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## Leading Effective Change in Schools of the 21st Century: The Attributes, Behaviors, and Practices of Effective School Principals

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

LEADING EFFECTIVE CHANGE IN SCHOOLS OF THE 21ST CENTURY:  
THE ATTRIBUTES, BEHAVIORS, AND PRACTICES OF  
EFFECTIVE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM IN ADMINISTRATION AND SUPERVISION

BY

JENNIFER FERRARI

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

In a period of tremendous change, as the educational landscape shifts to ensure our students are well prepared for new and unknown futures, the role of school principal is more essential than ever. The principal, as primary driver of change, sits at the helm of school improvement. He/she is charged with leading the complex orchestration of school efforts to develop and nurture the next generation of thinkers, problem-solvers, and innovators.

This study explored the attributes, behavior, and practices of effective K-12 principals through a mixed method design. Nine principals from the suburbs of Chicago participated in this study. Using 5Essential data to identify effective principals, participants completed a self-reflection survey about their leadership responsibilities and later participated in hour-long face to face interviews. The rich stories of their leadership journeys revealed many insights about the key influences and experiences that shaped their leadership practices. Further, through their descriptions of their roles and perceptions of themselves as leaders, the nine principals revealed several key leadership responsibilities, particularly in the area of building purposeful communities that were evident in their practice. Lastly, their personal narratives revealed their value in shared leadership and their beliefs that, together with their faculty and staff, they are stronger and better able meet the evolving needs of their students. The stories shared by these principals were relevant because while many of their leadership strengths are affirmed by

the literature and research on principal leadership, their unique circumstances and contexts provided insights that have not been traditionally examined in the field.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

As a country, the United States has seen more change in the field of education in the last decade than we have seen in a century. The rate of change is fast, and the need for effective, nimble, and dynamic school leaders has never been greater. With increasing expectation in society and in the workplace for knowledgeable, skilled, responsible citizens, the pressure on school intensifies. Sir Ken Robinson's (2010) pervasive, viral RSA lecture, *Changing Education Paradigms* has captured over 11.6 million views. On the one hand, this YouTube sensation strikes a chord by pointing out the inherent flaws of an egregiously outdated education system that Robinson argues "kills creativity" and "anesthetizes children." He poignantly highlights the adaptive challenges we face in public education, those which "can only be addressed through changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties" (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009, p. 19). On the other hand, this lecture resonates with its viewers precisely because education is in the midst of an exciting, albeit painstakingly slow, shift. "To succeed in this world, students need a broader and deeper set of skills, knowledge, and habits of success than those they develop through K-12 schools' traditional focus on academic content knowledge" (NGLC MyWays, n.d.). The rallying cry of the *need* for change in schools is approaching the tipping point-- the reality that schools *are* changing. However, because the "structures, culture, and defaults that make up an organizational system become

deeply ingrained, self-reinforcing, and very difficult to reshape” (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 51), it will take a skilled leader to navigate the necessary change, difficult in schools because they are “trapped by their current ways of doing things, simply because these ways worked in the past” (p. 51).

Who is the primary facilitator of this change? What are the hallmarks or indicators of effective change and effective change agents? Central to the purpose of this research, the answers to these questions pointed to the role of the school building principal. At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the complex role of the principal was conceived “at the nexus of educational practice and policy position” (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 3) and remains at the nexus at start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, yet with additional, and ever-increasing responsibilities, expectations, and mandates.

While education is tasked with preparing students for the future, the field itself continues to be mired in a long expired model. It is this irony that makes Robinson’s sentiments so compelling and a point with which Jim Rickabaugh, Senior Advisor to the Institute for Personalized Learning, an education innovation lab dedicated to the transformation of public education concurs.

Our current public education system was created in the late 1890’s to serve the economy and society of that era. It was acceptable for most youth to gain some basic skills and prepare for work that would present relatively low intellectual challenge, was highly repetitive, and usually performed under close supervision. Today’s society and economy require virtually all of our youth be educated at high levels. (Rickabaugh, 2012a)

The American public education system was conceived in the 1890s to meet the needs of society, where only a small portion of the population were expected to pursue advanced degrees-- with the balance entering skilled and unskilled trades and labor training (Rickabaugh, 2012b). Throughout the next one hundred years, the public education model remained much the same and yet continued to meet the needs of our society.

Two generations ago students could leave formal education knowing most of what they would ever need to know as adults. Even students who left the school system before high school graduation could find work that paid well enough to raise a family and enjoy a middle-class life. (Frontier & Rickabaugh, 2014, p. 5)

The evolution of education has changed the landscape of what our students must be able to know, understand and do.

Fifty years ago high school graduates left school knowing 75% of what they would ever need to know in order to function successfully in the workplace, in their families and communities. Today, the estimate is that our high school graduates leave knowing only 2% of what they need to know, leaving 98% yet to come. It is not that high school graduates know less than their counterparts back in the 1950's; in fact, they know far more. But today, a basic kit of knowledge just does not cut it anymore. (Barth, 1997, p. 56)

As our nation continues to evolve, the stakes continue to get higher. A college degree, which at one time nearly guaranteed gainful employment, is no longer the silver bullet for success.

Fifty years ago, a bachelor's degree likely led to a secure long-term job,

participation in an employer training program, and healthy wage increases. By contrast, despite a meaningful wage premium over high school graduates, today's college graduates face significant unemployment and underemployment, the elimination of most formal employer training, and reduced job security. (Lash & Belfiore, 2017, p. 4)

Times have changed. Our children require a different approach, one that more broadly prepares students for the new challenges that exist in our quickly evolving landscape and even less predictable futures. As a result, the 21<sup>st</sup> century is demanding more of educators.

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act which “represented a major new commitment by the federal government in educating our young people” (Homeroom. n.d.). It was a call to “strengthen and improve educational quality and educational opportunities in the Nation’s elementary and secondary schools” (Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA], 1965, p. 27.) In the 35 years that followed, federal resources and grants were established to improve the quality of public education. However, despite the many ESEA measures put in place to support public education, our nation continued to fall short on meeting the law’s goal (Homeroom, n.d.). In 2001, in an effort to “ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (US Department of Ed, NCLB Statement of Purpose, n.d.), Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to reauthorize ESEA. With increased emphasis

on accountability, “NCLB put in place important new measures to expose achievement gaps, and started an important national dialogue on how to close them” (Homeroom, n.d.) NCLB was an important part of public school improvement. “At the heart of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is a promise; to set a high bar for all students and to protect the most vulnerable” (Duncan, 2013).

However, while NCLB has played an important role in closing achievement gaps and requiring transparency, it also has significant flaws. It created incentives for states to lower their standards; emphasized punishing failure over rewarding success; focused on absolute scores, rather than recognizing growth and progress; and prescribed a pass-fail, one-size-fits-all series of interventions for schools that miss their state-established goals. (Homeroom, n.d.)

Recognizing that “times have changed,” and to encourage “groundbreaking reforms and innovations to increase the quality of instruction and improve academic achievement for all students” (ESEA Flexibility FAQ, 2012, p. 3), ESEA Flexibility was established in 2011 by the U.S. Department of Education. ESEA flexibility “enabled states to gain flexibility from the NCLB’s specific mandates in exchange for state-designed plans to set high standards; reshape accountability systems; and support the evaluation and development of effective teachers and principals” (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015, p. 7). It “provided educators and State and local leaders with flexibility regarding specific requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001” (ESEA Flexibility FAQ, 2012, p. 1) and served as a precursor to the newly enacted Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA) which was signed into law by President Barack Obama on December 10, 2015 (U.S.



Department of Education, Every Student Succeeds Act, n.d.). The No Child Left Behind era led to the narrowing of curricula, practice, and students' learning experiences in public schools. "Under NCLB, the learning that psychometricians and policymakers felt could be assessed with any degree of accuracy — basically, absorption of content — became the de facto definition of student success" (Lash & Belfiore, 2017, p. 4). Aiming to "fully prepare all students for success in college and careers," and acknowledging the "unworkability" of NCLB's "prescriptive requirements" Congress responded to the call for change with bipartisan support for the new Every Student Succeeds Act (U.S. Department of Education, Every Student Succeeds Act, n.d.). The newest version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), broadens the definition of success in schools and charges "educators, local and state leaders, and other stakeholders" to "join together to achieve success with results-driven, common sense reforms to help ensure that every child in this country has the opportunity for a high-quality education" (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015, p. 5) and places priority on equity, high standards, quality assessments, local innovation, preschool, and accountability for schools to perform (U.S. Department of Education, Every Student Succeeds Act, n.d.).

More local control, first with the ESEA flexibility and now the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), allowed educational leaders to begin making the significant shifts necessary to prepare American students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To support these shifts, "states [across the country] are challenged to build more efficient and effective systems of support for school and district improvement" (Center on Innovation & Improvement Brochure, 2011). As evidenced by decades of education policy and initiatives aimed at

reform (Nation at Risk, No Child Left Behind, Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Race to the Top, Every Student Succeeds Act, etc.), educational reform is critical and remains a central platform in our country. As articulated in its vision statement, The National School Boards Association (n.d.) emphasizes the importance of school improvement and the role public schools play in staging for the future success of our country. To that end, districts across the country are engaged in improvement and effectiveness initiatives, and a variety of school improvement and effectiveness centers and organizations (Center on Innovation and Improvement, The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, Center for Educational Effectiveness, etc.) have been developed to support student learning and sustained improvement.

In Illinois in 2003, as noted on its website, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) established a regional system of support to provide improvement assistance to its schools. In 2012, ISBE established the Center for School Improvement, which operated in partnership with the American Institute for Research (AIR), aimed to provide support services in order to raise student performance and bolster districts' capacity for effective teaching and learning (Illinois Center for School Improvement, n.d.). Further supporting Illinois educators in their school improvement efforts, "significant ISBE resources have been used to provide statewide professional development and coaching services and to develop a web-based continuous improvement platform called Rising Star" (Findings from a Statewide Review, 2014). According to the study, where two thirds of survey respondents represented school-level users (principals and teachers), the "most frequent uses of Rising Star were to build teams, review data, identify critical needs, assess

indicators, monitor implementation of plan tasks, and create a focused improvement plan” (Findings from a Statewide Review 2014). As school teams created their improvement plans using the Rising Star platform, educators assessed school indicators of effective practices as explained by Indistar Wise Ways research briefs. The Wise Ways research briefs provided educators with current research regarding educational practices in order to inform improved planning and decision making. Indistar, a tool developed by the Academic Development Institute (ADI), is yet another system of support that Illinois (among other states) uses to help guide school improvement through a web-based system that supports the “continuous improvement cycle of assessment, planning, implementation and progress tracking” (Indistar, n.d).

At the heart of myriad agencies, organizations, foundations, systems, and platforms created to support school improvement and ultimately improve student achievement across the country, resides the common charge to identify optimal conditions for learning and make programmatic and curricular changes accordingly. While there are many versions of the optimal conditions, the state of Illinois uses The Five Essential Supports for Positive Change as presented by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research: effective leaders; collaborative teachers; involved families; supportive environment; and, ambitious instruction (Bryk, Bender-Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; UChicagoImpact, n.d.). Originally launched to improve schools in urban America, the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute created UChicago Impact, a non-profit organization committed to the improvement of teaching, learning, and leadership. Every public school in the state of Illinois currently

administers the 5Essentials Survey, one of several UChicago Impact improvement tools. Based on over 20 years of research on successful schools, the evidence-based system designed to drive improvement, “reliably measures changes in a school organization through its survey, predicts school successes through scoring, and provides individualized actionable reports to schools, districts, parents, and community partners”

(UChicagoImpact, n.d). According to researchers from the Consortium on Chicago School Research, schools committed to improvement must recognize that improvement does not occur as a result of isolated efforts, but rather through the efforts that are integrated across all five essential supports (Bryk et al., 2010). According to the 5Essentials research,

Schools that measured strong in all five supports were at least 10 times more likely than schools with just one or two strengths to achieve substantial gains in reading and math. A sustained weakness in just one of these areas undermined virtually all attempts at improving student learning. (Urban Education Institute, 2010)

At the helm of school improvement is the school principal (Bryk et al., 2010; Davis, Kearney, Sanders, Thomas, & Leon, 2011; Fullan, 2014). He/she is charged with the complex orchestration of improvement efforts across all five essential supports in order to close the achievement gap, ensure college and career readiness among students, and prepare for the reality that today’s society (i.e., the post-grad, real world) is looking for in the new generation of thinkers, problem-solvers, and innovators (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Lash & Belfiore, 2017; Tough, 2012; Wagner, 2012). According to the

5 Essential Supports mentioned earlier, “School leadership [the principal] sits in the first position. It acts as the driver for improvements in four other organizational subsystems...” (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 197). The principal serves as a “critical lever in transforming education results” (Davis et al., 2011, p. 1) and “can have a profound effect on the achievement of students in their schools” (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2005, p. 38).

In several important studies (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Seashore, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010) the role of principal is identified as central to the improvement of successful schools that foster strong teaching and learning. The ambitious 2004 study (Leithwood et al., 2004) aimed to examine the effect of leadership on a student learning and concluded that “leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” (p. 5). The study has since been built upon (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, 2012; Seashore et al., 2010), and the findings were upheld. In their comprehensive meta-analysis of leadership research, the authors of *School Leadership that Works* (2005) concluded that principals profoundly impact school success and emphasized the critical need for excellent principals:

At no time in recent memory has the need for effective and inspired leadership been more pressing than it is today. With increasing expectation in society and in the workplace for knowledgeable, skilled, responsible citizens, the pressure on school intensifies. The expectation that no child is left behind in a world and in an

economy that will require everyone's best is not likely to subside. (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p. 123).

The role of the principal is both complex and critical, requiring skills that improve both instruction and climate (Bryk et al., 2010) “and the stakes have never been higher” (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012, p. 5).

Fullan and Leithwood (2012) acknowledge the challenges and frustrations of the perpetually evolving role of the principal (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003) and most recently articulated by Michael Fullan (2014) as the principal's new normal:

Principals' responsibilities have increased enormously over the past two decades. They are expected to run a smooth school; manage health, safety, and the building; innovate without upsetting anyone; connect with students and teachers; be responsive to parents and community; answer to their districts; and above all, deliver results. (Fullan, 2014, p. 6)

The responsibilities described above by Fullan are not new to the principalship.

Principals have always been charged with the responsibility to manage and oversee all aspects of a school's functioning. However, with the backdrop of the No Child Left Behind Legislation of 2001, the principal leadership landscape changed significantly. For the first time in American history, the principal became responsible for the growth and performance *each and every* child. The previous demands a principal faced remained but were compounded because now he/she became legally responsible to ensure that all students met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The bipartisan reform, led by George W.

Bush aimed to “build the mind and character of every child, from every background, in every part of America” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Prior to 1991, the responsibility to educate all children depended upon the motivation and moral imperative of an individual principal. The No Child Left Behind Legislation made students’ equity and access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) legally binding. Further, “education is widely held to be crucial for the survival and success of individuals and countries in the emerging global environment,” and education remains at the “center of political platforms” (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2012, p. 1). Therefore, and by comparison to the years prior to the passage of NCLB, the current demands on school principals have indeed “increased enormously” (Fullan, 2014). A building principal, who facilitates school improvement as a primary directive, requires a new set of skills including “the capacity to develop strong instruction and sophisticated understanding of organizations and organizational change” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007, p. 2). Heifetz et al. (2009) describe this capacity as “adaptive leadership,” which they define as the “practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive” (p. 14). Adaptive challenges, unlike technical problems, which have known solutions, are those which, “can only be addressed through changes in people’s priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties” (p. 19) and requires leaders to think differently and deeply about the ways in which they lead change. The building principal as change agent, shoulders the most visible burden in moving an entire organization and must hone his or her own skill set to implement innovative, systemic, and now mandated school improvements (Fullan, 2014). The adaptive challenges that schools face in their transformation efforts to effectively

prepare students for successful futures require principals to be skilled in leading complex change.

As the difficult work of a principal continues to mount, “it seems that various stakeholders have created expectations for the [principal] that are unrealistic. People are reluctant to aspire to a position that sounds impossible to perform” (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003, p. 46). The principal’s job continues to become more complex in nature:

In the current context of accountability, this critical role for school leaders takes on a high-stakes quality, which places incredible pressure on school principals and other leaders to be successful--in some cases achieving the miraculous in terms of reforming schools and ensuring student learning. (Scribner, Crow, Lopez, & Murtadha, 2011, p. 393)

These new demands and added pressures of the principal position account for the current shortage of principal candidates entering the hiring pool (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Gajda & Militello, 2008; Militello, Warren, Fusarelli, & Alsbury, 2009). Additionally, despite a call for improved principal training programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010; Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005) that more effectively prepare principals for their leadership roles, the newly enacted principal preparation legislation in the state of Illinois may also be a contributing factor to the school leadership shortage in Illinois. Congruent with the research presented earlier regarding the increased demands being placed on the building principal, the state of Illinois recognized the need to bolster principal preparation



programs. Beginning in the fall of 2012, colleges and universities were required to “redesign their principal preparation programs to strengthen recruitment, raise rigor and standards for training, and emphasize the role of the principal as instructional leader, not just building manager” (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.). A white paper (2013) produced by the Center for the Study of Education Policy at Illinois State University analyzed the supply and demand of principals as a result of the new Illinois principal endorsement requirements, and the data indicated “that the pipeline for the principalship has been greatly diminished” (p. 4).

Another factor adding to the demands and pressures of the principal role is the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA) of 2010. Building on the accountability era of No Child Left Behind, this legislation requires that a minimum of 30% of a principal’s summative evaluation be based on student achievement, (Evaluating Principals, 2010). This school improvement requirement raises the bar of expectations for principal performance and holds them quantitatively accountable for student achievement. Despite efforts to allow districts to create customized accountability systems which may include a variety of student growth measures, most districts still rely heavily on traditional, high-stakes content-knowledge measures to assess performance. Very rarely are all four domains of student learning, defined and equally weighted in the NGLC MyWays Student Success Framework, which incorporates “25 success frameworks and 200 studies” as Content Knowledge, Habits of Success, WayFinding Abilities, and Creative Know How, included in measuring student growth (Lash & Belfiore, 2017, pp. 1-2).

Measures of success remain narrowly defined, and as a result, leading effective change, that which requires leadership in all four domains, continues to be very challenging.

In light of the critical expectations of the building principal, the increased rigor and requirements (in Illinois) to earn a principal license, and the increased accountability for student achievement with a narrow definition of success, there continues to be a shrinking population of postgraduate students that aspire to pursue a principalship. However, those who do accept and embrace the challenges and responsibilities of the building leader find themselves amid very exciting and engaging possibilities (Fullan, 2014) for innovative changes and improvements in education. Yet, despite the daunting expectation that principals are now “superprincipals” (Copland, 2001) of school change and improvement, principals have the opportunity to find great satisfaction in their work (Fullan, 2014; Lovely, 2004), and “given the same opportunity they would become principals again,” (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003, p. 58). According to Fullan (2014), “The future for the principal can be exciting and profoundly significant for the school and the system improvement” (p. 7), and as a result, the principal can find great fulfillment and appreciation from others in his/her role. This research study aimed to identify the common attributes, behaviors, and practices of principals who “successfully” lead and manage the adaptive challenges that exist in today’s epoch of educational reform. A critical point of inquiry was to illuminate the principals’ description of their roles as agents of change using the lenses of the 5Essential Survey and The McREL Balanced Leadership Framework.

As explained earlier, based on 20 years of research, the University of Chicago

Urban Education Institute created the UChicago Impact system, with one component of the system being the 5Essentials Survey. The survey was intended to provide a comprehensive assessment of schools' organizational culture, a critical factor of effective schools, to guide school improvement efforts. "Research has shown that schools that were strong in at least three of the 5Essentials were 10 times more likely to have improved gains in math and reading than schools weak on three of 5Essentials" (UChicagoImpact, n.d). While Illinois school districts are encouraged to administer the 5Essentials Survey annually, school districts are required to administer the 5Essentials Survey at least biennially (Illinois 5Essentials Survey: Fact Sheet, 2014). Final, norm-referenced reports, where scores reflect results on each of the five indicators/essentials for school success, are published publicly through the Illinois State School Report Card. Therefore, data mined from the 5Essentials Survey, should be a viable tool for a building principal to use as validation of, or justification for, the transition to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.

The principal has tremendous potential to lead school improvement (Bryk et al., 2010; Fullan, 2014; Seashore et al., 2010; Waters et al., 2005), and 5Essentials Survey data, can be instrumental in his/her improvement efforts as they provide insight into the five essential components (effective leaders, collaborative teachers, involved families, supportive environment, ambitious instruction) for school success (Bryk et al., 2010; UChicagoImpact, n.d.).

For this study, 2015 Illinois' 5Essentials Survey data served as the primary filter to identify successful principals. Principals of high scoring schools, those with strong marks in at least three of the five essential components (UChicagoImpact, n.d), formed a

group from which subjects were selected for study. Nine principals (n=9) were invited to complete the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey, a research-based tool that offers principals insight about their leadership practices as identified in *School Leadership That Works: From Research to Results* (Marzano et al., 2005). Additionally, the principals selected for the study were asked to participate in a 60-minute interview. The McREL Balanced Leadership® survey provided the principals with a context for the interview and helped frame a rich conversation about principal leadership. The McREL Balanced Leadership Framework also served as the tool to analyze interview data and to identify themes which described the attributes, behaviors, and practices of effective principals. The framework provided 21 leadership responsibilities and the correlating knowledge, skills, strategies, and tools that the successful leaders demonstrated (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). The 5Essentials Survey data served as the lens to identify effective principals for the study, and the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework served as the data source and the conceptual framework to explain their success as proposed by this study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study examined the leadership journeys and variety of ways through which a set of principals with certain shared characteristics and contexts have managed to effect change given a complex education landscape. As concluded by Hallinger and Heck (1996) in their review of seminal, empirical research from 1980-1995, “If the impact of principal leadership is achieved through indirect means (e.g., school climate, school culture, instructional organization), we must advance our understandings of how such

linkages are shaped by the principal” (p. 34). As the second most impactful person aside from the teacher (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012), principals indirectly impact student achievement by building professional capital among staff members (Fullan, 2014). This study aimed to identify common attributes, behaviors, and practices among principals identified as leaders of high performing schools as measured by 2015 5Essentials Survey data.

Beginning in 2014, all school districts were required to administer the 5Essentials Survey at least biennially. This researcher used the most current (2014 and 2015) 5Essentials Survey data, broken down by school for all 246 public schools in DuPage County (DuPage County Regional Office of Education, n.d.), all 253 public schools in North Cook County (North Cook Intermediate Service Center, n.d.), all 144 public schools in West Cook County (Directory of West Suburban Public Schools of Cook County, 2012), and all 204 public schools in Lake County (Lake County Regional Office of Education School Directory, 2015-2016). From these data, this researcher identified the top performing schools in order to identify principals who were eligible to participate in the study. From the principals identified as top performers, nine were invited to complete the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey, a self-reflection exercise, followed by a 60 minute interview. This researcher selected DuPage County, North Cook County, West Cook County, and Lake County for her proposed research because the demographics in the selected counties most closely mirror the researcher’s work demographics, and findings would more likely be applicable in her professional context.

In light of the United States' reform efforts tied to school improvement, this researcher used the Illinois 5Essentials Survey data to identify a non-randomized, purposively selected group of participants with the aim of analyzing their perceptions about their practice and better understanding how they catalyze and lead measurable school improvement. Heck and Marcoulides (1993) explain that "the manner in which elementary and high school principals govern the school, build strong school climate, and organize and monitor the school's instructional program are important predictors of academic achievement" (p. 25). Carol Dweck (2006) and other champions of a "growth mindset" affirm these attributes can be learned and practiced (Gladwell, 2002; Gladwell, 2008; Tough, 2012; Pink, 2009). Yet, improvement cannot be a "paint-by-number," reproducible approach where a principal follows a prescription for effective leadership. The relational dynamics make school improvement possible (Bryk et al., 2010). School context matters, and the people within the organization and their actions are what ultimately make a difference in schools. Strong relational trust, as fostered by the school principal, leads to buy-in, motivation, and engagement, and while it "doesn't directly affect student learning...it creates the basic social fabric within which school professionals, parents, and community leaders can initiate and sustain efforts at building the essential supports for school improvement" (p. 140).

According to the Illinois 5Essentials FAQ, the "State Board has long recognized that test scores do not provide a full picture of teaching and learning," and the survey is meant to measure learning conditions, ostensibly created by the building principal to help paint a fuller picture to guide a principal in his or her school improvement efforts.

Studying principals of schools which rank high on the 5Essentials Survey offered an opportunity to identify specific, recurring traits among principals linked to the schools that produced “very strong” corresponding Survey results and which had climates that nurtured and perpetuated these results.

Nine, K-12 principals were identified for this study and asked to participate in a self-reflection exercise using the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey. The self-reflection survey was intended to set the stage for meaningful and reflective conversation and to identify prevalent areas of perceived strength which served as a form of member checking. Additionally, the selected principals were asked to participate in a 60 minute interview. The interview data from the nine principals were codified and analyzed using The McREL Balanced Leadership Framework. In 2003, Waters et al. introduced the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework. Based on over three decades of research, the framework was established to “provide practitioners with specific guidance on the curricular, instructional, and school practices, that, when applied appropriately, can result in increased student achievement” (p. 2). The research team identified 21 leadership responsibilities and the correlating practices, knowledge, strategies, tools, and resources that principals need to be successful. The leadership responsibilities, categorized into three domains: Purposeful Community; Focus; and Magnitude of Change. This “knowledge taxonomy” (p. 13) is a tool to help principals move theory into practice.

Through deeply listening to the stories and perceptions of each principal as he/she shared his/her leadership journey, this researcher identified common themes to analyze. This ultimate goal of this study sought to identify common attributes, behaviors, and

practices of successful principals in order to contribute to the literature aimed at informing and strengthening K-12 principal leadership practices.

### **Research Questions**

1. What do the leadership journeys of the selected nine K-12 principals of “Well-Organized” schools, as determined by the 5Essential Survey, reveal about key experiences and influences in their leadership development and professional practice?
2. Using the lens of the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework, what leadership responsibilities are most evident in these principals' descriptions of their roles and perceptions of themselves as leaders?
3. What do the principals' narratives reveal about effective leadership practice?

### **Methodology**

This mixed-method study was qualitatively driven. Because the research aimed to discover the kinds of principal attributes, behaviors, and types of principal practices that directly connect to leading successful schools, the sampling for this study was non-probabilistic and purposeful. “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). The first phase of the study was quantitative in that 5Essentials Survey data were used to identify principals as participants in the study. These 5Essentials data were important for the identification portion of the study. “Research derived from the Five Essentials for School Success has proven that schools strong on at least 3 of the 5Essentials are 10 times more likely to



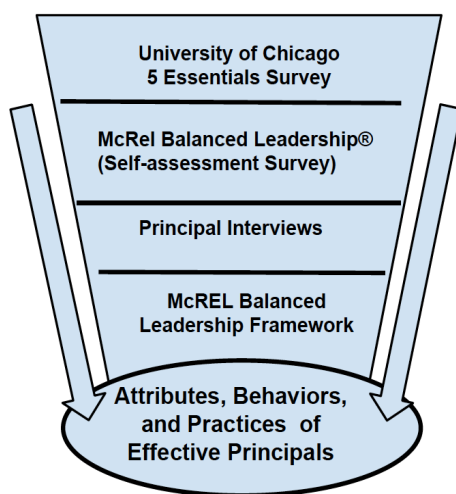
improve student outcomes” (School Environment Matters, 2013). As a result, DuPage County, North Cook County, West Cook County, and Lake County principals whose schools score highest on the 5Essentials Survey were invited to participate in the study.

For this study, nine, K-12 principals, identified as leaders of successful schools according to the 5Essentials Survey results, were selected. The nine principals identified for the study participated in a self-reflection exercise using the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey. The survey aims to “provide building principals with multiple perspectives on their fulfillment of the 21 leadership responsibilities identified in McREL’s leadership research” (McREL Balanced Leadership Profile®, n.d.) Additionally, these principals participated in a 60 minute interview so this researcher would gain additional information and insight regarding the participants’ reflections perceptions about their leadership responsibilities.

The 5Essentials Survey, which was consistently conducted throughout the state of Illinois in the spring of 2014 and 2015, served as the primary tool to identify eligible principals in DuPage, North Cook, West Cook, and Lake Counties. While the 5Essential Survey data provided a means to identify successful principals, this research study sought to uncover the attributes, behaviors and practices of identified principals based on their self-perceptions. Principals were interviewed using in-depth questions to gather information about their practices and leadership journeys. The interviews promoted an inductive process whereby “bits and pieces of information from interviews, observations, or documents are combined and ordered into larger themes as the researcher works from the particular to the general” (Merriam, 2009, pp. 15-16). The development of effective

questions were of greatest import and drew rich, codable information from participants yielding research results that strengthened the inductive study.

The McREL Balanced Leadership Framework was used as an instrument to code interview data and identify how specific attributes, behaviors, and practices of the principals, which emerged through the tellings of their personal leadership stories, correlated to the 21 leadership responsibilities. The interviews provided information and insights about principal's attributes, behaviors, and practices, as well as key influences and experiences that contributed to their leadership of successful schools. Figure 1 illustrates the mixed method approach used for this study. The findings of this study have the potential to identify useful implications in the education leadership arena and may contribute to the underdeveloped literature base on principal leadership, particularly from the perspective of the principal.



*Figure 1. Mixed Method Design*

## Conceptual Framework

The McREL Balanced Leadership Framework, which includes 21 specific principal leadership responsibilities (see Table 1), served as the primary conceptual framework for this research through which interview data were analyzed and interpreted. The McREL Balanced Leadership Framework is based on 30 years of research, which “describes the knowledge, skills, strategies, and tools leaders need to positively impact student achievement” (Waters et al., 2003, p. 2). Data from the meta-analysis demonstrated that substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement does exist (Marzano et al., 2005; Waters et al., 2003; Waters & Cameron, 2008). The McREL Balanced Leadership Framework provided this researcher with a lens to identify leadership themes among principals of high performing schools in DuPage County, North Cook County, West Cook County, and Lake County as identified by Illinois 5Essentials data.

Table 1

### *Principal Leadership Responsibilities*

<b>McREL’s Principal Leadership Responsibilities</b>	
Responsibilities	The extent to which the principal...
Culture	Fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation
Order	Establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines
Discipline	Protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus
Resources	Provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs
Involvement in curriculum,	Is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum,

instruction, and assessment	instruction, and assessment practices
Focus	Establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention
Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment	Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices
Visibility	Has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students
Contingent rewards	Recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments
Communication	Establishes strong lines of communication with teachers and among students
Outreach	Is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders
Input	Involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies
Affirmation	Recognizes and celebrates school accomplishments and acknowledges failures
Relationships	Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of the teachers and staff
Change agent	Is willing to and actively challenges the status quo
Optimize	Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations
Ideals/beliefs	Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling
Monitors/evaluates	Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning
Flexibility	Adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent
Situational awareness	Is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems
Intellectual stimulation	Ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture

Adapted from *The Balanced Leadership Framework: Connecting vision with action* (Waters & Cameron, 2008, pp. 4-8).

The passing of Illinois' Senate Bill 7 has catapulted Illinois' educational reform into the most aggressive school improvement era the state has experienced in decades.

Therefore, it is critical that educational leaders gain better understanding of what contributes to effective principal leadership. It is important to emphasize that the measure of successful schools goes beyond traditional accountability data (PARCC scores, SAT scores, attendance rates, etc.), and that effective principals manage a complex myriad of responsibilities, as listed in the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework, in their practice (Waters et al., 2005). Many of the responsibilities listed in the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework, when used in concert set the conditions for a deeper, broader definition of school success. The leadership responsibilities may be categorized as “soft skills,” those people skills or applied skills which have potential to foster relational trust within a school building, and those which help to develop a more well-rounded and better prepared, future-ready student. These applied skills, alongside relational trust “create the basic social fabric within which school professionals, parents, and community leaders can initiate and sustain efforts at building the essential supports [5Essentials] for school improvement” (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 140).

