching and learning. Implications generally suggest that school leaders and leadership researchers should be guided more by using existing evidence about school, classroom and family variables that have “powerful” effects on student learning, as they make their school improvements and research design decisions.

Characteristics and Critical Factors of Leaders and Leadership Structures

As this research study sought to explore the characteristics of principal leadership in improving schools, it was important to review the literature relative to leadership organizational structures employed by principals, as well as how they were developed and integrated within larger school cultures. By extension, those are directly reflective, on many levels, of a principal’s leadership beliefs, organizational frameworks, and actions. This review includes understanding the characteristics and factors of leaders and leadership structures, models of distributed instructional leadership and implications for administration in identifying leadership talent and leadership retention. Identifying characteristics of principal leadership and by extension, distributed leadership within schools is important in terms of understanding how those all help principal leaders achieve larger organizational goals. There are both underlying and explicit conceptions of how leadership is distributed, by whom, and with what effect.

When considering the characteristics and critical factors of leaders and leadership structures, models of distributed leadership are often used interchangeably with the terms

“shared leadership,” “team leadership,” and “democratic leadership,” and can be thought of in terms of structures, organizational quality, attributes, or a way of thinking about the practice of school leadership (Spillane, 2005). Those conceptual frameworks help to define the characteristics and critical factors of principals and their leadership structures.

Systematic quantitative research on measuring distributed leadership is scarce in the literature (Hulpia, Devos & Rosseel, 2009). Research suggested that perceptions of teacher leadership, from the perspective of both leaders and administrators, are important to the larger educational community, and that understanding those roles lead to a larger degree of shared decisionmaking, trust, and mutual accountability, as well as a stronger commitment to the work of the school (Angelle & Schmid, 2007).

Distributed leadership is often viewed through the lens of professional learning community (PLC) frameworks, thus advancing a process of identifying elements critical for “functional and sustainable” professional learning communities (Richmond & Manokore, 2010), wherein teachers identify and value collegiality as crucial for their own professional growth.

Research also has shown that the relationship between trust and the development of distributed leadership is crucial (Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy and Louis, 2007.) Trust clearly matters in the development of distributed leadership, and the relationship between those is dynamic and mutually reinforcing. It helps motivate and assists mid-level leaders in understanding and promoting their own learning within an organization. Additionally, principal leadership, as well as trust in that leadership, is crucial to the development of distributed leadership.

Models of Distributed Leadership

Numerous models of distributed leadership emerged throughout the literature reviewed. By nature, the idea of distributed leadership connotes a positional shift within an organization from “me to we.” Although many leadership constructs are evident, the potential for shared leadership in schools is largely untested, (Lindahl, 2008.) Shared leadership models can potentially provide the space, support, and opportunity for new leadership constructs with new opportunities for growth within an organization.

Considerable research has been conducted on aspects of principal leadership relative to the performance of those within an organization. Intrinsic to those tenets of institutional leadership are frameworks enhanced through promoting mid-level leadership opportunities by empowering others through personal mastery. Throughout much of the literature reviewed, the idea of a single, “heroic” leader has become obsolete, resulting in a paradigm shift toward a shared leadership perspective. Lashway (2003) notes “leadership should be distributed throughout the school rather than vested in one position.” Building upon that notion, current thinking about shared leadership incorporates a bigger vision and role within the school setting. Spillane, Halverson & Diamond (2001) framed distributed leadership in a larger construct that “incorporates leadership, instructional improvement, and organizational change.” Elmore (2000) noted that distributed leadership plays a key role in advancing educational reform and instructional improvement, with the underlying assumption that “instructional processes have to be guided rather than controlled.”

Harris & Spillane (2008) and Spillane, et al. (2001) maintain that distributed leadership is “transformative” in nature, “defining it as the ‘ability to empower others’,”

leading to several key factors that can be measured in terms of organizational outcomes and student learning. In consideration of the need to “grow leadership capacity” due to the demands of leading a network, Hadfield (2005) suggests that growth is best understood as “an adaptive response to the inherent challenges of sustaining networks” (within the school setting), similar to Michael Fullan’s concept of “systems thinkers in action.” Throughout the literature, there are numerous underlying and sometimes, explicit questions of “how leadership is defined, distributed, by whom and with what effect (Harris, et al., 2008).

The notion of shared leadership capacity (Grub & Flessa, 2006) expands the idea that there are many ways to think about the traditional role of the principal, not only in terms of the logistical / managerial functions, but also with regard to instructional leadership. Offering a shared model of leadership of the principal’s role leads to a greater, collective ownership of the school. Additionally, although there are potential qualitative gains to be achieved by rethinking the role of the principal as the “universal leader.”

Some note that educational leadership can be understood and studied as a collaborative phenomenon, such as the characteristics of a professional learning community, (Jappinen, 2012). Collaborative leadership, in that regard, is the “invisible but still identifiable and ambiance of an educational society,” and can be defined in terms of attributes and studied within a variety of settings and organizational challenges.

The emergence of a leadership schema transitioning from the idea of a single “strong, principal leadership” to a larger construct of collective school leadership based in major school reform efforts (Camburn, Rowen, & Taylor (2003) creates the foundation for new models of distributed leadership. Creating shared leadership structures to

accommodate a particular purpose or goal creates a level of success for the model. In essence the idea of “form following function” goes a long way. Additionally, professional development offered to leaders provides for a greater degree of success within and across the leadership roles.

Talent Identification and Leadership Retention:

Implications for Cultivating Leadership

Integral to considering the characteristics and critical factors associated with distributed leadership models as an extension of the principal’s leadership, was to explore research relative to talent identification and leadership retention, and the implications for cultivating and sustaining leadership within schools.

Leadership talent identification and development, as well as shared understandings among administrators, middle leaders, and teachers of the characteristics of effective leaders, was shown to be important in advancing trusted leadership in a school (Rhodes, Brundrett & Nevill, 2008). Mid-level leadership needs to be intentionally fostered, and potential mid-level leaders “groomed,” for leadership positions. It is also important to be able to identify potential leaders’ interest and “aptitude” in leadership positions, as well as to identify administrators to strategically plan for mid-level leadership development. Additionally, using identified characteristics of leadership talent as a means to “demystify” leadership, and develop new and shared understandings help create a stronger foundation to build a greater capacity for distributed leadership.

Leadership based around the process of inquiry and collective decisionmaking was found to form an important distributed leadership model (Copland, 2003.) Shared inquiry into improving student learning provides the basis for shared leadership.

Distribution of leadership functions across a school can provide the “capacity, coherence, and ownership” to sustain deepen school reforms. Inquiry is a powerful force to enable distributed leadership, and brings a school community together in a common work.

For leadership succession and planning, policymakers and institutions should carefully consider internal talent pools to both mitigate against negative influences resulting from poor choice, and to position more positively for improved leadership succession (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2005 & 2008; Fletcher & Brundrett, 2008), especially given the tensions brought on by the external forces of assessment and accountability.

Summary and Conceptual Framework for

Exploring Elementary Principal Leadership

The purpose of this research study was to explore the characteristics of principal leadership in improving elementary schools in Maine. This review has advanced a greater understanding of the relevant research available in the literature regarding the attributes and connections of principal leadership relative to models, theories and approaches to leadership, the leadership structures principals employ, and perceptions of principal leadership on the school’s culture, climate and student success.

A review of literature pertinent to how principals in improving schools view influential leadership noted several key points. In general, the conditions for leadership, leadership structures, and the attributes of leadership vary across educational settings. Many contrasting theories and approaches have provided foundations to scaffold organizational patterns of leadership within schools and may provide a valuable lens through which to examine patterns and themes of principal leadership attributes that emerge from this study. The literature around principal leadership and organizational

benefits to staff and the school noted that there is a sense of “value-added” to principals’ use of time directed toward the organizational aspects of schools. Principals matter in terms of student achievement and organizational productivity. Charismatic leadership increases group performance, while leadership style has a positive impact on job satisfaction. Actions are important to leadership influence, and organizations benefit from leaders with specific understandings and skills.

The literature review around the relationship of principal leadership and school climate and culture offered some key points in terms of organizational commitment and school culture. Those may influence how principal leaders view their influence on school culture and climate. Strong leadership teams support effective principal leadership and trust is a key factor in strengthening key aspects of a school culture. Teachers’ organizational commitment is intrinsically tied to their perceptions around the cooperation of the principal’s leadership team and support they receive from that team. Additionally, planned forms of distributed leadership in schools lead to a greater sense of teachers’ academic optimism, trust, efficacy, and organizational citizenship.

Key elements from the literature review informed the question of how principals in improving elementary schools perceive student success. In regard to principal leadership and benefits to students, several points emerged. Principal time spent on organizational management activities was associated with positive school outcomes. Principals matter in promoting efficacious levels of pedagogy and student learning, especially in high-poverty schools. Numerous contextual and external contributory factors affect principal effectiveness and impact with students. Principal experience

matters to school outcomes such as student achievement gains, which may take a longer time to play out. For student achievement and culture, distributed leadership, as an extension of principal leadership, builds the academic capacity of schools. Providing teachers with structural opportunities and skills to focus on teaching and learning is important, as with professional learning communities that provide a larger construct in which to frame leadership influence relative to student achievement.

The literature review also shared insight into leadership organizational structures used by principals and how they integrate within school cultures. Generally, critical factors of effective leaders and leadership structures can be identified. There are various models of distributed leadership that serve as a direct extension of the principals' leadership. Perceptions of teacher leadership from both the leaders and administrators is important to the larger school community, and understanding those roles lead to shared decisionmaking, trust, accountability, and a stronger commitment to the work of the school. Professional learning community frameworks are highly valued in that regard. In summary, the distribution of leadership through mid-level frameworks that principals create leads to high degrees of adaptation, collegiality, collaboration, inquiry and transformation within a school setting, all of which substantially impact teaching and learning. Talent identification and leadership retention offer strong implications for principals in cultivating teacher leadership capacity within their schools.

Overall, the implications that emerged from the review served as a backdrop to premise this research study, the intent of which has been to explore the emergence of themes of principal leadership in improving elementary schools, thus offering a greater

understanding and insight at a time when schools are under unprecedented internal and external pressures to improve.

Using the literature review, the following Conceptual Framework for Exploring Elementary Principal Leadership was created to assist and guide this qualitative study. The four research questions of the study provided the topical areas for the framework. Within each area, there are aspects of principal leadership noted, definitions provided from the literature review, and finally, manifestations in practice that would be evidenced by principal leaders. The Conceptual Framework for Exploring Elementary Principal Leadership was used to inform the construction of the three interview protocols in the methodology of this research study, thus allowing exploration of each area with principal participants. It was then used to guide, organize, and interpret the data analysis portion of this study.

Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership	
Aspect of Principal Leadership	Definition of Aspect of Leadership in the Literature And Manifestation in Practice
Leadership Theory and Approach	<p>The principal expresses characteristics of a specific leadership theory or approach that guides his or her practice such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transformational (Adaptive to needs and motives of followers; Acts as change agent; Facilitates transformative processes through focus on charismatic and affective elements) <i>or</i> • Authentic (Leadership is transparent, morally grounded, and responsive to people's needs and values; Defined by the characteristics of passion & purpose, compassion & heart, behavior & values, connectedness & relationships and consistency & self-discipline; Manifested through self-awareness, balance of motivations, building a support team, integrating one's life by staying grounded, empowering people to lead and personal development as an introspective leader.)
Organizational Commitment and School Culture	<p>The principal perceives his or her actions as influential in developing and working with the school's culture and climate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His or her actions and structures influence staff commitment, support principal leadership, influence school culture & climate, create positive perceptions of leadership and the leadership team and enhance teacher capacity. • The principal identifies ways in which he or she establishes staff trust, shared purpose, mutual goals, and power sharing to strengthen school culture.
Organizational Benefits and Influence on Student Achievement	<p>The principal perceives him or herself as an instructional leader whose leadership matters, and whose experience influences school outcomes and student achievement. He or she also identifies challenges, contextual and external factors that impact teaching & learning, and effectiveness, including mitigating public policy and political forces that impact school leadership.</p> <p>The principal perceives him or herself as influencing teacher turnover, school organizational aspects in terms of value-added time devoted to specific tasks, management of activities advancing school outcomes, group performance dynamics & job satisfaction, and overall school improvement efforts.</p> <p>The principal identifies how his or her leadership and leadership structures increase the academic capacity of schools, promote teaching and learning, and focus attention to professional development, learning, protocols and frameworks.</p> <p>The principal articulates the role of research evidence and leadership in school improvement decisions, classroom and family variables that impact student learning, the school's evolution as an improving school, and insight around change process.</p>
Characteristics of Leadership Structures And Cultivation	<p>The principal describes how his or her leadership structures extend his or her own leadership, advance and integrate the work of the school, are perceived by staff as important, provide for collegiality & professional growth, are developed and sustained by trust in the principal, contribute to educational reform, instructional improvement & organizational change, and are transformative.</p> <p>The principal describes how his or her leadership structures lead to collective ownership of the school, high degrees of adaptation, collegiality, collaboration, inquiry, and decisionmaking.</p> <p>The principal describes ways in which he or she identifies talent and cultivates leadership in others to advance teacher leadership capacity within the school.</p>

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Overview of the Chapter

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this research study was to explore and understand the characteristics of principal leadership within the context of improving elementary schools in Maine. As a result, the following served as the overarching question for this research study: what characteristics of good leaders do principals in selected improving elementary schools in Maine exemplify? Specifically, the following four characteristics of principal leadership in improving elementary schools in Maine were examined:

- What are the leadership theories and approaches of principals in selected improving elementary schools in Maine?
- How do those principals view the relationship between their leadership and the school's climate and culture?
- How do those principals perceive student success?
- What leadership and organizational structures do those principals use? How did they develop and integrate them into the larger school cultures?

Conceptual Overview

Research Design

This research study sought to examine the nature of principal leadership and how it presents itself in improving elementary schools in Maine - in essence, to more deeply explore the attributes, qualities and possible connections of principal leadership to school culture, climate and student success as defined within a specific sampling of improving schools. By nature, leadership is complex, involving human interactions, perceptions, and influences within a larger institutional framework. As a result, a qualitative study based in a phenomenological interview approach surfaced as the most appropriate methodology to advance this research work.

As it is very much a human experience, the need to deepen discourse with school principals, as the individuals most directly involved, seemed crucial in investigating aspects of elementary school leadership. That is especially true given the numerous factors involved in researching the complexities and intricacies of leadership within a school setting. By definition, the intent of qualitative research is to understand a particular social situation, group or interaction in a deeper way, and is an investigative process where the researcher attempts to make sense of a social phenomenon (Creswell, 2009), in this case the characteristics of principal leadership in improving elementary schools. Additionally, qualitative research has its roots in cultural anthropology and sociology, which emphasizes uncovering understandings about a culture, in this case the cultural milieu of school settings wherein significant improvements in student achievement have already been demonstrated.

Creswell (2009) identified three components that intersect in a qualitative research design of this type: philosophy, strategies of inquiry, and specific methods.

- This qualitative study followed the philosophical assumptions of a “social constructivist worldview,” seeking deeper understandings from the perspective of the principals interviewed: involving multiple participant meetings: considering a broader backdrop framed in social and historical construction: and resulting in theory generation in finding meaningful patterns of exploring principal leadership. The goal of this research from a constructivist perspective was to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied: in this case, the principals’ perceptions of their leadership influences.
- A phenomenological research strategy of inquiry has been employed by which the researcher identified the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon: leadership within an improving school community, as described by the principals.
- Within that tradition, the resulting methodology made use of studying subjects through extensive engagement of data collection and analysis to develop patterns and relationships of meanings. In the process, the researcher set aside his experiences in order to understand those of the participants in the study. Phenomenological research uses the analysis of significant statements, the generation of meaning from units of information, and the development of an essence description and emergent themes.

That philosophical backdrop, juxtaposed with a conceptual framework for exploring principal leadership in improving elementary schools, was used to shape the interview protocols, the data collection methodology for this study, the steps for data analysis, and the final narrative.

Several characteristics defined the research design of this study (Creswell, 2009). By definition, qualitative research occurs in natural settings, where human behaviors and events occur. Interviewing within selected improving school sites, the researcher acted as the primary instrument in data collection, gathering descriptive data through interviewing principals and examining documents. The data were then reviewed and organized into meaningful themes that integrated across all of the data sources. Those aspects served as the backdrop for the methodology of this research study.

In a phenomenological tradition, the focus of this research was on principals' perceptions and experiences – the meanings they held, and the way they made sense of their professional lives. Qualitative research relies on inductive data analysis, building patterns from the bottom up by organizing the data into meaningful constructs to better understand the phenomenon occurring. As a result, the qualitative research process was an emergent design. Phases of the process sometimes shifted as the researcher collected data, but the key idea was to learn about the issue from participants, and tailor the research questions to obtain that information. Those assumptions helped to guide the iterative nature of the interview protocols developed for this study.

Qualitative researchers are particularly interested in how things occur, and may use a theoretical lens to view their studies, as that has been an interpretive inquiry in which the researcher made interpretations of what he saw, heard, and understood. There

are many iterations as the data move from the participants to the researcher and finally, to the consumers of the study. Within that context, multiple views of the issue can emerge. This research study used the lens of leadership theories and approaches, as well as a larger conceptual framework for exploring principal leadership, in order to utilize literature review findings as a way to focus interview and document data into meaningful themes and patterns.

Lastly, qualitative researchers try to develop a complex picture of the issue under study, thus creating a holistic account of the phenomenon in question. This study employed a phenomenological interview approach to provide a richer context within which to embed the data and findings that emerged. The concept of exploring characteristics of principal leadership has been anchored in real-life situations, and offered a holistic account of leadership from the perspective of principals in improving schools – those that have lived through the experience. Consistent with a phenomenological interview approach, this research used a process of three in-depth interviews to explore the complex issue of principal leadership in improving schools by examining the experiences of the principals involved, and the meaning that had for them. The interview protocols were based on four themes that provided the theoretical rationale of phenomenological interview studies (Seidman, 2013, pp. 14-20):

- The temporal and transitory nature of human experience: interviewing that focuses on the experiences of the participants and the meaning they make of that experience: in this case, influential principal leadership

- Subjective understanding: the goal of the researcher has been to come as close as possible to understanding the reality of the principals' experience from their subjective point of view
- The lived experience as the "phenomena," focused on the "lived experience" of human beings, gained primarily through language, thus implying strategically interviewing as protocols and questions are developed, and finally,
- The emphasis on meaning in context: emphasizing the importance of making meaning of the experience, with heavy reliance on language.

Those four phenomenological themes came together to provide the rationale and logic for the interview protocols used in this research study. This research sought to understand and present principal participants' subjective experience as school leaders, and share them in the context of their current experiences within their school settings.

This research study also served as a comparative, multisite study of the phenomenon of influential characteristics of principal leadership. Interview and document data were gathered from principal participants, and sought to explore common characteristics or conditions in the form of emergent themes. It is multisite in that principal participants from five specific sites were used, through which distinct data analyses was then conducted and explored in a comparative fashion.

Using information gathered from the literature review relative to aspects of principal leadership, the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership* was developed to assist in guiding this qualitative study.

Research Context and Sample

The research context of this study was improving elementary schools in Maine with principals chosen through a multisite comparison. That involved a two-step process. The first was to consider the setting – improving elementary schools in Maine. The second was the choice of the participant sample group that was drawn from those identified schools. Extreme case sampling (a process of selecting highly unusual cases of the phenomenon of interest or cases that appear to be the “exception to the rule”) was used for setting selections, that being demonstrably improving elementary schools in Maine. Purposive sampling (a process whereby subjects are selected because of specific characteristics) was used for the participants, that being principals selected from improving schools that fit more delineated criteria. Using that process allowed access to the rich sources of information available in this inquiry.

The Setting: Improving Elementary Schools in Maine

The setting of this study was improving elementary schools in Maine, and multiple criteria were used to identify those sites that qualified for participant selection. The first was that the school improved according to Maine’s School Performance Grading System Results (2013-14). Beginning with the 2012-13 school year, a new accountability system for schools and educators was instituted by the state of Maine, creating a new measure for all Maine educators to ascribe. The Maine School Performance Grading System was developed to inform students, parents, taxpayers, and other vested constituencies how their schools are doing in the same manner as report cards help parents understand how their children are doing. Similar to thirteen other states and New York City, Maine adopted an A-F school grading system. That grading system

includes components of student achievement, as well as student growth in reading and math, given the need to measure both absolute performance as well as student improvement over time. To that end, Maine's elementary school grading system also incorporates performance and growth among the bottom 25 percent of students in the areas of reading and math. (For reference, the specific methodology of calculating grades with the Maine's School Performance Grading System for elementary schools is included as Appendix B.)

The second criteria for site selection was that the school was also identified as an improving school in the Study of More Efficient and Improving Schools conducted by Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) in the Center for Education Policy, Applied Research, and Evaluation (CEPARE) at the University of Southern Maine. As part of a research study undertaken at the request of the state legislature, MEPRI conducted a study culminating in 2013 of PK- 12 public schools that have been identified as improving. MEPRI explored the significant practices and characteristics of improving Maine schools, using Maine Educational Assessment data from the years 2006 to 2009, in an effort to identify some practices and attributes that have helped those schools improve student performance. As a preface to the study, MEPRI developed a set of metrics for identifying schools whose students are beating the odds by performing significantly better on state assessments than would be predicted from student and community characteristics. It used this same metric to identifying improving schools, with the goal of the two-phase study being to identify the strategies and practices that those two types of schools are using to support *all* learners. (For reference, the specific

criteria CEPARE used in determining more efficient and improving schools within this study are included as Appendix C.

In conjunction with the More Efficient and Improving Schools and the Maine School Performance Grading System, three major criteria were used for identifying settings from which participants for this study were drawn:

- Elementary schools that have increased at least one letter grade (or more) over the past two years that the Maine School Performance Grading System has been in place
- Elementary schools identified as improving in The Study of More Efficient and Improving Schools conducted by MEPRI
- Elementary schools with a principal in place for at least three years in order to have been present during the years of demonstrated improvement on the grading system.

In addition, principals were chosen from sites reflecting the diversity of elementary schools in Maine with varying characteristics of free and reduced lunch rate, grade configurations between Pre-Kindergarten and Grade 6, student enrollment numbers, and elementary school site locations by geographic region (county) that are reflective of rural, suburban, and urban settings across Maine.

Eleven elementary schools met both of the major student performance benchmarks: the primary screen to qualify as improving elementary schools for this study. They were noted as Improving Schools in the MEPRI Study culminating in 2013 *and* improved by at least one or more letter grade(s) as demonstrated within the Maine School Performance Grading System from 2012-2014 (as reflected in the 2013 and 2014 annual reports.) Four of those eleven schools had new leaders in place, as the previous

principals had either taken other positions or moved out of state. From the remaining seven schools that fit the major criteria points of this study (including a principal leader in place for at least the past three to ten years during the time of demonstrated school improvement), five principals from qualifying sites chose to participate in this study. They were: Heather, principal of Urban School A (USA); Marianne, principal of Suburban School A (SSA); Beth, principal of Suburban School B (SSB); Jean, principal of Rural School A (RSA); and Matthew, principal of Rural School B (RSB). A selected participant site summary is included here, followed by profiles of the principals of this study, reflecting their background and site information. (Summary descriptions of individual participant's leadership are included as Appendix E: Principal Participant Leadership Descriptions.)

The principals willingly accepted the invitation to participate in this research study and secured district level permissions to undertake the three-part interview series required. A summary of comparable information is included in Table 2: *Selected Participant Site Summary*.

Table 2							
<i>Selected Participant Site Summary</i>							
Type of Site	Site Name	Principal Participant	Principal Tenure	School Grade Span	Student Population	MSPG Increase	Poverty Rate
Urban @19,000	Urban School A USA	Heather	4 Years	K-6	280	C to B	70%
Suburban @ 10,000	Suburban School A SSA	Marianne	15 Years	4yr-4	452	C to B	24%
Suburban @8000	Suburban School B SSB	Beth	9 Years	3-5	271	C to B	23%
Rural @1100	Rural School A RSA	Jean	20 Years	4yr-5	106	C to B	73%
Rural @1100	Rural School B RSB	Matthew	6 Years	4yr-5	120	F to D	74%

Profiles of the Principal Participants

Heather

Heather is in her fourth year as principal of USA, having spent 17 years in education, 15 working within the city where her school is located. Prior to becoming a principal, she was a sixth and seventh grade teacher, as well as a district literacy mentor for secondary teachers. That position was particularly instrumental in piquing her interest in leadership and administration. Upon completing her master's degree and a certificate of advanced study in educational leadership, she served two years as assistant principal at the city high school, and then accepted her current position as principal of USA.

USA is located in a larger, mid-central city in Maine with a population of about 19,000 residents, and is one of four elementary schools in the city school district of which it is a part. It is a public school that serves 280 students in grades K-6, presenting as a local, neighborhood school within the larger school district. As such, it is one of the

newest schools in the city, having opened in September 1988. The poverty rate, as measured by the Free and Reduced Lunch Rate is 70 percent. In the 2013-14 school year, there were 24.4 full-time teachers, 22.4 percent of whom held a master's degree or higher. In 2011, USA had 13 students for every full-time teacher. Heather is the only full-time administrator.

USA experienced an increase in academic achievement as reflected by the Maine School Performance Grade (MSPG) from 2012-13 to 2013-14 of a "C to B." Student Attendance Rate in 2012-13 was 94.3 percent, and the Adequate Yearly Progress Status in 2011-12 was noted to be "CIPS1" (Continuous Improvement Priority Status 1). Table 3: *Maine School Performance Growth (MSPG) Student Achievement and Trend Data for USA* offers a breakdown of specific areas.

Table 3		
<i>Maine School Performance Growth (MSPG) Student Achievement and Trend Data for USA</i>		
NECAP Scoring Criteria	Score	Trend*
Math Proficiency	67.44%	Up
Math Growth	69.10%	Up
Math Bottom 25% Growth	52.00%	Up
Reading Proficiency	78.29%	Up
Reading Growth	81.01%	Up
Reading Bottom 25% Growth	66.50%	Up
*Trend compared to Maine Average Percentage		

USA meets the varied needs of its students through a variety of programs. In addition to the fourteen regular education classes, there are a gifted and talented program, a Title One program, a Project Pride program, a computer lab, a library/media center, a variety of special education programs, and art, French, music and physical education programs.

Marianne

Marianne has been in education for more than 35 years, and principal of SSA for fifteen. As a leader, she believes in a shared leadership style that has evolved over time, growing and transitioning through a journey from colleague to educational leader. With her bachelor's degree in psychology, she planned a career in social work, but the director at a day camp where she worked inspired Marianne to go into education. She pursued a master's degree in elementary education, and from the first day as a classroom teacher, found that she was a "natural" with both students and adults, and greatly enjoyed engaging curricular work. The road to administration became an engaging next step, requiring a formidable mental switch from colleague to supervisor. She completed a certificate of advanced study in educational leadership, and began her career in administration as a teaching principal in a small, rural district in Maine. Shortly thereafter, she assumed leadership of SSA as principal.

SSA is located in a southern coastal and resort town in Maine of about 10,000 residents, and is one of two elementary schools within the school district of which it is a part. Although the area is very much a vacation destination, the town's year-round residents represent a diversity of income levels, education and geographic locations. SSA is a public school that serves 452 students in grades PreK-4. The poverty rate, as measured by the Free and Reduced Lunch Rate is 24 percent. In 2013-14, there were 43.7 full-time teachers, 41.7 percent of whom held a master's degree or higher. In 2011, SSA had 12 students for every full-time equivalent teacher, consistent with Maine's average. Marianne is the one of two full-time administrators.

SSA had an increase in academic achievement as reflected by the Maine School Performance Grade (MSPG) from 2012-13 to 2013-14 of a “C to B.” Student Attendance Rate in 2012-13 was 95.8 percent, and the Adequate Yearly Progress Status in 2011-12 was “Making AYP.” Table 4: *Maine School Performance Growth (MSPG) Student Achievement and Trend Data for SSA* offers a breakdown of specific areas.

Table 4 <i>Maine School Performance Growth (MSPG) Student Achievement and Trend Data for SSA</i>		
NECAP Scoring Criteria	Score	Trend*
Math Proficiency	78.76%	Up
Math Growth	70.20%	Up
Math Bottom 25% Growth	50.91%	Up
Reading Proficiency	81.35%	Up
Reading Growth	73.23%	Up
Reading Bottom 25% Growth	49.57%	Down
*Trend compared to Maine Average Percentage		

Beth

Beth is in her seventh year of administration at SSB (three years at teaching principal, and the last four as full-time principal); she has more than 20 years of education experience. Prior to entering education as a second-career teacher, she worked in public health and medicine. After completing a pilot program for professionals interested in teaching, she taught for about 12 years in fourth and fifth grades. She then entered a program called Leadership for Tomorrow’s Schools, which led to certification as an administrator. She also attended the school where she is now the principal, as did her children.

SSB is located in a southern Maine coastal and resort town of about 8,000 residents, within close proximity to the largest city in Maine. It is one of two elementary

schools in the regional school district of which it is a part. Like Suburban School A, the residents of the community have diverse income levels, education and geographic locations. SSB is a public school that serves 271 students in third through fifth grade. The poverty rate, as measured by the Free and Reduced Lunch Rate is 23 percent. In 2013-14, there were 25.2 full-time teachers, of whom 47.2 percent held a master's degree or higher. In 2011, SSB had 13 students for every full-time equivalent teacher, slightly higher than the state's average of 12 per full-time equivalent teacher. Beth is the only full time administrator.

SSB experienced an increase in academic achievement as reflected by the Maine School Performance Grade (MSPG) from 2012-13 to 2013-14 of a "C to B." Student Attendance Rate in 2012-13 was 95.7 percent, and the Adequate Yearly Progress Status in 2011-12 was noted to be "Monitor." Table 5: *Maine School Performance Growth (MSPG) Student Achievement and Trend Data for SSB* offers a breakdown of specific areas.

Table 5		
<i>Maine School Performance Growth (MSPG) Student Achievement and Trend Data for SSB</i>		
NECAP Scoring Criteria	Score	Trend*
Math Proficiency	74.52%	Up
Math Growth	72.07%	Up
Math Bottom 25% Growth	49.07%	Up
Reading Proficiency	79.09%	Up
Reading Growth	75.63%	Up
Reading Bottom 25% Growth	65.12%	Up
*Trend compared to Maine Average Percentage		

Jean

Jean is in her twentieth year as principal of RSA and her thirty-sixth year as an educator. After receiving her bachelor's degree in secondary education, Jean taught 7th and 8th grade social studies, English and language arts for 16 years in a rural district in southwestern Maine. After completing a master's degree in educational administration, she returned to the area where she grew up and became principal of RSA.

In her own educational journey, the Jean has always viewed herself as involved with students. She enjoys the principal leader role, as administrators have a different kind of impact and greater ability to effect change than in the classroom setting. And she is steadfast in her belief that she makes a big difference outside the classroom.

RSA is located in a small, rural town of about 1100 residents in mid-central Maine about two hours north of the largest city in Maine. The geographic community represents a diversity of incomes, employment and family situations. It is one of six public schools in the regional school district of which it is a part, and serves 106 students in grades PK-5. The poverty rate, as measured by the Free and Reduced Lunch Rate is 73 percent. In 2013-14, there were 8.4 full-time teachers, of whom 14.3 percent held a master's degree or higher. In 2011, RSA had 16 students for every full-time equivalent. Jean is the only administrator at the school, and is there approximately one-third of her time.

RSA had an increase in academic achievement as reflected by the Maine School Performance Grade (MSPG) from 2012-13 to 2013-14 of a "C to B." Student Attendance Rate in 2012-13 was 95.1 percent, and the Adequate Yearly Progress Status in 2011-12

was noted to be “Making AYP.” Table 6: *Maine School Performance Growth (MSPG) Student Achievement and Trend Data for RSA* offers a breakdown of specific areas.

Table 6		
<i>Maine School Performance Growth (MSPG) Student Achievement and Trend Data for RSA</i>		
NECAP Scoring Criteria	Score	Trend*
Math Proficiency	61.70%	Down
Math Growth	59.71%	Down
Math Bottom 25% Growth	68.75%	Up
Reading Proficiency	82.98%	Up
Reading Growth	91.71%	Up
Reading Bottom 25% Growth	80.00%	Up
*Trend compared to Maine Average Percentage		

Matthew

Matthew has spent 25 years in education as a teacher, coach, and administrator. He is currently in his seventh year as principal of RSB. He grew up in mid-coast Maine, and earned a bachelor’s degree in physical education and health, which led him to a classroom position. Shortly thereafter, he began his administrative career as an assistant principal in a high-poverty rural school, where he was inspired by the impact he could make by forming both adult and student relationships to defy the odds. With the belief that “you can be whoever you want to be,” based in the development of relationships and trust, Matthew continued in his administrative career as principal in two other districts. During that time, he worked closely with afterschool programs to support students. He then worked for three years for the Maine Department of Education as a consultant, working with 13 schools that were developing and implementing school improvement programs. Following that position, he accepted the principalship of RSB

RSB is located in a small, rural community of about 1100 residents in mid-central Maine about two hours northeast of the largest city in Maine. As with RSA, the geographic community represents a diversity of incomes, employment and family situations. It is one of seven public elementary schools in the regional school district of which it is a part, and serves 120 students in grades PK-5. The poverty rate, as measured by the Free and Reduced Lunch Rate is 74 percent. In 2013-14, there were 7.4 full-time teachers, of whom 13.6 percent held a master's degree or higher. In 2011, RSB had 12 students for every full-time equivalent teacher, exactly the statewide average. Matthew is the only administrator at the school, and is there approximately one-half of his time.

RSB experienced an increase in academic achievement as reflected by the Maine School Performance Grade (MSPG) from 2012-13 to 2013-14 of an "F to D." Student Attendance Rate in 2012-13 was 93.1%, and the Adequate Yearly Progress Status in 2011-12 was noted to be "Making AYP." Table 7: *Maine School Performance Growth (MSPG) Student Achievement and Trend Data for RSB* offers a breakdown of specific areas.

Table 7		
<i>Maine School Performance Growth (MSPG) Student Achievement and Trend Data for RSB</i>		
NECAP Scoring Criteria	Score	Trend*
Math Proficiency	55.88%	Down
Math Growth	64.74%	Down
Math Bottom 25% Growth	18.33%	Down
Reading Proficiency	70.59%	Down
Reading Growth	70.53%	Down
Reading Bottom 25% Growth	36.67%	Down
*Trend compared to Maine Average Percentage		

Methodological Overview

Methodology for Data Collection

The methodology employed for data collection in this study was the Seidman Three-Interview Series Approach (Seidman, 2013), coupled with document analysis. The *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership* was used to inform the development of the three interview protocols. Interviews with principals were semi-structured, in a format of open-ended questions about predetermined topics, which allowed for flexibility and adaptability. Each interview lasted approximately an hour with the intention of exploring specific aspects of the participant's leadership. Overall, the data collection process was framed within a three-step process.

The first step focused on the getting to know the principal as school leader, and consisted of interviewing him or her, using the techniques of Seidman Interviews #1 and #2. The first interview focused on the background of the principal, as well as personal philosophical and theoretical beliefs. That created a context to allow them to share as much as possible about personal experiences in leadership up to the present time. The intention behind the first interview was to get to know the principal in a deeper way, thus exploring past experiences in leadership, teaching and learning, and further discerning the personal approaches and theories of current leadership. Interview two focused on concrete details of the principals' present lived experiences in specific areas of their leadership. The intention behind the second interview was to gain a greater understanding of how the principal actualized his or her leadership approach in the logistics of daily work. That included exploring concrete details of professional experience with leadership, leadership structures, teaching and learning, school culture and climate,

school improvement efforts, change process, and general reflections about the school's evolution.

The second step focused on a document study from the principal that exemplified or added to an understanding of leadership within his or her own school setting.

Document collections reflected a variety of materials that assisted in understanding the organizational structuring of leadership and managerial functions within each improving school setting. Artifacts included policy manuals, handbooks, staff information guides, essential district or school level documents, flow charts, meeting structure composites, and a variety of other informative literature sources specific to each setting. Additional public domain site-specific information was obtained including school profile data, School Efficiency Profiles and other information secured through the Maine Department of Education Data Warehouse. Documents were secured, recorded, and cross-referenced with interview notes, thus serving to triangulate interview data, and to exemplify key ideas shared by the interviewees. Overall, the documents served as artifacts to provide a deeper understanding of the transference of the principals' leadership stances into authentic structures within each of their schools.

The third step focused on reflecting and integrating principal responses through Interview #3 of the Seidman Interview Series, thus affording an opportunity to explore more deeply connections of the interview data from Interviews #1 and #2, as well as the document study. That interview focused on reflection and integration of findings, and asked principals to reflect on greater meanings of their leadership, thus exploring both emotional and intellectual connections between their work and lives. A major emphasis

within the last formal session with the principal was to consider more deeply the question: “How did you get here?”

This researcher obtained interview data using an electronic digital recording device with the permission of each interviewee. All participants willingly gave permission to use their first names throughout the interview dialogue and with regard to this study. A transcription service was used to secure a definitive, precise, and detailed transcription of each interview, thus serving as raw data for later analysis.

Methodology for Data Analysis

Several steps were used to guide the data analysis portion of this research study, keeping in mind that there is “a move from the specific to the general through multiple levels of data analysis, and that it is an iterative process causing the researcher to move back and forth between the data collection and analysis throughout the study” (Creswell, 2009). The process of data analysis required making sense out of text and image data, and involved the following methodology.

At the conclusion of each session, a researcher memo was completed to note specific themes, impressions, and reflective thoughts for reference during the data analysis phase. A system of bracketing (placing brackets around phrases that suggest the researcher’s own beliefs or personal sentiments) helped keep a conscious check within the process of note taking during data collection.

The data were prepared for analysis by obtaining and downloading a detailed transcription of each interview through a digital transcription service. The service also outlined and provided markers to key words and phrases within the transcription recording and text, thus allowing future references as needed. Recordings were reviewed

and compared to each transcription as a check for accuracy. Additionally, data were scanned and organized into different types depending on the sources of information (interview or document data), and arranged into notebooks.

Following that, all of the transcription data was read again, which allowed for review and reflection that obtained a general sense of the information and its overall meaning. Researcher memos were reviewed as a way to summarize research reflections.

The next step was to conduct a detailed analysis of the interview data through a coding process. That involved organizing the material into chunks of data so it could be sorted into categories for analysis through a sequential, inductive coding process, with the assistance of the coding software Dedoose. That software assisted in searching the transcription data, and categorized it into codes and specific themes that were cross-referenced with specific quotes. Developed codes were used to identify themes, and form larger descriptions in various areas of principals' leadership.

Additionally, collected coded and interview data were used to generate descriptions of the settings and principals' leadership. Comparisons were made across all participant settings, and then shaped into individual descriptions. That allowed the construction of profiles and structuring of meanings to assist in a cross-site comparison, thus showing how categories were interrelated and interpreted by principals at each site.

Within this study, document analysis was used to give voice and meaning around specific themes and descriptions that emerged regarding aspects of principals' leadership and school setting. As themes emerged, document data were reviewed to understand more deeply particular comments or quotes, as well as to exemplify how principals manifested particular leadership practices. Examples of those were notes on leadership

team structures, excerpts from handbooks, meeting minutes, vision and mission statements, and decisionmaking trees. Analysis of the documents involved coding artifacts and specific content into themes similar to how interview transcripts were analyzed.

The next step was to make an interpretation of the data. This involved reviewing and aligning research findings against the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*. That assisted in creating a detailed, multisite analysis of the data through emergent and common themes, in comparison to the literature review, thus acting as a lens in analyzing findings in order to answer the question, “what were the lessons learned?” Finally, findings were used to determine the outcomes of the study in order to provide a complex picture of emergent themes across the participant responses.

Trustworthiness

Several factors noted herein helped mitigate the limitations of this research study and enhance the trustworthiness of this work, thus serving to bolster internal validity and reliability (Creswell, 2009). Those include aspects of site selections from which participants were chosen, as well as the methodological strategies of data collection and analysis.

The strategic selection of participants’ sites was important to bolster the trustworthiness with this study. With a sampling of principals from five selected sites with a diversity of characteristics, an opportunity was created to explore data across different geographic and socioeconomic domains. All qualified under the rigorous screening criteria used for participant-site selections noted earlier.

In consideration of the setting, selected sites held both similarities and differences between and among one another, thus offering an interesting cross-matrix of shared characteristics and variances. The suburban sites, although similar in socioeconomic data (23 percent and 24 percent) and student improvement (both moved from a “C” to a “B”), differed in population size (452 and 271 students), lending to a nice comparison across two similar demographic but differing school populations. The rural sites were similar in size (106 and 120 students) and poverty levels (73 percent and 74 percent) with each other, but differed in terms of gender. Additionally, the rural schools differed in terms of their student achievement increases, as noted by school performance scores (one went from a “C” to a “B,” while the other went from a “F” to a “D.”) Similar in geographic location and town populations, both rural sites were part of much larger regional school unit configurations, with parallel socioeconomic communities. Rural schools were also similar in socioeconomic data with the urban site (70 percent poverty level). The urban site, although higher in poverty level compared to the two suburban sites, was similar in student improvement (all went from a “C” to a “B,”) and in size, to one of the suburban sites (280 students). Four of the sites, representing a diversity of urban, suburban, and rural schools, shared similar student performance growth (moving from a “C” to a “B.”) Given the three sites in this study of fairly high poverty-level (in contrast to the two sites of fairly low poverty-level), a nice backdrop presented to explore more deeply those schools that seem to be “beating the odds” in terms of student achievement and growth. Overall, the strategic inclusion of principals from these five sites offered a well-rounded opportunity to gather data from participants in similar, yet diverse settings, and lending to an enhanced confidence in consistent findings during the cross-site comparison phase.

Procedural steps during data collection such as data saturation, bracketing and researcher reflective notations helped maintain a focus toward the unbiased, reflectivity aspect of the researcher as instrument in the study. Data saturation occurred during the data collection process and marked the endpoint, wherein nothing new was seen or heard, and no new information was emerging. Bracketing techniques served to set aside the researcher's knowledge, and a way to note "collapsing" of statements into meaningful themes and impressions. That manifested in reflective notes about the researcher's connection to the interview data.

The researcher served as instrument for data collection, and was responsible for maintaining data that were accurate, credible, and free from personal bias, thus adding to the overall validity of the study. (Clarification of the researcher bias is articulated as a self-reflection component within this study and is included under the heading, *The Role of the Researcher, Biases and Assumptions.*)

Strategies used in data analysis, such as thick descriptions, triangulation, and crosschecking with reflective notes, transcripts, and audio files, thus provided data that were accurate and truthful. Thick descriptions detailing aspects of the principals' leadership within the context of selected sites allowed a clearer perspective of the principals' leadership and nuances to their sites. Additionally, descriptions are embedded throughout the findings, discussion, and summary chapters to allow a clearer perspective of the participants within the context of the settings of their leadership. With that in mind, an attempt was made to include enough detail about the principals as participants, and their leadership within their given settings, to get a sense of who the principals are as

leaders, and whether readers can transfer or apply research findings to their own experiences.

Data were collected and triangulated with multiple participants in multiple settings, and through document analysis. Triangulation provided credibility through a system of crosschecking and comparing different data sources with each other to maximize consistency.

An important strategy throughout the data analysis phase was intentionally and consistently crosschecking emergent themes with reflective notes and transcripts. That was done by comparing themes with specific quotes on an individual basis, as well as cross checking quotes across other participants. Under each emergent theme, reflective notes from each participant were organized to see the similarities or variances in responses, and compiled into a large summary document of participant responses.

All of those efforts lend a sense of trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility to the study.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The following discussion points are noted as limitations of this study, along with considerations taken to mitigate their impacts relative to this research.

Choosing an appropriate setting group and participant sample selection presented a significant limitation, as there were not recent multiyear comparison frameworks from which to seek out principals of improving schools. Improvement changes were noted to be over the course of one year only, as the Maine's Performance Grading System has only been in place during that time period. Given that it was, in fact, the only universal measure available for recent statewide student achievement comparisons. In this study,

the limitation has been mitigated with the overlay of the CEPARE Improving Schools Study data in order to offer a secondary layer of screening and quality control that was based on four years of data for each school.

Given the specific selection criteria necessary to identify the participant sampling of principals of improving schools used within this study, there was a possible limitation on confidentiality assured to principals involved with this study. Although every precaution was taken to mitigate the confidentiality and privacy of study data, participants consenting to this study were advised to do so with that understanding, and knew in advance that there is a confidentiality risk if others apply the same selection criteria. All of the principal participants secured district-level permissions, and offered their consent without hesitation.

Interview data collection was limited in that it provided indirect information filtered through the views of the principal interviewees only, and could be potentially biased by the researcher's presence. That understood, not all people are equally articulate and perceptive. Reasonable measures to minimize that were undertaken through the purposeful use of a defined Three-Interview Series that added consistency in terms of process. The researcher also attempted to follow similar formats in use of interview protocols, transcriptions, and comparative data analyses across the five sites, with the intention of providing reasonable consistency in the data collection, analysis and reporting phases.

An additional limitation is that this study was undertaken from the perspective of the principal participants, as leaders of improving schools, only. Although inherent biases, prejudices, and conveyance of leadership styles and attributes were noted from

their perspectives as administrators, the intent of the study has been to explore principal characteristics as self-reflections. Findings were the result of what the principal participants reflected as successful leadership. Although they were notified as to their status as improving schools, they did not necessarily delineate their perspectives relative to that designation.

There were limitations in document and artifact collections, as these varied across the sites, and not every participant offered the same types of artifacts. To mitigate that, sometimes the researcher was required to search out information in the public domain, such as school achievement data, and comparable site logistical data. That given, information gathered was freely offered and shared by principal participants.

This type of qualitative case study was also limited by the sensitivity and integrity of the investigator, as the researcher was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. As noted, interview protocols were established based on the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*, and were limited to general aspects and categories garnered through the literature review, and as organized by the researcher.

The following discussion points are noted as delimitations of this study, along with considerations taken to mitigate their impact relative to this research.

The researcher assigned a purposive sampling of principal participants from settings that included five elementary schools selected from the list of designated improving elementary schools in Maine, based on the criteria established by the Maine School Performance Grading System and cross-referenced with the CEPARE Improving Schools Study Participants. Of the seven sites that met all of the major screening criteria, five principal leaders of those sites willingly chose to participate in the study. This study

did not consider characteristics of principals from schools in any other sampling group, as the focus was on leadership attributes from within improving schools only. Reflected findings are what these principal participants saw as key tenets of successful leadership from their perspectives. Although they were notified as to their status as improving schools in meeting the aforementioned criteria, they did not necessarily delineate their perspectives relative to their designation as “improving schools.”

Overall, the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*, interview format and protocols, and products of data collection through principal interviews, transcriptions through use of a transcription service, and document sourcing, all served as delimitations. Who to ask, what to ask, and what to gather was up to the researcher and was both predetermined and organic, as is implicit in the nature of a qualitative study of that design.

The Role of the Researcher, Biases and Assumptions

In this qualitative research study, the researcher acted as the primary instrument in data collection – the one who was gathering information - collecting data through examining documents, observing behaviors, and interviewing the principal leaders involved from each improving school site. The following are noted as personal biases in this study.

In 2012, Village School in Gorham, Maine, agreed to serve as an “improving” pilot school in the larger CEPARE Highly Efficient and Improving Schools in Maine Study, as well as having worked under the Maine School Performance Grading System. As the building administrator of Village School, the researcher held internal understandings of processes, administrative structures and frameworks, as well as senses

of highly effective schools that are inherent in his role as principal. Within the context of this research study, and as author of the same, that all had to be kept in mind and controlled for through bracketing responses and other internal validity checks.

Additionally, the researcher's experience in reflectively processing, as a building administrator within his own school setting, may stand as a personal bias. In 2011-12, the Gorham School Department undertook a massive restructuring effort with the construction of a new elementary school in Gorham. The result was to merge two K-2 schools and one 3-5 school into three new K-5 schools, each with its own new and distinctive school populations (administrators, staff, students, parents, leadership structures, culture and climate). In essence, having gone through a major district reorganization and forming brand new schools provided a unique opportunity for an administrator.

It is a rare occurrence to be able to "create" a brand new school from scratch over four years, including all of the aforementioned areas of a school community. From that experience, the researcher watched how administrative colleagues in his district created their new school communities. Overall, the researcher's own perspectives, belief constructs, and value judgments around leadership have all factored as significant biases in exploring principal leadership in the improving schools selected. Through purposeful awareness of that potential researcher bias, careful attention to making sure participant voice was predominant in these research findings, and attending to aspects of data saturation, triangulation, and identifying themes that were demonstrably consistent across all participants, those biases were mitigated, minimized and managed.

CHAPTER 4: REVIEW OF THE FINDINGS

The intent of this chapter is to share findings relative to the overarching question for this research study: what characteristics of good leaders do principals in selected improving elementary schools in Maine exemplify? Specifically, the following four research questions were examined:

- What are the leadership theories and approaches of principals in selected improving elementary schools in Maine?
- How do those principals view the relationship between their leadership and the school's climate and culture?
- How do those principals perceive student success?
- What leadership and organizational structures do those principals use? How did they develop and integrate them into the larger school cultures?

These four research questions provided the topical areas of the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*, which was developed to assist and guide the analysis of data. It considered aspects of principal leadership, definitions provided from the literature review, and notations of what would be realized through principal manifestations in practice. It was used to inform the construction of each of the three interview protocols guiding the interview process. Responses to those questions thus formed the background from which the findings of this study are shared in this chapter.

As schools in Maine, and across the nation, are increasingly held to greater standards of accountability in terms of insuring higher levels of student academic growth and achievement, some schools are improving, while others are not. Even beyond the constraints of tightening financial impositions and increasing federal and state

accountability mandates, some schools are “defying the odds” and producing positive results. This research examined the conditions of principal leadership within some of those improving schools.

Findings in Chapter 4 are organized in the following manner and guided by the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*: The first section considers the characteristics of the principals’ leadership and focuses on their reflections on their leadership approach in various areas, as well as their perceptions of challenges within their leadership, and aspects of leadership and change. The second section focuses on principal leadership and aspects of school climate and culture – the principals’ perspectives of their influence relative to organizational productivity and new hires, supervision and evaluation, as well as school climate and culture. The third section focuses on the principals’ perceptions of student success - considering their influences on teaching, student learning and success, professional development, intervention structures and supports, as well as the importance of data. The last section focuses on principals’ leadership organizational structures, including the roles of principals in structuring learning teams, collegiality and empowerment, and finally, cultivating leadership within their schools.

Each section begins with a review of research connections from the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*. Individual findings from this research study are then offered, with summary statements defining what is meant by particular findings, and lastly, examples from principals’ interviews that were part of this study are shared. Findings are summarized in the *Graphical Summary of Findings - Exploring Principal Leadership in Improving Elementary Schools* that follows this page.

Characteristics of Principals' Leadership

Principals of these selected improving schools in Maine shared characteristics of authentic and transformational leaders

Leadership Style and Approach

Personal evolution as leaders were shaped by early education experiences with definitive transitions from colleague to supervisor (A)

Shared leadership manifested in collaborative work and responsive to others' needs and values (A)

Leaders shared a strong sense of values, integrity, honesty and transparency; believed in the importance of relationships and communication, and held "What's best for kids" as a priority (A&T)

Sustaining Forces and Balancing Leadership Demands

Leaders gained satisfaction, and were sustained and energized by work with staff, students, parents and school community, often through new initiatives (A&T)

Collegial supports were important to help principals to stay grounded, and maintaining balance between personal lives and professional work important and challenging (A)

Leaders experienced pressures of new accountability demands, helping staff think differently about their work, and mitigating challenges, as well as political and social forces (A&T)

Leadership and Change

Leaders understood and worked with staff through change processes, as well as the importance of taking time to build internal capacities necessary to handle new challenges and change (T)

Principal Leadership and Aspects of School Climate and Culture

Organizational Productivity and New Hires

Influential in strategically hiring and grooming new staff members

Supervision and Evaluation

Purposeful focus on supervision and evaluation practices highly influenced organizational productivity
Dual roles as both coach and evaluator

School Climate and Culture

Developing and maintaining positive school climates and culture,
Advancing meaningful change,
Establishing trust
Promoting collective ownership

Principal Perceptions of Student Success

Teaching, Learning, Student Success and Professional Development

Academic success as identified priority

Principal as instructional leader whose leadership matters in terms of school outcomes

Purposeful incorporation of core programming in reading, writing, and math

Focus on instructional practices and differentiation

Creating professional development opportunities

Leadership has direct influence on student achievement – modeling and working with staff

Visibility

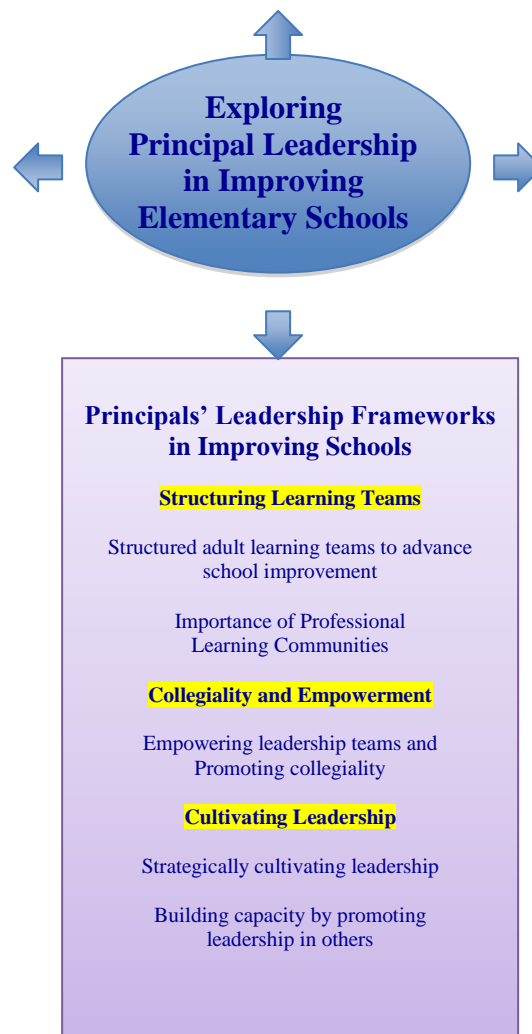
Creation of a school culture where students view themselves as learners

Intervention Structures and Supports

Principal influence on organizational frameworks attending to students' academic and affective needs

Importance of Data

Reliance on data to inform student progress, instructional programs, and decisionmaking



Characteristics of Principals' Leadership

The *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership* was used to analyze the interviews with the principals to determine their leadership characteristics.

From the framework, it was noted the principal espouses approaches to leadership or expresses characteristics of specific leadership theories that guide his or her practice. Two major leadership approaches that the principals identified are grounded in the theoretical foundations of transformational and authentic leadership (Northouse, 2012).

Transformational leaders adapt to the needs and motives of followers, act as change agents, and facilitate the process by creating a vision to guide people, thus transforming them through inspiration, as well as deeper commitments from members of the group. As a result, motivation, morale and job performance of staff members is enhanced through a bolstered sense of individual and collective identity to the initiative or goal, and to their work within the school (Northouse, 2012). Authentic leaders aspire to leadership that is transparent; morally grounded; responsive to people's needs and values; and defined by the characteristics of passion and purpose, compassion and heart, behavior and values, connectedness and relationships, consistency, and self-discipline. Authentic leadership is manifested through self-awareness; balancing extrinsic and intrinsic motivations; building a support team; integrating one's life by staying grounded, empowering people to lead; and personal development as an introspective, authentic leader. Additionally, authentic leadership emphasizes building a principal's legitimacy through honest relationships with staff members; valuing their input; and is built on an ethical foundation, creating trust within the school (Northouse, 2012).

The principals of the selected improving schools in Maine shared characteristics of authentic and transformational leaders. Their authentic and transformational leadership was evident in their leadership styles and approaches, including values and ethics, sustaining forces and balancing leadership demands, and finally, in how they approached change. The characteristics are summarized in Figure 1: *Overview of Findings:*

Characteristics of Principals' Leadership. Within each category, subfindings noted were more or less representative of authentic leadership approaches, transformative leadership approaches, or both.

Figure 1.

*Overview of Findings: Characteristics of Principals' Leadership***Characteristics of Principals' Leadership**

- *The principals of these select improving schools in Maine shared characteristics of authentic and transformational leaders.*

Leadership Style and Approach

- *As authentic leaders,*
 - Principals' evolutions as leaders were shaped by early teaching and leadership experiences, as well as definitive transitions they underwent when shifting from colleagues to supervisors.
 - Principals viewed their roles as leaders as responsive to peoples' needs and values.
 - Principals believed in shared leadership that manifested in collaborative work with others.
- *As authentic and transformational leaders,*
 - Principals believed in the importance of relationships and communication as intrinsic to their leadership.
 - Principals expressed the importance of having a strong set of values, integrity, and sense of honesty and transparency that served as the foundation of their leadership.
 - Principals shared a deep ethical conviction that "what's best for kids" was the priority and guided all decisions of their schools.

Sustaining Forces and Balancing Leadership Demands

- *As authentic and transformational leaders,*
 - Principals gained satisfaction and were sustained by their work with staff, students and parents.
 - Principals were energized by interactions with students and staff through new initiatives.
- *As authentic leaders,*
 - Collegial supports were important to help principals stay grounded.
 - Maintaining balance between their personal and professional lives was important to principals' success as leaders, but also proved to be challenging.
- *As authentic and transformational leaders,*
 - Principals were challenged by external demands, accountability pressures, and helping staff think differently about their work.
 - Principals were influential in mitigating challenges resulting from external accountability demands, political and social forces
 - Time was the greatest organizational challenge in principals' work as school leaders.