### **Summary**

The roles and responsibilities of a building principal are daunting. Pressures and expectations at the local, state and federal levels make finding success in the principal role significantly challenging. The number of professionals heeding the call to serve as a building principal is dwindling. There are building principals who do enjoy long and prolific careers, whose resilience, hope, mindset, and sense of duty actually achieve the task of moving an entire school community to address the adaptive challenges they face. They strive to make meaningful change and improvement to ensure their students have

the necessary skills and knowledge to be prepared for the new and unknown contexts of the future, while still complying with narrowly defined measures of success evident in the accountability mandates dictated by law. This study sought to identify common attributes, behaviors, and practices of high performing, effective principals to offer insight through the interpretation of interview data, and to contribute to the literature base on principal leadership.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### **Introduction**

This chapter explores a historical progression of reform efforts and summarizes the current literature with regard to effective principal leadership in an era of great change. First, this evolving role of the principal will be charted; next, national and state calls for changing principal roles are outlined; finally, frameworks for principal evaluation (past, present, and future) are described.

The role of the principal continues to evolve, and tremendous expectations are placed on building leaders to not only manage their schools, but to guide their transformation as we prepare for an unknown future. Principals are charged to navigate a vast array of legislative mandates, high-stakes assessments, and the politics of schools, while also developing students' "Content Knowledge, Habits of Success, WayFinding Abilities, and Creative Know How" (Lash & Belfiore, 2017, p. 2) to ensure their success in college, career, and life. As the education landscape continues to shift and demand more of those in schools, strong principals are essential figures for managing change and leading through adaptive challenges and uncertainty.

#### **The Evolving Role of the Principal**

At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the complex role of the principal was conceived "at the nexus of educational practice and policy position" (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 3)

where he/she is “both the administrative director of state educational policy and a building manager, both an advocate for school change and the protector of bureaucratic stability” (p. 2). As “the most complex and contradictory figure in the pantheon of educational leadership” (p. 2), the principal remains at the heart of schools at start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, yet with additional, and ever-growing responsibilities, expectations, and mandates:

Principals’ responsibilities have increased enormously over the past two decades. They are expected to run a smooth school, manage health, safety, and the building; innovate without upsetting anyone; connect with students and teachers; be responsive to parents and the community; answer to their districts; and above all, deliver results. (Fullan, 2014, p. 6)

At the helm of school improvement (Bryk et al., 2010; Davis et al, 2011; Fullan, 2014), “the work of the principal is multi-faceted, hectic, and fraught with uncertainties” (Zepeda, 2007, p. 1). The principal is charged with the complex orchestration of improvement efforts in order to close the achievement gap, ensure college and career readiness among students, and prepare for the new reality that today’s society (i.e. the post-grad, real world) is looking for in the new generation of thinkers, problem-solvers, and innovators (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Lash & Belfiore, 2017; Tough, 2012; Wagner, 2012). According to the 2013 Wallace Foundation report, *The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching & Learning*, long gone are the days when the “principal resembled the middle manager...an overseer of buses, boilers and books,” (p. 6). Rather, “in a rapidly changing era of standards-based reform and accountability, a



different conception has emerged. This shift brings with it dramatic changes in what public education needs from principals” (p. 6).

In a time of great urgency in education (Bryk et al., 2010; Fullan, 2014; Lash & Belfiore, 2017; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Rickabaugh, 2012; Robinson, 2010), “school leadership [the principal] sits in the first position. It acts as the driver for improvements...” (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 197). The principal serves as a “critical lever in transforming education results” (Davis et al., 2011, p.1) and “can have a profound effect on the achievement of students in their schools” (Waters et al., 2005, p. 38). “With increasing expectations in society and in the workplace for knowledgeable, skilled, responsible citizens, the pressure on school intensifies (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 60). Effective leaders must demonstrate a well-rounded set of skills and leadership attributes in order to succeed. According to the United States Department of Labor, important qualities that school principals must demonstrate include strong skills in following areas: communication, critical-thinking, decision-making, interpersonal, leadership, and problem-solving (Bureau of Labor and Statistics, n.d.).

The work is highly complex, and to successfully improve schools, the principal must develop not only effective school structures but also school culture (Bolman & Deal, 2010, p. 114; Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 6) where emphasis is placed on “student learning, a commitment to high expectations, social support for innovation, dialogue, and the search for new ideas” (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 7). According to the 2013 Wallace Foundation report, *The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching & Learning*, one of the five key responsibilities of an effective principal is to “create a

climate hospitable to education,” (p. 8) which helps to ensure for both adults and children that “learning is at the center of their daily activities” (p. 8). Because “strong, positive, collaborative cultures have powerful effects on many features of schools” (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 7), the principal, as primary culture shaper, can “make a difference by restoring hope, faith, and a shared spirit to the place called school” (p. 141).

### **The Urgency for Change**

Over the course of the last three decades, under the auspices of educational reform, the United States public education arena has faced myriad change initiatives and overhauls and increased levels of accountability to ensure that all children are learning. Beginning with the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, written by the National Commission on Educational Excellence, the United States has been in a “constant state of urgency” (Fullan, 2014, p. 23) with calls for change and sweeping educational reform. With the primary claim that “our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world,” (A Nation at Risk, 1983), educational leaders have been tasked with immediate school improvement.

In 2008, 25 years after the initial *A Nation at Risk Report* was published, the United States Department of Education published a follow up report, *A Nation Accountable*. In this 2008 version, the urgency for change continues with the consistent message being, “if we were ‘at risk’ in 1983, we are at even greater risk now. The rising demands of our global economy, together with demographic shifts, require that we educate more students to higher levels than ever before. Yet, our education system is not

keeping pace with these growing demands” (A Nation Accountable, 2008). Since 1983, when the public education crisis was determined to have stemmed from complacency among education officials, school leaders, and the American public (p. 2), we remain a nation at risk, however, “we are also now a nation informed, a nation accountable, and a nation that recognizes there is much work to be done” (p. 3).

Complicating matters further is the achievement gap that exists among various groups in the United States:

The achievement gap in education refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students. The achievement gap shows up in grades, standardized-test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college-completion rates, among other success measures. It is most often used to describe the troubling performance gaps between African-American and Hispanic students, at the lower end of the performance scale, and their non-Hispanic white peers, and the similar academic disparity between students from low-income families and those who are better off. (Achievement Gap, 2011)

On the “Nation’s Report Card,” which uses scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to measure what students know and can do in a variety of subject areas, gaps exist most prevalently between racial (black and white) and socioeconomic (rich and poor) groups. According to D’Amico (2001), Lee (2002), and Olson (1996):

Despite some evidence of success and strong progress by black, Hispanic, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students from 1970 to 1988, the education

reform efforts of the last decade have not enabled significant numbers of students to become educationally competitive or to close the gaps in achievement. (as cited by Williams, 2003, p. 1)

These achievement gaps are at the heart of the No Child Left Behind legislation of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, Executive Summary, n.d.) as well as the development of the Common Core State Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, Development Process, 2015), and remain at the core of public education today:

If we do not find ways to reduce the growing inequality in education outcomes, we are in danger of bequeathing our children a society in which the American Dream—the promise that one can rise, through education and hard work, to any position in society—is no longer a reality. (Reardon, 2013, p. 16)

To address the concerns that have been identified in the realm of public education, myriad education programs, initiatives, and edicts have risen, and continue to rise, out of this sense of urgency in the United States. At the same time, educators are experiencing what Fullan (2014) refers to as the “unplanned digital revolution” (p. 145), whereby planning for and control of the explosion of technology access and availability to students evolves as it unfolds (p. 148). Leading the way to address these concerns in “a time when the circumstances have never been more volatile” (p. 145), is the principal. “Facing the unpredictable, principals must be able to handle a great deal of ambiguity while displaying strong lead learner qualities” (p. 145). However, facing the unpredictable, in the absence of guidance for school leaders, particularly school principals, makes overcoming educational challenges a daunting task:

Given the perceived importance of leadership in school and the central role of the principal in that leadership, one might assume that suggestions regarding leadership practice in school are based on a clear, well-articulated body of research spanning decades. Unfortunately, this assumption is incorrect for two reasons. First, far less research on school leadership has been done than one might expect...Second, the research that has been done on school leadership is quite equivocal, or at least perceived as such. (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 6)

No real discernable strategy for school leaders has been developed to ensure school improvement, and “a crisis without strategy is a recipe for random action and growing frustration” (Fullan, 2014, p.23). This random action and growing frustration is causing the principal role to become a more challenging role than ever before.

### **Change within the Illinois Context**

While the accountability movement has spread to all corners of the United States, practitioners in the state of Illinois have experienced tremendous shifts over the course of the past 30 years. “It’s a new day for education in Illinois,” claims The Illinois State Board of Education, which has “raised expectations” for its students and educators to promote “innovative instructional practices and more engaged learners” (Illinois State Board of Education, ISBE Hot Topics, n.d.). On its website, the Illinois State Board of Education provides an “overview of current efforts and upcoming changes that are transforming teaching and learning across the state” listing the following “ISBE Hot Topics:” No Child Left Behind, ESEA Flexibility, Common Core State Standards, Partnership for Assessment of College and Career Readiness (PARCC) assessments,

Performance Evaluation Reform Act, and the new Interactive School Report Card, (Illinois State Board of Education, ISBE Hot Topics, n.d.). Practicing principals of today have experienced these shifts and changes in their current leadership roles. The following discussion of the “hot topics” is to illustrate the ever-changing educational landscape in Illinois, and as a result, the challenging reality that Illinois principals face in their daily work.

In 2001, The No Child Left Behind Act, which passed with bipartisan support, significantly changed the educational landscape in the United States. For the first time in American history, the stakes were raised for *all* children. Principals became legally responsible to ensure that all students learned and met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Led by George W. Bush, the reform aimed to “ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (U.S. Department of Education, NCLB Statement of Purpose, n.d.) and to “build the mind and character of every child, from every background, in every part of America” (U.S. Department of Education, Executive Summary, n.d.). The No Child Left Behind legislation made students’ equity and access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) a legal imperative. In the 2008 report, *A Nation Accountable*, The No Child Left Behind Act is credited as a step in the right direction with regard to school improvement. “Fortunately, thanks to the recent standards and accountability movement and the No Child Left Behind Act, we are finally taking an honest, comprehensive look at our schools. For the first time in our country’s history, we have reliable data to evaluate

student performance and address weaknesses in our schools” (A Nation Accountable, 2008, p. 1). The intent of the No Child Left Behind legislation was good; by 2014 every child would achieve academic proficiency. “By the early 2000s, every state had developed and adopted its own learning standards that specify what students in grades 3-8 and high school should be able to do. Every state also had its own definition of proficiency” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, Development Process, 2015). With no national framework, Illinois educators were held accountable for ensuring that students met or exceeded Illinois Learning Standards as measured by the state assessment, The Illinois Standard Achievement Test (ISAT). Educators across America developed standards for their respective states and held students accountable; expectations were the same, but different. “Now we had a discernible strategy: the wishful thinking of undefined standards with no particular way of enacting them” (Fullan, 2014, p. 24).

With increased emphasis on accountability, “NCLB put in place important new measures to expose achievement gaps, and started an important national dialogue on how to close them” (Homeroom, n.d.) NCLB was an important part of public school improvement. “At the heart of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is a promise; to set a high bar for all students and to protect the most vulnerable” (Duncan, 2013):

However, while NCLB has played an important role in closing achievement gaps and requiring transparency, it also has significant flaws. It created incentives for states to lower their standards; emphasized punishing failure over rewarding success; focused on absolute scores, rather than recognizing growth and progress;

and prescribed a pass-fail, one-size-fits-all series of interventions for schools that miss their state-established goals. (Homeroom, n.d.)

Recognizing that “times have changed,” and to encourage “groundbreaking reforms and innovations to increase the quality of instruction and improve academic achievement for all students” (ESEA Flexibility FAQ, 2012, p. 3), ESEA Flexibility was established in 2011 by the U.S. Department of Education. ESEA flexibility “enabled states to gain flexibility from the NCLB’s specific mandates in exchange for state-designed plans to set high standards; re-shape accountability systems; and support the evaluation and development of effective teachers and principals” (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015, p. 7). It “provided educators and state and local leaders with flexibility regarding specific requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001” (ESEA Flexibility FAQ, 2012, p. 1) and served as a precursor to the newly enacted Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA) which was signed into law by President Barack Obama on December 10, 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, Every Student Succeeds Act, n.d.). Aiming to “fully prepare all students for success in college and careers,” and acknowledging the “unworkability” of NCLB’s “prescriptive requirements” Congress responded to the call for change with bipartisan support for the new Every Student Succeeds Act (U.S. Department of Education, Every Student Succeeds Act, n.d.). The newest version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), charges “educators, local and state leaders, and other stakeholders” to “join together to achieve success with results-driven, common sense reforms to help ensure that every child in this country has the opportunity for a high-quality education” (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015, p. 5), and places priority on



equity, high standards, quality assessments, local innovation, preschool, and accountability for schools to perform (U.S. Department of Education, Every Student Succeeds Act, n.d.).

By affording more local control, first the ESEA flexibility and now the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) allow educational leaders to begin tackling the adaptive challenges that must be addressed in order to prepare American students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

### **The Introduction of Common Core**

On the heels of the No Child Left Behind accountability era, where high expectations were set for all without guidelines and supports, came the Common Core State Standards movement. As previously mentioned, each state in America had developed and adopted its own learning standards and its own definition of proficiency. “This lack of standardization was one reason why states decided to develop the Common Core State Standards in 2009” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, Development Process, 2015). The initiative, intended to clearly articulate “what students are expected to know and understand by the time they graduate from high school” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, Development Process, 2015) was led by the National Governors Association (NGA) in conjunction with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).

According to the *U.S. News and World Report* article, “The History of Common Core State Standards” (Bidwell, 2014), the Common Core State Standards initiative truly began when Janet Napolitano, former governor of Arizona and chair of the National

Governors Association in 2006-2007, set forth her *Innovation America* initiative which “focused on strengthening our nation’s competitive position in the global economy by improving our capacity to innovate” (Fitzpatrick, 2007, p. i). The final report urged American governors to be more active in their “critical role” and “responsibility to accelerate the rate of innovation” and to “set the educational policies and make decisions that lead to success” (pp. 1-2). In the report’s conclusion, the author acknowledges, “developing a comprehensive innovation agenda is a challenging mission, but it’s an imperative--and one that governors and states are well-equipped to take on” (p. 3).

In 2008, in response to the *Innovation America* report, a task force “composed of commissioners of education, governors, corporate chief executive officers and recognized experts in higher education,” released the *Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring US Students Receive a World Class Education* report which “served as the building blocks of what became known as Common Core State Standards” (Bidwell, 2014, p. 7). In the report’s foreword, Arizona Governor, Janet Napolitano, Georgia Governor, Sonny Perdue, and the Chairman of the Board of the Intel Corporation, wrote that “we are living in a world without borders” and that

to meet the realities of the 21st century global economy and maintain America’s competitive edge into the future, we need students who are prepared to compete not only with their American peers, but with students from all across the globe for the jobs of tomorrow. (National Governors Association, 2008, p. 1)

The report goes on to say that “standards-based education” and “international benchmarking will help state policymakers identify the qualities and characteristics of

education systems that best prepare students for success in the global marketplace,” so that “we have workers whose knowledge, skills, and talents are competitive with the best in the world” (National Governors Association, 2008, p. 1).

In 2009, the National Governors Association (NGA) teamed up with the Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to launch the “state-led effort to develop the Common Core State Standards” recognizing “the value of consistent, real-world learning goals...to ensure all students, regardless of where they live, are graduating high school prepared for college, career, and life” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, Development Process, 2015). To date, this multi-state effort has been adopted by “42 states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, Development Process, 2015).

The Illinois State Board of Education adopted the New Illinois Learning Standards (Common Core State Standards) for math and English language arts in June of 2010 and for science in February of 2014, (Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Learning Standards, n.d.). Prior to the Common Core adoption, no changes had been made to the Illinois Learning Standards since their initial adoption in 1997 (Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Learning Standards, n.d.). “The clear, consistent and higher expectations of the new standards are changing the way teachers engage and challenge their students by focusing on concept mastery, critical thinking and real-world application” (Illinois State Board of Education, Hot Topics, n.d.). However, as with any major change, the shift to Common Core State Standards has not occurred without its

challenges (Kober & Rentner, 2014; Sears, 2014) and “amid these controversies, several aspects of CCSS implementation are having, or will soon have, a major impact on districts and schools, and on principals, teachers, and students” (Kober & Rentner, 2014, p. 2). Several key findings in a recent report published by the Center on Educational Policy highlight the significant challenges that states and districts have experienced with Common Core State Standards as they pertain to perception, implementation, and assessment (Kober & Rentner, 2014; Sears, 2014).

According to the 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitude Toward the Public Schools, “most Americans (60%) oppose the Common Core State Standards, fearing that the standards will limit the flexibility of the teachers in their communities to teach what they think is best” (Bushaw & Calderon, 2014, p. 10). However, according to additional 2014 Gallup surveys, “A majority of participants favored a single set of national standards for reading, writing, and math and the use of assessments to monitor student progress” (Frizzell & Dunderdale, 2015). District leaders (including principals) responsible for implementing the Common Core State Standards are key players in shifting public perception through education outreach efforts intended to build Common Core State Standards awareness and understanding (Kober & Rentner, 2014, p. 23):

Working together, education professionals through their associations, along with business and political leaders can work together to mount a nonpartisan communications campaign explaining to Americans why the Common Core State

Standards are essential to the nation's future and to the success of all children.

(Bushaw & Calderon, 2014, p. 14)

“A majority of districts (86% or more)” reported significant challenges with regard to the actual implementation of Common Core State Standards, and challenges centered around “funding, curriculum materials, staffing, professional development, and time” (Kober & Rentner, 2014, p. 11). A common misnomer, one that exacerbates this misperception, of the Common Core State Standards Initiative is that it is a national curriculum:

The Common Core is *not* a curriculum. It is a clear set of shared goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills will help our students succeed. Local teachers, principals, superintendents, and others will decide how the standards are to be met. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms. (Common Core State Standards Initiative, Myths vs. Facts, n.d.)

Because the Common Core State Standards Initiative is not a national curriculum, “decisions on how to implement the standards are made at the state and local levels. As such, states and localities are taking different approaches to implementing the standards” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, Myths vs. Facts, n.d.). “Districts and schools should use the standards as a basis for developing their own curricula by designing course content, choosing appropriate instructional strategies, developing learning activities, continuously gauging student understanding, and adjusting instruction accordingly” (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2013). Common Core State

Standards implementation has proven to be quite challenging for many Illinois districts, because unlike other states, Illinois does not provide its school districts with a state curriculum. Illinois school districts are required to interpret the standards, write their own curricula, find and/or develop resources and materials to align to the curricula, professionally develop their faculty, and find the time to do all of this well. In myriad teacher blogs, Facebook posts, and school faculty meetings, implementation challenges are abundantly evident. “The Common Core State Standards represent a potentially powerful opportunity or a disaster of titanic proportions, depending on the decisional capital of the teaching force and school leaders” (Fullan, 2014, p. 86). As the primary instructional leader in the building, principals are required to demonstrate “leadership for innovations in a domain where no one knows in advance what is likely to work” (p. 156). A new level of tremendous responsibility and expectation is placed on the role of the principal.

And finally, in order to measure proficiency on the new standards, the Illinois State Board of Education adopted the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment. In the 2014-2015 school year, five million American students in eleven states (including Illinois) and the District of Columbia participated in the PARCC state assessments (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, PARCC States, n.d.).

### **PARCC, A New Measure of Accountability**

To measure its implementation of the New Illinois Learning Standards (Common Core State Standards) and to monitor student growth, the State of Illinois joined 23 other

states and the District of Columbia in the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers in 2011 (PARCC, Home, 2011). Using approximately \$185 million Race to the Top Funds (U.S. Department of Education, Race to the Top Assessment Program, n.d.) the consortium of states collaborated to develop a common set of K-12 English language arts (ELA) and mathematics assessments:

PARCC helps ensure that all students, regardless of income, family background or geography, have equal access to a world-class education that will prepare them for success after high school in college and/or careers. New state standards set consistent expectations in English and mathematics for every student, and PARCC provides a valid and reliable evaluation of each student's progress toward them. (PARCC, About, n.d.)

The PARCC test was created to measure the more rigorous Common Core State Standards and to “serve as an ‘educational GPS system,’ to assess students’ current performance, and point the way to what students need to learn by graduation so they are ready for college and/or a career” (PARCC, The PARCC Tests, n.d.). When initially conceived, the PARCC assessment was intended to be administered several times each school year (Hain, 2011, p. 1):

PARCC'S original proposal featured a "through-course" design, in which tests would be given after teachers completed one-quarter, one-half, three-quarters, and 90 percent of instruction. Some of those tests were to be in the form of essays and performance tasks, and others were to be quick-turnaround, computer-based exams. All four required components were to be combined into one end-of-year

summative score, which states would use for accountability required by the No Child Left Behind Act. (Gewertz, 2011, p. 8)

In order to “test the test” and to examine the assessment and provide administration guidance, “more than 1 million students in nearly 16,000 schools (in 14 states and the District of Columbia) participated in the spring 2014 PARCC field test” (PARCC Field Test: Lessons Learned, 2014). According to *Lessons Learned* report published by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, the field test went well and the PARCC states were using the feedback in order to make necessary adjustments to the assessment prior to the 2014-2015 testing window. Eleven states (including Illinois) and the District of Columbia officially took the PARCC assessment in the spring of 2015 for a “historic first - a multistate mostly online test administration to 5 million students” (PARCC, 2015).

However, as the State of Illinois prepared to officially administer the PARCC assessment as its state assessment in the spring of 2015, much controversy ensued. The new exams have become a lightning rod for debate and revolt, with many parents and educators alike opposed to a growing battery of tests at school. The length and difficulty of the tests will take away too much traditional class time, some critics have argued (Rado, Johnson, & Perez, 2015).

In January of 2015, one Illinois Superintendent wrote a letter to the parents and community members of her school district conveying her “growing wariness” about the PARCC assessments which was later published in the Washington Post (Strauss, 2015). Shortly thereafter, Chicago-based PARCC opposition groups like *Raise Your Hand* and



*More Than a Score* led strong opt-out campaigns encouraging parents to refuse the PARCC tests on behalf of their children. Opposers encouraged State legislators to “Park the PARCC” based on their beliefs that:

This test is not yet ready for statewide, mandatory administration. There is national concern over quality and reliability of this test due to inadequate time for field testing, and there is inadequate technological and Common Core readiness across the state. (Raise Your Hand [RYH], n.d.)

According to the Illinois State Board of Education, parents, however, did not have the right to “opt their children out” of the IL State assessments. In his October 2014 opt-out letter to Illinois parents, former IL State Superintendent, Chris Koch, stated:

Schools and districts must administer these assessments. Students may not opt out of the PARCC assessment. Federal law -- specifically, the Elementary Education and Secondary Education Act (also known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) -- requires states (including Illinois) receiving Title I funds to provide for the participation in the state’s academic assessment of all designated students. See Section 1111(b)(3)(c)(ix)(I) of that law. A district that allows students to opt out of the state’s required test would directly violate both federal and state law.

In an attempt to find a way around the law, specifically regarding funding regulations, many Illinois families cited language from Code 15 of the IL School Code, “student was presented a test booklet but refused to engage with the test” as an alternate way to opt-out, (ISBE, Guidance Document 13-21, 2015). In the same October 14 opt-out letter sent to Illinois families, Chris Koch, former IL State Superintendent emphasized:

Again, the state, local districts and schools are required to administer the PARCC assessment to all students. Districts can develop a policy for those students who refuse to take assessments on testing days, but federal and state law does not provide for any opt-out provisions. Therefore, ISBE does not provide any guidance on how a district or school can provide an “opt-out” because such an option would violate the law.

The refusal loop-hole had been found. Districts were allowed to create policy that would allow for not parent, but student, refusal of the PARCC assessments. A flurry of PARCC refusal promotions and resources could be readily found on Facebook and Twitter. The *Raise Your Hand* and *More than a Score* groups published the “Toolkit for Refusal” which included refusal letters, printable stickers for students to wear, and printable student refusal cards (More than a Score, n.d.).

In the Spring of 2015, Chicago’s two leading newspapers, *The Chicago Sun Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* published several articles about the PARCC opt-out and refusal controversy in Illinois emphasizing the burden placed on children. Despite the attempt to have a common assessment with common administration guidelines in place for Illinois public schools, “in the absence of a state policy for children who refuse, district leaders and principals have been given wide berth on what to do with students on testing days,” (Fitzpatrick, 2015). Discontinuity of practice became inevitable. Yet again, administrators across the State of Illinois were faced with the new challenge of writing and recommending new Board of Education policy to address the PARCC test refusal crisis in Illinois. As mentioned earlier, “a crisis without strategy is a recipe for random

action and growing frustration” (Fullan, 2014, p. 23). This random action and growing frustration ultimately led to the passing of Illinois House Bill 306 on May 21, 2015 which would amend the school code to state, “a student is not required to take a particular State assessment if that student's parent or guardian requests, in writing, that the student be excused from taking the State assessment” (Illinois General Assembly, Bill Status, 2015). According to Illinois Representative Will Guzzardi, what this bill does is “create a clear process and take the student out of the role as the decision maker” (Korecki, 2015). While test refusal processes were established to ultimately protect students from being overly burdened by standardized tests, a sentiment recently echoed by President Barack Obama in a Facebook message, the fact remains that test refusal options add yet another layer of challenge to the role of principal. He/she is chiefly responsible for the successful administration of the state required PARCC assessment, and assessment participation rates are reported on each school’s Illinois state report card. Yet by providing explicit testing refusal options to parents and students, a mixed message is conveyed, and principals are left to manage the disparity.

Despite the opt-out and refusal frenzy that occurred in Illinois prior to its first official PARCC administration, the Illinois State Board of Education reported a successful inaugural year and committed to continued use of the tool for future testing. Intended to “help the test better serve students, educators, parents, and policymakers,” the PARCC assessment was consolidated from two testing windows into one testing window and “tests the full range of standards and measure whether students are mastering the knowledge and skills they need to stay on track for success in college and/or their chosen

career field” (2015-16 Assessment Update, 2015). The results from the 2015 PARCC administration helped determine a baseline for proficiency levels, however, due to additional adjustments to the assessment, “baseline data will not be available until state assessment for all students has been administered and recorded for all student demographic groups for three consecutive years” (ESSA State Plan for Illinois, 2015, p. 18). When baseline scores are established in 2017, PARCC assessment results will be used to measure student growth for school and district accountability.

According to the *Chicago Tribune*, “The vast majority of grade school students did not meet the passing mark on statewide reading and math exams in 2017, and performance was largely flat compared to the year before” (Rado, 2017). With these results, it will be very challenging to meet the Illinois State Board of Education’s goal of 90% of third through eighth grade students meeting or exceeding math and reading standards by 2031 (ESSA State Plan for Illinois 2017, p. 20).

### **Performance Evaluation Reform Act, Another Layer of Accountability**

As a way to ensure “outstanding teaching and leadership” among school districts in Illinois, the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA), which requires the consideration of student growth (ultimately 30% of performance rating) in the measurement of principal and teacher performance was signed into law in 2010, (Teacher Evaluations; Talking Points, 2015). “Under the new evaluation systems, standardized test results do not determine a teacher’s [or principal’s] future in Illinois as student growth is only a portion of an educator’s evaluation rating” (Illinois State Board of Education, ISBE Hot Topics, n.d.). However, although “ISBE does not dictate the measures a

school should use to evaluate teacher [and principal] effectiveness” (PARCC Assessment FAQ, 2015), student growth is a required factor. Through joint committee work, school districts at the local level were required to determine how student growth was incorporated into evaluation for principals by the 2012-2013 school year for principals and by the 2016-2017 school year for teachers (Illinois State Board of Education, ISBE Hot Topics, n.d.). Despite the assurance from the Illinois State Board of Education, which downplays the impact of standardized tests on teacher and principal evaluation, the high stakes PARCC assessment meets the Type I requirements set forth by PERA and PARCC results are publicly shared. As suggested by the title listed on the Illinois State Board of Education website, both PARCC and PERA remain “hot topics” among principals and have the potential to directly impact a principal’s work and career future.

### **The Future of the Principalship**

In his book, *The Principal: Three Keys to Maximizing Impact*, Fullan (2014) illustrates the ever-changing and increasingly challenging role of the school principal. In the opening chapter of the book, one learns that:

75 percent of principals feel that their job has become too complex, half of all principals feel under great stress ‘several days a week,’ and the percentage who say they are satisfied in their work has dropped from 68 to 59 since 2008. (p. 5)

Contributing to principals’ sentiments about their work are the ever-increasing challenges and expectations placed on the principal as the “ultimately accountable person” (Fullan, 2014, p. 6). In a *Chicago Tribune* article about the 2015 Illinois 5Essentials data where “the worst performance was in the effective leaders category,” Jason Leahy, executive

director of the Illinois Principals Association emphasized the “magnitude of changes” occurring in schools and claimed that “the principalship right now is probably the most difficult job on the planet” (Rado, 2015). The role of principal continues to evolve into a seemingly impossible job with seemingly fewer people willing to assume a principal’s responsibilities. As anticipated by the Illinois Principals Association in its 2014-2015 planning study, a “shortage of qualified candidates to fill building-level administrative positions” will likely continue in the near future (Schwartz & Landers, 2014). As a result, we are faced with the question that Michael Fullan (2014) poses at the end of his book, “Time to change careers? Or to change gears?” (p. 157). At this critical juncture in American education history, superintendents have the unique opportunity to “change gears” by supporting principals in their ever-evolving, essential work through coaching:

Coaching is the new essential for today’s school leaders. Being a ‘coach-leader’ is a key competency, a new identity for anyone in the business of developing teachers, staff, and students. Because coaching language and skills requires alignment of the integrity of one’s attitudes and behaviors, coaching continually strengthens emotional intelligence for self-awareness, self-control, motivation, social awareness, and skill enhancement. On a daily basis, coaching challenges the leader to walk the talk-to continuously grow and improve before modeling and leading others. Being the coach leader offers the opportunity to create school communities that inspire and motivate for excellence and results! (Kee, Anderson, Dearing, Harris, & Schuster, 2010, p. 189)

Unfortunately, a lack of emphasis on principal development exists in the current education landscape, and leaders seldom have the same levels of support as teachers (von Frank, 2012, p. 3). “Although the nation has developed an intense focus on instructional coaching and teacher leadership...leadership development and principal coaching have received less attention (Psencik, 2011, p. 12). According to Psencik’s theory of change for leadership learning, through effective coaching, defined as “just-in-time, personalized support (p. 30), principals have the ability to become high performing professionals who create high achieving schools (von Frank, 2012, p. 4). The essential elements of Psencik’s (2011) theory mirror those of most continuous improvement cycles including the Illinois State Board of Education’s adopted *Growth through Learning Framework* which includes the following cycle of steps: understand, plan, collaborate, reflect, measure, evaluate. As superintendents look to the future, there is a strong case of need for increased leadership coaching and support for principals as they face the continuous challenges of public education.

### **5Essentials, A Screener of Effective Principals**

Based on 20 years of research, the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute created the UChicago Impact system, with one component of the system being the 5Essentials Survey. The survey, broken into five essential components (effective leaders, collaborative teachers, involved families, supportive environment, and ambitious instruction) provides a comprehensive assessment of schools’ organizational culture, a critical factor of effective schools (Bryk et al., 2010; UChicagoImpact, n.d.). “Research has shown that schools that were strong in at least three of the 5Essentials were 10 times

more likely to have improved gains in math and reading than schools weak on three of 5Essentials” (UChicagoImpact, n.d). Of particular interest with regard to effective principal leadership is the 5Essential component: Effective Leaders. “In schools with Effective Leaders, principals and teachers work together to implement a shared vision. In such schools, people, programs, and resources are focused on a vision for sustained improvement” (5Essentials, n.d.). Within the Effective Leaders component, there are four measures: Program Coherence; Teacher-Principal Trust; Teacher Influence; and Instructional Leadership (5Essentials, n.d.) all of which are rated on a performance continuum ranging from “not yet organized for improvement” to “well organized for improvement” (5Essentials, n.d.). The performance continuum also indicates where a school is performing in comparison with where schools are performing on average in Illinois.

In Illinois, school districts are required to administer the 5Essential survey to parents, students, and teachers on a biennial basis and results are publicly displayed on each school’s Illinois State School Report Card (Illinois 5Essentials Survey: Fact Sheet, 2014). Because administration of the 5Essential Survey is required of all public schools in Illinois, these data may be used to assess school improvement efforts. Further, the 5Essentials Survey, and more specifically data from the Effective Leaders component of the survey, served as an effective screener to identify principals for further study. By identifying effective principals as determined by the 5Essentials Survey, specific insights emerged. These insights have the potential to contribute to the literature base and may inform Illinois superintendents who aim to more effectively support and coach their



principals toward more becoming high performing professionals who create high achieving schools.

### **McREL Balanced Leadership Framework, A Conceptual Framework**

In 2003, Waters et al. introduced the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework. Based on over three decades of research the framework was established to “provide practitioners with specific guidance on the curricular, instructional, and school practices, that, when applied appropriately can result in increased student achievement” (p. 2). The research team identified 21 leadership responsibilities and the correlating 66 practices, knowledge, strategies, tools and resources that principals need to be successful. The Balanced Leadership Framework “groups the 21 leadership responsibilities into an organizing structure which includes: leadership, focus, magnitude of change, and purposeful community” (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 15). This “knowledge taxonomy” (Waters et al., 2003, p. 13) provides “the guidance principals need to enhance effectiveness, translate vision and aspirations into action, and improve achievement for all students (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 60). The 21 leadership responsibilities identified in the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework served as the conceptual framework for analyzing the practices of effective principals. Presented in the form of a survey about principal-led change initiatives, the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey is a research-based tool that “provides building principals with insight about their leadership practices” as identified in *School Leadership That Works: From Research to Results* (Marzano et al., 2005). Principals’ participation in the self-assessment survey intended to catalyze self-reflection among principals and to potentially reveal specific

responsibilities that are prevalent in effective principals. The identification of these prevalent responsibilities may potentially offer new insights regarding ways in which principals can be supported and coached to improve their practice.

### **Summary**

As President Barack Obama emphasized throughout his presidency, “we need a great teacher in every classroom and a great principal in every school,” to ensure that every child in America receives a “world-class education” (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015, p. 2). Through the exploration of the historical progression of reform efforts and the rapid pace of change, it remains evident that the school principal plays a critical role in school improvement efforts that ensure that every student does indeed succeed.

As the principal role continues to evolve and become more complex in nature, it is essential that we better understand what makes a principal successful. Principals are expected to juggle a lot. They are dually responsible for managing the school while also leading transformation efforts which will ensure students’ success in an unpredictable future. Throughout this literature review, the potential and risk for principals have been outlined. However, to date, the literature lacks firsthand perspective and account of experience from practicing principals who spend an inordinate amount of time and effort navigating this current education landscape. As a result, this study aimed to examine the personal accounts and experiences of principals to glean insights from their leadership stories about their successful practice. Results from the 2015 5Essential Survey were used to identify participants for the study as the survey was a distillation of the critical issues presented in this chapter. Additionally, the McREL Balanced Leadership

Framework, based on 30 years of research, served as the conceptual framework to situate the study. The following research questions were posed in response to the emergent questions of the study and the limitations that currently exist in the literature, particularly from the perspective of the practitioner.

1. What do the leadership journeys of the selected nine K-12 principals of “Well-Organized” schools, as determined by the 5Essential Survey, reveal about key experiences and influences in their leadership development and professional practice?
2. Using the lens of the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework, what leadership responsibilities are most evident in these principals' descriptions of their roles and perceptions of themselves as leaders?
3. What do the principals' narratives reveal about effective leadership practice?

The following chapter will outline the methods that will be used to answer these questions.

## CHAPTER III

### PROCEDURES

#### **Introduction**

This study examined the leadership journeys and self-perceptions of a set of principals who lead effective schools (according to 5Essentials Survey data) despite the current complex educational landscape. This study aimed to uncover common attributes, behaviors, and actions of successful principals in order to contribute to the literature base on principal leadership, specifically from the perspective of the practitioner. As concluded by Hallinger and Heck (1996) in their review of seminal, empirical research from 1980-1995, “If the impact of principal leadership is achieved through indirect means (e.g., school climate, school culture, instructional organization), we must advance our understandings of how such linkages are shaped by the principal” (p. 34). In order to support and coach principals in their school improvement efforts, one must deeply understand the current challenges of their work. “Successful principals shape the culture of schools, set clear expectations, and share leadership with others to create productive learning environments for students and staff” (Killion, 2012, p. 3). Principals are the “leading learners” (Fullan, 2014, p. 9) that are charged with “orchestrating multiple factors that contribute to student success” (Killion, 2012, p. 4). As the second most impactful person aside from the teacher (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012), principals indirectly impact student achievement by building professional capital among staff

members (Fullan, 2014). This study aimed to identify the common attributes, behaviors, and practices of effective principals and to provide insights about educational leadership through the exploration of the following questions:

### **Research Questions**

1. What do the leadership journeys of the selected nine K-12 principals of “Well-Organized” schools, as determined by the 5Essential Survey, reveal about key experiences and influences in their leadership development and professional practice?
2. Using the lens of the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework, what leadership responsibilities are most evident in these principals' descriptions of their roles and perceptions of themselves as leaders?
3. What do the principals' narratives reveal about effective leadership practice?

Prior to conducting any research, the researcher completed the IRB review process and was approved by Loyola University, Chicago to pursue her study.

### **Research Design**

Although largely qualitative, this researcher used a “sequential” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 51) mixed research approach to gain comprehensive insights about the attributes, behaviors, and practices of effective building principals. In an attempt to conduct high quality research, this researcher strived for deep understanding by mixing research methods which “is like putting together several flawed fishing nets, each of which has a hole, a torn part, or a weak point, to construct a ‘new,’ stronger net that works well despite the problems with each individual net” (p. 201).

This study, which used an explanatory sequential design, occurred in “two distinct interactive phases” where the “design starts with the collection and analysis of quantitative data” and is followed by “collection and analysis of qualitative data” (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 71). In the first phase, this researcher used quantitative data to select participants for a more in-depth qualitative study in the second phase. The researcher then used qualitative results to explain the quantitative results.

### **Study Design Overview**

In the first phase of the study, this researcher collected quantitative data from the 5Essentials survey that was universally administered in the state of Illinois on a biennial basis during the 2014 and 2015 school years. Based on over 20 years of research on successful schools, the 5Essentials evidence-based system designed to drive improvement, “reliably measures changes in a school organization through its survey, predicts school successes through scoring, and provides individualized actionable reports to schools, districts, parents, and community partners” (UChicagoImpact, n.d). According to researchers from the Consortium on Chicago School Research, schools committed to improvement must recognize that improvement does not occur as a result of isolated efforts, but rather through the efforts that are integrated across all five essential supports (Bryk et al., 2010):

Schools that measured strong in all five supports were at least 10 times more likely than schools with just one or two strengths to achieve substantial gains in reading and math. A sustained weakness in just one of these areas undermined virtually all attempts at improving student learning. (Urban Education Institute,

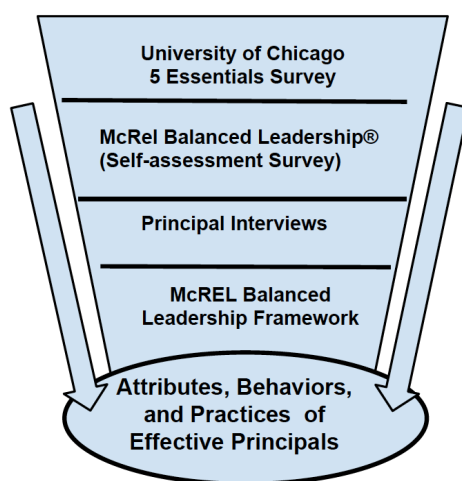
2010)

The intended outcome of this first phase of research was to use quantitative data to identify school principals of DuPage County, North Cook County, West Cook County, and Lake County schools with the highest 5Essentials results. Principals who lead schools that are most likely to be successful according to 5Essentials data formed the group from which principals were invited to participate in this research study. This researcher selected a diverse array of participants taking into consideration the principals' gender, age, race, years of leadership experience, and grade level responsibilities across the entire K-12 continuum. Nine principal participants completed the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey, "a research-based, feedback tool that offers principals insight about their leadership practices" as identified in *School Leadership That Works: From Research to Results* (Marzano et al., 2005). The McREL Balanced Leadership® survey provided principals with an opportunity to engage in a self-reflection exercise which then framed their thinking about their practice and led to a focused and reflective conversation in the second phase of the research.

During Phase II, qualitative data was collected through individual, semi-structured interviews that revealed principals' experiences or perceptions about their leadership practices as well as their leadership journeys. Justification for this research approach was that while the quantitative data helped to identify effective principals for the study, the "rich, descriptive" (Merriam, 2009, p. 16) qualitative data rooted in participants' "experiences, opinions, feelings, knowledge..." (p. 114) led this researcher to a deeper, more meaningful understanding of the phenomenon. The level of detail and

individual perspective gained through qualitative interviews would simply not be possible to gather using methods such as surveys. Additionally, this researcher examined complex phenomena that must be understood and potentially enacted in idiosyncratic and sophisticated ways, so these phenomena required phenomenological examination.

This research study included multiple sources of data and a variety of interpretive lenses to identify the effective principal attributes and actions that emerged. The figure below (see Figure 2) illustrates the mixed method design used to support the outcomes of this research.



*Figure 2.* Mixed Method Design

### **Phase I: Quantitative Data Collection**

#### **Quantitative Measure**

In the first phase of this study, 5Essentials data from all DuPage, North Cook, West Cook, and Lake Counties were used as a first filter in order identify principal participants for this research. Every public school in the state of Illinois currently



administers the 5Essentials Survey, one of several UChicago Impact improvement tools. Based on 20 years of research, the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute created the UChicago Impact system, with one component of the system being the 5Essentials Survey. The five indicators have been identified to positively affect school success are: Effective Leaders, Collaborative Teachers, Involved Families, Supportive Environments, and Ambitious Instruction (Bryk et al., 2010). The survey was intended to provide a comprehensive assessment of schools' organizational culture to guide school improvement efforts. "Research has shown that schools that were strong in at least three of the 5Essentials were 10 times more likely to have improved gains in math and reading than schools weak on three of 5Essentials" (UChicagoImpact, n.d). The evidence-based system designed to drive improvement, "reliably measures changes in a school organization through its survey, predicts school successes through scoring, and provides individualized actionable reports to schools, districts, parents, and community partners" (UChicagoImpact, n.d). According to researchers from the Consortium on Chicago School Research, schools committed to improvement must recognize that improvement does not occur as a result of isolated efforts, but rather through the efforts that are integrated across all five essential supports (Bryk et al., 2010).

At the helm of school improvement is the school principal (Bryk et al., 2010; Davis et al., 2011; Fullan, 2014). He/she is charged with the complex orchestration of improvement efforts across all five essential supports in order to close the achievement gap, ensure college and career readiness among students, and prepare for the new reality that today's society (i.e., the post-grad, real world) is looking for in the new generation of

thinkers, problem-solvers, and innovators (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Tough, 2012; Wagner, 2012). According to the 5 Essential Supports mentioned earlier, “School leadership [the principal] sits in the first position. It acts as the driver for improvements in four other organizational subsystems...” (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 197). The principal serves as a “critical lever in transforming education results” (Davis et al, 2011, p. 1) and “can have a profound effect on the achievement of students in their schools” (Waters et al., 2005, p. 38).

### **Quantitative Sampling Plan**

The target population for this study was currently employed K-12 public education principals in DuPage, North Cook, West Cook, and Lake Counties, Illinois who lead schools that measure “strong in at least three of the 5Essentials” (UChicagoImpact, n.d.) indicators: Effective Leaders, Collaborative Teachers, Involved Families, Supportive Environments, and Ambitious Instruction. This researcher selected DuPage, North Cook, West Cook, and Lake Counties for her proposed research because the demographics of these counties most closely mirror the researcher’s work demographics, and findings were more likely be transferrable in her professional context.

### **Quantitative Data Collection**

This researcher used the 2015 Illinois 5Essential data because public schools in the state of Illinois were universally required to conduct the 5Essentials Survey on a biennial basis. This researcher used the most current “5Essentials Overall” data (see Appendix A) broken down by school for Dupage County, North Cook County, West

Cook County, and Lake County. From these data, this researcher identified the top performing schools in order to identify principals for the study.

Once principals of schools which were strong in at least three of the 5Essentials were identified, a consent to participate in research letter (see Appendix B) was sent to the principals. An overview of the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey (see Appendix C) along with permission to use the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey (see Appendix D) was obtained and included in the letters sent to principals who were invited to participate in the study. Also included in the consent to participate in research letter, potential study participants were provided with the title and purpose of the study, the name of the researcher, as well as the potential benefits and risks to the participant. The consent letter explained that participation was voluntary, would remain confidential, and that compensation for participation would not be provided. Finally, the researcher shared her contact information along with the contact information of her faculty advisor, and the compliance manager for Loyola University Chicago in the event that participants had questions or concerns that they would like to have had addressed prior to consenting to participate. A short demographics input form (see Appendix E) was also included in the consent to participate in research letter, and a self-addressed, stamped return envelope was included in all letters to potential participants for easy reply.

To promote a higher response rate for the study, participation invitations were sent in hand-addressed envelopes with the researcher's name and address listed as the return address. Additionally, because the selection criteria was celebratory in nature,

acknowledging principals' success as measured by the 5Essentials data, this researcher was hopeful that more principals would agree to participate in the study.

Because of the many benefits of electronic correspondence, this researcher also used email as an additional strategy and attempt to solicit participation in her study. All potential participants were emailed an electronic version of the consent to participate in research letter (see Appendix B). Principals who were interested in participating in the study had the opportunity to immediately pursue the research opportunity by clicking on a the electronic versions of all of the documents included in the hard-copy mailer:

Consent to Participate in Research (see Appendix B); Overview of the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey (see Appendix C); Permission to use the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey (see Appendix D); Demographics Input Form (see Appendix E).

Principals were able to register for participation in the study in either hard copy format or in electronic format. Individuals who chose, with informed consent, to participate in the study in hard copy format were asked to sign the consent to participate letter, complete the demographics input form, and return both of them to the researcher for the exclusive purpose of this study using the self-addressed, stamped return envelope included in the invitation to participate letter. Individuals who chose, with informed consent, to participate in the study in electronic format were asked to sign the consent to participate letter via electronic signature, complete the demographics input form, and submit them via Google form to the researcher for the exclusive purpose of this study. Once written or electronic consent was received by the researcher, participants remained in a pool until the one month registration window expired. Principals who choose not to

participate were able to decline participation by returning materials to the researcher or simply through non-participation.

Nine Illinois principals (n=9) from DuPage County, North Cook County, West Cook County, and Lake County were invited to continue their participation the study by completing the electronic McREL Balanced Leadership® self-assessment survey, a research-based tool that offers principals insight about their leadership practices as identified in *School Leadership That Works: From Research to Results* (Marzano et al., 2005). The tool was used to identify the most prevalent responsibilities among the 21 “well-defined (and) research-based leadership responsibilities and associated practices correlated with student achievement” (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 3).

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

The overall intent of the first part of the quantitative phase of this research was to select a pool of successful principals as determined by the 2015 5Essential data for further study. Principals of schools who scored strong on at least three of the 5Essential indicators on the 5Essentials Survey were invited to participate in the study. Of the principals who agreed to participate in the study, nine were selected. The researcher attempted to select a participant pool that was heterogeneous in nature taking into consideration the participants’ gender, age, race, years of leadership experience, and grade level leadership responsibilities across the K-12 continuum. The remaining participant volunteers were thanked for their willingness to participate and released from the study.

The second part of the quantitative phase of this research was to identify the prevalent 21 Leadership Responsibilities and associated practices correlated with student achievement” (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 17) as a backdrop and member-checking feature of the research to ensure that the qualitative interview data was consistent with the quantitative 5Essentials and McREL Balanced Leadership Survey data. The McREL Balanced Leadership Survey was not designed to produce a score, nor was it intended to explicitly identify prevalent leadership responsibilities in the manner in which this researcher used the tool. With permission from McREL, this researcher used the tool’s copyrighted questions and corresponding answer codes to identify prevalent responsibilities for each principal participating in the study. The researcher tallied the number of survey answers that correlated with each of the 21 Leadership Responsibilities and looked for a natural cut to determine prevalence. For example, a participant may have had five tally marks for two of the 21 Leadership Responsibilities and only one or two tally marks for all the rest. In that case, only two prevalent leadership responsibilities would have been determined. In another case, a participant may have had four tally marks for three of the 21 Leadership Responsibilities and only one or two tally marks for all the rest. In that case, three prevalent leadership responsibilities would have been determined.

## **Phase II: Qualitative Data Collection**

### **Qualitative Measures**

Because we cannot observe the “feelings, thoughts, and intentions” of others, Patton explains “we have to ask people questions” so we can “enter into the other person’s perspective” (Merriam, 2009, p. 88). Nine principals were invited to participate

in the study because qualitative approaches were best suited to address this study's research questions and examining a smaller number of principals allowed for more in-depth analysis of individual experiences. Participants were mailed a packet of participant information which included a Recruitment Letter and Consent for Interview (see Appendix F) and an advance copy of the interview questions (see Appendix G) that were used in the interview.

In the Recruitment Letter and Consent for Interview (see Appendix F), the principals were provided with a link and asked to complete the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey as well as an advance copy of the Interview Protocol (see Appendix G). Completion of the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey prompted the researcher to contact participants to schedule a one hour interview at a convenient time and location. The self-assessment survey was used to frame the interview as a “conversation with a purpose” (Merriam, 2009, p. 88) and principals were asked to discuss their prevalent responsibilities results during the interview. The self-assessment was intended to stimulate thinking about their practice ahead of time in order to “yield descriptive data” (p. 99) and rich information about principal leadership during the interview. The prevalent responsibilities identified from the survey served as an additional “method of data” (p. 216) and were used to corroborate interview data and to check for continuity of answers with regard to the principals' insights about their attributes, behaviors, and practices. The use of the self-assessment allowed the researcher to more accurately validate the participants' oral responses. Also included in the Recruitment Letter and Consent for Interview (see Appendix F) was the name of the researcher, the purpose of

the study, as well as the potential benefits and/or risks posed to those who participated. The letter conveyed that participation in this study was voluntary and that participants needed to willingly complete the self-assessment survey and participate in a one hour, in-person interview with the researcher. The letter also outlined the details regarding compensation and confidentiality. Additionally, in the event that the participant had any questions or concerns, contact information for the researcher, her faculty advisor, and the compliance manager for Loyola University of Chicago were all listed. Upon receiving consent for the interview, the researcher contacted each participant to schedule the interview at a time and place that was convenient for the participants. Interviews were scheduled between November 15 and December 15, 2016, and all interviews took place at the participants' schools where the following questions were asked:

1. How long have you been in education?
  - a. Did you always know you wanted to become an educator?
2. How did you become a principal? Share your leadership story.
3. Tell me about an improvement initiative that you have led in your building about which you are proud.
4. Of the 21 leadership responsibilities outlined in the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework, which do you perceive to be your greatest areas of strength?
5. How did you develop your leadership strengths? Did you *learn* to be a leader or would you say you were born a leader?



6. According to your self-reflection survey results, your most prevalent leadership responsibilities are: (Results will be shared at interview)
  - a. Does this seem accurate?
  - b. Does this surprise you?
  - c. Do you think your staff members would agree?
  - d. Can you share some examples of how you've demonstrated these leadership responsibilities?
7. According to your 2015 5Essentials data, your school is strong on three or more indicators: effective leaders; collaborative teachers; involved families; ambitious instruction; supportive environment Tell me about your school's strengths.
  - a. How do you support the development of these strengths?
8. As you look toward your future, what is one area of improvement that you aspire to make in your practice?
9. When it comes to your leadership in your school, about what are you most proud?
10. What advice has been offered to you that has contributed to your success?
11. If you could share advice with a new principal, what is the most important piece of advice you would offer to him/her to ensure his/her success?
12. Is there a question you wish I would have asked you about your leadership and your success as a school principal? If so, what is it, and what would your answer be?

The interview questions were developed to get at the heart of principal leadership and were constructed to elicit stories and personal reflection. The questions were intentionally open-ended and attempted to get at the attributes, behaviors, and practices from a variety of angles. They aimed to uncover the unique leadership stories of each participating principal and to capture their unique perspectives and perceptions about their practice. In order to get at the heart of the principal's practice and to gather rich contributions about principal leadership, the researcher engaged in deep listening during the interview to guide follow-up questions and probe for more elaborate answers (Merriam, 2009, p. 101).

A semi-structured interview format was used by the researcher to offer the researcher flexibility in her questioning in order to gain deeper, richer information and detail from the principals who were interviewed. Because "specific information is desired from all the respondents" (Merriam, 2009, p. 90) the interview was structured. However, the semi-structured questions served as a guide for the researcher, "and neither exact wording nor the order of the questions [were] determined ahead of time" (p. 90). The semi-structured format "allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (p. 90).

At the start of each interview, the consent for interview forms (see Appendix F) were reviewed and signed in person by each participant. This once again ensured that the participant understood the purpose of the research, the scope of his/her participation, as well as the perceived risks and/or benefits as a result of participating in the study. The researcher reminded each participant that the interview was to be recorded, transcribed.

Finally, the researcher reminded the participant of his/her right to terminate participation in the study, withdraw from the interview, or refuse to answer any of the interview questions or parts of the interview questions at any time without penalty of any kind. After the oral reading of the Consent for Interview (see Appendix F), the researcher asked the participant to sign the consent form before beginning the interview.

Each principal was also provided a hard copy of the Interview Protocol (see Appendix G), the Principal Leadership Responsibilities (see Appendix H), his/her school's 5Essential Overall Data Report (see Appendix A).

The semi-structured interview was conversational in nature and they were recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription service for the purposes of coding and analysis. The researcher examined the answers to interview questions and then coded interview data according to the 21 leadership responsibilities outlined in the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework, which served as a backdrop for analysis and interpretation. In 2003, Waters et al. introduced the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework. Based on over three decades of research the framework was established to “provide practitioners with specific guidance on the curricular, instructional, and school practices, that, when applied appropriately can result in increased student achievement” (p. 2). The research team identified 21 leadership responsibilities and the correlating practices, knowledge, strategies, tools and resources that principals need to be successful. This “knowledge taxonomy” (p. 13) becomes a tool to help principals move theory into practice. This researcher used the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework to code and

analyze interview data from the nine principals identified as leading successful schools by the 2015 5Essentials Survey data.

As already mentioned, the interview was recorded so as to allow the researcher the opportunity to listen carefully and “become the repository of detailed information” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 207). Recording the interview also allowed the researcher to interact more naturally and conversationally during the interview because she was not pressed to record answers during the interview. To ensure confidentiality, the interview data transcription service was required to complete and sign a Confidentiality Agreement (see Appendix I). In addition to the recording and transcription of the interview, the researcher used a field journal to collect short field notes during the interview in order to highlight and mark areas for further reflection after the interview. Immediately after the interview, the researcher read through her notes and reflected on the interview in order to capture pertinent observations that would offer value to her analysis. Additionally, in an effort to be reflective and transparent:

keeping and using self-reflective journals can make the messiness of the research process visible to the researcher who can then make it visible for those who read the research and thus avoid producing , reproducing, and circulating the discourse of research as a neat and linear process. (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 704)

With “an emphasis on experience, understanding, and meaning-making, all characteristics of qualitative inquiry” (Merriam, 2009, p. 19) interview recordings, transcripts, and field notes were used during data analysis. Field notes were especially

helpful when identifying the common theme of shared leadership, something not specifically identified in the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

The nature of qualitative research is that it allows for “emerging insights, hunches, and tentative hypothesis” (Merriam, 2009, p. 165) during both data collection and data analysis, which occur simultaneously. “It is an interactive process throughout that allows the investigator to produce believable and trustworthy findings” (p. 165). In essence, qualitative analysis begins at the onset of the interview process and continues throughout the coding and interpretive phases of the study. “The process of data collection and analysis is recursive and dynamic” (p. 169). In other words, one informs the other. Understanding this, the researcher approached the entire process as an opportunity for analysis and was open to themes that emerged throughout the course of the research experience. In true qualitative research fashion, at the onset of the study:

The researcher does not know what will be discovered, what or whom to concentrate on, or what the final analysis will be like. The final product is shaped by the data that are collected and the analysis that accompanies the entire process....Data that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating. (p. 171)

Like a detective who uses one clue to explore the next, this researcher captured “reflections, tentative themes, hunches, ideas, and things to pursue” (p. 170) from the first set of data, and the experience of collecting it, to inform the next.

To begin, this researcher engaged in a purposeful exploration of these data after each principal interview session. The researcher reviewed the purpose of the study, carefully read through the entire interview transcript as well her field notes, and made additional notes and observations about the experience. The researcher then compared interview data with the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey results to validate the oral responses. Finally, to make sense of the interview and self-assessment data, the researcher used both a closed and open coding system to identify themes/categories for interpretation. Three categories were pre-determined from the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework: Purposeful Community; Focus; and Magnitude of Change. Two themes emerged organically.

The researcher was careful to avoid forcing data into preconceived categories so as to be true to inductive nature of qualitative research and reduce bias. The researcher organized the coded data into categories, and she was intentionally mindful to compare and connect ideas and observation from one interview to the next in order to “make sense out of the data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 175) and answer the research questions. During this process of “classifying data into some sort of scheme consisting of categories, or themes,” the “categories describe the data, but to some extent they also interpret the data” (p. 188). In the case of this research, two important categories or themes outside those presented in the McREL’s Balanced Leadership Framework emerged and became important to capture: Leadership Journey and Shared Leadership. The Leadership Journeys of each principal revealed important pieces of information about his/her perceptions about how and why he/she became a leader and revealed key influences and

experiences in their practice. Additionally, in all but one case, the principals revealed examples of and value in shared leadership. When key influences, experiences, or values were consistent among at least seven of the nine (78%) principals who were interviewed, for the sake of this research, they were considered to be common among participants.

Once data were categorized into the five identified themes, those which fell into the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework domains of Purposeful Community, Focus, and Magnitude were further coded according to the 21 Leadership Responsibilities identified within each domain. (See Table 2)

Table 2

*Primary Placement of Leadership Responsibilities in the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework*

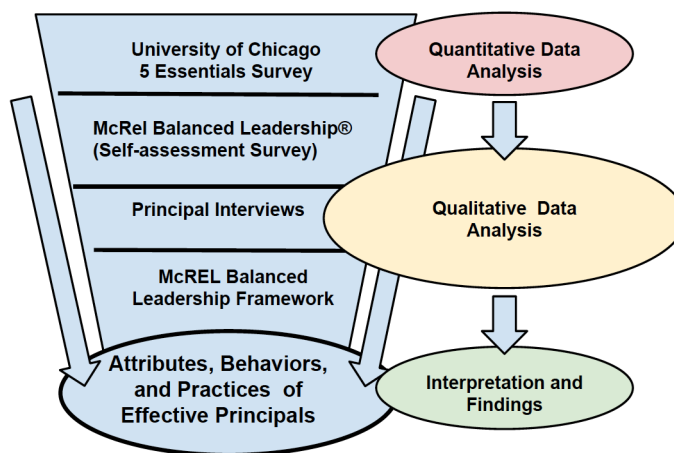
Primary Placement of leadership responsibilities in the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework		
Purposeful Community	Focus	Magnitude of Change
Affirmation Communication Culture Ideals/beliefs Input Relationships Situational awareness Visibility	Contingent Rewards Discipline Involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment Focus Order Outreach Resources	Change agent Flexibility Ideals/beliefs Intellectual stimulation Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment Monitor/evaluate Optimize

Adapted from *The Balanced Leadership Framework: Connecting vision with action* (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 17).

The researcher used the following categories to code each principal's transcript: Leadership Journey; Purposeful Community; Focus, Magnitude of Change; and Shared Leadership. Specific quotes from the interview transcript were color coded and presented

in their appropriate categories (see Appendix J). Finally, after extensive analysis and interpretation occurred, and as the inductive process became more deductive in nature, the researcher presented the data in a descriptive narrative.

The sequential mixed method approach for this study is depicted in the figure below. The quantitative data collection and analysis serves as a filter for the qualitative data collection and analysis. The combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods “improves the quality of research because the different approaches have different strengths and weaknesses” and is a “strength in educational research” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 51). In the final chapter of this dissertation, the research questions are answered through the analysis of the categorized data the common themes and experiences that surfaced across cases. The figure below (see Figure 3) illustrates the mixed method design and analysis structure to support the outcomes of this study.



*Figure 3.* Mixed Method Design and Analysis Structure



### **Limitations and Biases of the Study**

Mixed research is considered to be advantageous in the realm of educational research, particularly because of the rich, meaning-making narratives that unfold as a result of complementary quantitative and qualitative data. However, there are limitations. Due to their complex nature, mixed research designs sometimes yield contradictory findings (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 456) and “little is known about the relative merits of the different types of mixed research designs” (p. 456) which can potentially devalue the research findings.

Specific to this study, in addition to the limitations of its mixed research design, were the additional limitations of the methodology. Only nine principals were selected to participate in this study. This small number of subjects limits the degree to which results and can be directly applied in the field. Additionally, while the pool of study participants was diverse in gender, age, principal experience, and experience across a variety of grade levels, it lacked racial diversity. According to the ways in which participants identified their races, the study did not include any participants of color. Another limitation was that the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey, used to frame the interview process, was a self-reflection survey based on the principals’ personal perceptions of their leadership. The most significant limitation of the study was potentially the researcher’s ability to accurately represent the complex experiences of the nine principals who participated. To address this, the researcher attempted to triangulate information that was directly provided by the participants across methods and contexts in order to ensure that inferences that were extrapolated about each individual, and later the groups, were

grounded in data. It is also important to note that any study based primarily on survey and interview data is somewhat limited in its focus because it rests on the perceptions and experiences of the participants as individuals and neglects to acknowledge or consider that other people, forces, influences, and contexts are critical to their stories. This researcher recognizes these limitations but chose to focus on the principals' perceptions and experiences because they are often a neglected and perhaps even misunderstood part of the puzzle, which has inherent value due to the power of these individuals as part of their larger systems. Further the stories told by principals' revealed their deep convictions about their role as building principals, and the ways in which their experiences were deeply impactful to them as individuals.

A factor that may have biased the study was the fact the researcher served as a middle school principal for six years. Based on her school's 2013 5Essentials data, she would have fit the profile of principals who were invited to participate in this research study. The researcher's personal experience may have limited or biased her findings and colored her interpretation of data. And, because the researcher is a public school administrator with nearly fifteen years of administrative experience, it was possible that she knew the participants either directly or indirectly through her professional circles. Although safeguards to reduce limitations and biases were incorporated into the research study's design, the researcher is cognizant that they exist.