Leadership and Change

- *As transformational leaders,*
 - Principals were influential in understanding and working with staff through change processes.
 - Principals perceived the importance of taking time and building capacity during times of change.

Leadership Style and Approach

In terms of leadership style and approach, many traits of authentic and transformational leadership were evident.

Within the study, principals, as authentic leaders, shared how various critical life experiences helped shape their personal development as introspective leaders. Those served to deepen beliefs in their work, and in how they worked with their staff members. Additionally, principals noted definitive transitions in their professional journeys from colleagues to supervisors. They spoke of their belief in shared leadership and collaborative work together. As both authentic and transformational leaders, principals spoke of the importance of relationships and communication in their leadership.

As authentic leaders, principals' evolutions as leaders were shaped by early teaching and leadership experiences, as well as by definitive transitions they underwent when shifting from colleagues to supervisors.

As delineated previously within the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*, authentic leaders manifest with a sense of self-awareness, referring to the personal insights of the leader (Northouse, p.263. 2012), informed by critical life events.

The principals shared that there were various transitions they went through during their careers, as well as key experiences and influences that shaped their evolution as leaders. Two significant themes emerged in that regard. Collectively, principals noted a definitive shift occurred as they moved from colleagues to supervisors, requiring grounding as leaders so they could make the tough decisions necessary for school improvement initiatives. They also shared that early teaching and leadership experiences

served as powerful influences, positioning them for the important work in which they are currently engaged.

Heather spoke about using her teaching background and life experiences to help create her leadership experience as she noted, “ I had the opportunity to step out of the classroom and become a literacy coach for teachers. First, it was grades seven and eight, and then the second year, expanded to grades seven through 12. And so that’s when my focus became primarily working with the teachers. I indirectly work with students as far as modeling, good practices, and literacy for teachers because our focus was looking at content literacy... and how to improve instruction in the classroom.” Moving forward, she noted, “My principal actually pulled me aside and said, Heather, have you ever considered going into administration?” She shared, “ At one point, yes, if I could just do the curriculum aspect.” Early in Heather’s career, she noted, “I went to a Women in Leadership Conference... and listening to all these women who were principals, and superintendents, and curriculum coordinators, and it was like, you know what? I think I can do this.” She then obtained a certificate of advanced study in educational leadership. Heather saw leadership as an “opportunity to make an impact at a greater level.” She shared, “I enjoyed so much seeing the aha moments with teachers and working closely with them on best practices.” Heather noted, “never being satisfied with being where you are in terms of performance.” Heather also shared that early leadership experiences have taught her to be deliberate in her decisionmaking. “I have learned over time the need to listen and document when working with difficult decisions and conversations. When in doubt, don’t make an immediate decision and don’t react.” She shared a particularly delicate student issue early in her tenure in which a quick administrative reaction did not

serve the best long-term interest of a child she was working with. That gave her pause and led to a foundational shift in her approach with very difficult situations, as she noted, “it taught me to step back, reflect, and work on it. And don’t react and don’t feel compelled to react.... It’s okay to buy a little bit of time to make a decision that is important.”

Marianne spoke about early influences that shaped her leadership and created definitive transitions from colleague to supervisor. She noted, “I taught for 22 years and in five different schools in Massachusetts and Maine, ... worked with five principals, and not once did a principal ever sit down with me to talk about my teaching. ... And so I vowed when I became a principal that I wasn’t going to do that. That I was really going to hear about what the teacher’s passions are, and what struggles they have. And how I can help and what was great about your day today, and what was hard about it?” That emphasized the “need for communication and dialogue as a new administrator.” She added, “My perspective shifted in order to make things happen as an administrator. “Understanding that leaders need to have a “warm heart and tough skin in order to make the decisions to move the organization forward.” Marianne shared, “The hardest learning is to stay away from making or taking things personally. You have to have a warm heart, but a tough skin. I have been a mentor for several interns who have been going through the administrative track at USM. And one of the things I always give them is some kind of leather credenza because it’s symbolic. If you have to, you have to grow some leather skin. So you’ve got to be very humanistic about the way you treat everyone. But you have to make some decisions to move the organization forward.” Marianne shared that when people are not getting their way or try to make it personal, “You cannot let it

penetrate your thick skin to become personal because you're going to crash and burn in about a month of being an administrator. That, I think, was my hardest learning. But, I think I learned a lot of it by being the principal of colleagues - it forced the issue. And, I had to consciously make that decision."

Beth noted, "I had experience as a team leader and I really liked that piece of sort of organizing and pushing people's thinking and talking about student learning in a broader sense than my own classroom." She noted, "The model of a teaching principal position did not work. We were in an innovative school with competition for recruitment, but there was limited quality control. We tried many changes but they were unsuccessful." That required a shift in structure resulting in a new school governance schedule. There was a big transition from colleague to supervision, wherein she learned that "you can't be a peer and supervisor." In that way, "coaching is more challenging with past colleagues versus new hires." Beth noted that her leadership has evolved due to a predisposition to listening to and learning from others, and merging qualities of leadership from others to inform her own leadership style. She noted, "Knowing who you are as a leader is as much about knowing who you aren't - who you choose to emulate is often pieces of leadership that make your own style - sometimes it's about knowing what you don't like about leaders that helps you define who you are." Along with that she shared, "What you need to do is listen and learn, and then take what you consider to be the qualities that best mesh with you, and put those into play. That's what I've tried to do as a leader."

Leadership roles throughout education, and as an administrator, have sustained Jean in her evolution as a leader. "When I was teaching, I was chairman of this and that

committee and my principal encouraged me, gave me leadership roles and encouraged that I had the skills that would work in leadership.” Jean shared her belief that she could “make a bigger difference outside of the classroom and I enjoyed those pieces.” Through her early administrative experiences, Jean saw herself involved with students in that “administrators have a different kind of impact and ability to affect change than in the classroom.”

Matthew shared the influence of his mother and their family business that had a profound impact on his current leadership approach. “Seeing her love of kids was #1, as well as the importance of community and giving back, and the greater sense of family.” Another key experience was a professor in his educational leadership program who held a strong belief in him as a leader. “His belief in me to trust my own leadership beliefs... and trusting my own leadership instincts.” Matthew shared that the biggest lessons learned as a leader were “to keep focused on the student, make relationships with the students, and build a staff focus around that.” Inspiring others and uniting them under a common focus has been important in his leadership. Additionally, as a reflective practitioner, Matthew was cited with a leadership award for “data work and exemplary reflective teaching practices within his school.” Matthew’s leadership journey has been energized by his passion for seeking and promoting leadership opportunities for others. “Through that journey, creating teams that are cohesive and focused on helping students (has been a priority), and being drawn towards more of the poorer communities. I started to teach and I said, I think I can use the excitement for me in coaching and teaching, and working together as a team.” It is also this passion that “drives my ability to make the

tough decisions necessary as a leader in the best interest of the students that the school serves.”

As authentic leaders, principals viewed their roles as leaders as responsive to peoples’ needs and values.

Within the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*, authentic leaders were noted to view their leadership as responsive to peoples’ needs and values.

Heather expressed interest in leadership that served to motivate others, as exemplified by the statement, “I really liked working with the teachers and if that was one piece of what I could do, and I knew there were a lot of other layers to being an administrator... it’s important to be there for them... and I love the coaching aspect!”

Marianne shared, “Every staff has differences and there is a need to differentiate for everyone! One size does not fit all!” Marianne saw her role in service to others, as she stated, “I see myself as the person who makes the job that the teachers and support staff and everybody out there does, easier. I am trying to give them all the resources, all the training, all the materials. Everything they need to do, to be their very best at what they do. So I am trying to feed them professionally and also, I want to feed them, humanistically. And be their advocate.”

Beth shared, “we are public servants and employees, and we are a reflection of our community.” Beth noted, “This charge and responsibility is shared by all of the educators in our school.

Jean expressed a sense of service in her leadership by noting, “Promoting leadership through others, building capacity in others, supporting them, providing the resources they need, and doing the background work needed and helping them know they

are valued... Making sure they have the resources they need to do their jobs, doing the background work that they need because they're on the front lines. So, trying to support them and make them know they're valued and an important part of our school and part of our team." Additionally, Jean shared, "I've always known that I would need to be in a service profession. That's my calling – to be more in something where I'm serving people – and in this case, serving kids and families."

The idea of service was evident throughout Matthew's leadership, as he shared, "I am someone that's going to know the kids and what their needs are, and then is going to work really hard to meet their needs in a team approach where everyone (administrators, kids, parents, and teachers) are working together."

As authentic leaders, principals believed in shared leadership that manifested in collaborative work with others.

The *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership* noted authentic leaders build support teams and exercise their leadership by empowering people to lead.

Principals' beliefs in shared leadership proved to be a key tenet in advancing meaningful school improvements, informing not only the structures in place, but also the decisions that need to be made. Collaboration with others was evident in all aspects of their leadership. For example, Heather said, "I'm collaborative. I work best with others... having input from others... I thrive on that!" In this spirit, she further noted, "Shared decision making is needed for real staff buy-in." Additionally, she noted, "I rely on collaboration with my building leadership and student-support service teams."

Marianne shared, "There is a need to have real staff commitment... and their true "buy-in" through meaningful collaboration." That was exemplified in "our major

instructional decisions, leadership and professional learning community teams. “ Within that context, “My influence is in creating collaborative structures in all of these aspects of school functioning... This has been critical to the success of the school.” Marianne noted, “The biggest change has been an increased collaboration as teams.” She referenced the staff working together on new initiatives such as Common Core State Standards, noting, “Unpacking the standards and new initiatives helped to create an authentic task and the need to be collaborative.”

Beth shared that she is, “collaborative, high on relationships ... not authoritarian.” She expressed that over time, “my leadership has evolved into one of shared leadership.” She noted, “ so the leadership model of the school has changed and the structure of the school has changed.... We have also created student-services support teams since I have been here.”

Jean noted, “I certainly believe in shared leadership.” Working with three schools, she has developed a strong sense of collaboration with her staff members. “Shared decisionmaking is a key to advancing the professional development work of the school.” She repeatedly noted “shared ownership extends into all of the areas of discipline, school management, safety and caretaking, activities and all events of the school.”

Matthew’s approach was also one of shared leadership, “working as a team for the benefit of all students.” That was especially important in creating teams to make sure “someone is there for the kids everyday.” It was exemplified through his beliefs about working together for the benefit of the children. “Even though that’s hard work, we’ve

got to do that together. We've got to get it done for the child no matter what the background is."

As both authentic and transformational leaders, the principals believed in the importance of relationships and communication as intrinsic to their leadership. The *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership* indicated that authentic leaders are defined by the characteristics of connectedness and relationships, enhanced through communication. In a similar way, transformational leaders facilitate transformative processes through affective elements (focusing, on emotions, values, relationships and communication toward a common organizational vision.

The importance of focusing on people and relationships in order to build capacity for meaningful change was a belief of all of the principals interviewed. As an example of that, Heather shared the importance of developing relationships that lead to trust over time. She talked about adapting ways of communication as a way to differentiate with staff. "It's all in the approach and knowing who you are working with." You have to be able to communicate with lots of people with very different needs... people need to be able to be heard and also listen to." She noted, "so being a people person and being collaborative, I'm also able to adapt... How I am with certain people... How I talk and work with them. ... For example, how I talk to one person is certainly not how I'm going to talk to someone else. Also how I approach things with one person might not be the same as with another. ... Kind of like differentiating with the staff... It's a great skill and unfortunately, not that many people use it but, in order to do that, you have to know who you're working with. So over the years, I've gotten to know the staff and how am I going

to get this person to do this or that... I have to frontload for them sometimes in order for them to feel like they see the context and have the trust.”

In her role as leader, Marianne stressed, “This you know, the truth matters, honesty matters, relationships matter... So, I would say my first two to three years. Now, we were trying to build a building at the time.... And teaching people how to be with each other... So, you learn to accept people for who they are and the gifts they bring. And help them with the struggles they have, or help them to see. I don’t believe any of us can see our own weaknesses, whether it’s professional or personal, and it takes trust to let somebody point that out. So I like to celebrate the gifts publicly and privately with people. But privately, I like to point out the things, at least the things that I see, and hopefully, they can look at that. And, I invite people to be honest with me about things that I could be doing differently.” She also described her communication with staff. “There is a mixture of informal and formal conversations and conferences... Formal conversations three times a year... In the fall is goal setting, and January is a check in, and then spring is a reflective conference... Informal conversations are held two times a year.” This enabled her to “personalize experiences with staff through in-depth communications.” Beyond that, in all facets of her work with staff, “Communication was central to building of relationships and community” within her school.

Beth noted, “You’ve got to have relationships with your teachers or you’re not going to go anywhere. Teachers don’t leave (this) school once they are here.” That was largely because of the sense of “community” that had been established based on “deep trust in each other as a staff.” She noted that her style is to “listen and get all input, and then make decisions as needed...I try to be someone who gets all of the information I

need and then go ahead and make a decision. But I'm also not afraid to go against the grain, particularly on my administrative team. I often find myself in kind of a mediator position, trying to weigh both sides and negotiate. I'm definitely not one to make a decision and then never talk about it anymore." To this end, Beth shared, "Being able to trust each other and administration is so important in decisionmaking". She shared a "decisionmaking matrix that indicates levels of staff input necessary for various types of decisions" to describe the levels of conversation necessary for varying types of decisions.

Jean highly valued relationship building. She noted, "This is pivotal to everything! Relationships are everything! People won't remember what you did, but will remember how you made them feel. I think that's the piece that makes a difference in people's lives. And that, whether it's teachers or kids, pushes them to higher standards or higher achievement. If they feel they are valued and supported, and encouraged." Jean noted, "People need to see – be a role model for task and blend efficiency with relationship." She noted, "... I communicate well with staff and follow through because I know that's really important to people."

In the same way, Matthew noted, "Relationships are of the upmost importance – first with kids, then adults, then everything else grows out of that." The most important tenant to his leadership was "treating them as professionals and expecting that they will be professional." Matthew shared that "relationships build trust... relationships first with kids, then adults, then everything else grows out of that."

As both authentic and transformative leaders, principals expressed the importance of having a strong set of values, integrity, and sense of honesty and transparency that served as the foundation of their leadership

As delineated within the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*, authentic leaders adhere to leadership that is morally grounded and based in values reflected through their behaviors. Similarly, transformative leadership is focused on the values and ethics as affective components of the people within the organization.

The principals shared the need for honesty and transparency with staff throughout all of their work, and articulated specific values and a strong sense of integrity that their leadership was based upon. For example, Heather shared the need for “letting people see you for who you are - your successes, as well as your limitations.” That led to the “ability to take on the tougher issues as a school community together.” She noted, “When I work with teachers, they can see my energy and my passion. So I think that kind of gives them that oomph.” “High enthusiasm, open emotions, letting them see that you’re genuine, comfort with the staff,” and generally, “being real.” As an example, Heather shared a particular issue that evolved with a group of veteran staff members, through actions and side conversations, created staff factions that began to impact school culture. “There was this little clique that seem to have developed over the year... I was watching it... And I wanted to make sure that their actions outside did not impact our school culture. And then something significant happened... and it really was factioning [sic], and impacting the culture or school climate at the very least. So I met with them all individually. ... And I said, this is what I’m seeing and just wanted to make sure that you know you’re here to do work and that kind of thing. ... And this is also building trust

with others, because I said I was open when I came in, so I let others know when I make a mistake.” Overall, given the relational trust and openness with staff that had been established, she was able to work with them in a positive and productive way in order to repair the rift created and reintegrate staff.

Marianne noted her leadership “... is founded in honesty, trust and never hidden agendas.” Staff members would describe her as “running a very tight ship but being fair and equitable.” With that in mind, she noted an important point was to facilitate the jobs staff need to do while always acting in “honesty, integrity, and have their backs.” She further noted, “Some people are born leaders and some are learned leaders. I think I’m a learned leader. I think people with born charisma inspire people. So I’m a good manager and, I’m very honest, and I have a lot of integrity, and that goes a long way. I verbalize all the time, about all situations, that honesty is the best policy. That’s what I operate on. Not to be afraid of honesty. When we have hard issues, you need to put the issues on the table in an open and honest way.” Also, “I will always take the honesty is the best policy route. I will never have a hidden agenda, what you see is what you get. ... You can trust that what I say to you is what I feel. And I am not going to go behind your back and try to manipulate something you’ve said because that’s just never going to happen. And they (staff members) trust that over time.”

Beth’s sense of values and ethics are the center of decisions. “I keep to the values of honesty and integrity of process when making decisions,” serving as the guide to “honoring both the children, and the process of making decisions – both long term and in the moment.” She shared, “This was especially true in my early years as teaching principal and principal... and staff factions surfaced and threatened to further divide

staff.” Beth noted, “I organized and pushed thinking about student learning. Our school was innovative and there was strong competition for recruitment... There was a need to shift structure toward a new governance structure... and we had to place the students at the center.” To that end, “We created a school wide mission statement” with a common focus on the best interest of students. She further added, “This allowed the staff to refocus and align their individual and collective goals.” Throughout all of this early work, she shared that staff members’ “trust in common values sustained their work.”

Jean shared, “I value my integrity very highly! ... live what you preach.” Jean shared that when school improvement efforts were being advanced (notably around standards’ and proficiency-based work), those were mitigated by her reliance on her values and integrity about doing what was right for the students. “There were some people in the community that had jumped on that band wagon. And we feel strongly that no, we just needed to keep going. The state of Maine had adopted these, and there were a few detractors, but we need to keep going with it, and kind of had to convince them of that.... When I first came to the district, when I first came to the school, it was embroiled in a huge political issue. The first common core, back when I first came to the district... The staff was operating pretty independently of one another. And the school has people had been going to some workshops and national things. And were really leading and reconfiguring the whole building. But they did not market it too well. And they had a small group of parents that kind of got on board. But the change was too radical. Too quickly and if people didn't like it their attitudes were kind of like well, so we're doing this anyway. And so by the time I got here, a lot of people had pulled their kids out to homeschool them or bring them to other schools. ... It was and we slowly, and some of

the people had to leave. They just had to really find other jobs before we could all get the trust of the community. But that, we worked hard and that changed and I feel we have very strong support now. I just had to restore things that people trusted in education.” Additionally, Jean noted the importance to her of other’s perceptions of her as a leader. “There are some things that I don’t want people ever to be able to say about me – that I didn’t have integrity and that I was lazy. I want people to think I work hard, that I’m real, that I get into the trenches, that they can trust me, and that I support them.”

Matthew noted a leader “needs to be clear on expectations, provide a safe environment, engage parents as part of the process, and take on hard issues.” His belief in “you can be whoever you want to be” has been foundational to his work with the school community. He shared the story, “There was a trailer park right behind the school. So just letting kids know it doesn’t matter if your parent is in jail or your grandparents are raising you, you can still rise above that and, trying to get kids really excited about that - about their learning and working together.” Additionally, “I think everyone can be a leader. This is helpful because when you have more leaders in your school, you can do more for kids.” In the context of tackling tough issues with students and families, Matthew noted, “Again, it’s about relationships. People know and kids know whether you’re honest and upfront, and whether you’re going to do what you say you’re going to do. And take on the hard issues, and support the right issues, and try to involve people in the whole process to be transparent about it.”

As both authentic and transformational leaders, principals shared a deep ethical conviction that “what’s best for kids” was priority and guided all decisions of the school.

The *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership* indicated authentic and transformational leaders both anchored to values and ethics to guide decisions, and were driven with passion and purpose within the context of organizational visions.

The principals expressed the need to put the needs of students first in all decisions of the school. Having children at the center became the lens in advancing school improvement initiatives. Heather noted, “The priority is always the kids. This is the lens and filter to pass all decisions and mandates through and by.”

Marianne described anchoring to the “organization and doing what is right for students.” She noted, “I see myself as, as the person to make staff members’ lives easier...that's my constant goal. I'm not out there making that difference for kids anymore. They are, and so my job is to do everything I can to, to make that better for them.... To be their advocate and to make it better for them...And that comes down to, of course, the very best thing is serving kids... Ultimately, the kids can't serve themselves. It's got to come from the people that are out there... they become an extension of your surrounding their world, and creating and advocating for their world. They become an extension of you... If I get a well-educated great educator who nurtures kids in a classroom, then kids are going to get nurtured and well educated.”

Beth noted, “The number one priority is the kids. We are public servants and employees, and we are a reflection of our community.” Within that context, her sense of ethics led her to keep honoring them and making decisions in the moment. “You make decisions in the moment every single day and you’re dealing with human beings. And

sometimes, it's very, very hard. At their best, sometimes at their worst, at their most difficult and most vulnerable." Ultimately, "What's best for kids is most important!"

Jean noted the "kids as priority... Staff members work together constantly to make sure that all kid's needs are being met... That has been the "absolute priority of the school and all of its functions."

For Matthew, "If you can make an impact on the most disadvantaged communities. . . and then it's about relationship building. And then, once you have that trust built, you can go far with that." He noted, "It's hard if and when you have parents that aren't parenting... (and to explain and be clear with the parent that) these are the skills that your son or daughter is going to need to have. It begins with us creating a safe environment, but they need to be here every day. And then, if they're here everyday, I'm going to guarantee that your son or daughter is going to do well academically. If they can't and if they're not here or they're not behaving, then I need your help to be a part of this process." If not, he noted, "the school needs to do whatever necessary to work with (state) agencies to engage the child."

Sustaining Forces and Balancing Leadership Demands

As authentic and transformational leaders, principals gained satisfaction and were sustained by their work with staff, students and parents.

Within the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*, authentic and transformational leadership characteristics manifested, as principals were driven by a sense of passion and purpose, compassion and heart, and engaged transformative processes through focusing on charismatic and affective aspects.

As both authentic and transformative leaders, principals noted that their work with school staff members, students, parents, and the greater school community led to their satisfaction as leaders. Additionally, challenges that came with the job brought energy and purpose to their roles as leaders, and their abilities to influence and effect greater changes beyond themselves. That sense of renewed energy bolstered their ability to tackle the tough challenges inherent in school improvement work.

To exemplify this, Heather noted “transfers of energy with the give and take of learning and professional development... I have to be passionate and love the job... And I've always said that when I lose that, I'll have to leave. Because I can't see myself being one of those people who stays in a job where it's like, I've got to get up and go to work today... I love what I do. I love the kids. I enjoy. I draw from that coaching experience... When I work with teachers, and they can see my energy and my passion. So I think that kind of gives them that oomph... You know, they (new teachers) had energy that they gave them, and then the veteran staff was sharing their knowledge and what they had for ideas, and so we all kind of rallied together and supported these new teachers... So it's just. . it's been a power. And I think that's what kind of shifted some of our culture in the past few years is having this... New blood here with lots of energy, new ideas, a willingness to learn. And they just want to soak everything up as much as possible. And then you have these veteran staff who kind of inadvertently step up their game... When they see these new people wanting to learn, they want to do the same as well.” Those proved to be key sustaining forces that brought her satisfaction as a leader.

Marianne shared that “Always most satisfying for me is working, is working with the kids and just seeing the results of all the workshops we go to, all the training, all the

meetings we have. All the IEPs we have, all the student response teams for at-risk kids, all the work we do... When I go in for my walk-throughs and learning walks with, and I see what they're getting and the kids are thriving and they're empowered young learners, that just feeds me. So if I'm having a stressful day, I will very often drop everything and just go visit class."

Beth noted never wanting to get complacent. That was exemplified as she explained, "But then there's also a piece of me who, even when I was teaching, wanted to try different grade levels. I want to do different things. And it just seemed to me to be a natural progression. When I went back to school, I felt like I'd been the team leader ... and it (administration) felt like something I could do well." Beth notes that most satisfying are the "relationships with kids, staff and connections to the school." Satisfaction comes from an "inherent belief in the work" and knowledge that the school is "moving in the right direction and changes are in the best interest of kids." The need to always grow sustained Beth, as she noted, "What I know about myself is I don't want to get complacent about anything and this environment has not allowed me to do that, and I want to see it through." As far as most rewarding, "On a day-to-day basis, it would be the relationships I have with students and the relationships I have with teachers, and I often just feel incredibly proud. And watching their interactions as an entire school."

Jean shared that "kids sustain my interest and I like working with staff." Most satisfying was "when the kids do well, our celebrations, and pride in learning... I just really like children and working with children." Additionally, she noted, "When people feel comfortable with our school, trust us, feel like we're helping their children – that's really rewarding. And we get a lot of those kinds of comments here, which is nice."

From new families when they move in and they say, ‘Oh, my child loves it here or you know, we really like all the things that you do for the kids,’ and the special activities and projects which are done by the PTO, when I work closely with them.”

Jean also shared the satisfactions that come in work within the school. “When kids do well on a test or something – those are the moments when you think, yeah, this is all worthwhile, and this is why I went into this profession. That’s when they can really be proud of themselves. I liked teaching, but I like administration better. I don’t have the connection with kids I did as a teacher, but I have the big picture. I like that and I like working with adults. I like setting goals and working together to achieve them. I love the staff development piece of my job planning. I’ve always felt it’s a privilege to work in education and that I’m lucky to be here.”

Matthew noted, “Working with staff and students motivates me!” Relative to his passion for creating teams to work on behalf of the students, he shared, “Everyone is working together” in the team approach – “administrators, kids, parents and teachers.”

As transformational leaders, principals were energized by interactions with students and staff through new initiatives.

Within the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*, it was noted that as transformational leaders, principals facilitated transformative processes through focus on charismatic and affective elements within the organization.

Heather noted this in saying, “Kids motivate me!” She noted, “Coaching experiences with staff, such as with literacy initiatives, result in a lot of energy transfer... people get really excited about the work they are doing!” Another example of the energizing effect was noted in the growth within classroom achievement. “I get excited

when I see staff using data to increase student achievement!” Additionally, Heather shared, “I love the energy and shift in attitudes.”

Marianne noted, “The most satisfying part is the kids... The results of all of the efforts... They are thriving and empowered... During a stressful day, that is what I look to.” She shared, “I love the curriculum and children’s growth!”

Beth offered, “On your worst day, go to the best classroom and remember why you are here.” On a daily basis, she noted, “it’s the relationships with kids, staff and connections to the school.” In the bigger picture, “moving in the right direction (with staff initiatives) and knowing that changes are in the best interest of kids...” serve to energize. Seeing new initiatives advance because there is an “inherent belief in the work” and hanging onto those things valued, such as extensive creative arts, offered sustainability, as noted, “Another piece of the academic, though, are the areas of arts, art and music... I have worked incredibly hard to preserve those. Certainly, along with push from my staff. But it hasn’t been easy... and so we have a huge music and art program here... They are very big here! And we try hard to make sure that particularly those kids (who struggle academically) have the opportunity to shine.” Community support served as an energizer, as she shared, “There has been a pretty strong community connection! The community loves it! And that pulls us right in.”

For Jean, “Families feel comfortable with and trust the school... that is rewarding... Families trust us.” She shared that most satisfying was “when the kids do well and take pride in their learning. The community is very proud as well!”

Additionally, Jean noted the her enjoyment of working with staff, “I like administration

better. I'm able to see the big picture and work with adults in a different capacity... Working with the staff in setting goals and professional development is powerful."

Matthew shared the energy around new challenges, as he noted, "Every year is a different challenge and no matter what, the lens to use is student performance... the challenge of that is that more people are looking at achievement... That achievement that people are, certainly the teachers are, feeling more pressure, and administration more pressured by the results – I don't think it's a bad thing - it's just shifting the paradigm more and toward greater accountability and end results." Matthew's work as a reflective practitioner has been particularly energizing, as he received a special district leadership award citing his data work with staff in their teaching practices. "When I first came to the district in 2009, I was just coming in and feeling this is heavy work. Trying to get the right staff on. So when I won that award in the district, it felt like I was moving in the right direction. I knew I was. I knew it was heavy, but that was nice to be recognized by your peers. Every year the staff and buildings in the district can be recognized. And there was a leadership award and then there's a teacher award and then there's a support staff award. They recognize me on my data work. Just trying to make sure we always keep the data out front and we are looking at it. Teaching practices and if we are doing what we should be doing. It's on reflective practice."

Those findings have offered insights to the principal participants as authentic and transformational leaders whose evolutions have been shaped by their early teaching and leadership experiences. Principals' collaborative, shared leadership was based solidly in the importance of relationships, their sense of values and integrity, as well as intrinsic beliefs in students at the center of their work. Ongoing work with their school

communities served as powerful energizers, and sustained their satisfaction and work as school leaders. All of that given, principals noted consistent and important themes of finding balance between competing leadership demands, which is explored next.

As authentic leaders, collegial supports were important to help principals stay grounded.

The *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership* noted that authentic leaders integrate their lives by staying grounded.