The following efforts were made by the researcher to reduce bias and to protect the reliability and validity of the research. Participants were repeatedly informed of both the risks and benefits associated with participation in the study. A multi-step consent

process was used in order to allow participants ample opportunities to withdraw from the study for any reason. Secondly, notes taken during the interview, and journaling immediately afterward were incorporated into the study to help identify and reduce bias when appropriate. Third, any information obtained in connection with this research study that could be identified with the participant was not disclosed. Further, in any written reports or publications, no one was identified or identifiable. Finally, the researcher worked closely with her faculty advisor throughout her research period to review her reflective research journal (Ortlipp, 2008) and to help monitor potential bias and ensure a sound research study.

### **Summary**

The educational landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is fast changing, and the principal plays a critical role as the primary facilitator of this change. To uncover the unique perspectives of a set of principals with shared characteristics and contexts who have managed to effect change and be successful despite an increasingly complex public education landscape, this researcher conducted a sequential, mixed-method study. In two phases, the researcher used both quantitative and qualitative measures to gain a deeper understanding of the selected principals' perspectives and beliefs about their leadership. The aim of the study was to add to the literature base which currently lacks first-hand insight and accounts of leadership from the principal perspective.

In the quantitative phase of the study, the researcher used results from the 5Essentials Survey as a filter and means to identify eligible principal participants. Principals who scored high on the survey and were considered "Well Organized" on the

instrument were identified as eligible participants. Nine principals from DuPage County, North Cook County, West Cook County, and Lake Counties were invited to participate and asked to complete the McREL Balanced Leadership®. Survey data were used to identify prevalent responsibilities according to the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework. The survey was intended to set the stage for the qualitative phase of the study and served as a means for member checking to ensure that interview data were consistent with other more quantitative data.

In the qualitative phase of the study, principal participants engaged in a one hour semi-structured interview with the researcher. Research questions were open-ended in order to allow participants to share their genuine perspectives about their leadership attributes, behaviors, and attitudes. The interview was recorded and later transcribed. Data from the interview were coded and categorized into five categories (see Appendix J): Leadership Journey; Purposeful Community; Focus; Magnitude of Change; and Shared Leadership.

In the following chapter both the quantitative and qualitative data from the study will be presented along with the common themes and experiences that surfaced across cases.

CHAPTER IV  
PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

**Introduction**

This study sought to examine how school principals can effect positive and productive change and school improvement in an era of substantial educational reform and adaptive challenges. As concluded by Hallinger and Heck (1996) in their review of seminal, empirical research from 1980-1995, “If the impact of principal leadership is achieved through indirect means (e.g., school climate, school culture, instructional organization), we must advance our understandings of how such linkages are shaped by the principal” (p. 34). As the second most impactful person aside from the teacher (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012), principals indirectly impact student achievement by building professional capital among staff members (Fullan, 2014). Heck and Marcoulides (1993) explain that “the manner in which elementary and high school principals govern the school, build strong school climate, and organize and monitor the school’s instructional program are important predictors of academic achievement” (p. 25). Carol Dweck (2006) and other champions of a “growth mindset” affirm, these attributes can be learned and practiced (Gladwell, 2002; Gladwell, 2000; Pink, 2009; Tough, 2012). Yet, improvement cannot be a “paint-by-number,” reproducible approach where a principal follows a prescription for effective leadership. It’s the relational dynamics that make school improvement possible (Bryk et al., 2010). School context

matters, and the people within the organization and their actions are what ultimately make a difference in schools. Strong relational trust leads to buy-in, motivation, and engagement, and while it “doesn’t directly affect student learning...it creates the basic social fabric within which school professionals, parents, and community leaders can initiate and sustain efforts at building the essential supports for school improvement” (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 140).

This study aimed to identify the common attributes, behaviors, and practices of effective principals and to gain a better understanding of what resides at the core of their success across the K-12 continuum and to answer the following research questions:

1. What do the leadership journeys of the selected nine K-12 principals of “Well-Organized” schools, as determined by the 5Essential Survey, reveal about key experiences and influences in their leadership development and professional practice?
2. Using the lens of the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework, what leadership responsibilities are most evident in these principals' descriptions of their roles and perceptions of themselves as leaders?
3. What do the principals' narratives reveal about effective leadership practice?

In the first phase of the study, this researcher collected quantitative data from the 5Essentials survey that was universally administered in the state of Illinois on a biennial basis during the 2014 and 2015 school years to identify school principals of DuPage County, North Cook County, West Cook County, and Lake County schools with the highest 5Essentials results. Principals who led schools that were predicted to most likely

to be successful according to 5Essentials data were invited to participate in this research study. Striving to select a diverse array of participants from those who offered consent, using the Demographics Input Form data, this researcher considered principals' gender, age, race, years of leadership experience, and grade level responsibilities across the entire K-12 continuum in her selection of nine participants to invite to continue in her study (see Table 3). This researcher had hoped for a more diverse pool of participants, and this will be addressed in Chapter V.

Table 3

*Research Participant Demographics*

<b>Principal</b>	<b>Self-identified Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Self-identified race</b>	<b>Total years of service as a principal</b>	<b>Total years as principal in current school</b>	<b>Grade level responsibilities</b>
A	Female	45	White	6	6	K-5
B	Male	50	White, non-Hispanic	12	12	7-8
C	Male	40	Caucasian	12	6	K-5
D	Male	51	White	11	3	6-8
E	Female	39	--	11	7	6-8
F	Male	47	White	3	3	9-12
G	Female	45	Caucasian	5	3	6-8
H	Female	55	Caucasian	4	4	K-6
I	Female	38	Caucasian	4	4	6-8

This sample, taken from nine principals was comprised of 56% female and 44% male. The participating principals' ages ranged from 38-55, and their years of service as principals ranges from 3-12 years. 100% of the principals who chose to identify their race were white/non-Hispanic/Caucasian. 33% of the sample led elementary buildings, 56% of the sample led middle school buildings, and 11% of the sample led a high school building.

The nine principal participants then completed the McREL Balanced Leadership® Self-Assessment Survey, which provided principals with an opportunity to engage in a self-reflection exercise about their practice. This exercise was intended to frame the principals' thinking about their practice and led to a focused and reflective conversation in the second phase of the research. Additionally, the McREL Balanced Leadership® Self-Assessment Survey results allowed the researcher to identify the most prevalent leadership responsibilities among the 21 "well-defined (and) research-based leadership responsibilities and associated practices correlated with student achievement" (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 3). To determine the most prevalent leadership responsibilities for each participant, the researcher awarded a point for each survey response where participants ranked themselves a 4 or 5 on a 1-5 (not at all - completely) likert scale. Each survey question corresponds with one of the 21 leadership responsibilities. Leadership responsibilities were ordered based on total points, and the researcher determined the most prevalent of the 21 leadership responsibilities based on the natural break in points. In some cases, participants had one prevalent leadership responsibility, while others had two or three. The prevalent leadership responsibility identified from the survey for each



participant served as yet another lens for listening to and interpreting interview data.

During Phase II, qualitative data were collected through individual, semi-structured interviews that revealed principals' thoughts and beliefs about their leadership practices as well as their leadership journeys. The semi-structured interviews were conversational in nature, and they were recorded and transcribed for the purposes of coding and analysis. Because every principal's story was different, and because no two experiences were the same, this method allowed the researcher to reveal and embrace these differences. Each conversation with the principals was unique, and their distinct and varied leadership attributes enriched this study. The researcher categorized interview data into five themes, three of which were determined by the domains presented in the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework (Purposeful Community, Focus, and Magnitude) and two which emerged organically (Leadership Journey and Shared Leadership). Through the interview process, participants shared their rich, unique experiences, and the stories of their leadership journeys revealed insights about key influences and experiences that may play a part in a principal's success. Additionally, the interview process revealed that the participating principals placed a common emphasis on their belief in the importance of shared leadership. Both of these themes, which organically emerged from the interview data will be further discussed in Chapter V.

To sort interview data, the researcher read through each line of each interview transcript and coded the data according the five identified themes: Leadership Story; Purposeful Community, Focus, Magnitude of Change, and Shared Leadership. The researcher then engaged in a second round of coding to further sort data according to the

21 leadership responsibilities presented within the three domains from the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework. In the book, *The Balanced Leadership Framework: Connecting vision with action*, the 21 leadership responsibilities are categorized into three distinct components of the framework: Purposeful Community (Affirmation; Communication; Culture; Ideals/Beliefs; Input; Relationships; Situational Awareness; Visibility); Focus (Contingent rewards; Discipline; Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Focus; Order; Outreach; Resources); and Magnitude of Change (Change Agent; Flexibility; Ideals/Beliefs; Intellectual Stimulation; Knowledge of Curriculum, instruction, and Assessment; Monitor/evaluate; Optimizer) (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 17). The researcher isolated important quotes from each participant and organized them according to the five categories (see Appendix J). Quotes from the interview will be presented in a descriptive narrative in the Display of Data. Lastly, the researcher identified key influences and experiences that emerged during each participant's interview and later identified common key influences and experiences (no less than seven out of nine principals, 78%) among participants.

The sequential mixed method approach for this study is depicted in the figure below. The quantitative data collection and analysis serves as a filter for the qualitative data collection and analysis. The combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods “improves the quality of research because the different approaches have different strengths and weaknesses,” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 51).

This research study included multiple sources of data and a variety of interpretive lenses to identify the themes that emerged, and the researcher examined complex

phenomena in order to better understand the attributes, behaviors, and practices of effective school principals. The findings of this research have the potential to contribute to the knowledge base around administrator preparation and leadership in education and may help inform principal preparation programs and superintendents in their planning of meaningful principal development.

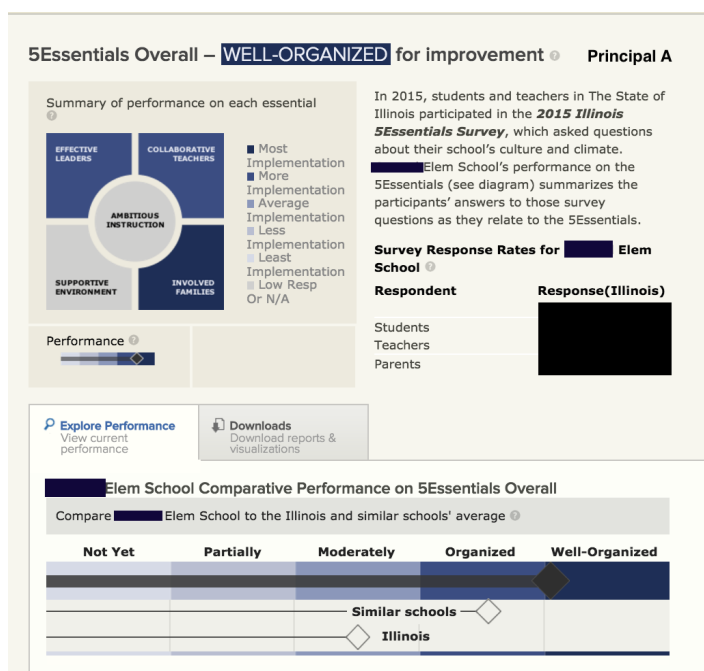
### **Display of Data**

In this section, 5Essentials data for each participant are shared, followed by a descriptive overview of his/her demographics information. All identifiable information has been redacted from each 5Essentials profile. Next, the most prevalent leadership responsibilities and their associated practices (Waters & Cameron, 2008, pp. 4-9) as identified by the results of the McREL's Balanced Leadership Self-Assessment Survey are presented for each participant in the form of a chart. Next, a summary of the semi-structured interview data for each participant, organized into five categories: Leadership Journey; Purposeful Community; Focus; Magnitude of Change; and Shared Leadership, are presented in the form of a descriptive narrative. Significant quotes from the interviews are integrated into the descriptive narrative to convey the richness and depth of information that was collected through the interview process. Finally, the key experiences and influences that emerged for each participant are presented in a chart.

## Individual Principal Profiles

### Principal A

**5Essentials data.** According to the Illinois 5Essentials data, Principal A's school is "Well-Organized" for Improvement scoring strong in three of the five essentials: Effective Leaders; Collaborative Teachers; and Involved Families (see Figure 4).



Source. Illinois 5Essential Survey website. Retrieved from [illinois.5-essentials.org](http://illinois.5-essentials.org)

Figure 4. 5Essentials School Data for Principal A

**Demographic information.** Principal A is a 45 year old who identified herself as both female and white. She has six total years of principal experience, and all of her years as principal have been spent leading in her current K-5 elementary school.

**McREL's Balanced Leadership Self-Assessment Survey data.** According to the McREL's Balanced Leadership Self-Assessment Survey, Principal A's most

prevalent responsibilities among the 21 “well-defined (and) research-based leadership responsibilities and associated practices correlated with student achievement,” (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 3) were those of Culture and Optimize (see Table 4).

Table 4

*Prevalent Leadership Responsibilities and Associated Practices for Principal A*

Responsibilities (extent to which the principal...)	Associated Practices
<i><b>Culture:</b> fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation</i>	Promotes cooperation among staff Promotes a sense of well-being Promotes cohesion among staff Develops an understanding of purpose Develops a shared vision of what the school could be like
<i><b>Optimize:</b> inspires and leads new and challenging innovations</i>	Inspires teachers to accomplish things that might seem beyond their grasp  Portrays a positive attitude about the ability of staff to accomplish substantial things  Is a driving force behind major initiatives

Adapted from *The Balanced Leadership Framework: Connecting vision with action* (Waters & Cameron, 2008, pp. 4-8).

### Summary of Semi-Structured Interview Data

**Leadership journey.** Principal A began her education journey as an undergraduate child psychology major, where through her work with children, she was drawn to the field of education and motivated to make a difference and have a lasting impact. Principal A recalled “lighting up” when she talked about her work with children and that she realized that she should follow her “passion” and become a teacher. Principal

A served as a teacher for nine years, six of which were spent in her current district as a 5th grade teacher. After just a few years of teaching, Principal A was invited to join a research team established to help school improvement efforts in the Detroit Public School System. She recalled being “fascinated with the whole process – the school improvement, the problem-solving,” and how she “got the bug (for leadership), for sure!” Principal A was consistently “drawn to the problem-solving piece and loved that before (she) even thought about administration. It was just ‘give me more of these opportunities. I loving this.’” Throughout her teaching career, Principal A was invited to participate in a variety of leadership opportunities. “Administrators would come up to me and say, ‘I want to make you an...; I want to put you on this leadership team; I’d like you to take this...; join this curriculum team; join the district committee; join this, join that.’” It was her participation these leadership opportunities that led her to pursue her master’s degree in education leadership and to her license in administration.

When Principal A returned from her maternity leave after her second child, she sat down with her superintendent and said, “I want to be an administrator. I want to be an assistant principal. But I only want to do part-time, because I just had a baby, and my husband’s traveling...Can you make that for me?” Having served as a teacher leader in her system for several years, Principal A’s superintendent did just that. He said, “Actually, our elementary schools growing. I think we need this, and this is a great idea. I’m going to make this work for you.” After only one year as a part-time administrator, with some “nudging,” from her superintendent “having confidence in me” and “believing that this was the right thing to do, letting me know that he had my back,” Principal A

assumed a full-time Assistant Principal role where she “kind of slowly had that progression toward the principalship.” Principal A remained in the Assistant Principal Role for six years in her current building before assuming the Principal role for the past six years.

**Leadership Framework Component of Purposeful Community: Affirmation; Communication; Culture; Ideals/Beliefs; Input; Relationships; Situational Awareness; Visibility.** As the leader of her school, Principal A’s description of her work includes a variety of leadership responsibilities within the McREL’s Leadership Framework component of Purposeful Community. The interview process revealed that Principal A places value on developing Culture, ensuring a clear understanding of the school’s Ideals/Beliefs, and providing plentiful opportunities from a variety of stakeholders for Input (see Appendix J).

“The shared belief, sense of community, cooperation; I feel like I have that.” Principal A shared stories of “creating a culture and collaborative nature” within her building. Principal A explained the many ways that people can contribute:

I have committees, not only for my learning commons, but my school improvement; I have a principal advisory, and I feel like people can volunteer and have input. They can share their passion and have impact where they feel they need to, and then I meet and touch base with each of these groups. It's a very collaborative atmosphere, so people feel like they have input if they want, or they have a rep who they can give input to. There's a place for them. And the same

with the parents, the community extends beyond the staff. So I feel like culture and input kind of go hand in hand.

Principal A shared her pride in in a recent school improvement initiative “because it’s something we did collaboratively as a staff and as a parent community and as students.” She explained that “we do things together, so they see us as a team. I’m not an island. I really need somebody to help me manage, and we do it together.” Principal A also shared that

doing the right thing doesn't always mean making everyone happy. You can't make everyone happy...sometimes even in our committee work, we'll walk out and say, ‘Well that's going to upset this grade level or this group, but this is the right thing to do and this is why we all feel that way’.

Principal A shared that in building a strong culture, you “try to focus your attention and your vision and your time on the bigger picture, molding, growing the vision.”

**Leadership Framework Component of Focus: Contingent rewards; Discipline; Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Focus; Order; Outreach; Resources.** When sharing her thoughts on her practice, Principal A described a variety of leadership responsibilities within the McREL’s Leadership Framework component of Focus through Outreach efforts and Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment (see Appendix J). While supporting change initiatives in her building, Principal A goes to great lengths to involve parents and community members in the work, while also ensuring that her central office team is aware and supportive of her school’s efforts. Principal A frequently makes presentations to the Board of Education



and often leads book studies to engage her parent community. “I try to pick books or studies that we do as a staff and you can do at home. You can use this as adults or as kids. So it's kind of universal in its theme. And so they feel tied to that.” When people have an understanding of the work, Principal A described how collaboration among the entire school community begins to happen. “And it just happened to be coincidence that at the same time we were exploring this improvement idea, we had parents who are on the CRC committee and they were leading this change and they were coming to me and saying ‘(Principal A), what do we need? I have this idea,’ and I said, ‘Oh! I have the same idea. I'm going to join the committee. You join the committee. We're all going to do this together!” Also through her outreach efforts, Principal A is able to garner the support and resources of her community:

(Parents) have over a hundred volunteer possibilities. I helped, from an assistant principal to now, helped them kind of create those volunteer opportunities, from serving lunch to volunteering at recess, to reading books in the class, to helping plan our enrichment program, and field trips and things, environmental awareness ... I could go on. There's lots of opportunity for parents to find their passion, where they can provide input, and then as a school we only benefit because we have everyone's passions.

Also to support improvement, Principal A is actively involved in supporting Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment in her building:

We look at our data together, and we develop instructional strategies together. So we meet as a grade level team, and everyone talks about kids that aren't making

progress, and everyone feels equally invested in those kids, even though they're not in their classroom.

Additionally, “we observe each other’s practice- work together to review assessment data development, instructional strategies...” Principal A describes her school’s commitment to teaching and learning:

The school leadership team sets high standards- teachers for teaching and student learning. In terms of instructional leadership, I do meet with each grade level on a regular basis and we look at instruction, we look at assessment scores, and we target kids who aren't meeting, and I ask questions like, "What do we need to do differently?"

**Leadership Framework Component of Magnitude of Change: Change Agent; Flexibility; Ideals/Beliefs; Intellectual Stimulation; Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Monitor/evaluate; Optimizer.** Principal A’s description of her practices includes a variety of leadership responsibilities within the McREL’s Leadership Framework component of Magnitude of Change (see Appendix J). The interview process revealed that Principal A perceives that she is a change agent. She shared accounts of driving change by serving as an optimizer who encourages staff to go beyond the status quo. She believes her strong understanding of her building’s ideals/beliefs, which she strengthens through intellectual stimulation and by monitoring/evaluating her building’s work, she is able to demonstrate flexibility throughout the change process (see Appendix J).

While reflecting on an improvement initiative involving a new learning space for STEM activities that required a significant change in her building, Principal A recalled “diving deep into some research and ideas...starting to read books and kind of dabbling in it,” before realizing that it was a “combination of things that made me realize, there's change that's going to happen here. Something needs to give, right? This is an opportunity here.” She went on to explain how it was a team of teachers who initiated the improvement. The teachers said, “We think we've got something bigger.” Principal A explained that the teachers came to her with the idea and she thought,

You just solved our problem. We need a Learning Commons. We have outdated spaces. We shouldn't have two separate spaces; we should have one space. Our population is down a little bit. Maybe we can also somehow morph that into this ‘new space’.

From there, Principal A and her team engaged intellectually and “studied the topic of learning commons for a year or so, and ended up converting an empty classroom into a makerspace, like a mini learning commons.” Principal A explained how she then

went to the superintendent and said, ‘I’m doing this,’ I just started without asking for approval, ‘this is what’s happening. We have to go in this direction. We’re going to have to innovate and remodel some of these spaces anyway. They’re old. Let me tell you how it has to happen and why.’

Principal A, a self-proclaimed “change agent,” explained that “change doesn’t always have to come from me. It could either come from a community member or a staff member, or myself, because I see it in the kids, but I’m willing to try new things.” She

went on to explain “there are some people who are the thinkers, and they mull over thing for a long time. We are more of the ‘Let’s go for this. Let’s try this’.” She shared how once you get the investment, it can start with a few, but then as long as it continues to boil over and bubble into everyone else, then the momentum should continue. I should be able to sit back and let that keep going.

Principal A described the importance of being able to pivot during a change initiative as well:

I feel like you have to be flexible, and I'm okay with things not going my way. I'm not going to lie, sometimes it's hard to hear difficult feedback, or hard that you don't go in a direction you want to go in, but I think I've learned over time, like I said, the collective wisdom of the whole is better than individual.

**Shared leadership.** Throughout the course of the interview, Principal A spoke often about the “collective wisdom” that exists within her school and the impact of sharing leadership responsibilities with others (see Appendix J). “I think you just have to allow yourself the flexibility, and as a leader I think you have to let go that the micromanagement piece. Let go and trust that your staff could have ideas that could be better than yours, or the collective wisdom is better than individuals' wisdom.” She went on to explain:

I've learned that time and time again, I might have an idea in my head of where I think something's going to go, but it's only when you come together that it gets to be this big thing that you could not have dreamed up on your own.

When describing a change initiative in her building, Principal A explained that by “involving teachers in the design implementation and important decisions--where we were collectively deciding,” that “everyone had input from the start, and I think that’s why they are all invested in its success.”

When explaining her leadership around change, she explained that change can start anywhere. In order to share leadership, Principal A shared:

I feel like you have to be flexible, and I'm okay with things not going my way. I'm not going to lie, sometimes it's hard to hear difficult feedback, or hard that you don't go in a direction you want to go in, but I think I've learned over time, like I said, the collective wisdom of the whole is better than individual.

She went on to say:

I trust in the leadership of individuals who are willing to take on a little bit more. I think you have build up those trusts, and you have to play to teachers' strengths. So I had to take time over the last six years to get to know people's strengths and kind of figure out ‘Where do you fit? And what's your passion? And where are you going to take off?’ and I'm going to be okay with that.

Principal A went on to say that she doesn’t “micromanage” and that when people approach her with well thought out ideas, she is eager to say, “Great! Have at it. Go for it!” and then support from the side. Principal A celebrated the impact of shared leadership by saying that when “[teachers] have the leadership, the delegation, the autonomy to take on some projects that will enhance the collective good, it is so, so wonderful.” Principal A also shared that she is “proud to see that the school is successful because of the

collective wisdom of the group, and that means staff, parents, students, and administrators.” The Key Experiences and Influences are listed in the table below (see Table 5).

Table 5

*Key Experiences and Influences for Principal A*

<b>Key Experiences and Influences for Principal A</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• child psychology major inspired her entrance into education</li> <li>• volunteered in schools during undergraduate studies (worked with children)</li> <li>• administrator pointing out leadership potential (encouraged)</li> <li>• took on leadership roles throughout teaching career (leadership roles)</li> <li>• administrator tapping her for actual leadership position</li> <li>• was promoted from within and encouraged by her superintendent (promoted from within)</li> <li>• had strong role model and mentor in her superintendent (mentor)</li> </ul>

**Principal B**

**5Essentials data.** According to the Illinois 5Essentials data, Principal B’s school is “Well-Organized” for Improvement scoring strong in four of the five essentials: Collaborative Teachers; and Involved Families; Supportive Environment; Ambitious Instruction (see Figure 5).

**Demographic information.** Principal B is a 50 year old who identified himself as both male and white, non-Hispanic. He has twelve total years of principal experience, and all of his years as principal have been spent leading in his current 7-8 middle school.



Source: Illinois 5Essential Survey website. Retrieved from illinois.5-essentials.org

Figure 5. 5Essentials School Data for Principal B

**McREL’s Balanced Leadership Self-Assessment Survey data.** According to the McREL’s Balanced Leadership Self-Assessment Survey, Principal B’s most prevalent responsibilities among the 21 “well-defined (and) research-based leadership responsibilities and associated practices correlated with student achievement” (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 3) were those of Relationships and Outreach (see Table 6).

Table 6

*Prevalent Leadership Responsibilities and Associated Practices for Principal B*

Responsibilities (extent to which the principal...)	Associated Practices
<b>Relationships:</b> <i>demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff</i>	<p>Remains aware of personal needs of teachers</p> <p>Maintains personal relationships with teachers</p> <p>Is informed about significant personal issues within the lives of staff members</p> <p>Acknowledges significant events in the lives of staff members</p>
<b>Outreach:</b> <i>is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders</i>	<p>Assures the school is in compliance with district and state mandates</p> <p>Advocates for the school with parents</p> <p>Ensures the central office is aware of the school's accomplishments</p>
<b>Communication:</b> <i>establishes strong lines of communication with teacher and among students</i>	<p>Is easily accessible to teachers</p> <p>Develops effective means for teacher to communicate with others</p> <p>Maintains open and effective lines of communication with staff</p>

Adapted from *The Balanced Leadership Framework: Connecting vision with action* (Waters & Cameron, 2008, pp. 4-8).

**Summary of Semi-Structured Interview Data**

**Leadership journey.** Principal B began his college career in pursuit of a degree in forestry and outdoor studies and evolved into a history major via a pre-law course of study. Toward the end of his undergraduate experience, Principal B “fell into teaching.”



He loved history and social studies, and his history major led him to secondary education. Principal B didn't anticipate becoming a teacher, and conveyed, "I definitely didn't think I'd be an administrator." Principal B explained that his journey into administration was an evolution and that it wasn't a planned trajectory. Principal B does not think of himself as a "born leader," and explained "it's been kind of interesting experience for me just continuing to try different things throughout my career."

Despite growing up in a large school system, Principal B began his career in a small, rural, K-12 school building of 110 students where he "taught all of it, seven different preps!" The experience helped him become more well-rounded and aware the range of needs that exist in a school. After finding success in his teaching role, Principal B assumed a variety of leadership roles including department chair, team leader, coach, sponsor, and supervisor. It was his principal at the time who "started pushing" him toward administration and who ultimately advised, "You should probably go back and get a masters in administration." Two years later, Principal went back to school for his administrative certification. His primary reason for pursuing a leadership was that he felt "it was time to try something different" and that he "wanted to have an impact beyond the classroom." It was his first administrative role as an associate principal of a large middle school that catalyzed his move from a rural to suburban school setting.

Principal B reported that the move from classroom teacher/team leader to assistant principal of a 1000 student middle school created a huge learning curve; "thank God it was such a wonderful, awesome place." Principal B shared that he learned so much in the two years that he was there and that he "learned more in two years than I had

probably [learned] in the previous five.” Principal B also shared that he learned how to lead by “watching other leaders” and by gradually “cultivating” his skills.

The same principal mentor who initially encouraged Principal B to pursue administration also encouraged him to apply for the principalship where Principal B currently serves and has served for the past 12 years. Principal B shared that he became an administrator and developed as a leader because he was always “flexible and willing to try new things” and because he had mentors and colleagues who “nudged” him along.

**Leadership Framework Component of Purposeful Community: Affirmation; Communication; Culture; Ideals/Beliefs; Input; Relationships; Situational Awareness; Visibility.** As the leader of his school, Principal B described a variety of leadership responsibilities from his practice that align to the McREL’s Leadership Framework component of Purposeful Community. The interview process revealed that Principal B places emphasis on relationships and culture building and values strong communication, visibility, and opportunities for stakeholders to offer input (see Appendix J).

When Principal B assumed his principalship, his school faced many challenges, and he quickly realized that establishing and nurturing a strong sense of culture and order was paramount. “We really, first and foremost, needed to focus on culture and getting some clear expectations down and starting to really build a positive culture within our building.” He emphasized that culture is built through relationship building and by “bringing people together” and finding ways to ensure that they “feel valued and heard.” When those two things come together, school and community members identify shared

values and beliefs, and in the case of Principal B's school, the measure of success became that all members of the school community would be proud to send their own children to the school. "Kids say they're safe...they like coming here...like being here."

In order to develop the kind of culture and shared beliefs that Principal B described his school to possess, he explained that visibility and presence in the building and a willingness to deeply listen and solicit input are essential. "I was visible. I listened. We had open discussions. I asked them for input...and they came up with all the things that I knew, for the most part, that we needed to work on." He went on to say, "I think leadership is about being able to bring people together...and coming to consensus in a way that may not please everybody, but [where they] still feel valued and heard." He reflected on the way he intentionally invited feedback and input from his staff members in order to inform decisions. "The resource of listening- being willing to be open, listening, asking for feedback. Take the feedback. Apply it and use it. It's powerful when you "listen and then act on some suggestions and things that people may recommend." Finally, Principal B also shared that affirmation is an important part of building a purposeful community and that he finds ways to acknowledge his staff. "The more seasoned I get, the more and more I realized that everybody needs recognition and everyone needs that kind of acknowledgement that the work you're doing is good, valued, important, and so on."

**Leadership Framework Component of Focus: Contingent rewards; Discipline; Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Focus; Order; Outreach; Resources.** Principal B described a variety of leadership responsibilities within the McREL’s Leadership Framework component of Focus. He shared his perceptions and ways in which he promotes Focus, Order, Discipline, Outreach, Resources, and Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment in his building (see Appendix J).

Early on in his principal role, Principal B shared that he recognized the importance of focus and order. “I came to the conclusion in talking with staff that we really first and foremost needed to focus on culture and getting some clear expectations down.” He recalled his arrival at the school where “kids just showed up,” there was “no rhyme or reason” to the way things were done and remembers asking his wife, “Where am I? I don’t know if this was the right decision.” He went on to say that it was “clearly defining” and “clearly teaching” expectations to his mixed stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, community members) that “had a transformative effect overall on all of us.” Principal B highlighted the importance of focusing on only “a couple of thing” and ensuring that sufficient support and resources are necessary to be successful. Principal B joined planning meetings to offer support and understanding and then “ran block for teachers so they could do what they needed to do.” Additionally, Principal B explained that he recognized that the appropriate training and time were the most critical resources necessary to ensure that teachers are making a difference:

I do my best to provide everything from physical kinds of things to supplementary

materials and other resources that they use. I think if there's one thing that everybody tells me they need more of, it's time. For that team time period you can meet with your subject-like partner. Or you can meet in teams and talk interdisciplinary kinds of activities. They have those opportunities to meet and collaborate. I think that's probably the best resource I can give them.

**Leadership Framework Component of Magnitude of Change: Change Agent; Flexibility; Ideals/Beliefs; Intellectual Stimulation; Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Monitor/evaluate; Optimizer.** Principal B also described a variety of leadership responsibilities within the McREL's Leadership Framework component of Magnitude of Change (see Appendix J). The interview process revealed that Principal B believes that he leads change by establishing a strong set of ideals and beliefs, pushing his staff to accomplish great things (optimizer), and monitoring and evaluating progress. He begins by asking questions about practice. He explained that he challenges his staff with questions like, "What is a middle school? Why does it exist? What's a team? Why do we do that? What's advisory?" And then, through study and conversation, he shared that he empowers his staff to find answers. He and his staff have "really good, sometimes hard, discussions" Once a clear understanding is reached, he pushes his team to plan and act. Principal B said, "I think I have the ability to both push people as well as support them through the process." He talked about "stretching" people toward ambitious outcomes and continually checking in along the way by "looking at what we're doing, measuring it, and analyzing it." He shared, "I strive to be a solid instructional leader who is also able to communicate and coach my staff through those

things.” In the event that things don’t go as planned, the staff is accustomed to “rebooting and then moving forward again.” He explained that all of this is a process, and said, “I’m really proud that my motto is I always want to leave something better than we found it.”