Heather shared that “I have close collegial relationships with fellow principals as well as my superintendent and assistant superintendent... (those) offer a (necessary) support team.” Marianne noted, “When I need counsel or to get help with decisions, I go to my assistant principal and close colleagues on the administrative team. My curriculum director is a close colleague.” For support, Beth sought the counsel of “close colleagues and key staff members,” and she “understands the boundaries necessary and keeps those in check.” Jean noted that because of her responsibilities spread across three distinct rural schools, “I don’t have the opportunity to see my administrative team frequently.” For Jean, supports have come in closer, “building-based relationships, such as my secretary,” with whom she has “built a relationship of over 20 years.” Jean also shared, “I trust in the folks in place... I have a very closely bonded, veteran staff.” Matthew shared, “I get feedback from through yearly surveys and conversations with staff and parents... I seek the advice of trusted administrative colleagues.”

Maintaining balance between their personal and professional lives was important to principals’ success as leaders, but also proved to be challenging.

Within the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*, authentic leaders were noted to integrate their lives by maintaining a sense of balance, as well as consistency and self-discipline.

Heather noted the importance of balance between her personal and professional life as she shared, “I don’t come to work on weekends and in fact, I encourage staff members to do the same... I separate work from home... I am learning to delegate many responsibilities to others.” Heather noted, “learning to balance work and personal life has been key; It is important to close the doors on weekends and leave school behind in order to be fresh when you begin again”

Marianne shared the importance of balance between her personal and professional lives by noting, “I enjoy hiking, exercise, meditation, and yoga, and staying active in the community and with church... I have great friends and family outside of my professional responsibilities... I think what’s crucial is to have a way to keep the balance. I have told family and friends that from 5 a.m. Monday to 5 p.m. Friday, the district owns me. So, it’s purposefully trying to stay balanced. I think new aspiring principals really need to know (and) really need to have a plan for how you are going to get away from it because the job can consume you.” Additionally, “In terms of sustaining myself as a leader, it is important to achieve balance in my professional and personal life.” Marianne shared that balance is achieved by maintained by “clear boundaries between school and home and life.” She noted that, “I live and work in the community, so finding balance is very important... The church community is very strong in my life.” Along with this, Marianne noted, “As a leader, you can’t be friends with employees. There have to be boundaries and strong relationships because of these.”

Beth shared, “The biggest mistake leaders make is trying to do it all and not having balance in life.” Sound advice was to “give personal balance and model this for others.” She also noted, “I think it’s so important to have other things in your life.... There has to be balance in all aspects of your life.... I depend on friendships and supports outside of school... and creating weekend escapes... I also build in time for physical exercise and recreational activities.”

Jean shared, “I absolutely love my job and unfortunately do not have much time for personal things, even though that is important... My life has always been mostly work. I wouldn’t say I’m good at balancing... When I’m by myself, just thinking and knowing the next day I have to put on a good new face because that’s important. Most days, I love my job and everything goes pretty smoothly, and it’s busy, but busy isn’t bad.”

Matthew noted, “It is important to have a schedule and build time in the day. Drawing boundaries between work and personal time can sometimes be a struggle.” Additionally, he shared, “Athletic and recreational activities have always been important to me... This is a goal that I consistently need to return to... You need to build in the space and time for these things!”

Administrators shared that maintaining the balance between their personal and professional lives was also a major challenge. Heather shared that “Keeping a balance between (and separating) personal life and work ... learning to delegate... are major and constant challenges.” Marianne noted, “The balance between personal and professional aspects of my life has been difficult to maintain at times.” Matthew noted this tension by offering, “I think my challenge is to try to keep a balance for myself and my family. I

think I still struggle with that. The amount of time and hours in this job – you could spend all day every day around the clock throughout the year. You’ve got to take of your relationships, your body and yourself.”

As authentic and transformational leaders, principals were challenged by external demands, accountability pressures, and helping staff think differently about their work.

As delineated previously within the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*, authentic and transformational leaders adhere to adapting to the needs and motives of their followers, especially in light of transforming an organization, as well as empowering others to lead. Good school leaders also identify challenges: contextual and external factors that impact teaching/learning, and effectiveness.

Principals shared common challenges in terms of new accountability demands and helping staff think differently about their work, particularly in getting staff to think differently about initiatives in an open, more growth-oriented mindset. For example, Heather noted, “Most challenging is the paperwork, especially with new hires, and the accountability aspect of keeping documenting their progress.” Additionally, “getting folks engaged in new ways of working together in learning teams has been a growth process.”

Marianne noted, “I love working on and I love watching the children thrive as a result of what people have planned, but way too much time is tied up in people issues. I would like to say that I’m an educational leader, but I think that’s only about 40 percent of my time. This is because I spend so much time on management tasks and facilitating people issues so they don’t become large problems.”

For Beth, most challenging are the “politics and the greater political climate.” Additionally, “maintaining the balance between love of learning versus external demands (such as student and teacher accountabilities, new assessments, and other initiatives) is often difficult.”

Jean note, “I am collaborative and supportive, but challenges arise when a person is not making the grade, and supports are needed when things are not okay.” She shared that the key to working through this type of challenge was to “...think about kids as a priority and anchor to something bigger than yourself.” Most challenging for Jean has been “working with children a high-poverty situation, family dysfunction, mental health issues, and other (socioeconomic) factors...”

Matthew shared, “There are challenges in terms of administrative and staff pressures due to increased accountability demands. Additionally, it has been hard to get parent engagement... there have been numerous foster situations, and other social difficulties.” He noted, “Working with disadvantaged kids has been a priority throughout my career, and building relationships across all levels form help in this difficult work... My job is to help staff see situations and their roles in new ways, and provide the service supports necessary to assist children in need.”

As both authentic and transformational leaders, principals were influential in mitigating challenges resulting from external accountability demands, political and social forces.

Within the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*, it was noted that authentic and transformational leaders adapt to the needs and motives of their followers in advancing an organizational vision through supportive actions. Additionally,

good school leaders have been shown to be influential in mitigating public policy and political forces that impact school leadership.

Dramatic influences of public policy and politics have come in the form of external mandates intended to improve teaching and learning, as demonstrated by student achievement scores. Principals played a key role in both mitigating major challenges that come as a result of such mandates, but also in integrating the necessary demands into the fabric of the school frameworks. That has been largely achieved by the development of internal systems necessary to support external demands such as the Common Core State Standards, Proficiency Based Learning, Smarter Balanced Assessment Coalition Maine Educational Assessment, and new Educator and Administrator Effectiveness Systems. In reflection, principals shared that successful school improvement depends on several factors: focusing on the best interests of students; engaging the work in a positive, straightforward manner; keeping balance with the various political forces of the community; and growing new school cultures that are able to adapt to increased accountability mandates.

Heather shared, “The principal plays in a big role in managing the impact of policy mandates and political influences on the staff.” Relative to the influences of policy and politics, Heather noted, “It is best to roll with it... always use as the filter or lens, the students and instruction.” She summed it up nicely in the following context, “You know, we understand where they’re coming from, but one of the things that we’ve tried to put our own little twist with it, is that it’s all about students and instruction. So, if we’re being told we have to do this, then how can we make it so that way it’s meaningful for the staff and the kids? So that way, it’s not just one more thing, and they’re going to

end up changing it again. Regardless of whether that happened, we want to make sure that it's for students and staff."

Marianne shared, "Policy influences have driven the direction of the school." As principal, she noted, "It is important to support the superintendent and advance necessary state and federal mandates... As a leader, you need to put a positive spin on it. Avoid manipulation, political maneuvering, hidden agendas, and most of all, games." A constant challenge for Marianne was "building that thick skin" that allows a leader not to personalize "staff reactions that are not always positive."

Beth noted the need to "stay focused on the students and keep the political climate out of the schools," as her school district was struggling to stay together as a regional school unit. "The balance between politics and policy demands are always present. The key is to avoid panic but be realistic."

Jean noted, "It is essential to understand and work with community politics about this." She shared, "When Common Core State Standards first came to the school, there was a potential conflict, as it was not marketed well... The change was too radical, and happened too quickly... some people had to leave or find new jobs." She noted, "They just had to really find other jobs before we could get all the trust of the community. But we worked hard and that changed, and I feel that we have very, very strong support in the community now."

Matthew shared, "The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) has been the biggest political influence." Within that context, he noted the importance of "staying involved, bolstering more parent support, and attending monthly PTO meetings" as crucial ways to interface with external demand brought on by policy and politics. Additionally, he

shared, “You need to stay current with social media... we have a Facebook pages for both of my schools... this is very important as a current means of communication and keeping the community in touch with the work of the school.”

Time was the greatest organizational challenge in principals’ work as school leaders.

As both authentic and transformational leaders within the schools’ work to advance teaching and learning, principals shared that time to work together presented as both a benefit and challenge. Leadership and learning teams valued their collegial interactions, but always were in need of more time. Heather shared, “Big challenges result with lack of time... the best laid plans don’t always happen.” Marianne shared, “The challenges always are that there is not enough team time.” Beth noted, “There is never enough time to get all of the work done that we need to do.” For Jean, “Finding enough time is the greatest challenge (organizationally), and not being in the school at all times,” given that she is administrator of three small schools within the district. “I think the only thing is not being here and having to make sure that everything is in place to function and move smoothly without a full-time principal.” For Matthew, the greatest challenge organizationally was “trying to find enough time to do the individual school (building-level) work (such as restorative practices and PLCs), as the district takes all of the professional development days.”

In summary, balancing various leadership demands was an important aspect of the selected principals’ leadership. As authentic leaders, principals believed in the strength of collegial supports to help them stay grounded. Maintaining balance between their personal lives and professional work was both important and challenging. As both

authentic and transformational leaders, principals were challenged by new accountability demands and pressures, and helping staff think differently about their work. They worked hard to mitigate the major challenges resulting from external accountability demands, as well as political and social forces. Time presented as the greatest organizational challenge.

Leadership and Change

As transformational leaders, principals were influential in understanding and working with staff through change processes.

As delineated previously within the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*, transformational leaders adapt to the needs and motives of their followers, and act as change agents. Additionally, good leaders understand the schools evolution as an improving school, insight around the change process, and the role of administration in school improving efforts.

As transformational leaders, principals understood and worked closely with staff through change processes. They also realized the importance of taking time to build internal capacities to handle challenges during times of change.

Heather noted, “Veteran staff members have a more difficult time with the change process... When I first came in, I didn’t want to change up too much... Developing a Continuous Improvement Priority School Plan helped to mobilize efforts and move things along... this gave us a real task to advance the work and help staff ... we had to all adapt a growth mindset.”

Relative to change, Marianne said “Learning needs to occur in many different ways... needs to be differentiated. When you go too fast, you need to reframe your

thinking and the task, especially with something new... Change is huge for people. It takes time. You can't just make a change and expect people to jump into it." In terms of lessons learned, she added, "Be careful you don't go too fast!"

Beth noted, "The school is definitely open to evolving and works within a growth mindset... A change mindset can be both negative and positive and put people off balance. Being mindful of this is important. We are all responsible for all kids."

Relative to change, Jean shared, "People need to know in pieces... Try out before it counts." She stressed the importance of pilot programs to "work out the bugs and gain input." As administrator, she noted the importance of "needing to support staff during implementation, understanding that change is hard, and embracing change versus the status quo." Further, "You also need to have the ability to work with different groups and understand that staff members are in different stages in their careers and have different life patterns that impact their ability to work with change... Trust in leadership has been so important to this work... If I say we'll be okay, then we'll be ok." Jean noted, "We know change is hard. I've learned in working with people that some people embrace change, and they ride on the next bandwagon and they're gone. And then there are the people that will go along with it, but a little slower, (with the mindset) show us why, convince us that this is the right thing to do, and then there's the people that drag their heels and hope it'll go away. You have to work with all those different groups, and different people who are in different stages of their careers. So you've got to recognize that and understand what other things are impacting people's lives."

Matthew noted the importance of "timing (in terms of) having discussions with staff and understanding how to support them.... Building in time and resources to assist

them is so important... We have district grade-level meetings, time with early release days, and staff professional development offerings (a new professional development model) to help them.” He noted, “Educators have been able to build their capacity to work with school improvement initiatives.” Matthew shared the importance of “knowing who’s getting it? (and) How do you ignite the passion? What are you doing with those that don’t get it?”

As transformational leaders, principals perceived the importance of taking time and building capacity during times of change.

The *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership* indicated that transformational leaders focus on their roles within the change process to create an organizational vision as well as serving as change agents

As transformational leaders, principals emphasized that a key learning was to take the time to build the necessary internal capacity to handle challenges and change. In conjunction with schools’ evolutions as improving schools under their leadership, principals noted the importance of having insight of the change process in advancing new initiatives, as well as strategically guiding staff through it, to build capacity for school improvements.

Heather shared, “the job of leadership is to build a capacity within the staff and to inspire them to do their best within the district vision.” She noted, “The biggest mistake leaders make is going into it with a preset, administrative agenda... It is important to make it about us and not about me.” Heather offered, “You have to understand the culture and climate... and how to get funding and support for the hard work you are doing.”

Marianne shared, “An important lesson learned has been to build capacity!” She exemplified that in sharing, “I went about making change in too much of a forceful way; instead of building capacity, or building believers, I just went after it as if this is what we have to do and this is where we have to go. I don’t think I had a strong enough vision of where we were going.” Furthermore, “New systems of teacher evaluation, student assessments, and proficiency-based education have created the need for this change...The biggest mistake leaders make is moving too fast... Not knowing their audience and predicting the reaction ahead of time. Start with those that are enthusiastic (for example, a new literacy night or STEM night), and then, once you have over half the staff, it is a tipping point and you have a critical mass. In making changes, build believers.” She shared, “Sometimes there is not enough capacity, and the leader must build a thick skin.”

Marianne offered yet another example of this, as she shared “Build capacity, and the way I have tried to build capacity is to start with a few people that I know are going to be aligned with what I'm doing. I know, philosophically that this is going to excite them, so I need to start with three people right here and say this is what I'd like to do, what do you think? And so those three people may help me do this, I'd like to try something, I'd like it to be optional to everybody else, I'd just like to try something. Here is an example we had, literacy night....Some people actually came to me and asked if we could do it. I said, yep. Start slow just be a family literacy...Many people don't like to do anything beyond the school day. And they stick to the contract and they, and I said, you need to make it optional. You need to, you know. Well, what if we don't get enough people? Then we don't get enough people....Long story short, we had two literacy nights, a math night and last year, and we had our first, we had a STEM night last night. Little by little,

the idea and excitement caught on... You build a critical mass and then it tips, and I'm a firm believer in that, but you, you have to start with some initial risk takers or believers.”

Beth shared, “Success has come from moving the school toward a greater capacity for teaching and learning, with continued opportunities for growth.” She noted the importance of “trying to let go and not do it all – to let things happen and trust the process... Surround yourself with people you trust to follow through... you don’t have to do everything for everyone. Trust the people around you. Surround yourself with good people and the right people for the job.” Additionally, she offered, “You need to put naysayers in positions of power and influence.”

Jean noted, “Leaders often make mistakes in being too dictatorial and unengaged. All together, things can be accomplished well than individually. Otherwise, the institution is missing benefits with talent and unhappiness results from non-commitment and non-caring.”

Matthew noted, “Leaders often move too fast without cultivating staff, provide correct focus and advance with the wrong approach.” He offered advice to others, “Slow down to go fast. You’ve got to really make sure that you know you have the right data you are talking about, you have the right supports in place for the student, and then, building the relationships and focus attention around that.”

In summary, as transformational leaders, principals shared the importance of understanding the change process and their influential role in advancing new initiatives as they worked with staff through the change process. When implementing change, several points surfaced as key aspects to be cognizant of, relative to a principal’s leadership influence. Sensitivity to staff needs around the change process, and differentiating for

those needs, were noted to be necessary for leadership effectiveness. Appropriate pacing and promoting “growth mindsets” among staff led to deeper understandings and acceptance. Understanding impacts and offering internal supports were key actions that leaders took. Trust in leadership was critical to successful change. Lastly, principals often perceived their role as strategically guiding purposeful, systemic change by engaging followers through transformations of minds and hearts, thus building greater capacities for change. Those key ideas are exemplified by the principals’ responses.

Overall, a primary finding was that principals of the selected improving schools in Maine shared characteristics of authentic and transformational leaders. Those were evidenced in three primary categories: leadership style and approach; sustaining forces and balancing leadership demands; and leadership and change.

In terms of leadership style and approach, principals’ evolutions as leaders were shaped by early influences as they moved through definitive role transitions from colleagues to supervisors. They espoused shared leadership manifested in collaborative work with staff, and embodied strong senses of values, integrity, honesty and transparency – believing in the power of relationships, communication, and “doing what’s best for kids.”

In terms of sustaining forces and balancing leadership demands, principals gained satisfaction and were energized by work with staff, students and other constituents, as they worked through new initiatives. Collegial supports were important, as well as maintaining balance between their personal and professional lives. Pressures of new accountability demands were shared and mitigated by the leaders.

Lastly, principals understood the process of change, and the importance of taking time to build necessary internal capacities to handle new challenges that emerged.

Principal Leadership and Aspects of School Climate and Culture

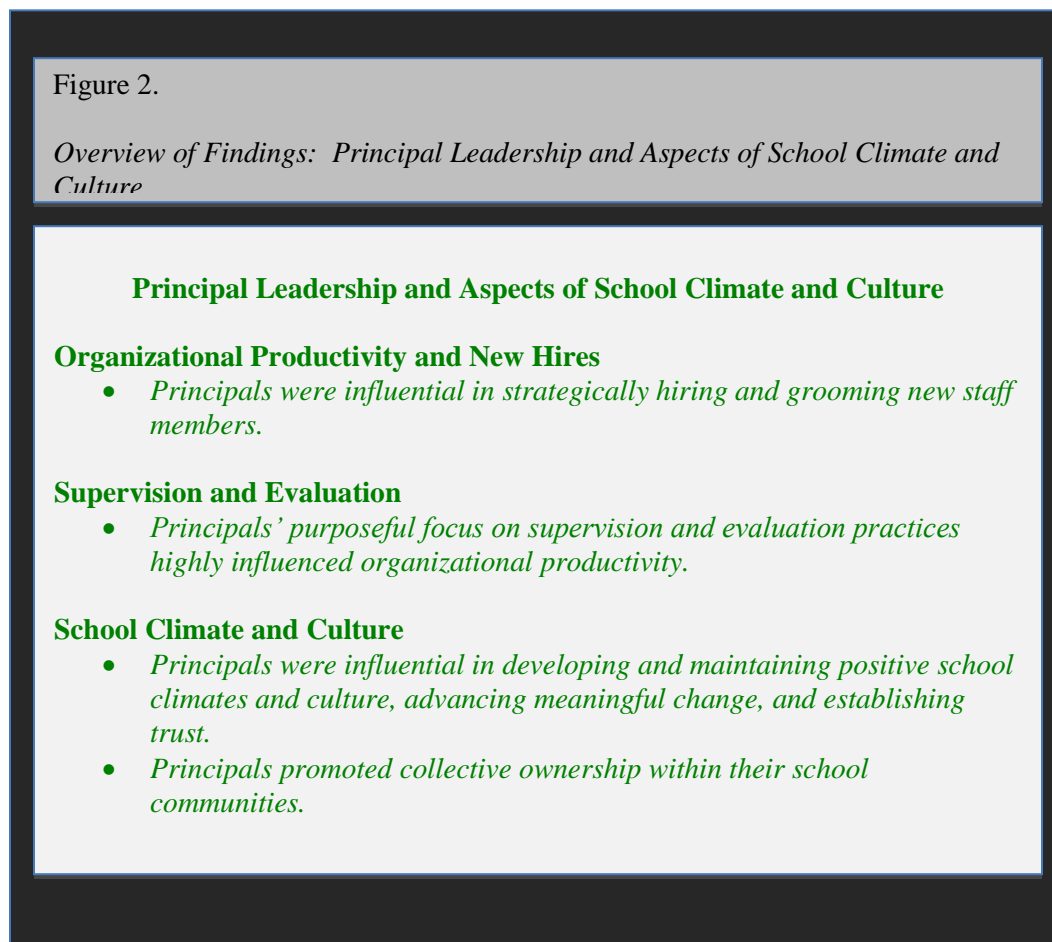
In referring to the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*, it was noted the principals' perception of the relationship between their leadership and their schools' climate and culture is both intricate and broad based – focused on organizational benefits to staff, students, and the school, as well as the larger organizational commitment and school culture. In that way, a principal perceives him- or herself as an instructional leader and that his or her leadership matters (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2012), that his or her experience influences school outcomes and student achievement (Coelli & Green, 2012), and that he or she is able to identify challenges, contextual and external factors that impact teaching and learning, and his or her effectiveness (Lavy, 2008; Billger, 2007 / Hallinger & Heck, 1998 / Branch, et al. 2012)

Additionally, a principal may perceive him- or herself as a charismatic leader (DeGroot, Kiker,P & Cross, 2000), and as having an influence on student achievement, teacher turnover, and organizational productivity (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2012); school organizational aspects in terms of value-added time devoted to specific tasks (Horng, 2009); management of activities advancing school outcomes (Horng, Klasik & Loeb, 2009); group performance dynamics and job satisfaction (Bhatti, Shaikh, Hashmi, & Shaikh, 2012); and overall school improvement efforts and specific actions linked to his or her effectiveness (Anderson, 2005) and skills (Dixon & Gilley, 2008).

In exploring findings related to the selected principals' leadership and aspects of the larger school climate and culture in improving schools, three distinct categories emerged, exemplifying the characteristics of good principal leadership demonstrated by the literature. Those focused on organizational productivity and new hires, supervision

and evaluation, and lastly, school climate and culture. They are summarized in Figure 2:

Principal Leadership and Aspects of School Climate and Culture.



Organizational Productivity and New Hires

Principals were influential in strategically hiring and grooming new staff members.

Within the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*, it was noted that good school leaders perceive themselves as having an influence on teacher turnover and organizational productivity.

Principals cited the importance of influencing teacher turnover through strategic hiring practices, and then in intentionally grooming and integrating new staff members into existing school cultures. Hiring new staff, along with careful supervision and

evaluation, surfaced as a most important role of their leadership for myriad reasons. Not only did that positively impact organizational productivity in terms of bringing on new energies, new ideas, and willingness to learn, it was instrumental in advancing school cultures and climate toward enhanced teaching and learning through substantive school improvement efforts. Creating enhanced internal capacities to do that work through purposeful hiring and grooming practices was a consistent theme of the selected principals in improving schools. The following examples help to illustrate those ideas.

Heather noted that she hired more than 50 percent of her staff. “Hiring is most important, as it brings a spike in energy with new teachers and a shifting culture. New blood here brings with it lots of energy, new ideas, a willingness to learn. And they just want to soak everything up as much as possible. And then you have these veteran staff that kind of inadvertently step up their game. As a matter of course, this paves the way for how we do business, and setting the stage for them.” She added. “There is academic growth in classrooms, increases in student achievement data, high energy and enthusiasm, and a shift in attitudes.” Of utmost importance has been to “take care of them and groom them” through a series of strong mentoring interventions. During the first year of hire, Heather noted, “I meet with new staff members once weekly, every two weeks the second year, and once a month during the third year.”

Marianne shared, “An important legacy to leave is that of the principal leader’s opportunity to get new teachers – only bring in the very best! Search and find the best. Only retain the best.” Within that context, “Hold teachers to high expectations.” Marianne noted, “One of the most important things a principal leader can do is hire the right people.” In her tenure, she has hired more than 60 percent of her staff. “They are

dynamite teachers with great attitudes!” and “People issues now are far less, and cultural issues are more an anomaly than the usual.” Additionally, she noted, “I only seek and find the best and only retain the best. And then I hold teachers, this district holds everybody to very high expectations and I, in turn, hold the teachers to very high expectations. And some of those unbelievable teachers that are in our building now have come here because they’ve heard that reputation, and they like that challenge.”

Beth noted, “Opportunities to hire amazing teachers and some retirement... (I have) hired strong/amazing people... over 50 percent of the staff.” Beth shared, “These folks have added to the energy and enthusiasm of the school culture and are leadership minded.” Additionally, “You have to work closely with them to mentor and integrate them into the staff culture.” She explained, “People like it here... Once you are part of (our) school, you don't leave.”

Jean worked with a veteran staff, all of who have been together for very long time, and she has hired more than half of them. “They work well together, know each other well, and are incredibly bonded.” As principal leader, Jean noted, “My role is structuring support and facilitating staff needs... They are the front lines and I must be both an advocate, and in the trenches with them doing the work of the district that is required of them.”

Matthew hired about 50 percent of his staff. He noted, “My most important priority has been building a team and establishing strong relationships with staff - treating them as professionals and expect they will be professional.” He shared that “Mentoring new staff has been a key priority in their beginning years with the school.”

Supervision and Evaluation

In terms of supervision and evaluation, leadership influence emerged as a predominant theme relative to principals' practices in those areas and organizational productivity.

Principals' purposeful focus on supervision and evaluation practices highly influenced organizational productivity.

The *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership* indicated good school leaders perceive themselves as having influence on school organizational aspects in terms of value-added time devoted to specific tasks, performance dynamics, and job satisfaction, as well as school improvement efforts and specific actions linked to his or her effectiveness.

Principals shared that strategically focusing on supervision and evaluation practices served as a key leadership influence on organizational productivity. Principals' attention to supervision and evaluation was a top priority in advancing school goals and quality professional development for staff members. Communication and continued conversations throughout deliberative evaluation processes led to greater staff ownership and growth. In that regard, principals played dual roles as coaches and evaluators, and perceived their influence on supervision and evaluation as directly linked to staff effectiveness, efficiency, and positive organizational outcomes for student achievement and growth. The following examples help to illustrate those ideas.

Heather shared, "Balancing supervision and evaluation demands requires significant organization, efficiency and communication." She noted further, "My influence as a leader is mostly in terms of setting up frameworks to deal with the logistics" necessary in maximizing the quality of her staff. "Early entry conferences are

important in getting staff feedback and goal setting... Pre-conferences, observations and post conferences are all part of the (supervision) process... We use the three to five minute walk-through process... It is very organized and teachers look for it.” Based on the Kim Marshall Model, she noted, “Probationary summaries are due in October and March, and conducted once for continuing contact in year three along with informal walk-throughs.” Visibility through classroom observations was important for both probationary and continuing contract staff. “With new staff, my goal, it’s a very lofty goal, but I try to get in there on a weekly basis, if not bi-weekly, just so that I can get a sense of how they’re doing, what do they need from me for supports, and as well as providing them with feedback.” With continuing contract staff, formal observations were done once in year three, but Heather noted, “I do an informal and I type that up. I’m also doing walk-throughs in their classrooms as well. Ideally, I try to get in their classrooms on a monthly basis as well.”

Marianne noted, “The second biggest priority of school administrators (after hiring) is to have a comprehensive supervision and evaluation system.... I manage the logistics and set the frameworks in place to make sure we have a high functioning staff.” She shared the importance of communication in the process, noting, “We start with goal setting, have midyear check-ins, and finally, wrap-up meetings in May.” Marianne noted, “Evaluations are conducted on all teachers. We use iPad applications and ‘three minute’ walk-throughs during the observation phase. All teachers have this twice a month by each administrator for a total of 10-12 times a year.... We follow up immediately with those with concerns.” Supervision and evaluation with probationary teachers was noted to be especially critical. “Continuing contract teachers also set their own goals.” Marianne

shared, “Staff responses have changed with this new system of mini-observations and check-ins... it began first as dialogue and has now become evaluation... it offers a true portrait and is authentic... offers supports (that are) needed for improvement plans and supports with Kudos.... Sometimes, longer observations are needed.” Marianne noted, “Trust in the process!”

Beth described the role of supervision and evaluation, and how implementation of a new district-wide evaluation system was to be managed by the principal at the building level. In the second year of her school district’s pilot system, “there are 6-8 mini observations with immediate feedback through much-appreciated post observation conversations... A small percentage of staff struggle and require stronger management... Supervising difficult teachers is the hardest part and may require tough conversations with potential action plans.”

Jean shared, “My work with supervision and evaluation of staff members is critical to our school functioning... it makes us accountable.” She shared, “Evaluation of staff members occurs on a two-year cycle with portfolio development, based on the National Board of Teacher Standards... Our focus is on spring-to-spring student growth measured by NWEA literacy and math targets.... Observations count as 50 percent of the evaluation summary.” Additionally, “In our district, there is a system of performance-based pay.” She noted, “The teacher evaluation process has been more on identifying areas for improvement and helping people develop, develop growth plans, and there is a lot more emphasis on that now (student accountability.) We are a TIF3 (Teacher Incentive Fund Grant) School, so we’re in good shape to be on target and on deadline (with the new state Educator Effectiveness System requirements). So, it gave us the

money and chance to do pieces at a time so that we didn't just throw the whole thing at people at one time. But there's nervousness and apprehension because there's a lot more that they have to do." Her role in managing the logistics of the system has been critical to its success.

Matthew noted that supervision and evaluation in his district is based in performance growth models using the Danielson and transitioning to the Marzano rubrics. "Components included multiple formal administrative and peer observations, self-assessments and walk-throughs... One of the things I'm excited about is our observations – we're looking at Marzano's work and his rubrics, and the IObservations to do the walkthroughs, but also to provide professional growth and feedback. We're doing a lot of work and I think that's the right work to do. And then we talk about how we can, as staff, go into each other's classroom and give feedback on that, because it's all about research-based best teaching."

In summary, principals noted strategic practices in the areas of ongoing supervision and evaluation with staff members were critical to their work in building improving schools. Those were framed in the context of enhancing organizational productivity, especially in terms of individual and collective accountability and growth toward increased student achievement.

School Climate and Culture

In referring to the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*, the literature noted that a principal might perceive his or her actions as influential in developing and working in concert with the school's culture and climate. In that way, principals describe actions and leadership structures that he or she has developed that influence staff commitment; support principal leadership; influence school culture and climate; create positive perceptions of the leadership team; (Hulpia, Devos & VanKeer, 2011), and enhance teacher capacity (Kaniuka, 2012). Additionally, principals may identify ways in which to establish staff trust, shared purpose, mutual goals, and power sharing to strengthen school culture (Angelle, 2010).

In terms of school climate and culture, two themes emerged from the participants in this study regarding leadership influence in developing and maintaining positive school climates and cultures, as well as promoting collective school mindsets.

Principals were influential in developing and maintaining positive school climates and culture, advancing meaningful change, and establishing trust.

Heather shared, "The climate and culture at this school has changed over the years... When I first arrived, it was disaggregated and divided into factions or cliques, more adult focused than on students and working together as a staff." Heather noted that she "learned to delegate to staff members and team leaders the planning of meaningful and authentic professional development. When introducing new initiatives, it is important to have them from the ground up. (They are) more effective if teachers come up with them and create them as part of their own needs versus administratively placed." She stressed that, "Trust in leadership is so important." Principal influences existed mainly

around building a sense of trust through having an “open door,” listening, responding, and reacting as appropriate and necessary. Heather shared, “Checking in with staff members allows me to keep a connection to the climate of the school... Upstairs and downstairs, I have pulse checks,” and veteran staff members offered useful insights.

Marianne noted, “The climate and culture is very good! Creating such a culture takes time, energy and persistence, and strategically setting the stage and creating activities to make this happen. There will always be resistance, but perseverance is what keeps the organization moving forward, vision and an inherent belief in the people - that they will do the right thing.” In the early creation stages, Marianne shared, “There were purposeful interventions and activities to bring staff members together ... for example, we administered the Myers Briggs to help us understand each other in different perspectives... We also did a special quilt square activity that helped bring us together as a new staff... (as well as) four-corners reflection, conflict resolution, and helping us to learn about how each other say things.” Although those set the groundwork, Marianne noted the need for an “authentic task to shift the culture for real.” That came in the form of professional development work to “create new standards based reporting procedures, giving the school community a common language.” Marianne noted that currently “the culture runs on its own... Folks talk to each other directly and when conflicts arise, they are dealt with directly and quickly without a lot of games and fanfare.” She noted, “All staff work incredibly hard for the students - that is the primary goal!” Regarding the importance of trust, Marianne noted, “There is an inherent trust in their professional nature and collegiality together.”

To further exemplify this, she shared, “Trust in the principal as leader, and in leadership teams, and each other is the necessary for a successful and productive school culture.” She relayed the story of the geese and the buffalo from a college professor. “When geese fly in formation, they continue until their leader gets tired. At times, the leader will back off or maybe fall off the flock. When this happens, one of the geese goes down to be with the leader on the ground and the rest will continue on. Buffalo see it differently. When their leader falls, they all lay down and fall together, and wait until the leader is better before any action occurs. This is true of leadership in a school as well. There are many days when the staff goes on as if the leader is not even present. That is the mark of a true leader and well functioning school...Trust in each other and trust in leadership!” Additionally, Marianne relayed a situation where a person with a rifle was in the parking lot at the end of the day, and students had to be dismissed separately, apart from normal procedures. No one among the staff or student population knew what was going on but in the whole process of dismissal, and nobody asked a question to anyone. They just did what they needed to do and kept the students safe. Afterwards, they shared that they knew something was going on, but it didn't matter what, their role was “simply to keep the kids safe and secure and protected. And they knew they would be taken care of as well!” Marianne noted, “The best barometer of the school climate and culture is being visible – in the school, at lunch, team meetings and whenever possible.”

Beth observed, “We created a collective vision for our school that helped our school climate and culture.” She noted developing strategic activities over time, “focused on process - using parent input, as well as staff and students.” Taking years to develop, “a change in structure required a change in vision and defining what we valued as a

school community... In March 2012, we worked through it all. What structure will allow us to do what we value? This (process) created a vision to use as a mirror and lens to focus and refocus (an example of that is consistent scheduling).” The result was to create a “climate and culture of learners.” As a barometer to keep touch with the climate of the school, Beth shared, “We use the Marshall model of mini observations... This gives me a pulse on individual teachers and the school as a whole.” She added, “People trust me and share with me as to what’s up or needed.”

Jean’s shared that she is “nurturing an already existing positive school climate and culture.” She noted her “great (very veteran) staff, and the continuity of relationship as important to a building and sustaining a successful school climate and culture... The key to our success is that kids see positive relationships between staff.” Although Jean manages three equal-size elementary schools, each with their own unique cultures and climates, RSA was different in that it “is a very veteran staff that has been together for very long time. They work well together, know each other well and are incredibly bonded.” She noted, “I have worked hard to provide the frameworks and resources needed to allow teachers to focus their efforts on improved teaching and learning.” Jean shared, “One big reason for the success of this positive school climate and culture is that there is an overriding sense of purpose in all of the work they do.... Special activities all have a learning component and there is no ‘down’ time. Instructional time is valued.”

Jean’s belief was “If people are happy, they will do a better job. Climate is important to me because I really feel it, it makes a difference for the children in terms of a learning environment, but also for teachers in terms of a working environment.” She noted, “The shift in our school culture has been an evolution with specially created

activities for our work together... we brought people together in 2010 when the school was built. They tore down the old school and opened the new school and then brought people together, but when two schools closed, there had been RIFs. You already have a situation where you know people have been RIFFed, so there already is a negative sense. They lost their colleagues. Their own jobs are insecure. And then all of a sudden you're being thrown into a new mix." Developing K-5 activities together helped to overcome some challenges, as she noted, "I try to create activities and things that will get together as a group... To try to make people have to work together, and just kind of K-5 activities – not just K-2 activities and 3-5 activities. To create sort of a bonding experience." Additionally, she noted, "Working together on authentic tasks has assisted this transition." Some of those were work with new teacher evaluation systems, Proficiency Based Learning, and other initiatives. As an administrator, Jean viewed her role as asking, "What would help people? Is there a way to support?" and to be "an advocate and their vision." To keep a barometer on the school climate and culture, Jean noted the need to listen to conversations. "Are people upbeat, negative, overwhelmed, or stressed? People feel comfortable to express their needs and have a strong sense of trust in administration and each other."

Matthew noted a "very positive school culture at all levels – between the staff, students, administration, and larger school community." His influence has been to "help to build frameworks to support school initiatives," but also in "guiding the vision and continued focus on students at the center of all of the school's work." Matt noted, "Monthly recognition assemblies are held as visible reminders of the good things that are happening... Students and staff all recognize each other... Students also help build the

larger school vision... Strong relationships are at the heart of all of this work.” Those were exemplified as he shared, “I think it’s a fun place. If you ask kids, they’ll tell you. You know, it’s respectful, it’s responsible, it’s okay to be different – it’s a fun place to learn. We do a lot of celebrations as we do our monthly assemblies. We recognize kids for showing our (school) vision, kids are recognizing staff, staff members are recognizing each other. So I think that community has been built. I think restorative practices have helped. I think parents feel that their kids are supported.”

In summary, the select principals noted their influence in developing and maintaining positive school climates and cultures, advanced through meaningful change, resulting from strategic and purposeful actions, activities, energy, and persistence on their part. Shifts in individual school cultures evolved as a result of purposeful work together and principals often looked to key staff members to keep a “pulse” on the climate and culture of their schools. There was an overriding sense of purpose in the collective efforts of staff. Working within valued, supportive, encouraging and task-oriented school cultures pushed all toward higher achievement. Creating internal school cultures and capacities to do this work meant building strong, enduring relationships. At the heart of the cultures necessary to do the work of school improvement was a sense of trust. Staff members trusted in leadership, leadership teams, and each other, all acted to build capacity and a strong, viable school culture. The value of positive relationships among the staff, witnessed by students, was held to be a critical key to success.

Principals promoted collective ownership within their school communities.

The *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership* noted that good leaders influence how their leadership leads to collective ownership of the school.

Heather noted, “The work in advancing new initiatives has led to a common language... and caused an epiphany and collective ‘aha’ moments.” Under her leadership, “This gave staff members an opportunity to build on instructional practices and engage in increasing ground-up decisions.” Heather shared, “Common reads among staff fostered the development of common language and common understanding... When looking at instructional practice they realize, I want to do this, because then it’s more meaningful.”

Marianne shared, “Working in teams around professional development to improve student academic achievement has fostered a greater sense of collective ownership.” That was exemplified when she said, “professional development work to create new standards based reporting procedures, gave the school community a common language.”

Jean shared, “Staff members look at students as ‘our’ kids and have a collective ownership of students... There is a collective mentality where all staff see themselves responsible for all students. K-2 or rather pre-K to grade two see themselves as equally important in the achievement of grades three through five.” Jean noted, “This sense of shared ownership extends throughout all aspects of the school - discipline, school management, safety, caretaking, activities, and events.” In terms of work, behavior, and manners, “We all speak with a common language... There is great value in younger grades to continue the growth, through a sense of collective ownership and understanding that everyone has a stake.” Jean noted how that was exemplified when accolades came as successes for the school, “National distinctions and receiving two Blue Ribbon School Awards (one for improvement over five years and one for achievement), as well as a Title 1 Distinguished School... These brought together the community, parents, teachers, and

kids, and really helped to validate that our small, rural school could be okay and nationally recognized.”

Matthew shared the importance of a “universal language, which gives kids tools to problem solve.” Matthew noted, “(substantive) improvements have come in the form of restorative practices, development of common language and vocabularies across the school community and building support with relationships being the key in all of these efforts”. Additionally, Matthew noted, “Breaking old habits, such as sharing kids across K-5,” and a “shift in staff perceptions toward a collective and collaborative mindset, (‘These are our kids versus my kids.’)”, has occurred. Matthew noted, “Building a strong sense of team within the school has led to collective ownership of the students at the school by adults.”

In summary, collective ownership and learning to work as teams helped advance successful school climates and cultures in these improving schools. Working together on purposeful, authentic tasks result in increased, collective ownership by staff. Those were enhanced through common language and understandings with regard to academic and affective initiatives and practices.

Principals' Perceptions of Student Success

In referring to the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*, research noted that the principal's perceptions of student success is integral to considering his or her influence on student achievement and advancing a larger climate of success. In that way, a principal expresses his or her influence on improving instruction and student success. The principal perceives him or herself as an instructional leader whose leadership matters (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2012), and whose experience influences school outcomes and student achievement (Coelli & Green, 2012.) The principal also identifies how his or her leadership and leadership structures increase the academic capacity of schools (Robinson, 2008), promote teaching and learning (Mascall, Leithwood, Straus, & Sacks, 2008), and focus attention to professional development, learning, protocols and frameworks (Saunders, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 2009). Lastly, in terms of intervention frameworks and supports, the principal articulates the role of research evidence about school, classroom, and family variables that impact student learning, school improvement, and research design decisions (Leithwood, Patten & Jantzi, 2010.)

In exploring findings related to the principals' perceptions of student success in improving schools, three categories emerged, as exemplifying the characteristics of good principal leadership demonstrated by the literature: teaching, learning, student success and professional development; intervention structures and supports; and finally, the importance of data. Those are summarized in Figure 3: *Principals' Perceptions of Student Success*.

Figure 3.

Overview of Findings: Principals' Perceptions of Student Success

Principals' Perceptions of Student Success

Teaching, Learning, Student Success and Professional Development

- *Principals identified academic success as a priority in their schools.*
- *Principals perceived themselves as instructional leaders whose leadership mattered in influencing student outcomes.*
- *Principals worked to create school cultures where students viewed themselves as learners.*

Intervention Structures and Supports

- *Principals were influential in promoting success by attending to the academic and affective needs of all students.*

Importance of Data

- *Principals were influential in creating strong reliance on data.*

Teaching, Learning, Student Success and Professional Development

Principals identified academic success as a priority in their schools.

Principals, as school leaders, identified as a priority, an intentional focus on the importance of academic aspects of the school as crucial to successful improvement.

Heather noted, “Aside from new hires, my other significant priority is the students, and guiding the success of new initiatives with regard to students, staff and curriculum...The way you invest time is so important.” Marianne noted, “The biggest priority and

influence is safety (physical, social, emotional) first, and then academics...Academically, there has been a substantial effort in the transition to common core state standards that require new thinking, strategies and materials.” For Beth, student achievement has always been priority. “How do we academically support kids at each end... Especially the lowest 25 percent?” has been an academic focus for her. “We now know those kids even better than ever.” For Jean, “student achievement is always priority.” She noted, “Student performance and boosting that is why we’re here. So that has to be the first priority. I think helping transition the schools, the staffs, the kids, and the parents to the new changes.” Matthew stated, “My greatest priority is getting into the classrooms and looking at the daily instruction, and making sure the learning is transparent, and that we are teaching learning targets to kids that need that ... and we are differentiating and collaborating about that.”

Principals perceived themselves as instructional leaders whose leadership mattered in influencing student outcomes.

In terms of teaching, learning and professional development, principals perceived themselves as instructional leaders whose leadership mattered in terms of influencing school outcomes through substantive school improvement efforts. That manifested in intensively focusing on students, keeping student achievement as a central priority, purposeful incorporation of core programming in reading, writing, and math, as well as revisions in instructional practices to differentiate for student needs, all critical to school improvement. Principals also played an important role in creating professional development opportunities for staff to support school improvement efforts. Investing time in professional development, understanding best practices, interventions, and effective

support structures within the school was noted to be critical in promoting school improvement efforts. In addition, there were strong measures of staff accountability for student achievement, as well as district-level commitments to professional development supporting new initiatives. Additionally, principals perceived that their leadership had direct influences on student achievement by modeling and working along with staff, and being visible as much as possible. The following examples help to illustrate those ideas.

Heather shared, “The most substantive improvement has been the shift in math, writing, spelling, and reading instruction... We moved to a new focus on whole group and individual practice, needed differentiation, and small group instruction... We were originally a CIPS school, it was important to strategically advance activities and core programming to promote best practices and differentiation.” By way of example, she noted, “These included such things as *after schoolbook buzz*, *My Math* and guided math groups, teachers’ math, writing and reading workshop programs, specialized groups, and book studies.” Heather noted, “Having these programs gave a common language to staff around programming.” Additionally, these programmatic shifts gave an “opportunity for staff to build upon instructional practices.

Marianne shared that, “investigating problems together and updating to a core reading program (Reading Street) made a substantial difference.” She noted, “I think we’ve evolved as an improving school from, starting with the data just starting with, years and years ago, we had a reading program.... And although all teachers were using it, our scores were quiet low... So we could not figure out what the persistent problem was, why it was, and at what point it was MEA’s and with the school report, the standardized tests we did to inform our instruction were just pretty low. So the first thing

we did was update our (reading) program.... Along with that, (we) started to do a lot of professional development.... Then, we started as teams, which we had never done before.”

Marianne further elaborated, “A key leadership role in advancing changes has been to help staff keep focused and maintain a global perspective.” She shared that a primary role in her leadership has been “to insure resources and helping folks to get the correct materials.” That played out in preparing staff for critical initiatives. “Listening to consensus and assisting to problem solve are important in advancing staff ability to make (systemic) improvements toward student success.” To exemplify that, Marianne stated, “Three years ago when the Common Core State Standards entered, revisions of the report card were necessary and offered an authentic task that staff needed to grapple with and resolve.” Over time, they “created the report card, materials, and by September, it was in... The first year was a work in progress - parents liked it.” To assist that effort, “A parent advisory council was formed.” She noted, “From a staff perspective, informal and formal measures, common grade-level assessments, standardized tests and team-developed tests all had to be considered... Formation of portfolio collections assisted in showing evidences... It was important to help parents process this change, with check-ins many times along the way.”

Beth shared that, “Implementing new systems have provided the most important change in the structure of the school.” By way of example, those included the “Learning Walk Strategy that encouraged peer connections, a greater focus on student work, and curriculum changes.” Additionally, focusing on “how well we are doing” that included self-reflections and personal learning has occurred. She also talked about “celebrations of

learning... strategically considering next steps...setting up forums to discuss at staff meetings and plans of action” all helped advance the work of the school.

As an example, Beth shared a particularly useful programmatic shift. “About four years ago, we made an affiliation with Teachers College of New York in terms of reading and writing workshops...Teachers College provided needed professional development, and we fully adopted their reading and writing programs.” As part of this, “Staff members were personally trained, coached and attended summer institutes... There was a very important district commitment to professional development that made a critical difference... In terms of academic respect, build on your own credibility!” Beth noted, “It was necessary to adopt structures, consistency of language, and a district vision for this.” Additionally, “Everyday Math was adopted before the regional school district was formed... It is very important that there is a common language with both math and ELA (English-Language Arts). This has made all the difference in terms of outcomes.”

Beth also shared the importance of global arts in the academic curriculum. “We worked hard to preserve art and music. As a result, 75 percent of fifth-graders are in band and 75 percent of fourth and fifth graders are in chorus. These are voluntary. Music and art offer huge opportunities and there are strong community connections.” Additionally, Beth noted, “As principal, you have to provide the supports and attend to the affective domain... and be as visible as possible.”

Jean noted, “Helping all of these constituents of the school community to understand new systems (such as Smarter Balanced Assessments, Common Core State Standards, Proficiency Based Learning, and systems of teaching and learning) has been a focus.” In terms of testing, “there has been NWEA for K-2 and 2-8, DIBELS K-1 three

times a year in reading, and DRA for all first-grade and Title 1... It is always important to get (my)self up to speed and then the teachers.” In terms of the most substantive improvement, Jean shared, “Our school was a TIF3 (Teachers’ Incentive Fund Grant) School, and so, focusing on literacy was a district priority with lots of district resources and time allocated for staff development toward this change... That included a six-year grant with the Content Literacy Project through the University of Maine in Farmington, Leadership Team Institutes, three or four times a year. We also had an external literacy coach, and we focused on literacy everywhere and with every subject....Then, all of these merged with Common Core (State Standards.)”

Jean’s shared, “As a principal, my job is to make sure that teachers have what they need, and to prepare them for important initiatives they undertake to advance improvement efforts.” She discussed how curricular decisions have advanced student academic achievement, and that alignment with Common Core State Standards has been a focus in district level work. To exemplify that, she noted that, as a school, “we learn from our mistakes... Core math (e.g. Go Math) and reading (Open Court Reading) programs have been implemented... along with supplemental trade books and Saxon phonics.” Training and support was offered as needed, and as administrator, she believed, “I think it’s really important for me to be there, for them to see me there, that I’m learning with them. I’m supporting their learning – that’s very important to me... You need to be in the trenches ... Leading by being part of the staff.”

Relative to his influence on teaching, learning, and student success, Matthew noted, “Proficiency-based education work has moved us to sharing students across learning targets... Fontas and Pinell Reading Assessments, along with multiple levels of

data, inform our instruction like with the guided reading program.” Within that context, there was a “sacred block” for guided reading that “staff members have developed.”

“You have to be okay with moving or changing structures... All of our staff are keeping data on frequent basis.” He also discussed that a shift of staff perceptions toward PBS (Positive Behavior Supports) has been important to “create a common system of working with the affective needs of students.”

Principals worked to create school cultures where students viewed themselves as learners.

Principals viewed themselves as influential in creating strong school cultures in which students viewed themselves as learners. Those were fostered by strong connections with the adults in the school community, and collectively led to greater student achievement, as students felt safe and cared for.

Heather shared, “Kids love teachers (and) have good connections with teachers and positive learning experiences. The staff will do anything for these guys (necessary to foster and build this strong sense of community.)... They (students) have a good relationship with their teachers. Their teachers would bend over backwards for them and jump through hoops to help them with their academic success or their learning. ... So they’re (teachers) constantly going above and beyond to try to make a positive learning experience for their kids.” That was exemplified through various classroom activities she observed, such as “first graders creating penguins to go along with their studies, math scavenger hunts, students learning cursive writing by practicing in shaving cream,” and overall, a “very positive energy in the learning environment.”

Marianne shared, “It is sometimes difficult for children to describe their academic experiences because they don’t have the vocabulary to express this. They would say school is rigorous, hard, and fun... They like technology and math games and iPads... Children see themselves as learners. They are very connected to the adults in the school.”

Beth shared, “Students have a strong perception of themselves as learners.” She noted, “Kids love reading and the arts. Math is hard. They are seeing themselves as learners.” Additionally, each classroom “develops its own constitution, and students are involved with conferences and reflections of their learning.”

Jean shared that an important part of the school’s work in helping students see themselves as learners has been to celebrate successes, as exemplified in using the “themes of super heroes with kids.” She noted, “It is very important to kids to see their identity as achieving children; believing in self; believing that it’s important, and parents want their kids to do well.” She envisioned her leadership role as providing ownership through expectations and successes, promoting a mantra of “I can do that! ...They see school as fun, with meaningful activities and celebrations of learning.” Those were noted to be “important in fostering the student’s perception of themselves as learners.” She added, “We’ve got a good group of kids here, and parents. And even though some of them don’t have a lot of means, they really support their kids and want their kids to be and to do well. But if they’re not getting it from home, then we have to do a super job in making them want it for themselves and feel proud.” She also noted that specific suggestions toward improvement helped them “latch on to that experience and take greater ownership.”

In the context of students viewing themselves as learners, Matthew shared, “It’s all about kids! . . . We set up the environment... It’s all about relationship building! It’s essential to talk with kids and most of the time, adults set kids up for success or failure... It’s all about relationship and team.” He also shared, “Kids need to feel and be safe... Knowing kids and keeping them safe... Then can move forward,” and alluded to Maslow’s hierarchy of basic needs and the “fight or flight” paradox. “The first priority of the school is to nourish and build.” Additionally, Matthew noted, “Students are prominent in taking a center stage in their learning... There is a Kids’ Council at the school, with an application process and interviews.” At the same time, he shared that “Accountability has been changing with new learning targets... Students need to have a greater voice in their academics, and being clearer about showing learning... Third through fifth graders are included on the Student Leadership Team.”

Intervention Structures and Supports

Principals were influential in promoting success by attending to the academic and affective needs of all students.

Principals reported perceptions of student success in terms of affective and academic domains that were strongly influenced by their leadership, manifested in promoting effective organizational frameworks to attend to students’ academic and affective needs. As instructional leaders, principals were extremely influential in promoting intervention structures and support systems, such as Response to Intervention, Title I programs, and special education resources, all intrinsic to student academic and affective success. Adults working collaboratively in cohesive teams to strategically monitor student progress, and take corrective actions as necessary to enhance student

achievement, were found to be critical facets of improving schools bolstered by principals. The following examples help to illustrate those ideas.

Heather shared, “In the big picture, attendance and academics are the biggest measures of student success.” Crucial within that context has been her role in “being a part of, and leading a strategic Response to Intervention process that includes critical interventions and support systems that include the literacy specialist, literacy coach, and guidance counselor.”

Marianne noted, “My influences with at-risk learners are to attend to the strategic program supports like morning tutoring, and intervention structures such as SRT, RTI, and special education.” Those were exemplified when she shared her efforts to create “student intervention supports and teams working together that serve as a safety net in assisting students’ academic and affective progress... Student Review Teams, Response to Intervention and 504 Teams” were all examples of this. “I meet every six weeks with data (literacy and math specialists) teams for progress monitoring and data screening. There was a “fluid title one approach... a dynamic approach with specific entrance and exit criteria for title programming.” Marianne referred to personnel supports for academic programming. “Up to last year, there was a math and literacy coordinator. In math, staff members developed many materials, along with the Reading Street Program. This has to be supplemented with many materials like Lucy Calkins.”

In terms of influencing student success, Beth shared, “The staff does a really good job identifying student strengths” and that our “kids are happy. We’ve done a great job and it is a team effort.” She noted, “All staff make a big effort, particularly in the morning... The most important part is when they enter... Making a personal connection –

greeting children when they are dropped off and at bus drop off.” Within the school setting, there has been a “silent mentor program, where adults are assigned to be mentors.” Beth noted, “The first priority is how do I meet and greet? We value this... working hard to be as one school.” Beth noted, “In addition to adopting core programs in math and ELA, other measures had to be undertaken to support academic programming... When we did not see the growth in the lowest 25 percent, we restructured our special ed and implemented RTI changes.”

Jean shared that her leadership has “helped advance the staff work of providing RTI supports, and the frameworks necessary to talk about the academic and affective needs of our students.” In terms of the school’s “10-year pattern of reading progress achievement,” Jean shared, “ We had some dips. We had some dips but in general reading was higher... last year, our kids did very well! ... especially with the lower groups or the lower 25 percents that are moving up.” She added, “ We try to analyze data together as a staff to, because when you have a small school, you can really talk about all of that to each individual student. There's pros and cons. You know, you definitely can target the kids that need accommodations, that need the extra practice. What can we do for this or that child? The RTI kinds of things.” Jean shared that as a small school, “Support services are involved and entwined... the regular ed teachers, special ed teacher, Title 1 teacher, counselor and other service providers are in close proximity and build in routine times to converse about student needs.” Also, she noted, “We have special screening meetings, RTI referral and PLP reviews, and other staff meetings to look more closely at student progress.”

Matthew ascribes to a larger team approach (including members of Special Education, Title I supports, and regular education) that has “provided a base for working together to promote student success.” Matthew shared, “Supports have been critical in guiding our work with learning targets and assessments to monitor progress... A lot of interventions and programming decisions have promoted student academic achievement.” “Staff members have worked hard with RTI, and focus on data meetings... We have assessments, such as AimsWeb in reading and math that help monitor student progress.” Matthew talked about “regular meetings between the principal and classroom teacher” that occurred to reflect on student data. He shared, “We have Tier 1 classroom discussions and common planning blocks, professional learning communities... K-2 and 3-5 meet for two hours a week.” Additionally, “grouping and regrouping students around learning targets” occurred frequently. “We have a common block to teach reading, common literacy blocks in the morning, and common math blocks in the afternoon... Intervention Blocks are through Title 1... and these provide another dose of instruction.”

Importance of Data

Principals were influential in creating strong reliance on data.

As leaders, principals were influential in creating a strong reliance on data to analyze and inform student progress, instructional programs, and decisionmaking. Understanding the importance and correct use of data was noted to be a critical component in improving schools’ evolution. That was shown to closely inform programming and instructional decisions, as well as to bring staff together in authentic, purposeful ways to be accountable for student growth. As instructional leaders, principals

were instrumental in creating school cultures reliant on data. Specific examples from principal responses help to illustrate those ideas.

Heather shared that she has been “active in fostering a (collective) process of using data to analyze student progress and growth, implement core programming, and thinking differently about instruction.” As a result of working directly with data, she noted, “Practices began to shift from whole group instruction in reading and math to small group, differentiated instruction.” Heather reflected, “The teachers have really honed in on their delivery of math and it’s not just a one size fits all. They have their mini-lesson and then they’re really tailoring the work down to the individual student needs.” In a small school, the “downside is that each child is worth a lot of percentage points on state level exams, such as NECAP.” She noted that staff are “always looking at kids on the bubble... and looking at kids around student scores.”

Marianne shared, “The biggest evolution has been starting with data.” At a school under her leadership, “staff members analyzed state assessment data together; K/4 reviewed their own data... then the whole staff began analyzing data.” The detailed inquiry involved looking at the types of questions, and teaching children about the test, as well as determining what components were missing. “A major cornerstone is learning to work as a team to look at data.” Marianne shared that “teams working together were given release items followed by the data that we had for our school around those released items...” thus beginning a deeper, strategic introspection with student data. “Beginning in 2003/4, there was a need to inform instruction and become data driven!” Additionally, in 2005/6, all staff needed some data as part of the teacher evaluation process. She noted, “100 percent of our third and fourth graders exceeded growth in reading and literacy...”

and staff began to challenge themselves to do better.... Then the K-2 group set up their own projects to enhance student learning.” Marianne shared, “What this did was turn evaluation conversations from what did you do for professional development and changed them to conversations about student progress and (understanding factors) impacting child growth.” Marianne noted that the key has been “awareness and using a process that moved to larger conversations – looking at data, identifying gaps and instructional practices, and using individual data from teachers.” “Overall, move to larger conversations using data to talk about teaching and learning... Evaluation validates a lot of what we are doing and new ideas... the goal as an entry point to discussions is that you own that discussion!”