**Shared leadership.** Throughout the entire interview, Principal B used the term “we” when talking about the school’s accomplishments and successes. He spoke often about charging teams with meaningful work through shared leadership and then coaching them from the side to ensure success (see Appendix J). The Key Experiences and Influences are listed in the table below (see Table 7).

Table 7

*Key Experiences and Influences for Principal B*

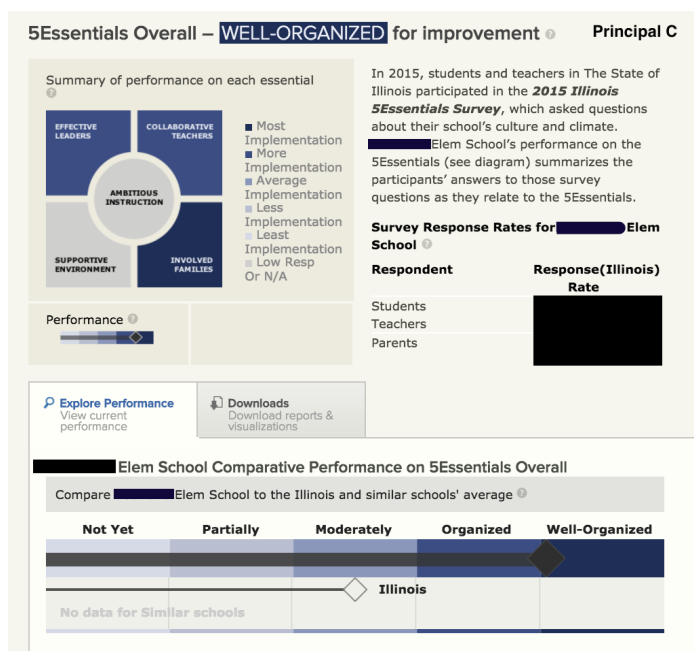
**Key Experiences and Influences for Principal B**

- rural, small school, teaching experience helped him become well rounded
- took on a lot of leadership roles within the building while teaching (leadership roles)
- administrator pointing out leadership potential (encouraged)
- administrator tapping him for actual leadership position
- strong mentor (mentor)

**Principal C**

**5Essentials data.** According to the Illinois 5Essentials data, Principal C’s school is “Well-Organized” for Improvement scoring strong in three of the five essentials: Effective Leaders; Collaborative Teachers; and Involved Families (see Figure 6).

**Demographic information.** Principal C is a 40 year old who identified himself as both male and Caucasian. He has 12 total years of principal experience, and the last six of his years as principal have been spent leading in his current K-5 elementary school.



Source: Illinois 5Essential Survey website. Retrieved from [illinois.5-essentials.org](http://illinois.5-essentials.org)

*Figure 6.* 5Essentials School Data for Principal C

**McREL's Balanced Leadership Self-Assessment Survey data.** According to the McREL's Balanced Leadership Self-Assessment Survey, Principal C's most prevalent responsibility among the 21 "well-defined (and) research-based leadership responsibilities and associated practices correlated with student achievement," (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p.3) was that of Culture (see Table 8).

Table 8

*Prevalent Leadership Responsibilities and Associated Practices for Principal C*

Responsibilities (extent to which the principal...)	Associated Practices
<i>Culture: fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation</i>	Promotes cooperation among staff Promotes a sense of well-being Promotes cohesion among staff Develops an understanding of purpose Develops a shared vision of what the school could be like

Adapted from *The Balanced Leadership Framework: Connecting vision with action* (Waters & Cameron, 2008, pp. 4-8).

**Summary of Semi-Structured Interview Data**

**Leadership journey.** Principal C grew up in a family of educators and knew early on that he, too, would enter the field. Throughout his childhood, he was inspired by his dad who taught and coached and knew that he wanted to have the same impact on kids. During his high school years, Principal C spent summers working with children as a coach and counselor and knew he was bound to be a teacher. As a freshman at the University of Illinois, Principal C declared an education major and pursued a middle and high school certification in social studies education. It was during his student teaching experience that he “fell in love with teaching middle schoolers” and landed his first job teaching middle school social studies in the suburbs of northern Illinois.

It was during his first year as a teacher, when he was “trying to figure out the classroom and staying a few pages ahead of the kids,” that his principal tapped him on the shoulder and said, “I see something in you. I see things in you that I don’t see in first year teachers. Have you ever thought about taking on more leadership?” At the time,



Principal C had planned to pursue a career in high school guidance counseling and had already enrolled in a master's program which he completed during his first two years of teaching. School leadership was not something Principal C had intended to pursue.

At the start of his second year of teaching, with some coaxing from his principal, Principal C became the 7th grade team leader. He vividly recalled the challenges he faced as a young teacher leading veteran colleagues with over 20 years of experience. He “learned a ton” that year and really pondered what it took to be a good leader. Principal C shared that his first true leadership role taught him about the value of relationships and the importance of adding value by supporting and collaborating with colleagues.

After a successful second year as team leader, Principal C was once again “tapped” for leadership opportunities and became the summer school coordinator for the district and then later the district athletic director. Principal C explained that it was through these opportunities that he gained his colleagues' trust and developed real credibility as a leader. At the end of his 5th year serving as a teacher leader, Principal C successfully interviewed for and assumed the role of assistant principal of his building. Two years later, he successfully interviewed for and assumed the role of elementary principal in his district.

Principal C rose from within the ranks of his district and after nearly ten years of service, he left to pursue his “dream job” in his current district where he has successfully served as an elementary principal for the past six years. When asked to reflect on leadership, Principal C shared that he never pictured himself as a principal but credits

mentors and colleagues for pushing him along and celebrating his talents throughout his leadership journey.

**Leadership Framework Component of Purposeful Community: Affirmation; Communication; Culture; Ideals/Beliefs; Input; Relationships; Situational Awareness; Visibility.** As the leader of his school, Principal C demonstrates a variety of leadership responsibilities within the McREL’s Leadership Framework component of Purposeful Community. The interview process revealed that Principal C believes he is a visible administrator who leads a building that values positive relationships, has a strong sense of culture, and that ensures plentiful opportunities from a variety of stakeholders for Input (see Appendix J).

When Principal C began at his current school, he shared that that the teachers “were beaten down and there was very little, if any, trust. It was a tough place to be...they were looking for someone to help them.” It was then that Principal C decided he was going to prioritize his efforts on “building a strong culture around stuff that really mattered.” He shared that he was going to “give it his best” and that he would start with “getting to know people and what mattered to them.” He believes that “leadership is like teaching. It starts with people. “He explained that leaders, like teachers, need to show that they care and that they are invested in getting to know people. It’s about the relationships.” Principal C sees his school as a “family,” one that can “go through disagreements and little spats” but that in the end, one that knows, “we all care about every member of this staff.” Principal C explained that the members of his staff have

taken time to “know who their families are” and to “do a lot of things together” so that work isn’t just a place to work, “it’s so much more.”

Principal C shared the collaborative and celebratory nature of his building and that the staff aspires to ensure that each child “loves coming to school.” To accomplish great things, Principal C emphasized the importance of “building capacity and growing from one another” and tackling initiatives and improvement efforts “together.” Principal C provided many examples of how he overtly seeks to hear his staff’s ideas and that he “wants their voices to shape our plans.” Principal C shared that at his school “there are many voices, and that there is a “constant rotation of people who are seen as leaders.” He shared that he wants to be “surrounded by people that are going to push and challenge [him],” in his leadership.

**Leadership Framework Component of Focus: Contingent rewards; Discipline; Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Focus; Order; Outreach; Resources.** Principal C described many leadership responsibilities within the McREL’s Leadership Framework component of Focus primarily through establishing Focus and Order (see Appendix J). Principal C described his school as running like a “well-oiled machine” and emphasized the importance of having very clear focus with systems and structures to support the work. When planning initiatives or improvement efforts, he budgets ample time to establish structures and to understand a given process and practice it. He shared, “we have a clear system, and because there is no mystery in our process, people are open to walk-throughs and might even enjoy them.”

Principal C also recognized that because “teachers’ load is great,” he continually

asks himself “what more can I be doing to take some of that [pressure] away from the teachers?” He aims to be an effective communicator with parents, so they are “in the know” and supportive of their students’ education. He also tries to “run cover on some of the minutiae, so they can do what they do best-teach.”

**Leadership Framework Component of Magnitude of Change: Change Agent; Flexibility; Ideals/Beliefs; Intellectual Stimulation; Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Monitor/evaluate; Optimizer.** Principal C also described a variety of leadership responsibilities within the McREL’s Leadership Framework component of Magnitude of Change. The interview process revealed Principal C’s strong knowledge in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and that he actively monitors and evaluates his staff’s progress toward improvement (see Appendix J). As the instructional leader in his building, Principal C, along with his team, set out to “prove that the applications of learning (student I can statements) are living and breathing in the school.” Principal C shared that his team established a walk through protocol that allowed staff members to visit one another’s classrooms to find evidence of the applications of learning and to celebrate “the great things they saw with the whole school.” Principal C shared that this collaboratively owned process continues to promote collegiality among staff members and also creates a rich data set to ultimately “show what best-practice looks like.”

This part of the interview revealed that Principal C places great emphasis on the importance of data to inform the curriculum and instruction model. He shared that his staff is invested in this walk through research process and that they are eager to share

their findings with one another. He shared that the process focuses and helps people. “I feel like you always have to have something that’s kind of pushing, always wanting more, and I like that.” The result is staff-led professional development and belief that “we’re all going to get something out of it. We’re going to learn something.”

**Shared leadership.** During the interview, Principal C consistently conveyed the message, “we’re in this together” (see Appendix J). In sharing the successes of his school, he emphasized the role that shared leadership has played in his building. He worried that his story was coming across as being all about him, but he was emphatic that his building’s continued success is a result of a collective effort. “What is important to me is I have basically rotated every person in this building into the School Improvement Plan Team Leadership role...there are many voices.” Finally, Principal C explained that he is not threatened by sharing his leadership. Instead, he advises, “you have to be comfortable in your leadership” and that he wants to be “surrounded by the best.” The Key experiences and influences are listed in the table below (see Table 9).

Table 9

*Key Experiences and Influences for Principal C*

Key Experiences and Influences for Principal C
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• family of educators</li> <li>• seeing parent inspire children</li> <li>• student teaching experience</li> <li>• wanted to worked with kids</li> <li>• had many leadership opportunities as a teacher (leadership roles)</li> <li>• administrator pointing out leadership potential</li> <li>• administrator tapping him for actual leadership position (encouraged)</li> <li>• internal promotion (promoted from within)</li> <li>• strong mentor (mentor)</li> </ul>

**Principal D**

**5Essentials data.** According to the Illinois 5Essentials data, Principal D's school is "Well-Organized" for Improvement scoring strong in four of the five essentials: Collaborative Teachers; and Involved Families; Supportive Environment; Ambitious Instruction (see Figure 7).

**Demographic information.** Principal D is a 51 year old who identified himself as both male and white. He has 11 total years of principal experience, and the last three of his years as principal have been spent leading in his current 6-8 middle school.



Table 10

*Prevalent Leadership Responsibilities and Associated Practices for Principal D*

Responsibilities (extent to which the principal...)	Associated Practices
<i>Input: involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies.</i>	Provides opportunity for input on all important decisions  Provides opportunities for staff to be involved in developing school policies  Uses leadership team in decision making

Adapted from *The Balanced Leadership Framework: Connecting vision with action* (Waters & Cameron, 2008, pp. 4-8).

**Summary of Semi-Structured Interview Data**

**Leadership journey.** Principal D entered the field of education after spending time in corporate America in the communications arena. With a degree in speech, Principal D aspired to be a novelist, yet after months of waiting tables to make ends meet, he realized quickly that he needed to “chart a course” for himself and decided to go back to school for his master’s degree in speech. As a graduate student at the University of Illinois, he accepted a teaching assistant position and felt that the role suited him. Growing up, Principal D identified himself as “that helper guy” who always pitched in and offered support. He was a children’s gymnastics coach and a peer advisor in college, and explained that he “always had inklings for education and teaching.”

Right out of graduate school, Principal D was a training and communications specialist at a corporate real estate firm. He edited corporate newsletters and taught management and professional development classes. He really enjoyed interacting with



people. However, when the commercial real estate in Chicago bottomed out in the early 1990s, Principal D was at another crossroads. He really enjoyed the classroom setting in his work and decided to pursue a non-degree certification program to become a speech and drama teacher. Unfortunately, with such nuanced credentials, Principal D searched for a teaching role for nearly three years, but got his start in 1998 as a high school drama teacher. He worked with high risk students and after just one year, he was asked by his administration to assume the team leader role for a core interdisciplinary team overseeing English, math, science, and social studies. Principal D was surprised by the offer and wasn't exactly sure why the leadership team chose him. He shared that he had a great relationship with his department chair and that perhaps "he saw something in me."

Principal D felt really natural in his leadership role and with a new wife and a child on the way, he decided to position himself for additional leadership opportunities and went back to school for his administrative degree. While working on his degree, he accepted a teaching position in a neighboring district that had a better compensation package, and he taught there for several years. When both the principal and assistant principal roles in his building opened, he was "encouraged by colleagues to pursue the assistant principal opportunity." Principal D shared that he "knew the school" and "was at the right place at the right time." He shared that the decision "felt good, but circumstances gave a gentle push." Then, just a few years later, Principal D accepted a principalship in his current district where he's served for the past three years.

**Leadership Framework Component of Purposeful Community: Affirmation; Communication; Culture; Ideals/Beliefs; Input; Relationships; Situational Awareness; Visibility.** As the leader of his school, Principal D described a variety of leadership responsibilities within the McREL’s Leadership Framework component of Purposeful Community. The interview process revealed that Principal D believes that his building places value on the importance of culture and seeking input from stakeholders, and he described using situational awareness to lead his building (see Appendix J).

When Principal D began his principalship in his current school, he recognized that there were multiple and competing systems and structures in the building. He reported that he realized quickly that the variability was impeding the staff’s ability to communicate and function effectively, particularly around the issue of student data and tracking. However, when Principal D began to address the problem, he wasn’t surprised by the “pushback,” and recognized that he had “to respect the reasons for their pushback” and “try to understand the concerns.” He “put his ear to the ground” to “really understand the nature of the pushback” and then aimed to help people “get comfortable with doing something in a new way.” Principal D shared that came to realize that staff members were pushing back because they felt defensive. The system they created was inadequate, inefficient. Principal D recognized that he “would not be living it [the change] as much as the staff is going to live it” and so through questioning and deep listening, Principal D was able to engage his staff as collaborators in change. “If there’s not going to be input and buy-in from the people who are going to be living it, it could be the most brilliant plan in the world, but it’s just not going to work.”

Principal D shared that he spends a lot of time “observing, listening, and watching, trying to get a sense of where people are successful, where they’re not.” It was through that constant dialogue that he got to know his staff, and they got to know him. He advised, “take time to learn about the organization and the people within it before you do anything.” Principal D emphasized the importance of engaging people in any change process and providing ample opportunities to offer input. “It’s embedded in the culture, where teachers have voice and they have a say. They have an opportunity to express themselves, and there really is actual influence of what happens in the district.” Principal D expressed that when staff members have the opportunity to engage and offer input, they are more likely to be able to “fix whatever problems are discovered.” He shared that “teacher voice is awesome when it is in service of helping us move forward as an organization.” He strives to “be humble and have no ego” and to “get out of the way” so as to “allow people to flourish.”

**Leadership Framework Component of Focus: Contingent rewards; Discipline; Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Focus; Order; Outreach; Resources.** Principal D’s primary leadership responsibility within the McREL’s Leadership Framework component of Focus was Order (see Appendix J). According to Principal D, when he joined his current school, systems and routines were lacking. As a result, people were working really hard, but they were not working efficiently. Principal D explained that knew he had to spend time and effort “retraining” staff on new and common ways of doing their work. For instance, instead of tracking student data in three different places, Principal D aimed to have “one place to record all

of our information.” He placed emphasis on the collaborative development of clear procedures and everyone worked to achieve that. Principal D was hopeful that after structures and order were put into place that he would have more opportunities to address other areas of school improvement.

**Leadership Framework Component of Magnitude of Change: Change Agent; Flexibility; Ideals/Beliefs; Intellectual Stimulation; Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Monitor/evaluate; Optimizer.** Within the McREL’s Leadership Framework component of Magnitude of Change, Principal D described ways in which he is flexible and a willing to learn through doing (see Appendix J). In his quest to lead his staff to be more data-driven and efficient in their planning and interventions, Principal D recognized that they needed a system to gather, store, and analyze data. He realized that change was going to be challenging for his staff and that he needed to be patient. As a change agent, he messaged to his staff, “The data is going to be messy for a while.” As people began to migrate over to the new Power School system, he said, “Let’s be comfortable with the mess, and let’s continue to live in both worlds. Those of you who are comfortable, start moving towards Power School and see how it goes.” He cautioned, “Tread very carefully and lightly on change. Small changes done gradually over time is more effective than big abrupt changes.” Principal D shared:

We thought we’d land in this spot, but we pursued it organically. We were open about our reason for change, and we assured people that we’d fix things along the way. Step by step, we problem-solved together, and step by step, we implemented the system together.

**Shared leadership.** During the interview, Principal D conveyed a sense of shared leadership through the input opportunities he consistently offered to his staff members as they faced the challenges of change (see Appendix J). He recognizes that people have to be a part of every solution, and shared, “If there’s not going to be input and buy-in from the people who are going to be living it, it could be the most brilliant plan in the world, but it’s just not going to work.” The key experiences and influences are listed in the table below (see Table 11).

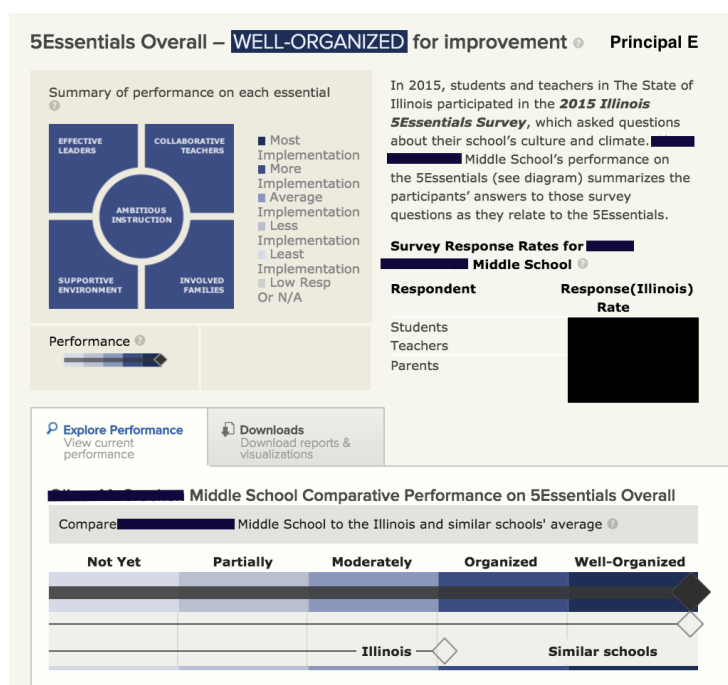
Table 11

*Key Experiences and Influences for Principal D*

<b>Key Experiences and Influences for Principal D</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• corporate experience (communications)</li> <li>• large family</li> <li>• helper identity</li> <li>• served as a coach in high school and college (worked with children)</li> <li>• took on lot of leadership roles (leadership roles)</li> <li>• administrator pointing out leadership potential (encouraged)</li> <li>• administrator tapping him for actual leadership position</li> <li>• internal promotion (promoted from within)</li> <li>• strong mentor who he still connects with (mentor)</li> </ul>

**Principal E**

**5Essentials data.** According to the Illinois 5Essentials data, Principal E’s school is “Well-Organized” for Improvement scoring strong in all of the five essentials: Effective Leaders; Collaborative Teachers; and Involved Families; Supportive Environment; Ambitious Instruction (see Figure 8).



Source: Illinois 5Essential Survey website. Retrieved from [illinois.5-essentials.org](http://illinois.5-essentials.org)

Figure 8. 5Essentials School Data for Principal E

**Demographic information.** Principal E is a 39 year old who identified herself as female. She did elect to share her race. She has 11 total years of principal experience, and the last seven of her years as principal have been spent leading in her current 6-8 middle school.

**McREL's Balanced Leadership Self-Assessment Survey data.** According to the McREL's Balanced Leadership Self-Assessment Survey, Principal E's most prevalent responsibilities among the 21 "well-defined (and) research-based leadership responsibilities and associated practices correlated with student achievement" (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 3) were those of Focus and Situational Awareness (see Table 12).

Table 12

*Prevalent Leadership Responsibilities and Associated Practices for Principal E*

Responsibilities (extent to which the principal...)	Associated Practices
<i><b>Focus:</b> establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention</i>	<p>Establishes high, concrete goals and expectations that all students meet them</p> <p>Establishes concrete goals for all curriculum, instruction, and assessment</p> <p>Establishes concrete goals for the general functioning of the school</p> <p>Continually keeps attention on established goals</p>
<i><b>Situational Awareness:</b> is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems</i>	<p>Is aware of informal groups and relationships among staff of the school</p> <p>Is aware of issues in the school that have not surfaced but could create discord</p> <p>Can predict what could go wrong from day to day</p>
<i><b>Culture:</b> fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation</i>	<p>Promotes cooperation among staff</p> <p>Promotes a sense of well-being</p> <p>Promotes cohesion among staff</p> <p>Develops an understanding of purpose</p> <p>Develops a shared vision of what the school could be like</p>

Adapted from *The Balanced Leadership Framework: Connecting vision with action* (Waters & Cameron, 2008, pp. 4-8).

**Summary of Semi-Structured Interview Data**

**Leadership journey.** Principal E always knew she wanted to be an educator. She aspired to be an early childhood or elementary teacher since she could remember.

However, she never planned to be an administrator. She enrolled in a Type 75 program and took night courses to earn her administrative certificate after teaching for almost ten years. Principal E recalled not really being interested in becoming a principal, and shared the following about pursuing administration, “I think it was to broaden my understanding of systems and inner workings and theories about education. It wasn’t to become or be placed in a specific role within education.” Toward the end of her coursework, Principal E was invited to apply for an administrative internship position, and after talking with a mentor, she decided to apply for the position. Principal E shared, “I remember not thinking anything would come of it and not even being sure why I was doing it, other than maybe itching for a change.” Principal recalled that she “worked very, very hard and cried a lot.” She believed that the work was not only hard, but that it was “not very meaningful work and at times really thankless.” She explained that “coming out of a first grade classroom and doing that [assistant principal role], is a real change.” The role was “drastically different.” Time was spent “dealing with adults who sometimes are pleased with you, and sometimes are not pleased with you, or sometimes they are not pleased with other people, and they’re telling you about it.” She shared that it was “just problem after problem.”

It was somewhat surprising when a middle school assistant principal position became available, and Principal E applied. She recalled that she was “scared and nervous about the possibility of being at a middle school” and that it sounded “not enjoyable.” Principal E talked to her colleagues to learn about middle school philosophy and spent a lot of time reading about the differences between middle school and junior high. She



found that “middle school philosophy was really more empowering than the elementary approach.” She vividly recalled the final interview with the superintendent where she shared that the school needed to be turned in a new direction, and that Principal E would have to “turn the ship at the school.” The superintendent explained that it was a big job ahead and asked Principal E if she was up for the challenge. It was in that moment that Principal E recalled thinking, “Yeah, I’m up for it. I can do this.” And she did. After just one year in the assistant principal role, the principal role opened and she was appointed to assume that role.

**Leadership Framework Component of Purposeful Community: Affirmation; Communication; Culture; Ideals/Beliefs; Input; Relationships; Situational Awareness; Visibility.** As the leader of her school, Principal E’s description of her work includes a variety of leadership responsibilities within the McREL’s Leadership Framework component of Purposeful Community. The interview process revealed that Principal E believes her building has a strong sense of culture. She also conveyed that she has a strong sense of situational awareness in the ways in which she leads, and that there are plentiful opportunities from a variety of stakeholders to offer input at her school (see Appendix J).

Principal E shared that her school has gone through a lot of change over the course of the last decade, and that to navigate change, “the most important part is having people understand what we’re doing and why we’re doing it and how we’re going to do it. The more that’s in place, the better it seems to go.” She explained that in her school culture, “the people who are doing the best are doing so because they understand why

what we're doing is important. They understand why it's meaningful. They understand all the nuances around the initiative and how all the pieces fit together." Because her staff members have a clear understanding of the why behind their work, they share a sense of purpose. With any change, Principal E shared that as a staff, they ask lots of questions and invite feedback. Staff members are invited to be part of the process and provide lots of input. The collectively ask, "What's the status quo? Is it working or not? How do we know? What are some things we can do about it? What would it take to do all of these things? Which one do we like the best? How are we going to do it? How are we going to know it's working?" Principal E shared that there are lots of opportunities to offer input in her school and that with "any change, we do lots of feedback loops.

Principal E described ways in which she has a strong understanding of her staff's efforts and shared ways in which she provides opportunities for teachers to contribute their thoughts and ideas to the work. Principal E is proud of the capacity she has helped to build in her staff:

I guess one of the things I'm proud of here is building up teaching capacity so we have lots of different leadership positions now and lots of different ways for people to get involved and be a leader and have their voice be heard.

She shared:

As a leadership team, we develop a purpose statement together and then we ask a series of questions to our teams. We identify the feedback that is comparable to the others teams, and we come back and use that data to make decisions.

And finally, Principal E explained the importance of situational awareness and being able to anticipate how people will feel or respond to a certain experience:

I pay attention. I listen. I feel you learn about people and what they need and what their perspectives are. If I'm going to communicate about something or ask something of someone, I'm going to think what is that person going to think? What is that person going to say? What does that mean that person's going to do? I have to be aware of all those things at any one time.

**Leadership Framework Component of Focus: Contingent rewards;**

**Discipline; Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Focus; Order; Outreach; Resources.** Principal E described a variety of leadership responsibilities within the McREL's Leadership Framework component of Focus through Focus, Order, and Discipline (see Appendix J). Early on in her principal role, Principal E explained how she recognized the importance of focus and order:

I feel that I'm very clear with staff around the district and school goals, and I feel like I keep moving them back and moving them back and moving them back and connecting them to different initiatives or project surveys or evaluations that we do. When someone or something skirts outside that, I feel like I stomp it out.

She talked about the importance of being very focused and that her primary role is to set systems and structures for success. Principal E said, "We still have a lot of work to do, but the rules, the system, the procedures of the school, the way those look and operate are in place." She explained how she "blocks" for her staff by protecting their time and efforts. She shared an example about an email she received from the area high school

asking her math teachers to add data into a spreadsheet. She said, “Absolutely not. It's not a good use of my 8th grade math teacher's instructional plan time, and five days is not enough notice.” She ended the story with “You’re not impacting the learning of my kids.”

**Leadership Framework Component of Magnitude of Change: Change Agent; Flexibility; Ideals/Beliefs; Intellectual Stimulation; Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Monitor/evaluate; Optimizer.** The interview process with Principal E did not reveal many leadership responsibilities within the McREL’s Leadership Framework component of Magnitude of Change (see Appendix J). The one example that Principal E shared that hinted at her being an optimizer was with the way her staff used their school’s 5 Essential data to set real goals. She explained how her staff analyzed their 5Essentail results and realized that their scores were low. She said, “I was celebrating when the data points were low” because she was able to say to her staff, “Right! Now you're actually scoring yourselves accurately. It’s true you don't do these things, and we need to, and we're having more authentic and real conversations about how we can improve. We can do this. You can do this.” She shared that she believed in her staff’s ability to accomplish real improvement.

**Shared leadership.** Throughout the interview, Principal E consistently messaged the importance of shared leadership through her use of teams. Decisions are collaboratively made, and people in her building have lots of opportunities for input and feedback. One of Principal E’s greatest points of pride is the capacity she’s build in her team. “We have lots of different leadership positions now and lots of different ways for

people to get involved and be a leader and have their voice be heard.” The key experiences and influences are listed in the table below (see Table 13).

Table 13

*Key Experiences and Influences for Principal E*

Key experiences and Influences for Principal E
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• always knew she wanted to be an educator</li> <li>• loved and worked with children (worked with children)</li> <li>• attended graduate school to learn more about systems and theory</li> <li>• assumed leadership roles in her building (leadership roles)</li> <li>• administrator pointing out leadership potential (encouragement)</li> <li>• administrator tapping him for actual leadership position</li> <li>• internal promotion (promoted from within)</li> <li>• two strong mentors have played a significant role in her leadership (mentor)</li> </ul>

**Principal F**

**5Essentials data.** According to the Illinois 5Essentials data, Principal F’s school is “Well-Organized” for Improvement scoring strong in all of the five essentials: Effective Leaders; Collaborative Teachers; and Involved Families; Supportive Environment; Ambitious Instruction (see Figure 9).

**Demographic information.** Principal F is a 47 year old who identified himself as both male and white. He has three total years of principal experience, and all of his years as principal have been spent leading in his current 9-12 high school.



Table 14

*Prevalent Leadership Responsibilities and Associated Practices for Principal F*

Responsibilities (extent to which the principal...)	Associated Practices
<b><i>Culture:</i></b> fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation	Promotes cooperation among staff Promotes a sense of well-being Promotes cohesion among staff Develops an understanding of purpose Develops a shared vision of what the school could be like
<b><i>Outreach:</i></b> is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders	Assures the school is in compliance with district and state mandates  Advocates for the school with parents  Ensures the central office is aware of the school's accomplishments
<b><i>Situational Awareness:</i></b> is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems	Is aware of informal groups and relationships among staff of the school  Is aware of issues in the school that have not surfaced but could create discord  Can predict what could go wrong from day to day

Adapted from *The Balanced Leadership Framework: Connecting vision with action* (Waters & Cameron, 2008, pp. 4-8).

**Summary of Semi-Structured Interview Data**

**Leadership journey.** Principal F “happened into” education after starting his undergraduate degree as a business major. He had always enjoyed math, but it wasn’t until he served as a camp counselor at a residential summer camp that he realized he loved working with kids and decided to “marry the math and kid piece together to

become a teacher.” He recalled a distinct moment in time where he felt, “Now I know what I’m supposed to do” (see Appendix J).

Principal F enjoyed teaching math for many years and never really expected to enter into leadership. He reported about entering the leadership space, “It really, quite honestly, was less to do with a passion in education leadership and more with just getting the degree.” Principal F was teaching math in a north suburban high school and decided that because living and working in the same community was a priority for him, he was going to leave his school and move closer to his home. It was upon meeting with his department chair to announce his leaving, that he was catapulted into a leadership role. Principal F’s department chair was about to be promoted within the school and she directly told him that she believed he would be great for the department chair role. Principal F shared that leadership “just kind of fell into my lap” and so he “took a stab at it.” Principal F shared that he loved the department chair role where he was able “dabble in leadership but still have your feet in the classroom.

True to his original priority, Principal F moved his family to the neighborhood where he served as department chair and they remain in the neighborhood today. When the opportunity presented itself, Principal F accepted the department head role in a brand new high school in his district. He chose to make the move because “the staff was young and energetic and ready for something new.” He shared that “there was a lot of energy toward developing something out of relatively nothing,” and that the experience was fun and exciting. Principal F explained that the move to his new school was fun and exciting because he and his team had the backdrop and knowledge of their sister school but with



the freedoms and liberties to build something new. He shared that the strong leaders in his district had a lot faith and trust in the new building's leaders and said, "You guys go. Do what you want to do."