Jean noted “transformations were made through modeling the importance of test scores, using data, and getting folks on board – taking serious the charge before educators.” Jean also shared that “The principal plays a key role in the staff work of analyzing data.” In our conversation, Jean noted, “There have been a lot of school improvement efforts over the last ten years... The school has increased in reading and math scores.” She spoke of “implementing of core reading and math programs, along with a special focus on continual data monitoring as a school.” For a smaller school, “The downside is that each child is worth a lot of percentage points on state level exams such as NECAP... (We are) always looking at kids on the bubble... Looking at kids around student scores.” Additionally, Jean spent “a lot of time talking with students about their progress,” and emphasized the importance of shared conversations around data with adults, children, and parents. “Students are excited and proud to take scores home!” She noted, “We’ve tried to really talk to the kids about their scores when they’ve

come back. I'll go into their classroom and I'll have their scores, and I'll have a letter to their parents and what our scores were. And then I'll talk to them about their performance levels... and let them look at their own and see if they understand. It gets them excited about, and proud to take those scores home. And maybe saying, gee, you were only three points away. I bet next year, if you get a couple more questions right, you could make it into that proficient. And I've certainly seen kids work really hard. The next year, they remember that and they really want to do that." In this way, it becomes a shared conversation among all – kids, parents, and staff. "I think we've really tried to give kids that ownership." With regard to the Northwest Educational Association Assessments, she shared that teachers discussed scores and have become self-competitive.

Matthew noted that a strategic focus on data has advanced teaching and learning within the school. "If they don't have that data (during data reviews or PLC time) or it's scant, or it's not enough, then that will come out pretty clear and the staff will say that's not okay. So, we're really holding each other accountable." Also, "I think it's uncomfortable. But I think it sets a different level of professionalism in the building. It is hard work, but it's the right work, and it's rewarding." He noted that there is "power in teachers sharing data...and holding each other accountable." Further, he mentioned that although at times uncomfortable, the efforts provided a different level of opportunity to advance the work.

In summary, in teaching, learning, student success and professional development, several themes emerged from the participants within this study. Principals were influential in setting the stage for student success by assuming instructional leadership roles, identifying academic success as a priority, and thus creating cultures of success

where students viewed themselves as learners, as well as working within their schools to advance teaching and learning. Principals' influence in promoting success by attending to students' academic and affective needs through specific interventions and supports were found to be common aspects of those leaders of improving schools. Additionally, selected principal leaders were highly influential in creating strong reliance on data to inform all aspects of their school improvement work.

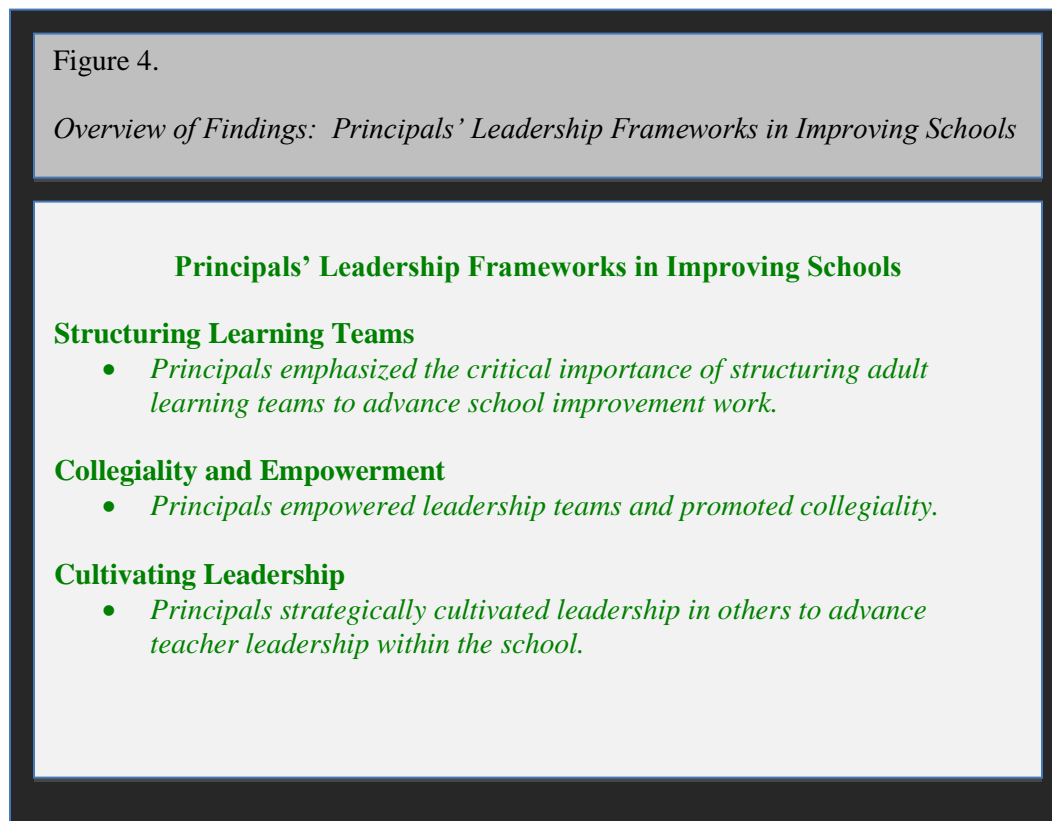
Principals' Leadership Frameworks in Improving Schools

It is important to consider the leadership organizational structures used by the selected principals in improving elementary schools, as well as how they developed and integrated them within their larger school cultures. In referring to the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*, research shows that a principal may describe how his or her leadership structures extend his or her own leadership (Lindahl, 2008), advance and integrate the work of the school (Spillane 2005), are perceived by staff as important (Angelle & Schmid, 2007), and provide for collegiality and professional growth (Richmond & Manokore, 2010).

Additionally, a principal may share how leadership structures are developed and sustained by trust in the principal (Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy and Louis, 2007); contribute to educational reform (Elmore, 2000), instructional improvement and organizational change (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001). Leadership structures used by the principal are transformative (Harris & Spillane (2008), and ultimately lead to collective ownership of the school (Grub & Flessa, 2006), high degrees of adaptation (Hadfield, 2005), collegiality and collaboration (Jappinen, 2012), and a sense of inquiry (Camburn, Rowen, & Taylor (2003).

Regardless of school size or configuration, principal leaders shared the importance of structuring learning teams focused on effective teaching and student learning, thus advancing and integrating the work of the school. Although those efforts took different forms, they had common characteristics of function and viability, as well as presentations of organizational challenges and benefits.

In exploring findings related to the principals' leadership frameworks in improving schools, three distinct categories emerged, as exemplifying the characteristics of good principal leadership demonstrated by the literature. They were in the areas of structuring learning teams, collegiality and empowerment, and cultivating leadership. Those are summarized in Figure 4: *Principals' Leadership Frameworks in Improving Schools*.



Structuring Learning Teams

Principals emphasized the critical importance of structuring adult learning-teams to advance school improvement work.

Generally, adult learning-teams structured by the principals were representative of shared leadership and decisionmaking models. Leadership teams and specific staff members played key roles in creating meaningful professional development activities.

Instructional leadership teams were noted to be crucial to curriculum and professional development within the school. In larger settings, grade level and specialist teams also served as internal resources to guide the work of the schools. In smaller settings, staff members worked collectively as collaborative learning teams, sometimes with the support of building-level teacher/leaders. Regardless of size, professional learning communities focused on student learning were integral to advancing school improvement efforts. The following examples help to illustrate those ideas.

Heather shared, “We were originally a CIPS (Continuous Improvement Priority School) planning team,” and she noted the importance of “structuring adult learning teams in (my) professional development work with staff.” They prepared the foundations for staff to engage new programming. “Professional development opportunities have allowed changes in instructional programs.” Learning teams took a variety of forms, such as “book studies at the district level, coaching experiences and professional development.” She noted, “The district administrative team meets twice a month, and principals and the curriculum director meet once a month.” In her building, Heather said that staff meetings are “no longer for nuts and bolts, but rather more about professional development opportunities through shared conversations.”

Marianne developed a highly effective leadership framework within her school. She talked about “working together to support teaching and learning and the work of her leadership structures... There is a professional development team and also collaborative learning teams... The instructional leadership team meets weekly for curriculum development. There are also grade level team meetings, as well as goal setting and learning teams. Logistics are handled through the office, and Friday updates give weekly

information.” She shared, “Planning of monthly staff meetings is given to the leadership team, which brainstorms needs. This focuses on professional development.”

Beth noted that under her leadership, a specific building leadership team has been established, comprising “five team leaders that receive stipends, as well as grade level and specialist professional learning communities.” Professional learning communities within the school have helped advance changes with new initiatives, but she noted, “There is still work needed around necessary time and logistics.” Further, she shared, “I do not attend these PLC meetings... The building leadership team sometimes meets in the summer to organize, and every other Friday for about 75 minutes.” Logistically, she shared, “Each maintains Google Docs with running minutes that are shared with the whole staff. The leadership team agenda is always: a quick report out of team meetings, crafting agendas for staff meetings, involvement in planning, and discussion of problems or issues.”

Beth shared, “We are continuing to build school culture” about the role the leadership team in advancing the work of the school. In addition to the building leadership and PLC structures, there were “monthly assemblies, a Silent Mentor Program, staff leadership activities (e.g. book buzz), and other committees that emerge as needed.” “Staff meetings consist of 15 minutes to reconnect, book takeaways, energizing activities, and 45 minutes for professional development.” Other simple activities often emerged from ideas within the staff. “The building leadership team models this.” She noted that the leadership team structures formed over the last two to three years, as the regional school district of which they are a part has allowed a greater focus.

Jean noted her influence in working with “adults in the building as a collective leadership team.” She shared, “We only have a staff of 13... staff meetings occurred monthly... and we have frequent data meetings.” When meeting with the whole instructional staff, “ed techs were included, as they are highly valued and appreciated in this school community.” Time spent “meeting with the lead and special ed teachers have helped to focus the work.” When asked what factors have helped advance the work of the school, Jean said, “A combination of consistent approach, changing leadership within the staff, using the teacher evaluation system as a way to identify areas of learning and professional growth plans have helped us.” Jean also noted that hers was a “TIF3 pilot school.” That included many “moving pieces” as part of the initiative that brought with it, “nervousness and apprehension within the staff.” Jean also shared that part of the reflection process involved a student survey.

Under Matthew’s influence, “Professional Learning Communities have focused our discussions about teaching and learning.” He noted, “A student leadership team has been put in place that staff members work with,” along with data work through PLCs “This has been an evolution ... and is paramount in advancing the greater academic work of the schools.” Matthew noted that, “As staff members are talking across grade level meetings and PLCs, there has been a greater focus on district leadership,” with teacher leaders in every school. “As a staff, we are talking about more issues of substance.” Matthew shared strong connections at a larger district-level have helped advance school improvement efforts at the local level. There were also larger leadership team agendas and teacher leaders that help with the conversations.

Collegiality and Empowerment

Principals empowered leadership teams and promoted collegiality.

Principals shared that across leadership structures, there were emergent foundations of collegiality and empowerment, manifesting in working together as schools, and focusing on student learning. Those were based in inquiry, and trust – not only among individuals, but also with administration, and by principals in the structures they put in place. Benefits included building relationships and collaboration, allowing administration to stay connected to staff and the pulses of their schools. Principal responses helped to detail those notions.

Heather noted, “Staff members prefer collegial conversations,” and the results have been “collaborative meetings that infuse quality teacher-leadership.” Sometimes, “there are grade-level specific meetings to address special topics or logistical needs.” Heather noted, “My goal is to empower others,” and she is “working on delegation... and letting them take the lead.” She shared that a benefit of her leadership structure has been that the team “offers a direct pulse on what’s happening within the school.” Additionally, she pointed out that “weekly meetings with new teachers, consistent walk-through observations and increased visibility contributed to a sense of connectedness and collegiality.”

Marianne shared, “The instructional leadership team has led the curriculum development process,” and her role, as leader, was to “ask challenging questions to tweak their thinking... The leadership team is more of an instructional leadership group... This has evolved into a shared leadership model, with good informed decisions made by the team.” Additionally, “It takes trust to point that out... And the celebration of our gifts...

Others' perceptions are supportive and sometimes not heard, so mechanisms need to be put in place so that they are." Marianne noted, "The organizational pieces are critical!" She spent a lot of time working with "very good secretaries that organize schedules," who are "very empowered... and know boundaries." She added, "The biggest benefit of these structures is the amount of common time colleagues spend together... They are passionate about their work together."

Beth set a priority of "promoting collegiality and empowering my leadership team." She noted, "The benefit of the building leadership team has been to act as a sounding board and staff liaison... challenges continue to exist around not having enough time." Beth stressed the importance of "training to support the teacher leaders to facilitate and move staff forward." Additionally, she noted the importance of "trusting and stepping back... The first couple of years, I would try to do everything... it didn't help the situation, although I desperately wanted to help...I needed to learn to trust and let go." She shared, "The results are, if someone else can contribute in the process, the benefits are greater and others are validated." As a result, she noted that, "Things are more positive and there is more ownership within the staff."

Beth shared a "decisionmaking matrix that allows for team empowerment" on a variety of decisionmaking needs. "I place a lot of emphasis on the leaders, and their ability to make decisions. There are different types of decisions. Some are like Type A and I need to just do those. But many more need their input. Teams work together on those." Beth further noted, "Team level professional learning communities are integral to the work of the school." Logistically, she noted that "building team leaders run the PLCs and post with Google Docs the agendas and minutes. PLCs meet one block per week

within the school day, and they are given extra time for other projects as needed.” “PLCs are intended to be about student learning... Conversations about teaching and learning our first priority, with logistics last. PLCs are important in setting school goals.”

Jean shared that her leadership configuration offers “a sense of collegiality formed at many levels.” Jean’s school is Pre-K-5, and “A priority has been the 4-year-old programming... There is universal Pre-K of three and a half days per week and contracts with Head Start that helped to provide early interventions.” She noted, “All of these create a consistent and strong bond with the school with parents, children, school personnel and care providers. The biggest challenge has been time.”

In reflecting on his leadership team structures, Matthew noted, “They (leadership team) really have ownership and value working collectively, and are collaborative. And having that discussion about what kids need. And making sure you’re meeting those needs. Primarily, the PLCs serve that role.”

Cultivating Leadership

Principals strategically cultivated leadership in others to advance teacher leadership within the school.

In referring to the *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership*, the literature revealed that good principals may describe ways in which they identify talent and cultivate leadership in others to advance teacher leadership capacity within the school (Rhodes, Brundrett & Nevill, 2008).

Principals were influential in strategically cultivating leadership in others to advance teacher leadership within their schools, and emphasized that critical to their own effectiveness as leaders was the notion of building capacity through promoting leadership

in others. Throughout the schools, principals shared the crucial nature of cultivating leadership within their schools. That involved strategic mentoring and support, thus positioning teacher leadership capacity within the school to advance school improvement efforts. The following examples help to illustrate those ideas.

Heather shared the importance of cultivating internal leadership and mentoring new hires. “You need to take care of them... groom them through a series of strong mentoring... meet with them once weekly first year, every two weeks second year, and once a month the third year.” “When introducing new initiatives, it’s important to have them from the ground up... It is more effective if teachers come up with them and create them as part of their own needs versus administratively placed.” Additionally, “The job of leadership is to build a capacity within the staff and to inspire them to do their best within the district vision.”

Marianne shared, “My role as the leader is to create the arena and set the stage so that trusted colleagues can do their work... Setting the vision... Keeping them in line with the vision despite new ideas as well as bolstering new ideas.” Her earlier analogy from the story of the geese and the buffalo clearly reflected her overall belief, “There are many days when the staff goes on as if the leader is not even present... That is the mark of a true leader and well functioning school.” She noted, “From the culture to the work with students to the organizational flow and most of all the trust - trust in each other and trust in leadership!”

Beth shared the importance of “building a strong school culture through cultivating building leadership and professional learning community structures.” She mentioned her efforts at “continuing to engage conversation and effect change at a

greater level whenever possible” has been led to “empowering teacher leaders to advance school improvement work” and invested in their individual and collective ownership.

Jean has worked to create a “positive environment by consistently supporting teacher leadership,” as exemplified in her statement, “There is an overriding sense of purpose in all of the work they do.” . . . I think that building and promoting leadership in others is a more effective way than dictating what people need to do – kind of building that capacity in people to be leaders – my job is supporting them.”

Matthew’s noted, “My goal is to foster and cultivate teacher leadership work as teams, based in the priority focus of what’s best for kids.” He shared how he has developed and integrated “a strong student leadership team that staff members work with, as well as data work through PLCs...(that) is paramount in advancing the greater academic work of the school.” Matthew’s approach is one of promoting and encouraging those who are interested in leadership. “I’ve encouraged teachers that I see in them the love of leadership and the gift of leadership to go back to school. So I’ve got most recently three teachers that have finished their leadership programs and are now principals.” He stated, “I think we finally know what we don’t know, and we’ve got a long way to go, but now, we have built relationships to go there!”

Overall, principals’ leadership frameworks, as manifested in their improving elementary schools in Maine, focused on three major themes: structuring learning teams, collegiality and empowerment, and cultivating leadership. Adult learning-teams, often in the form of professional learning communities, were important in advancing school improvement efforts. Empowering leadership teams promoted collegiality, and

strategically cultivating leadership within schools helped build internal capacities to advance school improvement efforts.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to identify key findings of leadership roles that were common across all of the selected principal participants of improving schools within this study, as they exemplify the characteristics of good leaders as defined by the research literature.

In general, principals reflected authentic and transformational leadership styles, centered in collaboration and shared leadership, grounded in the importance of building internal capacities for school improvement through strong, productive relationships, honest communication, and service to others. Their leadership was influential in developing and maintaining positive school cultures through strategic and purposeful actions, energy, and persistence, which resulted in transcendent levels of trust and collective ownership throughout their buildings. Principals perceived themselves as instructional leaders whose leadership mattered in terms of influencing school outcomes: manifesting through strategic hiring, supervision and evaluation practices, informing decisions using data, and intentional focus on teaching and learning. High staff accountability and district commitments toward purposeful school improvement bolstered by substantive professional development, helped drive the success of the schools. Empowering leadership teams to advance school improvement efforts was critical, thus promoting collegiality intrinsic to meaningful change. Within the richness of those findings, the selected principals of improving schools in Maine exemplified many characteristics of good principal leadership, as defined in the literature.

CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this research study was to explore and understand the characteristics of principal leadership in selected improving elementary schools in Maine, with the intent to provide a greater understanding of how principals in improving schools view their leadership and approaches to leadership; the relationship between their leadership and school culture and climate, how they perceive student success; and how they employ leadership structures within their schools to advance teaching and learning. Additionally, this study offers insight for others to consider in examining their own leadership, and how they can lead in shifting school cultures toward an ultimate goal of improved student learning.

The following overarching research question served to frame this research study: what characteristics of good leaders do principals in selected improving elementary schools in Maine exemplify? Specifically, the following four characteristics of principal leadership in improving elementary schools in Maine were examined:

- What are the leadership theories and approaches of principals in selected improving elementary schools in Maine?
- How do those principals view the relationship between their leadership and their schools' climates and cultures?
- How do those principals perceive student success?
- What leadership and organizational structures do those principals use? How did they develop and integrate them into the larger school cultures?

This chapter summarizes the conclusions from those findings resulting from the cross-site analysis of the reflections from principal participants, and discusses some of the nuances and critical insights in light of the four research questions of this study.

Additionally, an analysis that discusses the strength of the findings and transferability to other populations, settings and conditions is offered. A discussion of recommendations examines implications for policy and practice based upon those findings, considers needs for further research, and offers recommendations for principal leaders' preparation. Lastly, a discussion of final thoughts shares new insights, the personal value of this research experience to the researcher, as well as other knowledge and inspiration gained from this study.

Discussion and Conclusions

This discussion is offered in relation to major themes across all leaders of this study, directly related to the research questions. It is intended as conclusive statements and discussions of what is known after this research study, and presents myriad “takeaway” messages for the reader, which will be explored more deeply in the recommendations and implications.

The purposeful sampling of participants from sites meeting the selection criteria determined for this study assisted in advancing a greater sense of trustworthiness with the research. The diversity among the sites from which participants were selected presented an interesting cross-matrix of shared characteristics and variances, and offered an opportunity to explore principal leadership across multiple domains. That helped to frame the discussions embedded with each of the research questions that follows in this chapter.

Geographically, the suburban sites, although similar in socioeconomic data and student improvement, differed in school population size, thus offering a nice comparison across two similar demographic populations with differing school populations. Overall, the size of the school sites did not seem to matter to the findings of this study. Some variances were noted in terms of leadership team compositions, support service provisions and resources. Those were all present in the larger school, simply due to having more personnel directly accessible as part of the regular staff, but modified in the smaller schools.

The rural sites, although similar in size and poverty levels, had principals of different gender, which did not seem to be a factor in terms of the general findings, or with regard to leadership characteristics. The rural schools also differed in terms of their

student achievement increases, as noted by school performance scores. The score gap differential did not appear to matter relative to leadership characteristics common between both school leaders. Geographically similar, both rural sites were part of much larger regional school unit configurations, with parallel socioeconomic community compositions. Principals from the schools attended to multiple schools, as well as differing town dynamics, as part of their overall leadership work. The rural schools shared similar socioeconomic data with the urban site, with findings generally consistent in the major areas of principal leadership explored.

Overall, four sites shared similar student performance growth across a diversity of geographic regions. The urban site was similar in student improvement to the two suburban sites, even though it had a higher poverty level. Three of the five sites that participants led had fairly high poverty levels, thus allowing an opportunity to explore more deeply principal leadership within those selected schools that seem to be “beating the odds” in terms of student achievement and growth. Collectively, the strategic inclusion of principals from the five sites offered a well-rounded opportunity to gather leadership data from their work in similar, yet diverse, settings.

In terms of tenure, participants ranged from one leader just beginning her administrative career as principal to those approaching retirement. They were educators with varied backgrounds, yet all spoke of similar journeys that led them to their current administrative roles. As distinct participants, the principal leaders varied in personalities and demeanor, but all approached their work and engagement with others with a warmth, sincerity, and conviction of purpose.

In revisiting the original screening criteria from which participants were selected, and in conjunction with the diversity that presented across the sites, an important point emerges. Given the well-rounded nature of the participants from various sites, each with identifying characteristics that might be presumed to be influential (urban or rural nature, grade span, principal tenure, school size, performance increase, and poverty level), none appeared to be important factors with regard to leadership of the principal of the improving schools. In general, within the major aspects of principal leadership influence explored (characteristics and leadership approach, climate and culture, student learning, and leadership frameworks), although there were occasionally nuances related to identifying characteristics of the participants or sites, there was agreement and consistency in the key findings identified. It is against that backdrop that the following discussion of each major area of influence is offered.

Characteristics of Principals' Leadership

Not surprisingly, the principals in the selected improving schools exemplified many of the characteristics of leadership related to good school leaders, as noted in the conceptual framework. The findings have shown that, like many effective leaders, the leaders of the schools share both authentic and transformational characteristics.

The first section considered the question, "What are the leadership theories and approaches of principals in selected improving elementary schools in Maine?" The focus was on examining closely the principal participants' perspectives with regard to leadership approach and style, values and ethics, sustaining forces and leadership satisfaction, balancing leadership demands, and lastly, leadership and change.

It is important to note that any number of leadership theories could have been used (as indicated in Table 1: Leadership Theories and Approaches). However, findings from this study showed that in terms of style and approach, aspects of authentic and transformational leadership ran through all of the findings. Principals lived what they believed, which manifested in all aspects of their leadership. With regard to authentic leadership, principals in the selected schools viewed themselves as people first, and acted in leadership capacities as a result of who they were. That was evidenced in their identity as leaders who held strong personal value sets and senses of integrity, honesty, transparency, and believed in the importance of relationships. As a result, transformation of their followers first, and then their schools, became important because of who the principals were.

Principals' leadership approaches were centered in collaboration and shared leadership, based solidly on the importance of building internal capacity to transform schools through strong, productive relationships, communication, and service to others. Principals' leadership across the participants had foundations based in articulated sets of values and ethics, manifesting in integrity, honesty, transparency and trust with and among the staff members. Principals' journeys through various transitions and leadership influences evolved them as leaders, and helped to form their current leadership approaches. Various sustaining forces, such as their work with school staff, students, parents, and the larger school community, were found to positively influence principal leadership and job satisfaction. Additionally, challenges that came with the job brought energy and purpose to their roles as leaders, and to their abilities to influence and effect greater changes beyond themselves. Those also served to keep principal leaders energized

and connected to their leadership work, along with strategically maintaining systems of support and balance between their personal and professional lives. New accountability demands affected the principals' efforts to help staff think differently about their work. They spoke to the dramatic influences of public policy and politics in the form of external mandates intended to improve teaching and learning, as demonstrated through student achievement scores, as well as maintaining senses of balance with the various political forces of their communities. Principals exercised significant influence, as leaders, in mitigating major challenges resulting from various external political and social forces. Additionally, they were instrumental in influencing the integration and development of internal systems necessary to support external demands such as the Common Core State Standards, Proficiency Based Learning, Smarter Balanced Assessment Coalition Maine Educational Assessment, and new Educator and Administrator Effectiveness Systems. As authentic leaders in their own right, principals' freely offered sage advice to aspiring school leaders.

A particularly salient point to note among all of the principals in this study is the underlying passion, energy, and commitment to something bigger than themselves that was evident in their roles as building leaders. As noted, their authentic leadership styles were consistently grounded in their beliefs about children, and in an underlying trust in the adults who worked within their school communities. Regardless of school locality, size, type of site, socioeconomic status, or tenure of the administrator within the school, all shared an unspoken passion and pride in the school communities of which they were a part. Far from egocentrism, individually and collectively, the leaders manifested a greater sense of altruism in aspects of their leadership tenets, outlook and logistical work. As

they had evolved as leaders, transitioning from colleagues to supervisors, they all carried with them the lessons learned from the classroom, with deeply held beliefs in their abilities to influence and effect changes beyond themselves. As authentic and transformational leaders, the principals lived what they believed, and trusted in others to do the same. Additionally, in the tough work of transformational change, they were not afraid to take on challenges in all aspects of their leadership roles. It was those same foundational anchors of integrity, honesty and transparency with others that allowed them to embrace the difficult challenges before them, and guide staff members forward in substantive school improvement.

Of particular interest relative to the rural school administrators, there seemed to be an unusually strong tie to the communities of the district, especially with regard to working with children in the throes of societal influences beyond their control. Given poverty levels of 73 percent and 74 percent, as measured by free and reduced lunch status, those principals often found themselves in more encompassing roles, working with families largely untrusting of schools. Ironically, the schools were intrinsically noted to be at the center of the rural towns or communities, frequently becoming centerpieces for social events. Thus ensued a dual role of the administrators – to gain the trust of families often disenfranchised from education, and to consistently advocate for their interests. Notable within this context was a deeper (often evolving) belief by the parents of those children in the importance of school and education to creating better lives for their children than they had experienced. In many ways, the academic success of the children, and consequently the schools, became a rallying cry for the community in their beliefs of

the potential of their children, and trust in the schools. The principals, at the center of these schools, were instrumental in their leadership influence and connections.

Finally, if there was a single resonant and recurring theme, it was the principals' beliefs in the importance of relationships as intrinsic to all aspects of their leadership. As a "through-line" framing all aspects of culture building, student success and leadership work within the schools, the importance of strategically cultivating deep, meaningful relationships created solid foundations for all of these leaders' school improvement work, and the ultimate success of their students.

Principal Leadership and Aspects of School Climate and Culture

The second section explored the question, "How do those principals view the relationship between their leadership and the school's climate and culture?" The focus was on organizational productivity and new hires, supervision and evaluation, and lastly, school climate and culture.

Findings from this study revealed that within the context of organizational productivity and new hires, principals of the selected schools cited the critical importance of influencing teacher turnover through hiring new staff members, and strategically grooming and integrating them into existing school cultures to enhance a climate focused on teaching and learning. Principals also noted supervision and evaluation to be a key leadership influence on organizational productivity, allowing them to serve in dual roles as both coach and evaluator. In conjunction with that, the principals perceived their influence on supervision and evaluation to be directly linked to staff effectiveness, efficiency, and positive organizational outcomes in terms of student achievement and growth. Foremost, principals of these selected schools deeply believed that their

leadership was influential in developing and maintaining positive school climates and cultures, primarily through strategic and purposeful actions, energy, and persistence, resulting in transcendent levels of trust and collective ownership throughout their buildings.