After three years in the department head role, Principal F was once again approached to assume a new leadership role. The principal was set to retire, and the assistant principal was set to assume the principal role. Principal F recalled the day when the assistant principal "was at my door like, 'Come on, you can do this--be our assistant principal'." Despite being torn about leaving the classroom completely, Principal F accepted the assistant principal role and served in that position for over a decade. In the spring of 2014, Principal F was once again "tapped" for promotion and became the principal of the high school where he has been in the role for three years. He shared, "I was encouraged and nudged along by peers. I don't know that I necessarily got permission or acceptance, but I definitely got my share of, 'Hey, yeah, that's something that you'd be good at. You should consider doing that.'"

**Leadership Framework Component of Purposeful Community: Affirmation; Communication; Culture; Ideals/Beliefs; Input; Relationships; Situational Awareness; Visibility.** Principal F's description of his work includes a variety of leadership responsibilities within the McREL's Leadership Framework component of Purposeful Community (see Appendix J). The interview process revealed that Principal F believes his building has strong Culture and sense of shared Ideals and Beliefs. He also shared that strives to build strong, trusting Relationships with staff members and students and that he has a keen sense of Situational Awareness. Principal F also shared a variety of

examples of ways that staff members and stakeholders are able offer Input into decisions made for the school (see Appendix J).

Principal F talked a lot about the importance of good culture, shared ideals and beliefs, and the conditions that lead to a healthy building. He shared:

I became the leader of a building that had a very positive culture. It is a culture where the teachers love to teach here, because they know they're going to be supported. They know they're going to be respected. They know that what they're doing in the classroom matters. They know that we value their input. They know that we respect what they do with our kids. I also know that they're encouraged to and expected to develop good, trusting relationships with kids and adults. It has less to do always with kind of the instruction and the material, the content, as much as it has to do with the relationships that they have with their kids. We foster that, and I speak to that often.

Principal F also shared his ownership of ensuring that “the people on the bus have the same core values” and that if a “person isn’t fitting what we’re all about, then this person needs to find a different place.” Principal F explained that he believed his staff would say, “the administration has been very careful to make sure that the people we bring into this organization have the same shared values.”

Further explaining the culture of the building and the shared ideals/values, Principal F said, “we are all about celebrating our kids, creating environments where they are safe, where they can maximize their learning, whether that's school-wide initiatives or just how they're treated in the classroom.” To foster this kind of culture, Principal F

described ways in which he was regularly visible throughout the school. He talked about roundtables with the principal, visiting classrooms and getting to know people through listening. He explained that he is “big in relationships” and described himself as having “his ear to the ground” and that his larger leadership team have the “heartbeat of what’s going on.” He explained that through these relationships and through situational awareness that “people are confident in our leadership.”

With regard to having a deep understanding of the building and its ideals and beliefs, Principal F shared:

it is tremendously important for me to understand where people are coming from. Teachers, we ask a lot of teachers, we put a lot on their plate. For me to understand that is to inform decisions moving forward, and be able to put supports and resources in such a way that they don't feel like there's just this team up top who's making decisions and asking us to do, but doesn't really get what we're dealing with.

He also explained his belief that “if you don't understand the underlying issues and where people are coming from, then you're probably solving the wrong problem, which is just creating another problem.” Principal F conveyed the importance developing “a rapport and a respect and a kind of a mutual understanding,” before making changes or problem-solving.

Principal F credits his relationship-building skills:

I'm most proud of the kind of trusting relationships that I built over time. I think you can be a successful internal candidate, only as long as the trust and respect for the people who you're working with is there.

**Leadership Framework Component of Focus: Contingent rewards;**

**Discipline; Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Focus; Order;**

**Outreach; Resources.** The leadership responsibilities in the Focus component of the Leadership Framework were described by Principal F as a shared effort (see Appendix J). He described these leadership responsibilities as a collective effort and did not explicitly make mention of his direct leadership in this area. With the exception of setting high expectations for performance (focus) and providing the resources and time staff members need to be successful, Principal F follows the lead of his mentors by valuing the strengths and expertise of those that have been hired and then providing them with the freedom, confidence, and support to go out and do the work. Principal F shared how the building tackled improvement efforts in both literacy and technology by providing teacher leaders with time, compensation and support to support the larger staff with job-embedded professional development to improve practice. Principal F also shared that in his school they have “spent gobs of time working with PLCs,” in a really meaningful way. They use PLC time to develop relationships and build synergy around ways to truly move ahead in their practice.

**Leadership Framework Component of Magnitude of Change: Change Agent; Flexibility; Ideals/Beliefs; Intellectual Stimulation; Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Monitor/evaluate; Optimizer.** Throughout his interview, Principal F's description of his practice aligned to several leadership responsibilities within the McREL's Leadership Framework component of Magnitude of Change. He shared several examples of ways in which he believes he serves as an Optimizer in his building by promoting best practice, inspiring teachers to try new things and encouraging staff to go beyond the status quo (see Appendix J). Additionally, Principal F conveyed a sense of collective effort and shared leadership in this component of the framework. Principal F shared, "I put a lot of trust and faith in my leadership team, which is my assistant principals, instructional leaders, and department supervisors. I think a lot of our teachers are some of our best leaders."

As a former assistant principal of curriculum and instruction, he shared that he had a lot of experience in the area of professional development. While describing his building's current professional development structure, he recalled his earlier experience where "we'd bring in consultants, or we'd kind of catch the new wave and see where that took us," and described how he and his team moved to what they call "organic PD." Under Principal F's leadership, the team uses teacher leaders to identify the building's needs, and then uses "internal leadership and internal skills and kind of the giftedness of some of our own staff to lead professional development." The 'teachers teach teachers' with support from the administrative team behind the scenes. Principal F explained that he and his leadership team find the people who are passionate about particular topics,

claiming, “we know we have good people here, and it’s a matter of tapping the right people” and then “letting them kind of run and develop some momentum moving forward.” Principal F shared examples of how the leaders lead “lunch and learns,” half-day seminars for new teachers, and how they support instructional literacy skills through coaching. He explained how this approach “caught fire and really helped the teachers.” He also shared that teachers appreciate the in-house professional development and understand “that we’ve got a lot of greatness here.”

**Shared leadership.** Throughout the interview, Principal F spoke often about the team effort at his school and answered nearly every question with the pronoun “we.” When asked to clarify “we,” he shared, “I don’t like the pronoun ‘I.’ I just don’t feel like there’s a lot that I just do. We’re a healthy organization not because of the principal, but because of kind of the group effort.” Going a little further, he explained:

We’re in this together. I think about it from support staff all the way up. When I talk about culture kinds of things, I guess I am talking about our leadership team, relative to some of the programs and initiatives that we’re pushing, but it takes our teachers, our classroom teachers, to be able to pull those things off. I definitely say ‘we’ in a kind of global way.

Principal F shared that “decisions are made by a team of folks” who are constantly looking at their current practices and finding ways to improve. He shared his belief that he works among truly talented and gifted colleagues and said, “I’d love to be able say it was me leading the charge, but really not. It was me supporting them doing the things

that they do best.” The key experiences and influences are listed in the table below (see Table 15).

Table 15

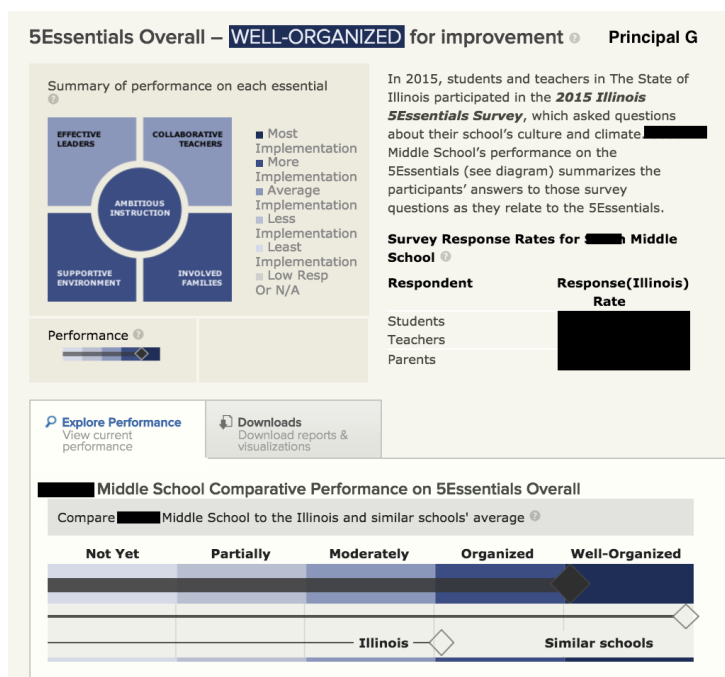
*Key Experiences and Influences for Principal F*

Key experiences and Influences for Principal F
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• working with children at summer camp (worked with children)</li> <li>• wanting to work in the community where he lives</li> <li>• played a significant leadership role in new school development as a teacher and chair (leadership roles)</li> <li>• administrator pointing out leadership potential (encouragement)</li> <li>• administrators tapping him for leadership positions</li> <li>• internal promotion (promoted from within)</li> <li>• three mentors have influenced him (mentor)</li> </ul>

### Principal G

**5Essentials data.** According to the Illinois 5Essentials data, Principal G’s school is “Well-Organized” for Improvement scoring strong in three of the five essentials: Involved Families; Supportive Environment; Ambitious Instruction (see Figure 10).

**Demographic information.** Principal G is a 45 year old who identified herself as both female and Caucasian. She has five total years of principal experience, and her last three years as principal have been spent leading in her current 6-8 middle school.



Source: Illinois 5Essential Survey website. Retrieved from illinois.5-essentials.org

Figure 10. 5Essentials School Data for Principal G

**McREL’s Balanced Leadership Self-Assessment Survey data.** According to the McREL’s Balanced Leadership Self-Assessment Survey, Principal G’s most prevalent responsibilities among the 21 “well-defined (and) research-based leadership responsibilities and associated practices correlated with student achievement” (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 3) were those of Culture and Ideals & Beliefs (see Table 16).



Table 16

*Prevalent Leadership Responsibilities and Associated Practices for Principal G*

Responsibilities (extent to which the principal...)	Associated Practices
<i><b>Culture:</b> fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation</i>	Promotes cooperation among staff Promotes a sense of well-being Promotes cohesion among staff Develops an understanding of purpose Develops a shared vision of what the school could be like
<i><b>Ideals/beliefs:</b> communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling.</i>	Holds strong professional beliefs about schools, teaching, and learning Shares beliefs about schools, teaching, and learning with the staff Demonstrates behaviors that are consistent with beliefs

Adapted from *The Balanced Leadership Framework: Connecting vision with action* (Waters & Cameron, 2008, pp. 4-8).

**Summary of Semi-Structured Interview Data**

**Leadership journey.** Principal G shared that she was always drawn to education, and that through babysitting and lifeguarding that she had a natural attraction to it. Principal G's mother was an educator, and despite briefly considering other majors in college, she quickly steered toward education and knew it was the right choice for her. She earned her bachelor's degree in education and her master's degree in education administration (see Appendix J).

Principal G started her education career as a teacher where she taught both elementary and middle school grades for just over a decade. She shared that she knew pretty early on that she would end up in leadership because she "just got tapped for

things.” She explained that as an elementary school teacher, she was “presented with opportunities or asked to be a part of things.” In a district with a lot of turnover, she was one of the more senior members of the school and had lots of opportunities to take on leadership roles. However, despite her access to leadership opportunities, she knew she wanted to teach for several years and that she wanted to have a well-rounded experience. Her desire to broaden her experience led her to move from an elementary teaching position to a middle school spot, where Principal G shared that she “just became a leader naturally.” As a teacher leaders, she served as a middle school team leader and department chair.

From the middle school classroom, Principal G was recruited to support the district office alongside an elementary school teacher when her assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction became ill. She and her colleague filled in during her absence, and upon her return, Principal G became a teacher on special assignment for two years. She shared that she enjoyed supporting all kinds of different people in her role but that she “missed the building and the hustle and bustle.” As a result, Principal G was excited when she was appointed as an elementary school assistant principal and later as the assistant principal in her current building. She successfully served in her assistant principal capacity for two years and was once again tapped for leadership when she was appointed as an elementary school principal. Finally, the middle school where she currently serves had experienced a lot of turn-over, and because of her broad teaching experience and successful leadership record within the district, she was appointed as the middle school principal where she has been for the past three years. Principal G shared

that as an internal candidate she has always had the edge and has been able to move and transition quickly. She feels that her many leadership roles have helped her cultivate her leadership skills.

**Leadership Framework Component of Purposeful Community: Affirmation; Communication; Culture; Ideals/Beliefs; Input; Relationships; Situational Awareness; Visibility.** Principal G's description of her work includes a variety of leadership responsibilities within the McREL's Leadership Framework component of Purposeful Community (see Appendix J). The interview process revealed that Principal G believes her building has strong culture. She perceives herself to have helped to strengthen the culture by building strong relationships, being visible, and actively participating in the work alongside her staff. Additionally, she shared that she strives to provide people with opportunities for input and then aims to communicate often and effectively (see Appendix J).

Principal G explained that the building had been through several transitions prior to her arrival and that as a staff, they had to spend time as a staff figuring out "what we stood for." She explained that she believed it was important to "set systems and expectations for how we'd work together, and how we'd collaborate to get the best outcomes." Principal G shared her belief that "it's really important to communicate and be transparent" and that she tries "to be a resource and provide all pertinent information." She charges her leadership team to "keep things smooth" and commit to "no surprises."

In order to get a sense of what the priorities for her building should be Principal G described her use of surveys to get input. She shared that when staff members have

opportunities for input, they're "willing to take a risk" with her and that she works hard to listen to what people think. She shared, "when the right mix of people are in the room, and a lot of different voices contribute and offer perspective, we can solve anything."

Principal G described ways that she tries to connect with her staff so that she understands what is going on and how she can participate in the work alongside them. "I think the face to face time is essential. Whenever there's a doubt or a struggle, I really try and get face time and work through it as colleagues." Principal G shared that she regularly works with teams at all levels in order to "get a pulse on things," and that she and her assistant principal regularly attend team meetings and "keep their hands in everything." Principal G said, "I prioritize being with the teachers, even if it does get you in the muck of things. But I think for this building, they need that." Principal G identified herself as a "relationship person" and emphasized, "I spend time getting to know people...encouraging others to get to know one another."

**Leadership Framework Component of Focus: Contingent rewards; Discipline; Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Focus; Order; Outreach; Resources.** Principal G described a variety of leadership responsibilities within the McREL's Leadership Framework component of Focus by sharing examples of Focus, Discipline, Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment and Outreach (see Appendix J). Principal G described her commitment to remaining focused in the work of her building. She shared, "Time is so precious, so we're super strategic about our use of time." She shared her belief that "focus is really important" and conveyed that she tries to remain disciplined in protecting time for staff members to do the work that is

most important. She explained that she tries to “protect the plate of everyone while letting the new ideas surface up, but keeping people feeling secure in what we're moving forward with our work.”

Principal G also explained how she and her assistant principal are very “hands on” with curriculum, instruction, and assessment and described ways in which she leads alongside her staff. She shared, “We were really strategic about modeling during staff meetings. We learned together and researched best practice, went to workshops, and tried things as a team, and I was right there with them.”

As the advocate and spokesperson of the building, Principal G also shared her outreach efforts. She shared:

I think, sometimes with the parent community, helping them to know the higher thinking things that we're doing as well. School is hard work, and our staff is doing great stuff. I find it's my role to make sure our community knows what our professionals are accomplishing.

**Leadership Framework Component of Magnitude of Change: Change Agent; Flexibility; Ideals/Beliefs; Intellectual Stimulation; Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Monitor/evaluate; Optimizer.** The interview process with Principal G did not reveal many leadership responsibilities within the McREL's Leadership Framework component of Magnitude of Change (see Appendix J). Principal E shared examples of ways in which she presents as an optimizer. With regard to the school improvement efforts she shared, she spoke of the importance of letting members of staff take ownership of initiatives to ensure their success. She described herself as

being a cheerleader, someone who encourages others to do good work. When describing a technology initiative the building was working on, she shared, “The group took control, and I just got behind them and cheered. They helped really plan out our PD and helped shift our culture around technology.” She followed up by sharing, “Sometimes, teachers just need a little pushing and need to know that I believe in them. That if they put their heads together, great things can happen.”

**Shared leadership.** Throughout her interview, Principal G emphasized the importance of providing input opportunities and involving teams in decision-making. Principal G believes in the overall collective efficacy of her staff, and as already shared above, she believes that great things happen when people put their heads together. The key experiences and influences are listed in the table below (see Table 17).

Table 17

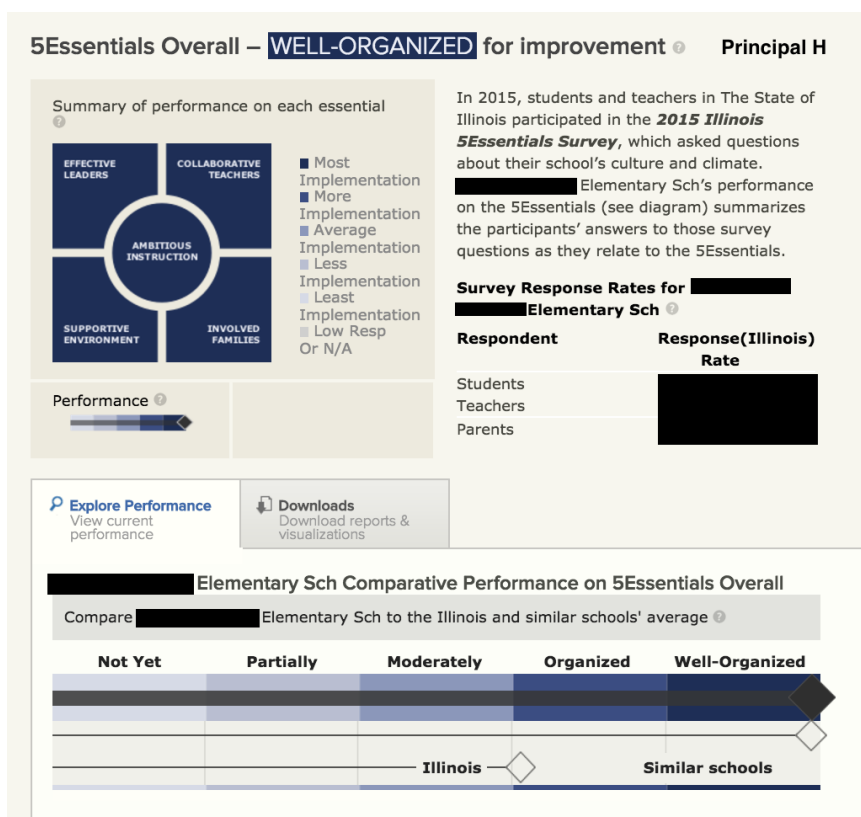
*Key Experiences and Influences for Principal G*

**Key experiences and Influences for Principal G**

- mother was an educator
- was drawn to education
- working with children as a babysitter and lifeguard (worked with children)
- working at central office made her realize she preferred building leadership
- presented with many opportunities to lead (leadership roles)
- administrators tapping her for leadership positions (encouraged)
- internal promotion (promoted from within)

## Principal H

**5Essentials data.** According to the Illinois 5Essentials data, Principal H’s school is “Well-Organized” for Improvement scoring strong in all of the five essentials: Effective Leaders; Collaborative Teachers; Involved Families; Supportive Environment; Ambitious Instruction (see Figure 11).



Source: Illinois 5Essential Survey website. Retrieved from illinois.5-essentials.org

Figure 11. 5Essentials School Data for Principal H

**Demographic information.** Principal H is a 55 year old who identified herself as both female and Caucasian. She has four total years of principal experience, and all of her years as principal have been spent leading in her current K-6 elementary school.

**McREL's Balanced Leadership Self-Assessment Survey data.** According to the McREL's Balanced Leadership Self-Assessment Survey, Principal H's most prevalent responsibilities among the 21 "well-defined (and) research-based leadership responsibilities and associated practices correlated with student achievement" (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p.3) were those of Focus, Culture, and Outreach (see Table 18).

Table 18

## Prevalent Leadership Responsibilities and Associated Practices for Principal H

Responsibilities (extent to which the principal...)	Associated Practices
<i><b>Focus:</b> establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishes high, concrete goals and expectations that all students meet them</li> <li>Establishes concrete goals for all curriculum, instruction, and assessment</li> <li>Establishes concrete goals for the general functioning of the school</li> <li>Continually keeps attention on established goals</li> </ul>
<i><b>Culture:</b> fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotes cooperation among staff</li> <li>Promotes a sense of well-being</li> <li>Promotes cohesion among staff</li> <li>Develops an understanding of purpose</li> <li>Develops a shared vision of what the school could be like</li> </ul>
<i><b>Outreach:</b> is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assures the school is in compliance with district and state mandates</li> <li>Advocates for the school with parents</li> <li>Ensures the central office is aware of the school's accomplishments</li> </ul>

Adapted from *The Balanced Leadership Framework: Connecting vision with action* (Waters & Cameron, 2008, pp. 4-8).



### **Summary of Semi-Structured Interview Data**

**Leadership journey.** Principal H always knew she wanted to go into education. She spent summers during high school and college as a counselor at a camp for special needs children. It wasn't surprising to her or any of her family members when she decided to pursue her undergraduate degree in deaf education. It was her passion, and she wanted to make a difference in the lives of children (see Appendix J).

Upon graduation from college, Principal H struggled to find employment as a deaf education teacher, so she pursued a job in the corporate sector serving as a lab supervisor overseeing deaf employees. She decided to go to graduate school for a master's degree in education so she could broaden her certification and open additional doors to the education field. Upon graduation with her general education certificate, ironically, her first teaching position was an itinerant special education position serving hearing impaired students. Principal H shared that she loved this part of her career because of the many relationships she developed with staff and students across her district.

During her time as a hearing itinerant teacher, Principal H's district decided that it wanted to develop its own hearing impaired program. Principal H was invited to help design the program and it was during the collaborative planning process that her assistant superintendent for student services and her superintendent directly encouraged her to pursue her administrative certificate. She followed their advice and immediately upon completion of her program, she became a special education coordinator for the district. She served in that role for six years and then became the district's special education

director. From the director position, Principal H decided to pursue building leadership and became an assistant principal for three years. During her time as an assistant principal, where she always split time between two buildings, she gained a broad perspective of her district. From assistant principalship, she ascended to the role of principal and has served in her current building for four years.

While reflecting on her leadership journey, although she claims to have “always been a leader,” Principal H shared that she did not anticipate becoming an administrator. She often tells teachers that “education is not a linear path” and shared, “My path has taken me in such very different places and to me that's been a very exciting thing because I've been able to tap into different parts of my personality by doing that.”

**Leadership Framework Component of Purposeful Community: Affirmation; Communication; Culture; Ideals/Beliefs; Input; Relationships; Situational Awareness; Visibility.** In her interview, Principal H described a variety of leadership responsibilities within the McREL’s Leadership Framework component of Purposeful Community. She shared examples and stories of being visible in her building, developing relationships, providing opportunities for input (see Appendix J).

Principal H shared what she loves most about the principalship are the relationships she has been able to form. “I have good relationships with kids and families here, ongoing. I know who their younger siblings are and when they're coming in and parents trust me. It's neat to see how that evolves.” Principal H believes that relationships are her “strongest suit” and credits her special education background for this. She

explained how, in her special education role, she would be involved in situations where educator teams and parents were frustrated. Principal H explained:

I would come in and be the calming factor, making sure I have good listening skills, making sure people's concerns are heard, that input is valued, but always through the lens of what can we do to make a change or what can we do to support this in a different way?

She believes that this training carries over into her principal role. When talking about school improvement efforts, Principal H emphasized that “our focus areas come from with the staff” and how that excites her. It’s what she “likes to see.” She shared an example of how staff input and participation work:

I don't want it (professional development) to be something that's coming from me and they're like, ‘Oh gosh, here's something else we have to do.’ If it comes from people who use it and see the benefit of it, then they’ll bring it back to staff, and it will stick.

To cultivate relationships, Principal H explained that her “door is always open” and that everyone knows they can talk to her. She believes “relationships go a long way.” She also shared that visibility matters and that being in classrooms and being on the same page makes a difference. She shared, “I’m out front most mornings so I know kids by name. I walk the building regularly and do my best to get to know people. People know I care about them.”

**Leadership Framework Component of Focus: Contingent rewards; Discipline; Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Focus; Order; Outreach; Resources.** Principal H described many leadership responsibilities within the McREL's Leadership Framework component of Focus. Principal H emphasized the importance having a very clear Focus with systems and structures to support the work as well as her responsibility to share her building's work through Outreach. She explained her responsibility to make sure the building understands the focus and that a "common understanding of what good literacy instruction and math instruction looks like and then determining what pieces we are missing or what extra supports we need so we can plan our professional development." She explained that her district plays a significant role in determining the systems and structures for all the buildings so that they remain focused on specific improvement initiatives. Principal H shared, "I'm keeping initiatives to a minimum...protecting people's time" and "I think our focus has helped because they (teachers) don't feel overwhelmed by too many things that are happening at one time." To illustrate the focus in her building, Principal H described her building's schedule, which is created so that all grade level teams have common plan time so they can work as a PLC (Professional Learning Community). She shared how PLC time is used to "pour over" and honestly discuss data in order to address areas for improvement.

In Principal H's district, three times each year, principals are required to present their building's work and improvement effort to the central office team. Principal H sees this as an outreach effort and explained that she sees this as her opportunity to "make sure that people know how hard our teachers are working and the great progress they're

making.” She also shared that she invites teachers to present with her so that with their voices, the “story is richer.” Principal H also shared that she believes that making connections is an important part of her outreach efforts. “In my weekly communications one of my goals is to consistently share our focus areas and show how all our work is connected. They see the reason why we're doing what we're doing.”

**Leadership Framework Component of Magnitude of Change: Change Agent; Flexibility; Ideals/Beliefs; Intellectual Stimulation; Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Monitor/evaluate; Optimizer.** Principal H described a variety of leadership responsibilities within the McREL’s Leadership Framework component of Magnitude of Change. The interview process revealed that Principal H believes that her staff has a strong sense of Ideals and Beliefs and that she serves as an Optimizer to support the work of the building (see Appendix J).

Principal H shared that the previous had been a challenging one. The school faced a variety of challenges that needed to be addressed, which required a lot of Principal H. They were really dissatisfied with their winter data and realized they “had some digging to do to see what was going on with their first/second grade team.” Through their exploration, Principal H realized “It was a time we really had to revisit our values and beliefs and what we are aiming to accomplish in our school.”

Principal H ended up letting one of her teachers go, and teams needed to be rearranged which made things a “little tumultuous.” She explained, “we had a job to do, and it was time to do something different.” The staff was distrustful. After reflecting, Principal H shared, “I think their feeling was, ‘We were honest about our problem, and

now we feel like we did something wrong. Like, we're being punished because something didn't work'." Principal H felt it was her responsibility to help her work through these struggles and she did not shy away from conflict. She recalled the challenge of talking through things and remembers "conversations were sometimes heated." Principal H shared how she and her team "relied again on what we commonly believe, what we're here to do--help kids grow." Principal H explained, "I saw my job as pushing my staff to solve problems and take charge of their outcomes." Principal H shared, "my style tends to be that I take in what people say to me and I really do try to empower staff to accomplish great things."

**Shared leadership.** During her interview, Principal H explained the importance of allowing people opportunities to share their beliefs and opinions and the importance of listening deeply to them. She described how she supports the work of professional learning communities and explained that she strives to empower staff to solve problems. However, Principal H did not provide many explicit examples of ways she shares leadership in her building. The key experiences and influences are listed in the table below (see Table 19).

Table 19

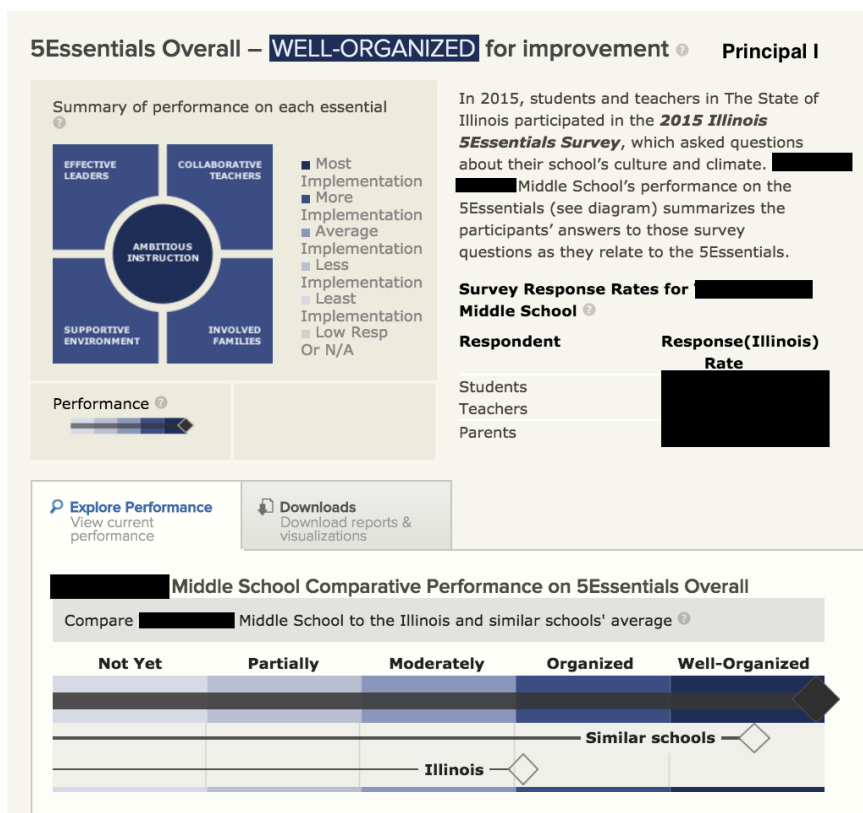
*Key Experiences and Influences for Principal H*

<b>Key experiences and Influences for Principal H</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• worked at a camp for special needs students in high school and college (worked with children)</li> <li>• always knew she wanted to be an educators</li> <li>• corporate experience</li> <li>• district-initiated systems and structures</li> <li>• led program development as a teacher (leadership roles)</li> <li>• was encouraged during program development to get administrative degree (encouraged)</li> <li>• internal promotion (promoted from within)</li> <li>• strong mentors pushed her along (mentor)</li> </ul>

**Principal I**

**5Essentials data.** According to the Illinois 5Essentials data, Principal I’s school is “Well-Organized” for Improvement scoring strong in all of the five essentials: Effective Leaders; Collaborative Teachers; Involved Families; Supportive Environment; Ambitious Instruction (see Figure 12).

**Demographic information.** Principal I is a 38 year old who identified herself as both female and Caucasian. She has four total years of principal experience, and all of her years as principal have been spent leading in her current 6-8 middle school.



Source: Illinois 5Essential Survey website. Retrieved from illinois.5-essentials.org

Figure 12. 5Essentials School Data for Principal I

**McREL’s Balanced Leadership Self-Assessment Survey data.** According to the McREL’s Balanced Leadership Self-Assessment Survey, Principal H’s most prevalent responsibilities among the 21 “well-defined (and) research-based leadership responsibilities and associated practices correlated with student achievement” (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 3) were those of Outreach and Situational Awareness (see Table 20).



Table 20

*Prevalent Leadership Responsibilities and Associated Practices for Principal I*

Responsibilities (extent to which the principal...)	Associated Practices
<i><b>Outreach:</b> is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders</i>	<p>Assures the school is in compliance with district and state mandates</p> <p>Advocates for the school with parents</p> <p>Ensures the central office is aware of the school's accomplishments</p>
<i><b>Situational Awareness:</b> is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems</i>	<p>Is aware of informal groups and relationships among staff of the school</p> <p>Is aware of issues in the school that have not surfaced but could create discord</p> <p>Can predict what could go wrong from day to day</p>

Adapted from *The Balanced Leadership Framework: Connecting vision with action* (Waters & Cameron, 2008, pp. 4-8).

**Summary of Semi-Structured Interview Data**

**Leadership journey.** Principal I knew she wanted to be an educator, and from the first moment of her freshman year of high school she devoted as much time as she could to serving special education classrooms. She recall jumping right into her coursework and knowing very clearly that serving students with special needs would be her area of focus. Although she always thought she would end up working at the high school level, Principal I “fell in love” with elementary school after student teaching at that level.

Right out of college, Principal I began her teaching career in elementary special education where she taught for ten years until she was promoted internally to serve as an

assistant principal and special education coordinator for three years. During her teaching career, Principal I assumed a variety of leadership roles despite not having a leadership title. Throughout her teaching tenure, Principal I experienced eight different assistant principals and two different principals. Throughout the various changes in leadership Principal I assumed a variety of leadership roles which led her to be self-reflective about her role and her own leadership skills. Along with her husband, Principal I realized that she wanted to go back to school to get her administrative degree and endorsement.

Principal I knew that she wanted to be a school leader, but she remained open to the various possibilities until the right opportunity presented itself. Throughout her teaching career, Principal I had a variety of leadership opportunities. Although there were no formal team leader positions at her building, she assumed a team leader role. Almost immediately upon completion of her degree, an assistant principal position opened at a sister school, and Principal I was appointed to that role. She described herself as always having been a “planner,” someone who has been “organized” and able to take charge. After three years in the assistant principal role, Principal I interviewed for and accepted a principal position in a nearby district where she has served for the past four years. Principal I shared that although she believes she has developed as a leader over time, she feels as though her skills are innate and that she was “born” a leader.

**Leadership Framework Component of Purposeful Community: Affirmation; Communication; Culture; Ideals/Beliefs; Input; Relationships; Situational Awareness; Visibility.** Throughout Principal I’s interview, she often spoke about the strong presence that her district has in the schools. Many of the initiatives she described

were district led, so many of the stories of leadership were not her own. Of those that were her own experiences, Principal I described three primary leadership responsibilities within the McREL's Leadership Framework component of Purposeful Community. She focused on her efforts to be visible, the importance of communication, and her efforts to build relationships (see Appendix J).

Principal I shared a story about a time when her 5Essentials data were not very strong and how she invited people to share their thoughts and communicate openly. She provided staff members with a single note card and instructed them to share constructive feedback on one side and affirming feedback on the other. Principal I then took the information on the cards to initiate a needs assessment to determine the building's needs, and it was through that process that she 'found out that there was no trust.' She shared that she worked hard to address the lack of trust by boosting communication and visibility.

Principal I is most proud of her communication skills and emphasized the importance of being quick, responsive, and transparent with all school stakeholders. In order to remain open and transparent, she explained that she shares meeting agendas, minutes, brainstorming lists and that "people are welcome to ask me anything, and that my door is always open." Principal I also shared that she is very "visible in the school" and that she takes a "hands on approach." She often covers classes for teachers and regularly attends team meetings.

Principal I explained that she works to build relationships with her staff and makes overt efforts to do fun relationship building things. For example, she does

giveaways for things like “free sleep-ins” or “free leave earlies.” She leads “Twitter Challenges” and gives away fun prizes. She shared, “My staff knows that we’re here for business, but we should be happy where we work.” Principal I explained that by building good relationships, that she is better able to lead because she has “chips in the bank” and that trust has been improved in the building.

**Leadership Framework Component of Focus: Contingent rewards; Discipline; Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Focus; Order; Outreach; Resources.** Principal I primarily described focus and order as her most exercised leadership responsibilities within the McREL’s Leadership Framework component of Focus (see Appendix J). Principal I emphasized the importance having a very clear focus with systems and structures to support the work. She again credited her district for her building’s success, claiming, “We have a lot of district initiatives that this school has been very rigid about.” She explained that “everything is based on the district goals,” and further explained, “structures are in place, and we all carry them out in our buildings.” Principal I shared, “to carry out district initiatives, we have to make sure teachers have the support they need.” She explained that six instructional coaches provide support in their work. Principal I also shared that she directly supports her staff by providing “structure and routine and concrete expectations” because, my staff, they need a template, they need a protocol, they’re black and white.” Principal I emphasized that in her school and district, “our focus is crystal clear.”

**Leadership Framework Component of Magnitude of Change: Change Agent; Flexibility; Ideals/Beliefs; Intellectual Stimulation; Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Monitor/evaluate; Optimizer.** Through a story of a significant staffing changes, Principal I described herself as a Change Agent within the McREL's Leadership Framework component of Magnitude of Change (see Appendix J). Principal I explained, "there were some coaches who felt strongly that my school was catering to the strong voices that didn't want to do things." She explained that she had to "make some unpopular decisions about staffing" and shared that she made some "highly contested" shifts in coaching and team leader line-ups. Principal I recalled that her decisions were unpopular but that "people have come around" and that they now respect her decision because they "now see how much better things are." Principal I shared that she believed a change in staffing was necessary despite the fall-out from the decision. She said, "It wasn't easy, but the status quo could not continue."

Principal I shared, "I made some huge switches, but I knew where we needed to be." Reflecting on her decision, she explained that as a result of her decision to make a significant change, there are now "true leaders" on her team who push the staff to learn and grow professionally and carry out programs with fidelity.

**Shared leadership.** During her interview, Principal I shared that her professional goal is to build capacity in her building that she has a plan all laid out. As a rationale for her goal, she shared, "I don't like to do things just myself. Way more brains are better than one or me and the AP." However, Principal I did not provide explicit examples of

ways she shares leadership in her building. The key experiences and influences are listed in the table below (see Table 21).

Table 21

*Key Experiences and Influences for Principal I*

<b>Key experiences and Influences for Principal I</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• always wanted to be an educator (always wanted to be an educator)</li> <li>• supported special needs students in high school (worked with children)</li> <li>• strong cooperating teacher</li> <li>• presented with many opportunities to lead (leadership roles)</li> <li>• pushed by her husband and principal to enter administration (encouraged)</li> <li>• she was internally promoted (promoted from within)</li> <li>• strong district (central office) leadership and direction</li> </ul>

### **Presentation of Data Summary**

This chapter displayed the 5Essentials data for each principal participant followed by a descriptive overview of his/her demographics information. Next, the most prevalent leadership responsibilities and their associated practices (Waters & Cameron, 2008, pp. 4-9) as identified by the results of the McREL's Balanced Leadership Self-Assessment Survey were presented for each participant in the form of a chart. A summary of the semi-structured interview data for each participant, organized into five categories: Leadership Journey; Purposeful Community; Focus; Magnitude of Change; and Shared Leadership, were presented in the form of a descriptive narrative. Significant quotes from the interviews were integrated into the descriptive narrative to convey the richness and depth of information that was collected through the interview process. Finally, the key experiences and influences that emerged for each participant were presented in a chart.

In the following chapter, the research questions posed by this study will be answered through the analysis of data and the common themes and experiences that surfaced across cases. Additionally, concluding thoughts will be presented along with recommendations for further study.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### **Introduction**

In a continuously changing and ever-evolving education landscape, the school principal plays a critical role in addressing the adaptive challenges that schools must face to ensure their students are positioned for bright futures in college, career, and life. He/she sits at the helm of school improvement and is charged with the complex orchestration preparing for the reality that today's society (i.e., the post-grad, real world) is looking for a new generation of thinkers, problem-solvers, and innovators (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Tough, 2012; Wagner, 2012). Corroborated by a breadth of research that continues to inform the NGLC MyWays Project, the future is asking for something different from its students. "To succeed in this world, students need a broader and deeper set of skills, knowledge, and habits of success than those they develop through K-12 schools' traditional focus on academic content knowledge" (NGLC MyWays, n.d.). Currently, a principals' success is largely determined by his/her school's student achievement data, which are almost exclusively measured by traditional, high-stakes assessments and compliance factors. There is a disconnect between what is being measured, and what is being requested of educators in their preparation of students in the work/learn landscape of the future. This adaptive challenge requires principals to



productively navigate the current reality of accountability while also disrupting it in order to meet the demands of the future.

The pathway is not a straight line, and because working through an adaptive challenge will always involve distributing some losses, albeit in service of an important purpose, the systemic dynamics that ensue, the politics of change, will have many unpredictable elements. (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 31)

At no time in recent memory has the need for effective and inspired leadership been more pressing than it is today. With increasing expectation in society and in the workplace for knowledgeable, skilled, responsible citizens, the pressure on school intensifies. The expectation that no child is left behind in a world and in an economy that will require everyone's best, is not likely to subside (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 123). As the educational paradigm continues to shift, and as schools continue to transform to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the stakes are high. More than ever, because of their ability to profoundly impact school success (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2012; Seashore et al., 2010), there is a critical need for excellent principals.

As concluded by Hallinger and Heck (1996) in their review of seminal, empirical research from 1980-1995, "If the impact of principal leadership is achieved through indirect means (e.g., school climate, school culture, instructional organization), we must advance our understandings of how such linkages are shaped by the principal" (p. 34). This study examined the leadership journeys and practices described by nine principal participants who lead effective schools (according to 5Essentials Survey data), despite the current complex educational landscape. The research questions posed in this study were

answered using the qualitative data collected during one-hour, semi-structured interviews with each of the nine principals. Focus was placed on principals' descriptions of their experiences and perceptions about their practice, because they are often a neglected and perhaps even misunderstood part of the principal leadership puzzle. Their stories revealed their deep convictions about their roles as building principals and the ways in which their experiences were deeply impactful to them as individuals. These stories have inherent value due to the power of these individuals as part of their larger systems. To further support the interpretation process, The McREL Balanced Leadership Self-Assessment Survey results supplemented and confirmed the data collected during the interviews. The study aimed to offer insights about the common attributes, behaviors, and actions of successful principals, specifically from the perspective of the practitioner, and to contribute to the literature base on principal leadership.

### **Overview**

This chapter provides an overview of the research and presents answers to the research questions posed by this study through the analysis of the categorized data and the common themes and experiences that surfaced across cases. Also included in this chapter are the identified limitations and biases of the study. Finally, this chapter presents the implications of this research on educational practice and offers recommendations for future study.

## Answers to Research Questions

### Research Question 1

*What do the leadership journeys of the selected nine K-12 principals of “Well-Organized” schools, as determined by the 5Essential Survey, reveal about key experiences and influences in their leadership development and professional practice?*

The literature base for what makes for effective school principals primarily focuses on the specific skills that are demonstrated in the school setting. Based on over three decades of research, the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework was established to “provide practitioners with specific guidance on the curricular, instructional, and school practices, that, when applied appropriately can result in increased student achievement” (Waters et al., 2003, p. 2). The research team identified 21 leadership responsibilities and the correlating 66 practices, knowledge, strategies, tools and resources that principals need to be successful. Similarly, based on over 20 years of research on successful schools, The Five Essential Supports for Positive Change, presented by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, claims that schools with effective leaders, collaborative teachers, involved families, supportive environment, and ambitious instruction are most likely to be successful in their efforts (Bryk et al., 2010; UChicagoImpact, n.d.). Beyond the skills demonstrated in the school setting, the principals’ leadership journeys revealed key influences and experiences that shaped the leaders’ developmental trajectories.

The nine principals’ leadership journeys were rich with detail and warranted further attention in order to gain a deeper, more comprehensive understanding what

makes a successful principal. Their stories revealed that each individual's history is critical to better understand how the motivations, support systems, and talents they brought with them into administration, apart from what they learned in their principal preparation programs, influenced their leadership. Their unique skills and attributes, and their effectiveness, were developed and nurtured by themselves and others over time through their individual experiences, and their entrance into administration presented new opportunities to further develop and build upon their skills. In order to better understand and support the individual in becoming effective principals, it is important to acknowledge how their histories and unique skill sets and motivations apply to the essentials of effective principal leadership. Through the interviews of the nine participating principals, several common key experiences and influences, earlier defined as consistent among a minimum of seven out of the nine principals (78%), emerged from the stories of their leadership journeys:

1. They **worked with children** prior to entering education (coaching, babysitting, camp counseling, etc.);
2. They took on **leadership roles** throughout their lives and while teaching;
3. They were “nudged” or **encouraged** to assume their leadership positions by others;
4. They were **promoted from within**;
5. They had strong **mentors**.

In nearly all cases (a minimum of seven out of nine principals or 78-100%), the principals shared stories of interacting with children in some capacity during their high

school and college years. They were camp counselors and coaches, and they were interested in children. Most principals also identified themselves as being natural leaders, people who often found themselves in leadership roles. They were captains of their athletic teams, heads of their sororities, student council officers, department chairs, team leaders, etc. Many shared that they were encouraged by others to assume their leadership roles, and that their first leadership positions were often in their own systems. And finally, nearly all principals identified having a strong mentor in the field, someone who guided them and encouraged them to become who they are today.

### **Key Influences and Experiences for Principal A**

Although principal A did not explicitly share pre-leadership experiences with children, it was her fascination of child psychology and her undergraduate studies that led her to volunteer in schools and ultimately pursue education (**worked with children**). She described “lighting up” when she talked about her experiences in schools and that she realized she had to follow her passion and become a teacher. Principal A explained that she has always been drawn to **leadership roles**. Throughout her childhood and adolescence, she was “always a leader of the group” holding positions on the student council and in various clubs, etc. Principal A shared that as a teacher, she was often directly invited by her administrators to participate on leadership teams. She was a part of many committees and teams, and it was through these leadership experiences that she was **encouraged** and motivated to pursue her administrative degree. She was identified by her superintendent as a leader, and her formal entrance into leadership occurred when she was appointed by her superintendent as an assistant principal (**promoted from**

**within**). She was later promoted to the principal role, and she continues to serve in the same district. Principal A identified having several **mentors** throughout her career, but she most specifically identified the superintendent who first encouraged her to take on a formal leadership role to be her most impactful mentor.

### **Key Influences and Experiences for Principal B**

Principal B did not aspire to be a teacher. It was through his undergraduate study in the field of history that he happened on teaching. To use his history degree, he contemplated going into law, but he ultimately decided to pursue teaching. What began as a practical career path became his passion. Once he became a teacher he never thought he'd do anything else. He developed strong relationships with his students and found a profound connection to teaching. As a teacher, Principal B was very involved at school, and he regularly assumed **leadership roles**. As a team leader and later a department chair, he contributed to the school as a lunchroom supervisor, head coach, and club sponsor. He did not claim to be a natural leader. Instead, Principal B shared that he became a leader over time and that his leadership skills were cultivated through all of his mistakes and the things he did wrong. He recalled the lessons he learned as a coach and sponsor explaining that those experiences were invaluable because of all the things he had to think about and manage in order to be successful. Principal B shared that some of his most valuable learning came from observing other leaders and learning from them. Principal B shared that his principal recognized his strengths and pushed him to get his master's degree in leadership and administration (**encouraged**). When Principal B completed his degree, there were no open or anticipated leadership positions in his small,

rural school. He had gone as far as he could as a leader in his school, so he was encouraged to look outside for more opportunities. He accepted an associate principal role in a new district and just two years later, the same principal that encouraged him to get his leadership credentials, introduced him to the district where he assumed his first principalship and where he's remained ever since. Although Principal B was not **promoted from within**, he shared that he would have been had there been open positions. Further, his original principal was an integral person in helping him find his current principal role. Principal B's identified **mentors** were his father, his first principal, and his current superintendent, all of whom he credits for their sage advice and for helping him become the leader he is today.

### **Key Influences and Experiences for Principal C**

Principal C grew up in a family of educators, and he knew early on that he was going to be an educator. He was an avid student athlete, and as far back as he could remember, he knew he wanted to teach and coach and work with children. He claimed his major as a freshman in college and never wavered. Principal C spent five years as a middle school social studies teacher and during his first year, his principal tapped him on the shoulder and told him that he saw something in him. He said, "I see things in you that I don't see in first year teachers" and **encouraged** Principal C to start taking on more **leadership roles** and responsibilities. At the start of his second year of teaching, Principal C became a team leader and remembers learning a lot about relationships and how to navigate the role, especially among peers. Soon thereafter, Principal C became the summer school coordinator and he athletic director. He went back to school for his

administrative certificate immediately became the assistant principal of his school. After just two years in his assistant principal role, Principal C was promoted to be an elementary principal in his district where he served for six years (**promoted from within**). He later moved to a neighboring where he has served as an elementary principal for the past six years. Principal C shared that he wasn't born a leader, but rather that he developed his talent over time and grew into his leadership identity. He credited his first principal as his primary **mentor** and guide through leadership. He also identified his current superintendent as someone who has helped shape him and his leadership style and approach over time.

### **Key Influences and Experiences for Principal D**

Principal D took a circuitous route to education. He began as a writer and novelist and spent several years in the corporate world in human resources. However, Principal D shared that although he didn't begin as an educator it was not a surprise that he ended up being one. While growing up, Principal D described himself as "that helper guy." As a student athlete, he taught gymnastics to little kids (**worked with children**). In college he was a peer advisor, in graduate school he was a Teacher Assistant, and even in his career, Principal D became a trainer for his company. Principal D shared that he was meant to be an educator and that it just took him time to find his place. He began his teaching career as a high school drama teacher. With years of life experience under his belt, he easily assumed **leadership roles**. He started programs, tried new things in the classroom, and was a flexible addition to the team. Principal D was quickly promoted to the role of team leader, a role that felt very natural and comfortable for him. Principal D decided to go



back to school to earn his administrative degree. During his graduate work for administration, Principal D accepted a new teaching role in a neighboring district that paid significantly. Much like in his first teaching role, Principal D was identified as a leader. After just a year of teaching in his new school, with a new administrative certificate, he was gently pushed (**encouraged**) by his principal to apply for the assistant principal role that became available in his school (**promoted from within**). He became the assistant principal and later became a principal in the same district where he remained in his role for eight years. He later accepted a principal role in a more prestigious district where he has served for the past three years. Principal D reflected on how instrumental that gentle push from his mentor had been, and that knowing his principal believed in him really mattered. He stays in touch with his **mentor** and calls upon him often for advice and counsel.

### **Key Influences and Experiences for Principal E**

Principal E always knew she wanted to be an elementary or early childhood teacher. She shared that she has always loved and **worked with children** and even recalled frequently playing school as a child. She explained that she didn't aspire to be a principal but that she began her leadership degree because she wanted to broaden her understanding of systems and the inner workings and theories about education. Principal E shared that her entrance in to leadership was not purposeful or even desired. However, when an elementary assistant principal internship position was posted, her principal highly **encouraged** her to apply. She shared that she was a "natural doer" and that she had taken on a variety of **leadership roles** in her building. Principal E applied for the role

not even sure it was what she wanted and thinking that nothing would likely come of it. However, she did earn the spot and spent a year as her school's assistant principal. She recalled the experience being very difficult and even shared that she cried a lot. She felt the role was a lot of work but that the work was not necessarily meaningful to her.

Principal E was "good at the role" but uncertain that administration was a good fit for her. Before making any definitive changes, Principal E decided that it would be a good idea to try a different leadership role before ruling it out. An assistant principal role opened in the district, and after being encouraged by her superintendent to apply, and after talking to her colleagues about the unique attributes of middle school philosophy, she interviewed for the role and earned the position (**promoted from within**). The building was not in a good place, and she was charged by the superintendent to help turn the school around. Principal E remembered thinking, "I can do this." After a year of success in her role, she was appointed to the principal position where she spent four years working to improve the school. She later moved to another neighboring school district that seemed like a better match for her at the time. She's been there for seven years.

Unlike the other principals in this study, Principal E still questions her love for this job. She believes she ended up in her current role because she was encouraged by others, namely her first superintendent, to pursue the position. However, she would not necessarily encourage others to pursue school leadership. She believes although she is "good at her job," the role is so demanding, not only personally and emotionally, but logistically; it takes a lot of time and energy. She identified two **mentors** that have helped her on her journey. The first was her first superintendent with whom she still talks and

problem-solves. The other is an older principal colleague who she finds to be an excellent role model and person to emulate.

### **Key Influences and Experiences for Principal F**

Principal F recalled that it was the summer between his sophomore and junior year of college that decided wanted to go into education. I spent the summer **working with children** at a residential camp. At the time he was a declared math major, but after his experience as a counselor, he “married the math and the kids piece together to become a teacher.” It was that moment the he knew what he was supposed to do. He shared that he loved teaching and never really planned to leave it. He pursued his master’s in education administration, not because he wanted to be a principal, but because he was just going for an additional degree, something he believes many educators do. He shared that with a young family, he made it a priority to live and work and in the same community. He had been interviewing closer to home, and when he went to his department chair to tell her he would be leaving, she countered his statement by telling him that she was leaving and that she believed he would be ideal for the job and **encouraged** him to apply. Principal F interviewed and was selected for the math department chair position (**promoted from within**). He remained a math department chair for many years and never really felt he’d leave the classroom, that he had the perfect combination of teaching and leading. However, when the principal of his school was set to retire, and the assistant principal was slated to take the principal’s position, and she approached Principal F and said, “C’mon, you can do this. Be our assistant principal.” Principal F was promoted to the assistant principal position where he happily

served in that role for ten years. Despite many offers to go to other school districts, he was very happy in his role and committed to remaining at his school by moving his family to the community where he worked. When his principal announced her retirement in 2013, Principal F was once again promoted, and he assumed the role of principal and continues to serve in the role today. He recalled of his leadership journey many opportunities to influence and contribute to the school and the way it approached initiatives and efforts. Being part of a new school, he was one of the founding designers and had many opportunities to lead and guide his department and building as they grew together as a school community (**leadership roles**). Principal F shared that his school has always been his home and that he developed as a leader over time help and guidance from his peers. Although he shared that he has never had a formal mentor, he identified three people he respects and who have served as **mentors** throughout his career. He shared that they connected because of their core values and their shared commitment to them, their focus on servant leadership, and their belief in others to lead. He recalled appreciating the freedom he received from his mentors to do his job, and he tries to offer the same confidence and belief in others to do what they've been hired to do.

### **Key Influences and Experiences for Principal G**

Principal G was always drawn to education. Her mother was a teacher, and she knew early on that education was where she was headed. During her growing up years, Principal G always **worked with children** as a babysitter and lifeguard, and it was no surprise that she became a teacher. Throughout her teaching career, she taught in primary, intermediate, and middle grades, and developed a broad set of teaching skills diversifying

her teaching experiences. Principal G shared that she often took on **leadership roles** as a teacher and that she often “just got tapped for things” (**encouragement**). She led professional development, sat on a variety of committees, and later became a team leader and department chair while teaching middle school. Principal G shared that she didn’t know her last year of teaching would be her last. While serving as department chair, she was working on a district-wide literacy review, when her assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction became ill. Along with another teacher, Principal G was recruited to support in the district office during her absence. However, even when the assistant superintendent returned, Principal G was officially named as a Teacher on Special Assignment, and that was the beginning of her administrative career (**promoted from within**). She was later appointed to an assistant principal role in one of the elementary schools in her district and was appointed once again as an assistant principal in one of the middle schools. After a few years, Principal G’s district appointed her to be a principal in one of the elementary schools and then later appointed her to be the principal of the middle school where she previously served as its assistant principal. She has been a middle school principal for four years and continues to serve in the same building today. At no time during her interview did Principal G mention a mentor or someone who specifically guided her along her leadership journey.

### **Key Influences and Experiences for Principal H**

Principal H always knew she wanted to go into education and entered the field as a deaf education undergraduate. She worked with special needs students in high school and again in college as a camp counselor (**worked with children**). Upon graduation, she

struggled to find a teaching position in deaf education, so she worked as a lab supervisor overseeing deaf employees for several years while she worked toward her masters in elementary education. Interestingly enough, upon graduation with her elementary certificate, she ended up accepting a position as an itinerant teacher for the hearing impaired serving the district where she currently leads. During her time as an itinerant teacher, her district decided to “take back” their hearing impaired program and officially hired Principal H as a district employee. She was given many leadership opportunities during this process, and many would credit her for building the deaf education program that exists there today (**leadership roles**). Principal H described herself as always having been a leader. “I was always a good kid and was always president of the whatever.” While she helped to develop the deaf education program, she was **encouraged** by her administrators to pursue her administrative degree, which she did, and she ultimately became a Special Education Coordinator for her district for six years and later the Director of Special Education (**promoted from within**). After nearly ten years leading in the special education realm, Principal H shared her interest in building leadership with her supervisors and was almost immediately appointed to an elementary assistant principal role where she split her time between two buildings. She learned a new side of administration and really enjoyed the role. After three years in an assistant principal role, Principal H was appointed to her current building where she has served for the past five years. She shared she enjoys the way she is able to establish meaningful relationships with families in different ways that she was able to while serving in the special education side of education. Her biggest champions and **mentors** have been her supervising

administrators. Principal H recalled really being pushed by her Director of Special Education as well as her superintendent. They're belief in her, and their encouragement really motivated her to pursue leadership, and she credits both of them for where she is today.

### **Key Influences and Experiences for Principal I**

Principal I always wanted to be an educator. She shared that she even knew she wanted to be in special education since her freshman year of high school when she devoted all her free periods, study halls, and gym periods to spend time and support the special education classroom (**work with children**). In college, she began her education courses with an immediate focus on special education. During May and June of her senior year, she ended up serving as a temporary substitute in the special education classroom where she student taught because the teacher had to take an unexpected leave. Immediately after graduation, she found an elementary special education position in a great district where she taught for ten years. During her teaching years, Principal I shared that she had a lot of leadership opportunities. She experienced a lot of administrative turnover and shared that during her ten years, she had eight different assistant principals. Principal I explained that it was frustrating to have such inconsistency in the role. As a self-proclaimed driven and natural leader, she took it upon herself to jump in, and she ended up assuming many of the roles and responsibilities that typically belonged to the assistant principal (**leadership roles**). She opened programs and closed programs, and essentially served as an administrator while she was teaching. It was her husband who encouraged her to go back to school for her administrative degree. She took his advice

and loved the leadership side of things. She completed her practicum with her building principal who **encouraged** her to apply for an assistant principal/student services coordinator position that had opened in her district. She applied and got the job (**promoted from within**), and even though her colleagues were happy for her, they were sad to see her leave the building. For three years, she served as an assistant principal/student services coordinator, but she felt she was getting enough of a building leadership experience in her role. She shared that about 90% of her job revolved around special education duties and that she wasn't doing the kinds of things she had previously enjoyed as a teacher leader and really wanted a new perspective. With no open principal positions, she began interviewing in neighboring districts and was quickly hired as the principal of the building where she currently serves. Principal I speaks very highly of her district administrators, and she shared that she looks at her current superintendent as a role model and someone to emulate. Although Principal I did not explicitly name a mentor, she described modeling her practice off of leaders she respects.

### **Summary of Key Experiences and Influences**

In addition to the 21 leadership responsibilities identified in the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework, and beyond what The Five Essential Supports for Positive Change, presented by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, can predict about effective leaders, the leadership journeys of the nine principals who participated in this study revealed significant insights about their effectiveness as leaders of their schools. Although no one has examined these specific histories before, they are relevant in helping to better understand how key influences and experiences shape



professional practice and perhaps how individual development shapes choices and effectiveness.

While many of the principals shared that they knew early on that they wanted to be educators, it was the experience of working with children in pre-service years that was most common among the principals who participated in the study. Seven of the nine principals (78%) explicitly shared ways in which they worked with children in high school and college. As coaches, babysitters, and camp counselors, it appears they naturally gravitated toward education by working with children.

Many of the principals described themselves as leaders, sharing stories of the leadership positions and roles they had in elementary school, high school, and college. They served as captains of their teams, student council leaders, and people who others turned to for help and leadership. More specifically, all nine principals (100%) shared examples of ways they embraced leadership roles during their teaching careers. They identified themselves as head coaches, team leaders, department chairs, curriculum leaders, committee heads, and as people who just jumped in to assume responsibilities where needed. In light of the principal shortage that currently exists and that has been predicted to continue into the unforeseeable future (Schwartz & Landers, 2014), this leader identity may be something to pay closer attention to. By identifying teacher leaders who naturally gravitate toward leadership roles, it may be possible to predict a cohort of future principals in whom school leaders can invest time and energy to develop.

Similarly, all nine principals (100%) shared that they were identified as leaders by others and that they were nudged or encouraged to pursue their leadership degrees and/or

apply for formal leadership roles in their buildings. They shared stories of being tapped by their supervisors to take on more responsibilities as team leaders, department chairs, coordinators, assistant principals, and ultimately as principals. And, eight of the nine principals (89%) were promoted from within. The principal who was not promoted from within explicitly shared that he would have been had a position been available. In his case, his principal encouraged him to apply externally, because he believed he was ready for more leadership responsibilities, but he did not anticipate any leadership vacancies in the near future.

To address the existing principal shortage, opportunities to encourage practicing leaders to actively seek out teacher leaders as potential principals may be something to consider. The stories from all nine principals suggested the potential power of encouragement from existing leaders. In all cases someone in a leadership position, usually the current principal, prompted the principals in this study to pursue more formal leadership roles. Additionally, in nearly all cases, leaders were internally promoted for their first administrative positions. This suggests that internal principal pipelines and leadership training efforts may be another solution to developing high quality principal candidates during this time of need.

Lastly, most of the principals (seven out of nine, 78%) who participated in the study explicitly reported having some sort of mentor. In each of these cases, the mentors that were identified were informal mentors, people with whom the principals naturally connected. None of them were formally assigned. The principals described their mentors, as the people who encouraged them to become educational leaders and who have also

guided them in their practice by sharing sage counsel, advice, and direction. For those who named mentors, they emphasized the value and impact of being personally encouraged and guided by someone they trust. For one of the principals who did not name a mentor as a significant part of her leadership story, she did mention the importance of having administrator role models to emulate and imitate. Extensive research has been conducted on the positive impact of coaching. The stories from the eight out of the nine principals (79%) corroborated the importance of coaching, which Psenick (2011) describes as “just-in-time, personalized support.”

Each of these common experiences and influences offers insights about what may be valuable in building effective principal pipelines to address the current shortage. These common key experiences and influences also have the potential to reveal additional insights about effective principal leadership and may provide guidance for future study.

### **Research Question 2**

*Using the lens of the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework, what leadership responsibilities are most evident in these principals' descriptions of their roles and perceptions of themselves as leaders?*

The McREL Balanced Leadership Framework situates leadership as the interface between the domains of focus, magnitude of change, and purposeful community making the claim that “leaders are continually engaged in focusing the work of the school, leading change with varying orders or magnitude, and developing purposeful community both within the school and in the larger community” (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 16).

McREL's meta-analysis of school-level leadership and its effect on student achievement revealed that the Framework's domains of Focus and Magnitude of Change work hand in hand, and their interplay and the degree to which a principal's level of attention and effort are placed in either domain can have an impact on improvement (Waters & Cameron, 2008). The third domain, Purposeful Community, also plays a significant role in a school's success. "Everything in a school occurs within the context of a community, composed of students, parents, teachers....The more this diverse community is able to coalesce around shared purposes, the more sustainable and effective a school's change efforts will be" (p. 45).

An analysis of the coded interview data, based on nine principals' perceptions and perspective about their practice, revealed that the participating principals' most commonly leveraged leadership responsibilities belonged to the domain of Purposeful Community, followed by Focus, and then Magnitude of Change.