Of particular interest and salience in the findings of this study was that all of the selected principals expressed the importance of strategically hiring new staff member as intrinsic to advancing school improvement and transformation. Aside from maintaining safe schools, that was noted to be among the most important and influential tasks that school leaders undertook. With pride, each of them noted the hiring of more than 50 percent of their current staffs. More than a sense of ownership, it was the ability to impact and create new school cultures by bringing in new personnel with fresh ideas, understandings, energies and passions that was a driving force within their leadership. Beyond mere hiring, however, it was the intentional “massaging” of existing cultures by purposefully bringing staff toward common visions, understandings, language, and commitments that advanced the evolution of each of the improving schools. Although the dynamics varied slightly with regard to school size and staff impacts, the net effect was to use authentic tasks as rallying points to create senses of collective ownership within staff configurations.

The rural schools faced particular challenges: small staff changes had big impacts, especially among veteran staff members that already had tight working relationships. That said, it was the notion of smaller teams working more closely across role and positional distinctions that often brought the bonding necessary to achieve school improvement. Each of the rural principals played key roles in bringing people together,

creating purposeful activities, and, behind the scenes, doing the tough work to hold to new cultural norms. The smaller, rural schools also faced some challenges in that the principals had to double or triple their efforts across other sites: they had other buildings within their charge. Both those principals noted that the improving schools for which they were cited had staff members who were willing to work tightly together to achieve the goals and meet the challenges before them.

The suburban and urban schools faced similar challenges with regard to working with veteran staff members to bring new focus and renewed energy in transforming school cultures. Principals noted the importance of creating a shared vision to facilitate a unified direction and purpose. In all cases, those took the form of formally and informally adopting norms of behavior and conduct and, generally, creating the way staff members were to be with another. As with the smaller schools, however, it was the hard work of standing firm in those agreements that led to positive transformations, and sustaining positive school climates and cultures. Principals noted their work in “calling people” on behaviors not fitting within accepted norms, as well as consistently reinforcing the positive efficacy of the emerging cultures that were being created. Even beyond the principals’ direct leadership, staffs began to monitor their own social mores and work together.

Regardless of size or school configuration, one factor seemed to emerge as important. In all of the schools, the nature of the caring adult relationships, witnessed by children, had direct influences on the attitudes and achievement of the students within their charge. The sense of mutual respect, positive interactions, belonging, and overall, collective ownership between adults and students was perhaps the single most important

component contributing to school improvement. The give and take of creating and sustaining strong relationships, manifesting in trust across and between all levels, created school climates and cultures that were safe for all to take risks, fail, and succeed. As a result, those cultures fostered high expectations for all, and the willingness to challenge themselves (adults and children) to even greater goals. In essence, strong school cultures formed the foundations for all of the schools to engage the work necessary for transformation and student success.

Principal Perceptions of Student Success

The third section investigated the question, “How do those principals perceive student success?” The focus was on principals’ priorities, their perceived leadership influence on student achievement (through teaching, learning and professional development), fostering a climate of success (intervention structures and supports, the importance of data, and students as learners) and the principals’ perspective on leadership and change.

Findings from this study revealed that principals reported perceptions of student success in terms of affective and academic aspects that were strongly influenced by their leadership. Principals perceived themselves as instructional leaders whose leadership mattered in terms of influencing school outcomes - manifesting in purposeful incorporation of core programming in reading, writing, and math, as well as revisions in instructional practices to differentiate for student needs, all critical to school improvement. That was reflected in their priorities, substantive school improvement efforts, and the way they worked to meet myriad organizational challenges, the greatest of which was time. Strong reliance on data to analyze and inform student progress,

instructional programs and decisionmaking to inform all teaching and learning within the district was found to be essential. Collective ownership, collaborative work, high staff accountability, and district commitments to purposeful school improvement initiatives, bolstered by substantive professional development, all helped advance the success of these schools. Intrinsic to that, principals reflected on their evolutions as improving schools, underscoring the importance of building internal school cultures and capacities through strong relationships, common language, and understandings toward improved teaching and learning. Similarly, principals were influential in creating school cultures where students viewed themselves as learners, supported by strong connections with the adults in the school community. Lastly, principals noted the importance of understanding the change process in advancing new initiatives and taking the time to build the necessary internal capacities to handle challenges inherent in substantive school improvement efforts.

With regard to principals' perceptions of student success, of notable importance was that all principals, regardless of school size or configurations, used multidimensional approaches to guide their work with staff and assert their leadership influences. Essentially, they worked within multifaceted approaches that simultaneously focused on aspects of core programming, professional development, and systems of intervention and supports – all bolstered by the use of data, and embedded in school cultures based in collective ownership and accountability for student progress and instructional pedagogy.

In each of the schools, the intentional advent of core programming in reading, writing, and math, supported by differentiated instructional practices, was a key factor to raising student achievement. Although the core programs varied among the sites, the

importance lay mostly in the consistency that such programming brought to classroom instruction, curricular delivery, assessment, expectations, and overall accountability. Over time, principals noted dramatic increases in student academic progress in those areas. Principals' attention to purposeful professional development advanced program implementation and integration into the everyday fabric of the schools. Often, those brought new common languages and understandings, serving as rallying points for staff. Principals expressed significant investment in their roles as instructional leaders within their schools. They "walked the talk," learning right along with staff through professional development, modeling investment in programming, being visible, and generally reaching out along the journey to assist staff through providing resources, information, time, and encouragement.

Principals used varying systems of interventions and supports across the school settings, depending upon size and staffing resources. Rural schools had to share resources, and work together in interdisciplinary ways to support children, while the larger schools were able to have greater specialization. Regardless of size, principals were deeply connected to the development and ongoing work of intervention frameworks and supports within their schools. They also utilized systems of wraparound supports; teams of educators and specialists attended to both the academic and affective needs of the individual child. All principals were significantly reliant on student performance data for both achievement and growth. They fostered climates where meaningful, objective conversations resulting from the use of data focused on students and instructional practices. Principals highlighted significant systems of support in the affective realm. Within the smaller, rural schools, that was more personalized and shared among staff.

Of particular note within the rural settings, principals shared the importance of preschool programming, which served as an integral part of their educational sphere of influence. They worked closely within their communities to identify and connect families to the school resources, and strategically integrated preschool academic programming into the continuum of their school communities.

Within all of those dimensions, significant changes in curriculum, instruction, assessment and systems of support brought substantial changes in approaches and practices to the principals' school communities. Principals' leadership influences within the change process were profound in terms of differentiating for their staff members as adult learners, and in building the necessary internal capacities to advance school improvement work. That took time. An interesting nuance was noted to be in terms of principal tenure at their schools. Those leaders with longer tenures may have slight advantages in having worked with staff members over a longer period, developing deeper connections and long-standing relationships. Strategically building staff members' ability to successfully engage school improvement work early through culture building activities, as well as authentic tasks relative to new initiatives, was universal with all principals.

Principals' Leadership Frameworks in Improving Schools

The last section considered the question, "What leadership and organizational structures do those principals use? How did they develop and integrate them into the larger school culture?" The focus was on the leadership frameworks utilized in improving schools, collegiality, and empowerment, and finally, cultivating leadership.

Findings from this study found that principals' leadership frameworks play a key role in improving schools. Principals shared the critical importance of their roles in empowering leadership teams to advance school improvement efforts, thus promoting collegiality intrinsic to meaningful staff work. Additionally, principals shared their direct influences on creating professional learning teams that focused on effective teaching and student learning, in order to facilitate and integrate the work of the school. Regardless of school size, professional learning communities focused on student learning were integral to advancing school improvement efforts. Principals noted the importance of strategically cultivating leadership in others to build and advance teacher leadership capacities within their schools, as well as promoting leadership in others.

Across the districts, leadership team configurations varied in composition and purpose relative to school size. Principals of the medium to larger schools were afforded opportunities to maintain larger and/or more diversely representative leadership teams because of greater numbers of staff members. In those, leadership teams played key roles in professional development planning and facilitation. Conversely, principals of the rural schools provided professional development leadership more directly, or with specific teacher leaders. By nature, the more intimate settings of the rural staffs afforded direct, hands-on experiences of learning and working together.

An interesting observation is that all principals of the improving schools, regardless of tenure, saw their role as important in empowering others to leadership roles within their schools, and cultivating leadership in others through extensive mentoring relationships. That may be due in part to their own personal journeys in developing their leadership capacities, as well as their deep beliefs in others' potentials as future leaders.

All of the principals felt the impact of external policy demands, and the constant tension of mitigating the impacts on their staff members. That given, the principals expressed their influence in terms of leveraging leadership teams and professional learning communities to engage the necessary work, with consistent and intentional focusing on data to guide their decisions. Principals also resoundingly noted their leadership roles in providing the direction, structures, support, and resources necessary to advance the work, as well as creating safe working environments that afforded professional risk taking, but also demanded high collective and individual accountability. Principals modeled that by engaging the work along with their staffs, and being actively engaged in data-monitoring practices.

Rural districts, more geographically isolated, had to work harder to stay together as unified districts on big topics and programmatic initiatives. District-level administration seemed to play key roles in keeping those geographically diverse school districts working in unison to implement key programming mandates. Principals shared that the oversight was both helpful and demanding, since limited professional-development time was left to focus on building-based work.

In retrospect, it is also important to note that although principals of the smaller, more rural schools faced varying organizational challenges (limited supports, more diverse staffing patterns, and responsibility for multiple school sites), they were steadfast and tenacious regarding the professional development efforts and school improvement work within their settings. In some ways, the multiple roles they played to actualize mandates and school reform work seemed almost overwhelming. Thus, their ability to

lean on key staff members in leadership roles, and develop the internal capacities to advance key initiatives, seemed even more admirable.

Comparisons to Turnaround Schools

Interesting comparisons may be drawn relative to findings from this research study and the notion of Turnaround Schools, a policy initiative began by the Obama Administration in 2009. As earlier referenced, a school that is designated in the lowest performing 5 percent of all schools in the nation, and has consistently not met Adequate Yearly Progress, is identified in that category, and is subject to one of four initiatives: Turnaround, Restart, Transformation, or Closure.

The Turnaround Model (Wallace Foundation, 2010), varies from school to school, yet meets many criteria points, including: replacing the principal; using locally adopted "turnaround" competencies to review and selected staff for school; implementing strategies to recruit, place, and retain staff; selecting and implementing an instructional model based on student needs; providing job-embedded professional development designed to build capacity and support staff; ensuring continuous use of data to inform and differentiate instruction; providing increased learning time for staff and students; providing social, emotional and community-oriented services and supports; implementing new governance structure; and lastly, granting operating flexibility to school leader.

In terms of leadership approach, principals within this study of selected improving schools conveyed varying combinations of authentic and transformational leadership influences throughout all aspects of their work, not explicitly mandated with Turnaround Schools models. As previously noted, the sense of passion, energy and commitment in the leaders of the selected improving schools for something greater than themselves was

evident and pervasive. Rather than a unilateral focus on a leader to drive school improvement efforts, those principals prioritized the notion of building community among staff, students and parents, and like Turnaround Schools, established strong ties to the communities they served. Unlike Turnaround Schools, there was an intentional focus by the leaders of the selected improving elementary schools to cultivate deep, meaningful relationships to advance and frame school improvement work.

That focus on relationships had profound influences on the climates and cultures of the principal participants' schools. Carefully executed hiring practices, along with strategic grooming of new staff members afforded principal leaders an ability to impact and create new school cultures. In that regard, a focus on hiring was very important, but unlike Turnaround Schools, the improving schools did not replace the leaders. Additionally, rather than replacing at least 50 percent of staff through rehiring, principals from this study worked within authentic and transformational leadership models in order to achieve a greater sense of purpose and productivity based in genuine transformation of practices, minds and hearts. As reflected by principal participants, particular challenges dependent on strong working relationships existed in small rural schools. Like Turnaround Schools, there was an emphasis on the importance of supervision and evaluation, but a premium was placed by the principals on the importance of caring adult relationships to influence children and achievement.

In terms of student success, like Turnaround Schools, principals of the selected improving schools reflected a multidimensional approach to guide school improvement work, with a focus on core programming, professional development, interventions and support, best teaching practices, and the ongoing, strategic use of data to inform practice.

But perhaps more deeply, emphasis was placed on the affective nuances of the schools, and carefully nurtured by the principals, to attend to the collective ownership of students by all of the adults.

Additionally, as with Turnaround Schools, school governance relied on the principals' leadership structures. Unlike Turnaround Schools, however, principal participants still worked within the boundaries of their district-level governance structures, and depended upon internal leadership teams to play key roles in school improvement efforts, and to mitigate the significant impacts of external policy demands. In all cases, the consistent and intentional use of data to guide policy and programmatic changes was evident as a key factor in school improvement. Unlike Turnaround Schools, the leaders did not have additional financial resources to provide increased professional learning time, but rather depended upon internal structures to afford and maximize needed professional development. The situations were magnified within the smaller schools: they had larger organizational challenges, and smaller staffing situations.

Conclusions

It is important to note that characteristics of principals shared through the findings and themes of this research are from participants' perspectives as leaders of improving schools. As part of securing their initial consent to be part of this study, principals were notified of their schools' designations as improving schools through the site selection criteria earlier described. Prior to that, they were not all necessarily aware of their status as long-term improving schools. Having that information at the onset of the interviews provided the backdrop and context of their conversations – how the various areas of leadership figured in their evolution as improving schools. Although some of the

reflections were offered in terms of accomplishments and leadership work facilitating past school improvement efforts, it seemed evident that none were explicitly seeking to do things in order to achieve status as “improving schools.” At the same time, they were clear on their charge as leaders to advance initiatives toward school improvement. In their roles as authentic and transformational leaders, the principals inherently believed in and were motivated by the work they were doing, driven by their passions for doing what’s right for children.

The *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership* was a useful framework to organize data findings across the many aspects of principal leadership considered in this study. It accounted for overarching themes, and accommodated analyses of how they were influential in the schools, of how certain initiatives and traits were integral to different aspects of leadership. Of particular note, were the “intangible” themes of the importance of relationships, building a sense of team, collective ownership, collegiality and collaboration, adaptability and transformation, trust, school culture, and building capacity (human or organizational). Many dynamic internal components make up a school community, which makes it difficult to quantify their natures objectively. Even the notion of a principal’s influence stems from a personal perspective. That said, an inspirational richness emerges from this study, centered on the passions, convictions and beliefs of the principal as leader. Those intangibles are rarely taught in leadership preparation programs, but emerged as critically important to the organizational success discussed in this research. Although findings were noted in particular areas, they could easily extend to others as well.

Transferability to Other Populations, Settings and Conditions

It is important to note that readers of this research study may apply a level of transferability with confidence. Unlike generalizability, transferability in this research does not involve broad claims, but invites connections between elements of the study and personal experience.

To assist in transferability, detailed descriptions of participant contextual settings and assumptions central to the research have been provided. Each site's principal was described in detail in Chapter 3, noting background information and site descriptions. Description summaries of participants' leadership are included as Appendix G: Principal Participant Leadership Descriptions. Readers are encouraged to consider those, as well as specific participant responses noted in each area of exploration through the key findings and themes in Chapter 4, and take them under advisement as they transfer the results to a different context. The readers of this study will also need to discern the plausibility of their transfers.

Implications for Policy and Practice Based on Findings

The following section shares implications for policy and practice based on the findings of this study. The thoughts, reflections, and statements should be regarded as elements for consideration, not generalizations from this research. They are this researcher's observations and suggestions discerned from the data and, in the spirit of transferability, intended to offer reflections for others' consideration as applicable.

Characteristics of Principals' Leadership

As noted in the review of the literature, numerous leadership approaches and theories may be influential in framing principal leadership. As garnered from this research study, the leaders from selected improving schools, all of whom held most closely the tenants of authentic and transformational leadership, effected deep and lasting shifts in their school cultures toward enhanced teaching and learning. Other school leaders may want to deepen their sense of collaboration, shared leadership and communication through building relationships and internal capacities within their school communities to advance school improvement work. Maintaining a strong sense of integrity, honesty, trust and transparency with staff was important to the principals of the selected schools, as well as the importance of staying grounded, empowering others to lead, and acting as reflective practitioners.

In terms of practice and pragmatism, several suggestions are offered with regard to leadership approach. Administrators may want to engage a greater focus on people and relationships in order to enhance capacity for meaningful change. Strategically attending to relationship building with staff members, especially in the beginning stages of principal tenure at a given site, was noted to be important to participants of this study.

That encompasses a number of possible activities ranging from informal conversations, yearly entry and exit conferences to check in with staff, to specific team-building activities. Principals may choose to share with staff members a clearly articulated set of values and beliefs that define their leadership to assist in helping staff see them as authentic, transparent, and consistent leaders. Principals may choose to gain greater understandings of the correct use of data, provide appropriate supports for students, and build strong, meaningful relationships with staff and students, as these were all deemed important by participants of this study.

As authentic and transformational leaders, with regard to inspiring a sense of possibility when introducing new initiatives, principals may want to adapt a strategic and proactive approach to anticipating staff reactions, adapting responses of staff, and scaffolding staff needs for professional development, resources and supports. As a precursor to larger school improvement initiatives, a principal, as leader, may choose to consciously work to eliminate fixed ideas, and develop and model a growth mindset among staff members. They can help people see the possibility in change; show them the benefits of embracing new challenges. The principals of the improving schools actively worked to build internal capacities for growth opportunities for others in the areas of teaching and learning.

In terms of personal development, new leaders are encouraged to be self-aware in their transitions from colleague to supervisor, and to seek counsel and mentorship with administrative colleagues to assist them. Policy development at the local or even state levels to support principal mentorships is strongly encouraged. Principals should foster effective professional support teams. They should continue their own professional

development to keep themselves grounded, and to empower others to lead. Principals are encouraged to maintain balance between their professional and personal lives, setting boundaries between the two, as well as attend to their own personal social and spiritual needs so they may better assist others.

The principals in this study shared the importance of knowing and understanding oneself as a leader, as well as understanding one's passion and love of leadership. As leaders, principals may benefit from having an understanding of those within their organizations, and build relationships to create and sustain a strong, viable, and flourishing school culture. Principals are encouraged to find the right fit between their leadership styles and the organizations they lead.

Given that participants of this study shared the importance of principal leadership in change processes necessary to advance new initiatives, others may benefit from being grounded in the knowledge and understanding of change processes. Sensitivity to staff needs, and differentiating for them, may enhance leadership effectiveness. Leaders may also find it helpful to strategically develop plans to work with staff during change in terms of pacing, promoting a growth mindset and trust, offering supports, and building an internal capacity to advance the work.

Principals' Leadership and Aspects of School Climate and Culture

Throughout this research study, principals of improving schools viewed the relationship between their leadership and their school's climate and culture as an important interface impacting the organization in terms of organizational productivity, new hires, supervision and evaluation practices, school improvement efforts, meeting organizational challenges, and sustaining a positive school climate and culture.

The highest priority cited by principals was the ability and responsibility to bring on new personnel through the hiring process. That offers implications for district-level policy and local practices. Beginning at the school board and central office levels, administrators may wish to strategically develop policies, protocols and processes to bring in the most skilled and highly qualified workforce, attending always to quality and sense of organizational “fit.” Additionally, it may be helpful to develop a strategic plan of “grooming” new staff members in an effort to integrate and positively influence existing school cultures. That may include strong mentoring systems, careful administrative attention, coaching, supervision, and activities to actively integrate new staff members into the school community. Participants of this study noted that such efforts positively influenced organizational productivity by bringing on new energies, new ideas, and willingness to learn. Consistent and purposeful interaction and communication with principals also seemed to help with greater engagement of new staff. State-level policy mandates around probationary periods may also need to be considered with regard to retention or succession of probationary staff.

Principals noted supervision and evaluation to be an important leadership influence on organizational productivity. In their dual roles as coach and evaluator, supervision and evaluation seemed to influence staff effectiveness, efficiency, and positive organizational outcomes for student achievement and growth. Beginning at the state level, educator effectiveness laws and policies usually directly inform district policy decisions. Strategic district-level policies and protocols may assist in the careful evaluation of staff, as exemplified through protocols that govern the informal and formal evaluation process with staff. What may also be helpful is consistent and timely

communication, as well as continued conversations throughout deliberative evaluation processes. Participants noted it was important to trust the process, to make it a comprehensive check and balance system.

Additionally, to proactively attend to aspects of school climate and culture, principals may wish to simultaneously focus on the affective aspects and collective ownership within the school community. Practically, that can manifest by strategically working with vested parties to maximize professional development and collegial time together through systems of support, interventions and frameworks of collaboration. Principals might choose to develop and maintain positive school climates and cultures through purposeful actions, energy, and persistence. Participants of this study noted that leadership teams and specific staff members often play key roles in creating meaningful professional-development activities. That may include working together on purposeful, authentic tasks. Throughout the process, principals are encouraged to have consistent and honest conversations with staff to define and understand the purpose of the school improvement work, administrative roles in building trust, and assisting others in building a greater capacity to do the work needed for school improvement.

Principals' Perceptions of Student Success

Participants in this research study extensively shared their perceived influence on affective and academic aspects of student success within their schools. That manifested in strategies for effective teaching and learning, understanding and learning from their evolution as improving schools, and finally, understanding their roles as leaders in working with the change process. As a result, there are some practical implications for principals as leaders of improving schools.

Districts and schools may wish to carefully attend to core programming in reading, writing and math, with intentional and strategic programmatic and curricular decisions being made to advance teaching and learning. All of the principals noted a purposeful shift to core programming as a key to school improvement. Incorporating core programming in reading, writing, and math, as well as revisions in instructional practices to differentiate for student needs, may be important in the greater process of teaching and learning. That may also require a district level commitment to professional development supporting new initiatives. Participants in this study noted development of common language and common understandings with regard to best instructional practices seemed to create greater ownership and meaning with staff. Administrators at the district and building levels may wish to strategically consider implementing new core instructional programs in reading, writing, spelling and math to advance a collective emphasis on improvement. Those could potentially require significant district commitment in terms of philosophical agreements, buy-in, and resource allocations.

It may also be important for principals to advance school goals and quality professional development for all staff members to position them more favorably for success. When undertaking substantive school improvement efforts, it may be prudent for school leaders to actively work with staff to reflect the school and district priorities – keeping focused on students, as well as keeping student achievement and growth at the forefront. Investing time in professional development, understanding best practices, and creating interventions and support structures within the district and school, were all noted to be important by principals in this study to promoting school improvement efforts.

Principals, other school and district administrators, staff and students may benefit from training to work with data to analyze and inform student progress, instructional programs, and decisionmaking within a school setting. That implies creating a culture and developing policies, protocols and procedures for gathering, analyzing, and reflecting on student data as an integral part of the school and district culture and expectations. Professional learning communities were shown in this study to play a role in setting a framework for that to occur. Collective ownership, learning to work as a team, and strategically working with data appear to be important in leading important conversations about teaching and learning,

Along with that, the strategic development and monitoring of intervention and support systems (such as Response to Intervention, Title I programs, and special education resources) may prove to be beneficial to student success. That may include creating structures and affording the time for adults to work collaboratively in cohesive teams to strategically monitor student progress, and take corrective actions as necessary to enhance student achievement.

Measures of staff accountability for student achievement might also be included in administrative and educator effectiveness evaluation systems, which would have policy implications at the state, regional and local levels. In this study, principal leadership was perceived by participants to influence student achievement by providing structural and affective systems and supports. School leaders may benefit by intentionally modeling, working along with staff, and being visible as much as possible.

This research has shown that students view themselves as learners, supported by strong relationships with adults in the school community, thus leading to greater

achievement and an overall sense of safety and wellbeing. Schools are encouraged to develop strong mentoring and systems of support for strategically building relationships with students. That may also mean creating systems to support alternative learning plans, with attendant programming to bridge the gap for disenfranchised or otherwise non-attending students. Providing staffing, resources and thinking differently about delivery models may be important within that context.

Principals' Leadership Organizational Structures

This research study also revealed that leadership organizational structures used by principals in selected improving elementary schools were essential in advancing the work of schools toward improved teaching and learning. In that context, several suggestions are offered.

It may prove beneficial for professional learning communities or other instructional leadership teams to be developed and integrated within a school (and reinforced by its district), to focus on student learning and advancing school improvement efforts. Those may play an important role with regard to curriculum and professional development within the school. Emphasis here may well be considered to be on shared leadership and decisionmaking models that help staff and administrators frame choices that need to be made in the course of their work. Participants of this study noted time was the greatest commodity in collaborative work as learning teams. Given that, staff and administration may wish to be strategic about making it a priority and finding creative ways to build it into weekly schedules.

Principals also noted the importance of cultivating leadership in others to advance teacher leadership capacity within a school. That implies strategic mentoring and

supports offered to teacher leaders within schools, thus building capacity within to advance school-improvement efforts.

Administrators at the district and building levels are encouraged to work together to develop and integrate internal systems necessary to support external policy demands presented with Common Core State Standards, Proficiency Based Learning, Smarter Balanced Assessment Coalition Maine Educational Assessment, and new Educator and Administrator Effectiveness Systems. Such efforts may involve using middle level leadership teams to support and facilitate school improvement work and new initiatives. It may serve them well for administrators at the district and school levels to be strategic in creating implementation plans, and in involving their constituencies along the way.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research study focused on principals' perceptions of their leadership and influence over various aspects of their school functions. This section offers recommendations for further research of topics needing closer examination, and new questions for study as a result of this work.

Within this study, data were collected from the five principal participants, so findings cannot be generalized to a larger population (generalizability is defined as the extension of research findings from a study conducted on a sample population to the population at large, and sound generalizability requires data on large population samples.) Findings may, however, be transferable to another setting, as noted in the preceding section, because of the connections individual readers may make between elements of the study and their own experiences. With that in mind, consumers of this study may wish to expand similar research studies to other sites in other locales using comparable metrics of school improvement as standard screening criteria. It would be most interesting to see if similar conclusions regarding principal leadership in improving schools are drawn across other states and regions within the United States, or if there are nuanced differences that are regionally specific.

The perspective of this exploration of principal leadership is based solely on the principals' perspectives relative to their leadership, experiences and consequent influences. A further examination that would act as a triangulation for the study would be to include staff perceptions of principal leadership, and whether they align with the principals' perceptions, with regard to the same areas of investigation.

Additionally, this study considered data through the lens of participants who were principals at designated improving schools. What is not known is how those characteristics might be similar or different in principals of schools not designated as improving schools, or schools otherwise deemed as “effective,” in a future study. It would be interesting to see how findings of a study of schools not designated as “improving” would compare to the results of this research.

Another point to be considered is that this study focused on characteristics of principal leadership in improving elementary schools. It would be interesting to conduct the same research with principal leaders of improving middle and high schools, and see how findings about common themes and nuances would compare to those of elementary schools.

As previously noted, interview protocols and the resulting data obtained from principal participants in this study were developed from the research-based *Conceptual Framework for Exploring Principal Leadership* developed by the researcher. The consistency in use of interview protocols to guide individual conversations with participants, as well as in data collection and analyses, supports the strength and sense of consistency of findings across the five sites. As reflections from participants were analyzed individually, and then side-by-side in a cross-site comparison, this researcher found limited variance in responses regarding the key areas of exploration.

That given, there are other useful leadership frameworks that might serve as models to compare findings resulting from this study. They might further triangulate the findings of this study across a larger conceptual matrix. Two of particular note are included here.

Similarities could be linked to Marzano's 21 Point Thematic Leadership Framework (as cited in Chapter 1) that noted qualities of a school leader. From that study, as reported *School Leadership that Works, From Research to Results* (Marzano, Waters, McNulty, 2005), Marzano, Waters, and McNulty conducted a meta-analysis that included 69 studies, which highlighted over 2,800 schools, with an estimated 14,000 teachers and 1,400,000 students. Prior to establishing the premise of that text, they defined two prominent theories on leadership: transformation leadership and transactional leadership. The first type of leadership is focused on change whereas the second type is defined as trading one thing for another. Both transformational and authentic leadership styles are typically favored in education. The authors noted 21 responsibilities that make an effective school leader, stemming from their meta-analysis. They range from actions to dispositions and comprise the following categories of responsibilities: affirmation; change agent; contingent reward; communication; culture; discipline; flexibility; focus; ideas/beliefs; input; intellectual stimulation; involvement in curriculum, instruction and assessment; knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment; monitoring/evaluating; optimizer; order; outreach; relationships; resources; situational awareness; and visibility.

Another useful conceptual framework to compare research findings from this study could be the five leadership theme areas, as proffered by the Wallace Foundation and cited in Chapter 1. The Wallace Foundation offered several significant reports relative to principal leadership and success in schools, noting that although a range of leadership patterns exists, "the principal remains the central source of leadership influence" (Wallace Foundation, 2013.) Furthermore, the principal's role as instructional leader is said to entail five key responsibilities:

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

In consideration of the findings associated with this research study, several areas emerged that lend themselves to closer examination, and pose new questions for study.

Characteristics of Principals' Leadership

In terms of characteristics of principals' leadership, including leadership style and approach, many of the findings linked to the concepts of collaboration, shared leadership, the importance of relationships and communication, service to others, and building capacity through promoting leadership in others, as central approaches in principal leadership. Further examination into those questions may be helpful: How does collaboration and shared leadership manifest in principal leadership? Are there more, greater, or less-effective ways to create shared leadership within staff configurations? How do principals go about building internal capacity necessary for organizational improvements to sustain improved teaching and learning?

This research study noted that principals in improving schools shared authentic and transformational leadership based in an articulated set of values of honesty, integrity

and transparency. The questions emerge: How are those virtues of leadership measured? What are their influences on staff and the school? How do those virtues impact a greater sense of trust? Trust continually surfaces as intrinsic to relationship and culture building, so how do principal leaders establish trust with and among staff? Additionally, what is the role of “charisma” in principal leadership and what are the influences of that trait on staff members in the work of improving schools?

Having strong, professional support teams is important to principals’ leadership. How do those teams manifest in principals’ professional lives, and do they have varying levels of influence and utility to the leadership work of a principal? Additionally, the study revealed that significant challenges exist in maintaining a balance between principals’ personal lives and work, and maintaining said balance is a key factor in their success as leaders. More research could be conducted relative to how principal leaders maintain their sense of balance between their personal and professional lives. Do different strategies have differing levels of influence?

Leadership challenges and successes were shown to influence principals. They bring energy and purpose to principals’ roles as leaders, and the ability to influence and effect greater changes beyond themselves in a classroom setting. That suggests the following questions for further investigation: What are the major types of challenges administrators deal with, their impact, and how are they mitigated by the principal? How do administrators face and/or embrace challenges? What are the attributes that lead to an ability to take on challenges and the difficult work required for substantive school improvement? Additionally, challenges result when growing new school cultures to adapt to increased accountability mandates. Getting folks to see the possibility in change

and learning to let go of old traditions and thinking present challenges becomes a priority. How do administrators develop and promote a growth mindset in themselves, and with staff?

This study also noted that principals perceived that their leadership plays a key role in working with change in terms of pacing, promoting passion and a growth mindset among staff, understanding impact and offering supports, and finally, building an internal capacity to advance the work. How is each of those aspects manifested in practice and efficacy of result within principals' school communities?

Principal Leadership and Aspects of School Climate and Culture

With regard to principals' relationship between their leadership and the schools' climate and culture, the following ideas emerged. In terms of organizational productivity, principals consistently cited the importance of their role in hiring new staff, coupled with strategic mentoring, supervision and support, as the most important role of principal leadership, thus positioning teacher leadership capacity within a school to advance school improvement efforts. Closer investigation into aspects of that might deepen understandings with regard to principal leadership. What are the most effective methods of mentoring (and grooming) new hires, and how do these influence or impact school improvement outcomes? Principals also noted supervision and evaluation to be a key leadership influence on organizational productivity, and advancing school goals and quality professional development for staff members. Are there ways to create greater administrative efficiencies in the supervision and evaluation process? What are the differing models, benefits and challenges in the of educator effectiveness/evaluation systems developed to address the new educator-effectiveness legislation?

In terms of school improvement, principals perceived themselves as instructional leaders whose leadership matters in influencing school outcomes. Investing time in professional development, understanding best practices, interventions, and support structures within a school is critical to promoting school improvement efforts. A key question emerges as to how they do that, and to what level of efficacy? Are there support structures in each of those areas that are more effective than others? How do improving schools structure professional development systems and systems of support for staff members? Time was noted as the greatest organizational challenge. How is that mitigated within the various models explored?

Principals also noted that their actions were influential in developing and maintaining positive school climates and cultures, and were the result of strategic and purposeful actions, energy, and persistence. Several questions may be worthy of further investigation. What is the role and influence of building leadership teams to creating meaningful professional development? How is collective ownership promoted within staff? How does staff trust in leadership impact school culture? What are the most effective ways of building a positive and productive school culture focused on teaching and learning? The value of positive relationships among the staff, witnessed by students, was found to be a key to success. What is the influence of staff relationships on students, and how can it be maximized?

Principals' Perceptions of Student Success

With regard to principals' perception of student success, the following ideas emerged. The study revealed that principals and their school communities had a strong reliance on data to analyze and inform student progress, instructional programs, and

decisionmaking. How do administrators build capacity for staff to understand and utilize data for those purposes? This study noted that in improving schools, adults worked collaboratively in cohesive teams to strategically monitor student progress, and took corrective actions as necessary to enhance student achievement. How are intervention and student support systems structured across improving elementary schools? What is their level of effectiveness and efficiency in student progress? This study also revealed that collective ownership within the school community, and simultaneously focusing on affective aspects of the school is crucial to success. Within that context, students viewed themselves as learners, supported by strong relationships with adults in the school community. What are different ways in which improving schools attend to the affective aspects of their school culture to meet student needs? This study also found that the development of common language and common understandings with regard to best instructional practices resulted in greater ownership and meaning with staff. How is the development of common language and understandings manifested in improving schools?

Principals' Leadership Organizational Structures

With regard to principals' leadership structures within their schools, the following ideas emerged. Throughout this research, principals shared the importance of structuring adult learning teams that advanced collective ownership, learning to work as a team, and strategically working with data is key to lead important conversations about teaching and learning, as well as to work with curriculum and professional development.

Professional learning communities were predominant throughout and focused on student learning integral to advancing school improvement efforts. A deeper exploration of how those are constructed, their work, the benefits to a school's productivity, and culture

would offer valuable information for administrators looking for leadership structures.

Additionally, as time presents as both a benefit and challenge, understanding how time is constructed as an integral part of a school's schedule would offer ideas to others. Lastly, a deeper look at how school leaders are developing and integrating internal systems necessary to support new policy initiatives such as Common Core State Standards, Proficiency Based Learning, Smarter Balanced Assessment Coalition Maine Educational Assessment, and new Educator and Administrator Effectiveness Systems, would be beneficial to districts creating them.

Recommendations for Principal Leadership Preparation

As this research indicates, there is a tension between the logistical needs and responsibilities of principal leadership and the authentic aspects of the role – how it plays out in real life.

Affective components come into play here, such as the balance between principals' personal and professional lives, building school culture and internal capacity through staff and leaders to support changes and school improvement, and crosscutting as a theme – the importance of relationships and team.

Overwhelmingly, those “intangible” aspects were noted to be instrumental to the success of principals as leaders of improving schools, but rarely are they incorporated as integral areas of administrative leadership programs. They are the “real-life” notions of how to communicate effectively, create lasting relationships, build successful teams, deal with conflict resolution, and inspire others toward a common vision and purpose. Additionally, there is a need for the personal introspection aspects such as understanding oneself as a leader and the importance of “fit” in the types of leadership roles principals may pursue.

Given that those are critical areas that were embedded throughout the transformative work of the principals, as authentic leaders of this study, they may be worth considering in creating new administrative leadership or mentoring programs. Consideration should include: incorporating ontological leadership designs (that build the introspective components necessary to build an ability and sense of self-reflection, vision, passion, self-confidence and power in leadership); communication; self-expression and leadership; and models of building community. Such efforts may help to

build a deeper understanding of a leader as individual first, then then an ability to reach through powerful communication and relationship building, thus designing communities of collective visions and purposes. Those are frequently embedded in the realm of executive coaching models, but not as integral to administrative leadership programs.

Final Thoughts

Several new insights emerged as a result of this study in terms of methodology, findings, and reflections, and are worthy of notation here. With regard to methodology, the use and importance of the Seidman interviewing technique to base interview protocols on proved to be exceptionally useful and propitious in several ways. As a result of using that protocol, there was a sense of deepened relationships and bonding with the principal participants involved, and a connection that manifested in an evolving trust and ease with the process. Participants openly expressed their appreciation at being able to share insights about their leadership beliefs and practice, as well as about their personal and professional connections to their work. The process of building through a set of interviews based in their leadership background and context, as well as on their current experiences integrating and reflecting their work, was especially meaningful to creating a richer picture of their leadership experiences as principal leaders.

Several points emerged as new insights to this researcher through the process. Overall, the importance of transformational and authentic leadership as pivotal to advancing real and substantive change toward school improvement efforts was reinforced. Within the depth of the conversations, the principal leaders “walked the talk,” and shared with authenticity their leadership journeys. Continual emphasis on the importance of relationship building through all aspects of the school community and daily school life was highlighted. Although always understood to be important, it emerged as a continual and most important foundational piece to all of these principals’ influence as leaders. Along with that was their sense of energy and passion, grounded in

the importance of “growth mindsets,” to create through their shared leadership something greater than themselves within their school communities.

Within the context of a descriptive qualitative research study, the principal, as researcher, plays a unique role as the instrument of data collection, as well as in data analysis. Doing so for this study was personally and professionally rewarding, affirming educational growth and rekindling a sense of leadership passion. The outreach afforded by the research on inspirational colleagues has been invaluable. The unique opportunity afforded by this study to explore leadership at a different level afforded new insight not only to my role as a primary researcher, but also as a practicing school administrator. The reflections, findings, and conclusions herein are offered as inspiration to others in continuing to advance educational leadership in the best interests of teaching and learning.

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Appendix A: Description of the Study

University of Southern Maine

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

Project Title: Exploring principal leadership in improving elementary schools

Principal Researcher: *Brian A. Porter, 24 Mousam Ridge Road, Kennebunk, Maine 04043, (207) 468-4497, brian.a.porter1@usm.maine.edu*

Overview

The purpose of this research study is to explore and understand the characteristics of principal leadership in improving elementary schools in Maine. As schools in Maine, and across the nation, are increasingly held to greater standards of accountability in terms of insuring higher levels of student academic growth and achievement, there are some schools that are improving and some that are not. Even beyond the constraints of tightening financial impositions and increasing Federal and State accountability mandates, some schools are “defying the odds” and producing positive results.

This research will help to shed some light on what the conditions of principal leadership are within these improving schools. The intent of this study is to provide a greater understanding of how principals in improving schools view their leadership and leadership theories they espouse, the relationship between their principal leadership and school culture and climate, how these principals perceive student success and lastly, how they employ leadership structures within their schools to advance teaching and learning. Additionally, this study may offer insight for others to consider in examining their own leadership, and shifting school cultures toward an ultimate goal of improved student learning.

Research Plan

The exploration of principal leadership in improving elementary schools in Maine will involve a 3-part interview process with selected principal leaders who have been in schools where demonstrable student improvement has taken place. Interviews will be transcribed and analyzed for themes and patterns. These themes and patterns will be compared with artifacts and other interview data and reviewed with the principals interviewed for accuracy. Each school site will be treated as a separate phenomenological interview study and then a cross-site comparison will occur, looking for larger patterns or commonalities among and between those sites selected.

Interviews

Before each interview, the researcher will obtain participation agreement and schedule interviews at a mutually convenient time and location. The interviews will be audio taped. Each interview will last 45-60 minutes. Principals will be asked to bring relevant

documents (policy manuals, handbooks, staff information guides, essential district or school level documents, flow charts, meeting structure composites, or a variety of other informative literature sources specific to the given setting) to the second interview. These documents will be used to help extend interview data and exemplify key ideas shared by principals. Additionally, documents will serve as artifacts and evidences to provide a deeper understanding of the transference of the principals' leadership stances into authentic structures within the sites explored.

Report of Findings

All data collected and reported will be in aggregated and incorporated into a summary report identifying cross interview findings. All data and reporting will insure the confidentiality of the participants to the maximum extent possible, as noted in the *Consent for Participation in Research*. At the completion of the interviews, the researcher will create individual phenomenological interview studies with each site selected and then conduct a cross-site analysis undertaken, and finally prepare a final dissertation report with findings that will benefit other principal leaders in Maine and beyond.

Expectations

Principals participating in the study agree to:

- Indicate an interest in participating in this 3-part interview process,
- Participate in all three interviews,
- Reflect openly about their background and context, philosophy and practice, and impact of their leadership on their schools organizational framework, climate and culture, perceptions of student success and other aspects,
- Provide access to relevant documents, and
- Provide feedback as to the accuracy of patterns and themes that emerge.

Further Information

If additional information is needed, principals are encouraged to contact

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Appendix B: Maine's School Performance Grading System 2013-14

Methodology

Just as no one single score or grade tells the whole story of a student, neither does it tell you everything about a school. That's why Maine's school grading system is based on several factors including student achievement in reading and math; growth/progress in achievement, and, in particular, the growth of the bottom 25 percent of students (for elementary schools); and the graduation rate (for high schools). Please note Maine schools/districts are provided an opportunity to verify all the data used in their report card.

Read on for the complete methodology for the 2014 report cards, which were calculated using the same formula as in 2013 to allow for comparison between the two years.

Elementary Schools (Grades 3-8)

Calculations are based on the most recent data available, which are 2013-14 assessments, given to students in grades 3-8. Proficiency accounts for 50 percent of the grade (100 points each for math and reading) and growth accounts for the other 50 percent (50 points each for the growth of all students in math, the growth of all students in reading, the growth of the bottom 25 percent of students from the previous year in math and the bottom 25 percent of students from the previous year in reading).

Data used in the school calculation includes grades 3-8 students who participated in the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) in the fall of 2013 or were assessed using the Personalized Alternate Assessment Portfolio (PAAP) in the spring of 2013, and who were continuously enrolled at the school listed on their assessment results for the entire academic year (as determined by counts submitted to the Department by schools in both October and April).

Because the elementary school grades take into account the growth of individual students, it takes two years of assessment data for a student to be included in the calculations. Excluded from the calculations are schools that have no or limited data or have significantly changed school configuration.

Elementary school grades are based on the following measures:

Proficiency

- **Math Proficiency** – Percent of the students in each school who achieved an achievement level of proficient or proficient with distinction in mathematics.
- **Reading Proficiency** – Percent of the students in each school who achieved an achievement level of proficient or proficient with distinction in reading.

Growth - Individual student growth, year to year, collectively for the school.

- **Math Growth* – All Students** – Measures the collective growth of individual students – that is, how well did individual students improve from the previous testing year. Calculation: total mathematics growth points in a school, divided by the number of all students used in the calculation. (See notes below)
- **Reading Growth* – All Students** – Measures the collective growth of individual students – that is, how well did individual students improve from the previous testing year.

year. Calculation: total reading growth points in a school, divided by the number of all students used in the calculation. (See notes below)

- **Math Growth – Bottom 25 percent**** – Growth among students in math who scored in the bottom 25 percent in the previous testing year – that is, what was the growth (calculated same as for All Students) among the most struggling students.
- **Reading Growth – Bottom 25 percent**** – Growth among students in reading who scored in the bottom 25 percent in the previous testing year – that is, what was the growth (calculated same as for All Students) among the most struggling students.

Assessment participation

State assessments provide important information that informs classroom instruction and school improvement. The participation of all students ensures the progress of all learners is valued and reflected, and provides the most accurate picture of school strengths and challenges. Additionally, schools are required by State and federal law to meet at least a 95 percent participation rate. Participation of less than 90 percent results in an automatic “F” and participation between 90 and 95 percent results in a one letter grade reduction.

*Growth Calculation

The growth calculation measures whether students are improving (or declining) one year to the next based on achievement levels. It is calculated on each individual student’s growth (or decline). In order to be included in the growth calculation students must have been assessed for two consecutive years.

Students who advance a proficiency level, regardless of what level they were at, as well as students who maintain a proficiency level of 3 (proficient) or 4 (proficient with distinction) are considered to have made growth. There is a bonus weighting for students who advance more than one proficiency level in a year.

Level 1 (substantially below proficient) and level 2 (partially proficient) have been broken into two levels each: 1A, 1B, 2A, and 2B, making it easier to show growth and recognize advancement even at levels below proficient.

A “1” or greater is considered to be a year’s growth.

		Current Year					
		1A	1B	2A	2B	3	4
Past Year	1A	0	1	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4
	1B	0	0	1	1.1	1.2	1.3
	2A	0	0	0	1	1.1	1.2
	2B	0	0	0	0	1	1.1
	3	0	0	0	0	1	1.1
	4	0	0	0	0	0	1

**Bottom 25 Percent

In order to be included in the Bottom 25 percent calculation students must be continuously enrolled in the same school for two consecutive years. If no students fit that criteria the Bottom 25 percent value will be replaced with the All Students value for the same subject.

Appendix C: Summary of The Study of More Efficient and Improving Schools Study

Within the context of selecting appropriate school settings to examine principal participants' leadership, the second criteria for site selection was that the school was also identified as an improving school in The Study of More Efficient and Improving Schools conducted by the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) in the Center for Education Policy, Applied Research, and Evaluation (CEPARE) at the University of Southern Maine.

As part of a research study undertaken at the request of the state legislature, the MEPRI conducted a study culminating in 2013 of PK- 12 public schools that have been identified as improving. MEPRI explored the significant practices and characteristics of improving Maine schools, using Maine Educational Assessment data from the years 2006-2009, in an effort to identify some practices and attributes that have helped these schools to improve student performance.

As a preface to this study, MEPRI developed a set of metrics for identifying schools whose students are beating the odds by performing significantly better on state assessments than would be predicted from student and community characteristics. It used this same metric to identifying improving schools, with the goal of the two-phase study being to identify the strategies and practices that these two types of schools are using to support all learners.

In terms of reference, in order for a school to be considered More Efficient, it has to be both performing well and getting a good return on education spending. More specifically;

Higher Performing schools qualify with the following characteristics:

- Three-year average composite scores on state assessments that are at least 1/3 standard deviation above State average, and above predicted scores based on student demographics and prior performance;
- Two-year average percent Meeting Proficiency and percent Partially Meeting Proficiency above the State average.

Efficient schools are defined as demonstrating:

- A “return on spending quotient” (defined as the school percentage of students at or above the “Meets” proficiency level divided by the school per-pupil operating expenditure) above the State average and above what would be predicted based on pupil characteristics.

The efficiency criterion identifies schools that are not spending disproportionately more than other schools for the higher performing student outcomes achieved. Improving schools show a demonstrated record of improvements in academic performance that have put them on a path to become more efficient schools.

For more information, please reference the CEPARE Study, *Maine's Improving Schools An Examination of Distinguishing Features of a Sample of Maine's Improving Public Schools*.

This can be found at the following website link:

http://usm.maine.edu/sites/default/files/cepare/Imp%20Schools%20report%202013_B1.pdf

Appendix D: Summary Overview of Findings: Exploring Principal Leadership in Improving Elementary Schools

Characteristics of Principals' Leadership

- *The principals of these select improving schools in Maine shared characteristics of authentic and transformational leaders.*

Leadership Style and Approach

- *As authentic leaders,*
 - Principals' evolutions as leaders were shaped by early teaching and leadership experiences, as well as definitive transitions they underwent when shifting from colleagues to supervisors.
 - Principals viewed their roles as leaders as responsive to peoples' needs and values.
 - Principals believed in shared leadership that manifested in collaborative work with others.
- *As authentic and transformational leaders,*
 - Principals believed in the importance of relationships and communication as intrinsic to their leadership.
 - Principals expressed the importance of having a strong set of values, integrity, and sense of honesty and transparency that served as the foundation of their leadership.
 - Principals shared a deep ethical conviction that "what's best for kids" was priority and guided all decisions of their schools.

Sustaining Forces and Balancing Leadership Demands

- *As authentic and transformational leaders,*
 - Principals gained satisfaction and were sustained by their work with staff, students and parents.
 - Principals were energized by interactions with students and staff through new initiatives.
- *As authentic leaders,*
 - Collegial supports were important to help principals stay grounded.
 - Maintaining balance between their personal and professional lives was important to principals' success as leaders, but also proved to be challenging.
- *As authentic and transformational leaders,*
 - Principals were challenged by external demands, accountability pressures, and helping staff think differently about their work.
 - Principals were influential in mitigating challenges resulting from external accountability demands, political and social forces
 - Time was the greatest organizational challenge in principals' work as school leaders.

Leadership and Change

- *As transformational leaders,*
 - Principals were influential in understanding and working with staff through change processes.
 - Principals perceived the importance of taking time and building capacity during times of change.

Principal Leadership and Aspects of School Climate and Culture

Organizational Productivity and New Hires

- *Principals were influential in strategically hiring and grooming new staff members.*

Supervision and Evaluation

- *Principals' purposeful focus on supervision and evaluation practices highly influenced organizational productivity.*

School Climate and Culture

- *Principals were influential in developing and maintaining positive school climates and culture, advancing meaningful change, and establishing trust.*
- *Principals promoted collective ownership within their school communities.*

Principals' Perceptions of Student Success

Teaching, Learning, Student Success and Professional Development

- *Principals identified academic success as a priority in their schools.*
- *Principals perceived themselves as instructional leaders whose leadership mattered in influencing student outcomes.*
- *Principals worked to create school cultures where students viewed themselves as learners.*

Intervention Structures and Supports

- *Principals were influential in promoting success by attending to the academic and affective needs of all students.*

Importance of Data

- *Principals were influential in creating strong reliance on data.*

Principals' Leadership Frameworks in Improving Schools

Structuring Learning Teams

- *Principals emphasized the critical importance of structuring adult learning teams to advance school improvement work.*

Collegiality and Empowerment

- *Principals empowered leadership teams and promoted collegiality.*

Cultivating Leadership

- *Principals strategically cultivated leadership in others to advance teacher leadership within the school.*

Appendix E: Principal Participant Leadership Descriptions

Heather

Heather holds as her central tenets the importance of collaborative leadership and developing relationships that lead to trust and a strong school culture. The impact of early education influences, middle level experiences - both in the classroom and as a literacy specialist, and coach created a strong foundation from which she embarked on her administrative journey. Strong models of women in leadership acted as an inspiration to begin her career a few years ago as an administrator. With a passion and love for her job, she is collegial in nature, working best with others through shared decision making.

Balancing supervision and evaluation demands through a highly organized system, strong communication, and close work with staff in a professional growth model has proven to be the key to advancing good teaching and learning. Never being satisfied with where folks are at in terms of performance, meaningful and purposive professional development is at the heart of this principal's leadership. As an authentic leader, Heather takes her personal life experiences and uses them to create her current leadership stance. When introducing new initiatives, she believes that it is important for them to emerge from the ground up, as they are more effective if teachers develop and create them as part of their own needs, as opposed to being administratively placed. The importance of trust in leadership is profound, as well as letting people "See you for who you are... your successes as well as your limitations." This transparency and passion for leadership serves to motivate and inspire others.

Heather's core belief is that students are always the priority and their best interest is the lens and filter to pass all decisions and mandates through. Her job as the leader is to build capacity within the staff, and to inspire them to do their best to actualize the district vision.

Marianne

Grounded in the traits of authentic and transformational leadership, Marianne stresses the importance of spending time community-building to develop school culture in the early part of her tenure, sustained by the belief that truth, honesty and relationships matter most in setting the stage to do the tough work demanded in educational reform. After 22 years of teaching, and as a veteran administrator, the importance of engaging conversations to highlight the passions and struggles of educators cannot be emphasized enough. That said, Marianne's primary belief and ongoing goal, as a leader is to create the arena and set the stage so that trusted colleagues can do their work.

There is an inherent trust in the staff's professional nature and collegiality together that is reflected in the school's leadership and learning structures (professional development and instructional leadership, collaborative learning and grade level teams), as well as using energy and persistence to create a culture of perseverance that moves the organization forward through authentic tasks focused on teaching and learning. All of this is based in the extensive and deliberate use of data to inform all instructional and programmatic decisions. New initiatives such as the implementation of Common Core State Standards, Proficiency Based Learning, and new

Educator Effectiveness Evaluation systems, have ushered an increased collaboration as teams, working together in authentic tasks. In all aspects of advancing the work of education, she believes that it is crucially important to build capacity within the staff, while acting in honesty, integrity and an inherent trust that as a leader, you “have their backs.”

Beth

Beth presents as a strong and vibrant leader, creative and not willing to rest. She loves to engage meaningful conversation and effect change at a greater level whenever possible. These character traits form the basis of her authentic and transformational leadership style. Working in a non-traditional, innovative school setting throughout this transition helped to organize and push her thinking about good teaching and student learning in new and exciting ways. She shared that “knowing who you are as a leader is as much about knowing what you don't like about leaders. That helps define yourself as a leader; from those you choose to emulate, you gather pieces of leadership that help create your own style.” In this way, Beth has taken key qualities and merged them to form her own leadership style that is collaborative, high on relationships, and active in listening, thus getting all input then make necessary decisions that may sometimes go against traditional norms and beliefs.

Sustained by the daily relationships with students, staff and connections to the school, Beth's priority is to move the greater school community in the right direction with changes that are in the best interest of kids, anchored in an inherent belief in the reform work at hand, hanging on to those things that are valued, while maintaining the balance between love of learning and the numerous external demands of current education. These are numerous and include Smarter Balanced Assessment, Common Core State Standards, Proficiency Based Learning, Educator Effectiveness systems and so on. Within this context, the principal's influence extends to many aspects of promoting structural, academic and affective changes necessary to provide the strongest possible learning community where all children and staff see themselves as learners. Structural changes require changes in vision and identifying what was valued as a school, thus creating a vision to use as a mirror and lens to focus and refocus all of its initiatives.

With the priority of building relationships with students, parents and staff, as well as trusting in both people and processes, all aspects of teaching and learning for the benefit of children are advanced. Grounding herself as a leader, Beth offered that “On your worst day, go to the best classroom, and remember why you are here.”

Jean

As a rural school principal, Jean manages three equal size elementary schools, (2 are PreK-5 / 1 is K-5) each with its own personality, culture, and climate, collectively overseeing 320 students, with the assistance of a head teacher at each building. RSA is particularly unusual in that it is a very veteran staff that has been together for very long time – all of whom work well together, know each other well, and are closely bonded. Through shared leadership and promoting leadership through others, Jean holds as a priority building capacity in others by supporting them, providing the resources and doing the background work they need, and making them know they are valued.

As principal leader, Jean sees her role as structuring support and facilitating staff needs, playing a dual role as both advocate and being in the trenches with them doing the work of the

district that is required. There is a collective mentality wherein staff members view themselves responsible for all students, regardless of grade level. This sense of shared ownership extends into the areas of discipline, school management, safety, caretaking, activities and all events of the school. The key to their success was noted as the positive relationships students see between the staff.

Under Jean's leadership, student achievement and a collective investment by adults and children in their successes has been a continual priority. There is no "down time" and instructional time is highly valued at this school. RSA's school improvement journey has taken it as a TIF3 (Teacher Incentive Fund) school to regional and national distinctions as a Title 1 Distinguished School and Blue Ribbon School for Achievement. All of this has required significant personal investment, seriousness of purpose, extensive data use to inform all aspects of teaching and learning, based in professional trust and relationship building, keeping students as a priority and creating something bigger than themselves.

Matthew

Matthew presents as a deliberative and reflective thinker. Collaborative in nature, his leadership comes out of authentic tendencies based on real-life experiences. Throughout his 25 years in education as a teacher, Department of Education consultant, coach and administrator, creating cohesive, focused teams have been a priority, thus setting the stage to work collaboratively with others on school improvement goals.

Working as teams and in collaboration with others forms the essence of Matthew's leadership. All priorities focus on what's best for kids and this concept is the lens through which all of his leadership tenets are processed. Building strong relationships, continuous improvement and creating leadership opportunities for others are of the utmost importance. Overall, his leadership is based in appreciating the importance of community and giving back, as well as trusting in others, in addition to his own leadership beliefs.

Working with disadvantaged students has been a priority throughout Matthew's leadership career. Safety and security form the basis from which everything else is created and relationships overlay all of this - relationships first with kids, then adults, then everything else emerges from that. Growing a critical mass within the school teaching community to advance major school improvements is a priority. These include extensive work in restorative practices, development of common language for students and staff (both in the affective and academic realms), building relationships and a strong sense of team, working with PLC groups to use data to drive curricular and instructional decisions, focusing on integrating literacy into all aspects of instruction, proficiency based learning work, and grouping / regrouping students around specific learning targets. As a staff, RSB is talking about more issues of substance. There is power in teachers sharing data and holding each other accountable, thus creating an uncomfortable yet different level of opportunity.

Centered leadership affords the key to successful innovation and school improvement. Finding the right fit is so important, as well as defining passion in individual leadership. Matthew sees schools in the context of learning facilitation, flexibility, and exploring new models to advance teaching and learning.

Biography of the Author

Brian A. Porter was born in 1958, in Flint, Michigan, and graduated from Flint Central High School. In 1981, he graduated from the University of Michigan-Flint with a bachelor of arts degree, with majors in elementary education and biology. Brian went on to study at the University of Southern Maine, earning a master of science degree in educational administration in 1990.

For 33 years, Brian has worked as a teacher, teacher leader, consultant, leadership coach, and administrator in private and public schools in Michigan and Maine, spanning pre-kindergarten through grade 8. He is currently in his sixteenth year as principal of Village Elementary School in Gorham, Maine.

Brian lives in Kennebunk, Maine, with his partner, Michel Lussier. He is a 2015 candidate for the doctor of philosophy degree in public policy, with a concentration in educational policy and leadership, from the University of Southern Maine.