### **Purposeful Community Domain**

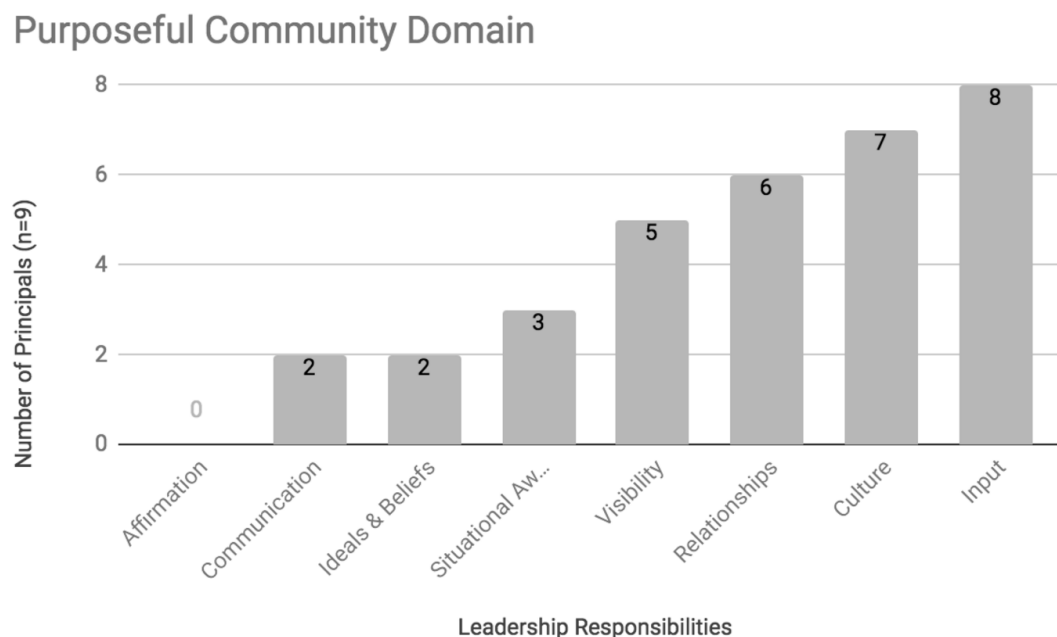
In the domain of Purposeful Community, coded interview data revealed that 34 specific prevalent responsibilities in this domain were identified for the nine principals (see Table 22). Prevalent responsibilities were identified when multiple examples were evident for each domain in each principal's transcript. Of the 34 identified prevalent responsibilities, the only two that were identified as common (previously defined as consistent among at least 7/9 or 78% of principals) were the responsibilities of Culture and Input.

Table 22

*Summary of Prevalent Leadership Responsibilities for the Purposeful Community**Domain*

Leadership Responsibilities	Purposeful Community									% of prevalent leadership responsibilities among principal participants
	Principal A	Principal B	Principal C	Principal D	Principal E	Principal F	Principal G	Principal H	Principal I	
affirmation										0/9 0%
communication		x					x		x	2/9 23%
culture	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			7/9 78%
ideals/beliefs	x					x				2/9 23%
input	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		8/9 89%
relationships		x	x			x	x	x	x	6/9 67%
situational awareness				x	x	x				3/9 33%
visibility		x	x				x	x	x	5/9 56%
% of prevalent leadership responsibilities within this domain for each principal participant	3/8 34%	5/8 63%	4/8 50%	3/8 34%	3/8 34%	5/8 63%	5/8 63%	3/8 34%	3/8 34%	
<b>Total % of prevalent leadership responsibilities within this domain for all principal participants.</b> 34/72 47%										

The leadership responsibilities of Visibility and Relationships were prevalent in more than 50% of principals, while Communication, Ideals and Beliefs, and Situational Awareness were prevalent in less than 50% of principals. The leadership responsibility of Affirmation was not prevalent in any of the principals' transcripts. The chart below illustrates the number of principals for whom each leadership responsibility was prevalent (see Figure 13).



*Figure 13.* Prevalent Leadership Responsibilities among Principals within the Domain of Purposeful Community

The domain of Purposeful Community is defined as a community with “the collective efficacy and capability to use all available assets to accomplish purposes and produce outcomes that matter to all community members through agreed-upon processes” (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 46). The leadership responsibility of Culture, common among 78% of participating principals, was evident in their accounts of the various ways in which they “fostered shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation” (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 56). Among the interviewed principals, this notion of culture, was described across cases as a togetherness, a sense of team with common beliefs and values. Principal A described culture as functioning as a team with a “common philosophy and vision,” and having a “shared belief, sense of community, and cooperation.” Principal B articulated culture as being part of a “positive, respectful,

collaborative place that people are proud of and feel good about,” while Principal C explains it’s about “owning things together.” Principal D describes culture as everyone “having a voice and a say.” For Principal E, culture is evident when “people know why what we’re doing is important,” and by the ways people “interact with one another.” Principal F described culture as working in a school where everyone “shares common beliefs” and “teachers love to teach” because “they know they’re going to be supported, respected, and that what they’re doing matters.” And for Principal G, culture is captured by her staff’s ability to “see what could be.”

Also within the domain of Purposeful Community, the leadership responsibility of Input, common among 89% of the participating principals, was evident in their accounts of ways in which their school “involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions” (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 57). The interviewed principals shared the value they place on providing teachers with opportunities to be a part of the decision-making process in their schools. Principal A shared that she’s really proud of her school’s joint decision making and that she values “diverse stakeholder input.” She shared that “people can volunteer and have input; they can share their passion and have impact where they feel they need to.” Principal B described input as “bringing people together” and “finding a way to make sure people feel valued, heard, and that their opinions are worthwhile.” Principal C described input when he said she was “more interested in the staff’s ideas. I wanted their voices to shape our plans.” Principal D valued input by explaining that “if there’s not input and buy-in from the people who are going to be living it, it could be the most brilliant plan in the world, but it’s just not going

to work.” He went on to share that in his building, teachers “have an opportunity to express themselves, and there really is actual influence over what happens.” Principal E revealed value in input through her use of “feedback loops.” She shared that she believes, “people have been empowered to speak up.” Principal F described input in the way teachers drive their own professional development based on what they determine are their needs. Principal F celebrated input by explain that “when the right mix of people are in the room, and a lot of different voices contribute and offer perspective, we can solve anything.” Principal G referenced input in the way she brings diverse stakeholders to the table to offer different or missing perspectives. Principal H valued input through her intentional goal to ensure that she has “good listening skills” and making sure “people’s concerns are heard and input is valued.”

Within the domain of Purposeful Community, both Culture and Input emerged as the most prevalent responsibilities. These two responsibilities, in combination, seem to embody the other leadership responsibilities that exist in the domain: Affirmation, Communication, Ideals and Beliefs, Situational Awareness, Visibility, and Relationships. Establishing a purposeful community is complex, and the people and circumstances that define the culture within the organization are what ultimately make a difference in schools. The community creates the “social fabric” of the school social and sets the conditions for school improvement (Bryk et al., 2010). In an effort to better define what makes for successful leaders, is there something in the shared experiences of these nine participating principals that explains the significance and impact of having a purposeful



community? Further study may reveal the relationship that strengths in the areas of Culture and Input have on the greater development of a purposeful community.

### Focus Domain

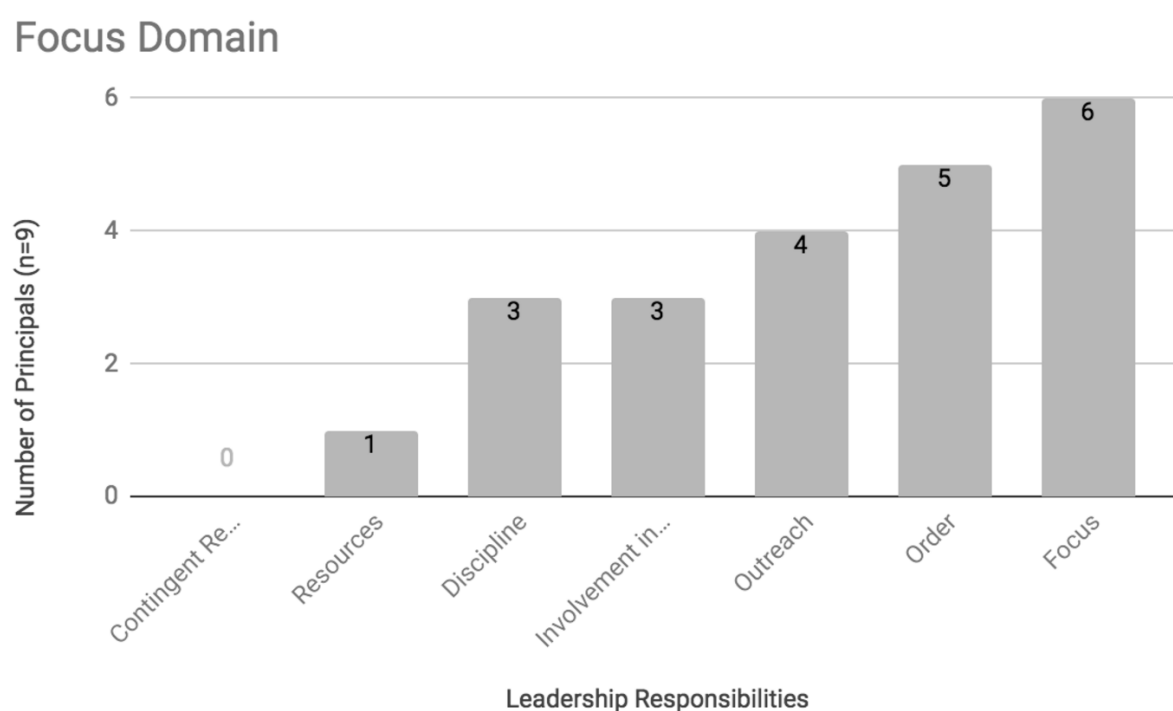
In the domain of Focus, coded interview data revealed that 22 specific prevalent responsibilities in this domain were identified for the nine principals (see Table 23). Prevalent responsibilities were identified when multiple examples were evident for each domain in each principal's transcript. Of the 22 identified prevalent responsibilities, none were identified as common (previously defined as consistent among at least 7/9 or 78% of principals).

Table 23

#### *Summary of Prevalent Leadership Responsibilities for the Focus Domain*

Leadership Responsibilities	Focus									% of prevalent leadership responsibilities among principal participants
	Principal A	Principal B	Principal C	Principal D	Principal E	Principal F	Principal G	Principal H	Principal I	
Contingent rewards										0/9 0%
discipline		x			x		x			3/9 33%
Involvement in CIA	x	x					x			3/9 33%
Focus		x	x		x		x	x	x	6/9 67%
Order		x	x	x	x				x	5/9 56%
Outreach	x	x					x	x		4/9 44%
Resources		x								1/9 11%
% of prevalent leadership responsibilities within this domain for each principal participant	2/7 29%	6/7 86%	2/7 29%	1/7 14%	3/7 43%	0/7 0%	4/7 57%	2/7 29%	2/7 29%	
Total % of prevalent leadership responsibilities within this domain for all principal participants. 22/63 35%										

The leadership responsibilities of Focus and Order were prevalent in more than 50% of principals, while Resources, Discipline, Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, and Outreach were prevalent in less than 50% of principals. The leadership responsibility of Contingent Rewards was not prevalent in any of the principals' transcripts. The chart below illustrates the number of principals for whom each leadership responsibility was prevalent (see Figure 14).



*Figure 14.* Prevalent Leadership Responsibilities among Principals within the Domain of Focus

The domain of Focus refers to leaders' ability to "focus their schools on research-based classroom and school practices that have impact on school achievement" (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 23). Although no leadership responsibilities in this domain were considered common among participants, prevalent in a minimum of 7/9 or 78%

principals according to their coded interview data, it is worth noting that order and focus were leadership responsibilities that were prevalent in 50% or more of participating principals. Order is defined as a leader's ability to "establish a set of standard operating procedures and routines" (p. 25). Focus is defined as a leader's ability to "establish clear goals and keep those goals in the forefront of the school's attention" (p. 24). It was also interesting to note that although principals are considered to be the instructional leaders of their building, only one third of principals revealed this leadership responsibility prevalently in their interviews. It seems as though setting the conditions for strong curriculum, instruction and assessment practices was more important than actually leading it.

### **Magnitude of Change Domain**

In the domain of Magnitude of Change, coded interview data revealed that 17 specific prevalent responsibilities in this domain were identified for the nine principals (see Table 24). Prevalent responsibilities were identified when multiple examples were evident for each domain in each principal's transcript.

Table 24

*Summary of Prevalent Leadership Responsibilities for the Magnitude of Change Domain*

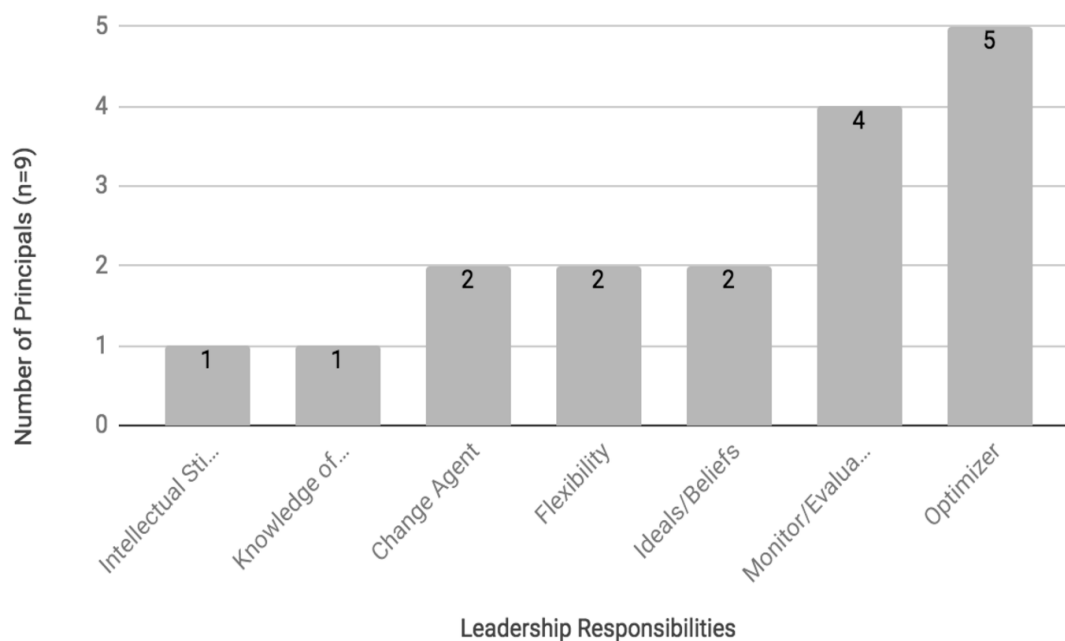
Leadership Responsibilities	Magnitude of Change									% of prevalent leadership responsibilities among principal participants
	Principal A	Principal B	Principal C	Principal D	Principal E	Principal F	Principal G	Principal H	Principal I	
Change agent	x								x	2/9 23%
flexibility	x			x						2/9 23%
ideals/beliefs		x						x		2/9 23%
Intellectual stimulation	x									1/9 11%
Knowledge of CIA			x							1/9 11%
Monitor/Evaluate	x	x	x	x						4/9 44%
optimizer	x	x				x	x	x		5/9 56%
<b>% of prevalent leadership responsibilities within this domain for each principal participant</b>	4/7 57%	3/7 43%	2/7 29%	2/7 29%	0/7 0%	1/7 14%	1/7 14%	2/7 29%	0/7 0%	
<b>Total % of prevalent leadership responsibilities within this domain for all principal participants.</b> 17/63 27%										

Of the 17 identified prevalent responsibilities, none were identified as common (previously defined as consistent among at least 7/9 or 78% of principals) The leadership responsibility of Optimizer was the only responsibility that was prevalent in more than 50% of principals, while Change Agent, Flexibility, Ideals/Beliefs, Intellectual Stimulation, Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, and Monitor/Evaluate were prevalent in less than 50% of principals (see Figure 15).

The domain of Magnitude of Change refers to a leader's ability to understand the "implications of change for individuals expected to carry out the change effort" (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 23). Although no leadership responsibilities in this domain were considered common among participants, prevalent in a minimum of 7/9 or 78% principals according to their coded interview data, it is worth noting that being an

Optimizer was the only leadership responsibility in this domain that was prevalent in 50% or more of participating principals. Being an Optimizer means that the leader “inspires and leads new and challenging innovations” (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 31). In several cases, leaders mentioned the ways they serve as optimizers in their schools.

### Magnitude of Change Domain



*Figure 15.* Prevalent Leadership Responsibilities among Principals within the Domain of Magnitude of Change

The stories from the nine participating principals imply that their work is most connected to the domain of Purposeful Community. While it is the responsibility of principals to focus the work of the school, lead change, and develop purposeful community by skillfully navigating all 21 leadership responsibilities at different times for different purposes (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 17), the findings of this study suggest that establishing a Purposeful Community is most essential to these individuals. This

finding is supported by the research earlier around adaptive leadership. In order to effectively “mobilize people to tackle tough challenges and thrive” (Heifetz et al., p. 14), it seems that establishing a strong focus on Purposeful Community, more specifically the leadership responsibilities of Culture and Input, has the potential for great impact. Focus on the domain of Purposeful Community has the potential to reveal additional insights about effective principal leadership and may provide guidance for future study.

### **Research Question 3**

*What do the principals' narratives reveal about effective leadership practice?*

### **Personal Narratives**

In this quickly changing and ever-evolving public education landscape where more is being asked of public educators than ever before, the role of principal is a challenging one. The principal is charged with the complex orchestration of improvement efforts in order to close the achievement gap, ensure college and career readiness among students, and prepare for the new reality that today’s society (i.e., the post-grad, real world) is looking for in the new generation of thinkers, problem-solvers, and innovators (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Lash & Belfiore, 2017; Tough, 2012; Wagner, 2012). Principals are the essential figures that must skillfully navigate change and lead through adaptive challenges and uncertainty. Being a principal is hard, and not everyone is meant to be one. Through one hour interviews, nine principal participants shared rich stories and personal accounts which provided valuable insights about what it takes to be an effective principal.

During their interviews, the nine participating principals shared their beliefs and reflections about their practice with rich detail and depth. As presented earlier, interview data revealed that many of their perceived strengths aligned to the 21 leadership responsibilities identified in the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework, particularly in the domain of Purposeful Community. Waters and Cameron (2008) define Purposeful Community as “one with the collective efficacy and capacity to use all available assets to accomplish purposes and produce outcomes that matter to all community members through agreed-upon processes” (p. 46). In schools, principals nurture intentional communities that share the work of the school and create common vision with outcomes that can only be achieved together. Principals help members of their schools answer the question, “What is it that we can do together that we cannot do as individuals?” (p. 47).

As the principal participants described their work and the challenges they regularly face in their roles, seven of the nine principals (78%) explicitly emphasized the power of the team, the collective whole, and the importance of sharing leadership with others. Principal A explained that it’s important to “let go of the micromanagement piece,” and to “trust that your staff could have ideas that could be better than yours, or the collective wisdom is better than an individual’s wisdom.” She said,

I've learned that time and time again, I might have an idea in my head that I think something's going to go a certain way, but it's only when you come together that it gets to be this big thing that you could not have dreamed up on your own.

She reflected and shared that she is grateful to have leaders with whom to share this work. She shared that she is proud of her school and believes “the school is successful

because of the collective wisdom of the group, and that means staff, parents, students, administration.” Principal C explained that in his building, there is a “constant rotation of people that are seen as leaders in the building by name, by role, by title, and by action. There are many voices that shape what this building is.” Principal D talked about input leading to buy-in and shared, “You have to let go, and let people be a part of the planning. More minds are better than a few, and it usually turns out better anyway.” Principal E said she was proud of the teaching capacity in her building and that there were “lots of people who take on leadership roles and lots of ways for people to get involved and have their voices be heard.” Principal F referred to the “giftedness” of his staff and the ways he uses internal leadership to lead efforts in the school. Principal G described a group that “took control” of an initiative and that she “just got behind them and cheered.” She explained that the group helped shift culture and through that work, they “started to see what could be.” Principal I shared her desire to “build capacity” and that she doesn’t like doing things by herself, because “way more brains are better than one, or me and the assistant principal.”

As they shared their stories, the principals were humble about their accomplishments. At times, they even appeared uncomfortable while talking about their successes and areas of pride in their school. While specifically talking about herself as the leader of her successful school, Principal A said, “To be honest, it makes me a little uncomfortable, just because deep down I feel like I use ‘we.’ It’s a ‘we.’ So I would rather my staff be celebrated and not myself.” Principal F said, “I’d love to be able say it



was me leading the charge, but really not. It was me supporting them doing the things that they do best.”

They were reluctant to take credit for their buildings’ efforts, initiatives, and accomplishments and were quick to acknowledge that the work was not their own, but rather the work of many. Principal C said, “I think this almost sounds like it’s coming across as it’s all me, me, me, and it truly hasn’t been about just me.” In many cases, principals used “we” to describe the work of their schools. Principal F said,

I don't like the pronoun ‘I’. I just don't feel like there's a lot that I just do. We're a healthy organization not because of the principal, but because of kind of the group effort. When I say ‘we’, I really do feel like yeah, it's a leadership thing, but it's because we share common beliefs.

These principals’ stories are relevant, because they suggest that although the participating principals possess many of objective leadership skills present in the literature, their effectiveness is influenced by experiences and people that may not have been traditionally examined in the field. In order to better understand how we can best support these individual in their practice, it is important to understand their circumstances and contexts.

### **Limitations and Biases of the Study**

It is important to acknowledge that this research was presented with identified limitations due to its mixed research design and methodology. Only nine principals were selected to participate in this study. This small number of subjects limits the degree to which results and can be directly applied in the field. Additionally, while the pool of

study participants was diverse in gender, age, principal experience, and experience across a variety of grade levels, it lacked racial diversity. According to the ways in which participants identified their races, the study did not include any participants of color. Another limitation was that the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey, used to frame the interview process, was a self-reflection survey based on the principals' personal perceptions of their leadership. The most significant limitation of the study was potentially the researcher's ability to accurately represent the complex experiences of the nine principals who participated. To address this, the researcher attempted to triangulate information that was directly provided by the participants across methods and contexts in order to ensure that inferences that were extrapolated about each individual, and later the groups, were grounded in data. It is also important to note that any study based primarily on survey and interview data is somewhat limited in its focus because it rests on the perceptions and experiences of the participants as individuals and neglects to acknowledge or consider that other people, forces, influences, and contexts are critical to their stories. This researcher recognizes these limitations but chose to focus on the principals' perceptions and experiences because they are often a neglected and perhaps even misunderstood part of the puzzle, which has inherent value due to the power of these individuals as part of their larger systems.

A factor that may have biased the study was the fact the researcher served as a middle school principal for six years. Based on her school's 2013 5Essentials data, she would have fit the profile of principals who were invited to participate in this research study. The researcher's personal experience may have limited or biased her findings and

colored her interpretation of data. And, because the researcher is a public school administrator with nearly 15 years of administrative experience, it was possible that she knew the participants either directly or indirectly through her professional circles. Although safeguards to reduce limitations and biases were incorporated into the research study's design, the researcher is cognizant that they exist.

### **Implications for Educational Practice and Future Research**

At no time in recent memory has the need for effective and inspired leadership been more pressing than it is today. With increasing expectation in society and in the workplace for knowledgeable, skilled, responsible citizens, the pressure on school intensifies. "To succeed in this world, students need a broader and deeper set of skills, knowledge, and habits of success than those they develop through K-12 schools' traditional focus on academic content knowledge" (NGLC MyWays, n.d.). The rallying cry of the *need* for change in schools is approaching the tipping point – the reality that schools *are* changing. However, because the "structures, culture, and defaults that make up an organizational system become deeply ingrained, self-reinforcing, and very difficult to reshape" (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 51), it will take a skilled leader to navigate the necessary change, difficult in schools because they are "trapped by their current ways of doing things, simply because these ways worked in the past" (p. 51).

As the educational landscape shifts, and as educators aim to prepare the next generation of thinkers and problem solvers for new and unknown contexts, the principal must navigate the tremendous adaptive challenge of what Sir Ken Robinson calls changing education paradigms. "To succeed in this world, students need a broader and

deeper set of skills, knowledge, and habits of success than those they develop through K-12 schools' traditional focus on academic content knowledge" (NGLC MyWays, n.d.). However, despite the call for a new kind of education, a principal's success (and her school's success, for that matter) is still largely determined by traditional accountability measures. And the stakes are high.

Our current education system fails to measure or place value on student efficacy and agency, or nuanced expertise that results from students' passionate pursuit of their interests. The system doesn't honor students' impressive ability to make eye contact and converse easily with others. The system doesn't consider students' collaboration skills and their abilities to work through conflicts and frustrations together. It doesn't place value on the ways in which students support and genuinely care for one another, and it certainly doesn't place special value on the fact that many students show this level of empathy despite coming from communities and environments that experience regular trauma and hardship. The system doesn't measure students' genuine curiosity and brilliant questions they ask and explore, nor does it measure the myriad ways in which our communities of learners find answers to their questions and problems. And finally, the system doesn't measure the joyful and optimistic culture of the buildings where people want to come to school/work each day. But these things matter. This researcher would argue they are just as essential as the other measures—maybe even more. These types of complex skills are related to those identified by the principal participants in this study as meaningful. More importantly, they are likely aligned with some of the practices and impactful experiences of future leaders.

As principals work purposefully and tirelessly with their school communities to transform education by broadening the definition of success and developing a deeper set of competencies in their students, it is essential that they are supported. It is critical that they are heard, and that their talents and gifts are recognized. Extensive, high quality research, cited throughout this dissertation, has been conducted to inform the field on effective principal leadership and best practices, and the researchers' contributions are valuable to the field. It is this researcher's hope that the rich stories from the nine principals who participated in this study confirmed that the field has much to learn from their individual contexts and from the accounts of their key experiences and influences. In this era, where we have seen more educational change in the last decade than we have in a century, principals have their work cut out for them. It takes a special person to be a principal, and it is this researcher's most sincere hope that new studies will be conducted and new information gained that will support principals and their effective leadership of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The existing principal shortage, coupled with the adaptive challenges of the current education landscape, create a call to action to develop a pipeline of great principals, better prepare principals for this important work, and support and retain practicing principals. Through the first-hand accounts from principals where they share their unique experiences, key influences, and diverse perspectives, the field may be able to glean more about the key ingredients of principal leadership. Much research exists on principal leadership, and a wealth of literature addresses principals' perceptions with respect to principal preparedness, professional development, standards-based leadership,

evaluation, etc. However, little of the research includes the principals' perspective about their specific journeys to leadership and the key experiences and influences that led them to their practice. Future researchers should consider looking more deeply into the first-hand experiences of practicing principals. Because the principal's context continues to evolve quickly, more current research, reflective of the changing education landscape should be explored.

### **Principal Pipeline**

Throughout the interview process, all nine principals (100%) shared that someone in a leadership position, usually their principal, prompted them to pursue more formal leadership roles. They recalled being tapped, or nudged, or encouraged to begin leadership programs. This reveals a potential power that existing leaders may have in helping to identify and encourage teacher leaders to pursue school leadership paths. Districts might consider using its existing leaders to identify new talent that emerges in teacher leaders who accept leadership roles from the classroom as team leaders, coaches, department chairs, etc. Additionally, since eight out of nine principals (89%) principals were promoted from within for their first administrative positions, it may also be beneficial for districts to pursue more formal leadership development programs for their existing staff. Through the creation of administrative internships, teacher on special assignment opportunities, and leadership residencies, teacher leaders can gain valuable insights and field experience by practicing alongside their trusted administrators. For the principals who participated in this study, they pinpointed the administrators who encouraged them to pursue leadership opportunities and clearly had a significant

influence on their career paths. Additionally, the unique development opportunities that the participating principals experienced as teacher leaders, was seemingly a key factor in their internal promotions. To address the existing principal shortage and encourage teacher leaders to pursue principal leadership, additional research should be conducted to determine the influence that practicing school administrators have on teacher leaders and their pursuit of more formal leadership opportunities. Additionally, to build a better principal pipeline, additional research and development in the areas of internal leadership training and promotion should be further explored. Finally, to inform the development of effective principal training programs, the leadership experiences of internally promoted leaders should be further studied.

### **Principal Preparation**

In all cases (100%), principals who participated in this study, shared that they assumed leadership roles while serving in their teaching roles. They gained what they perceived to be valuable learning experiences as team leaders, committee heads, coaches, summer school administrators, department chairs, and project leaders. Their unique journeys provided them with a diversity of experiences, which contributed to each principal's unique assets and leadership talents. Interestingly, none of the principal participants mentioned his/her formal principal preparation programs as a key influence in his/her leadership development. Principal C shared "My principal prep program was pretty good, but I don't think it truly prepared me...you just have to get in there and go through it." Learning through doing was a common key experience among principal participants, which suggests the importance of providing meaningful, experiential

training opportunities during principal preparation. Many of the functions of the principalship, like building a master schedule, planning a staff meeting, holding a post-observation conference, leading a Parent Teacher Association Meeting, or writing a school improvement plan may be best learned through practicum experiences.

The previously presented analysis of the coded interview data, revealed that the participating principals' most commonly leveraged leadership responsibilities were in the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework domain of Purposeful Community. Waters and Cameron (2008) define Purposeful Community as "one with the collective efficacy and capacity to use all available assets to accomplish purposes and produce outcomes that matter to all community members through agreed-upon processes" (p. 46). Seven out of the nine (78%) of participating principals explicitly emphasized the importance and power of team and collective efficacy. A key implication for principal preparation programs is to examine ways in which their current programs align to the responsibilities identified in the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework in order to identify the types of experiential learning opportunities that should be offered to ensure more coherent and relevant preparation. Additionally, added emphasis on the value of purposeful community should be further explored.

### **Principal Support and Retention**

To support practicing principals as they navigate the significant adaptive challenges they face in public education, and as they lead necessary change efforts in their schools, it is essential that intentional steps are taken to support and retain them. Practicing principals must have opportunities to develop their skills through ongoing, job-



embedded practice, as opposed to training, so they can “learn through doing.” Several of the principals who participated in this study shared that they learned how to do their jobs by experiencing the work first-hand.

As the principals honed their building leadership experience, seven out of nine of them (78%) shared that their mentors were key influences in their development. Like coaches, their mentors offered “just-in-time, personalized support” (Psencik, 2011, p. 30), and helped them navigate the many challenges they have faced. The relationships that the principals established with their mentors were informal, and like friendships, they developed organically. Much research has been conducted in support of principal mentorship, however, the literature mainly addresses formal mentoring programs and protocols. Because the principals in this study offered such compelling stories about the impact of their informal mentors and the support they offered them as they developed as leaders, shifting principal support from mentoring to coaching may be worthy of further study. “Although the nation has developed an intense focus on instructional coaching and teacher leadership...leadership development and principal coaching have received less attention” (Psencik, 2011). Leadership coaching in general may be an area for additional research.

As shared previously, eight out of nine (89%) principals explicitly emphasized the importance and power of team and collective efficacy. Several participating principals shared the general sentiment that more minds are better than one, and that when responsibilities are shared with the larger school community, results are positive. Based on this collective sentiment, practicing principals may benefit from specific development

on the principles of shared and distributed leadership. James Spillane (2006), leading expert in distributed leadership in schools, offers key guidance on how the work of schools is best managed when it is spread among those in formally designated leadership positions (p. 50). Additionally, further development in adaptive leadership, the “practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive” (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 14) may be useful. Although not explicitly named as adaptive leadership in their interviews, many of the principals described adaptive leadership practices at play in their work.

### **Final Thoughts**

As a former principal, this researcher knows and deeply understands the challenges that principals face in their everyday professional lives. The work penetrates every layer of a principal’s being, because she is responsible for the academic, social, and emotional well-being of her faculty and students, and the stakes are high. The principal must nurture a purposeful community with “the collective efficacy and capability to use all available assets to accomplish purposes and produce outcomes that matter to all community members through agreed-upon processes” (Waters & Cameron, 2008, p. 46). These become the conditions for true success.

APPENDIX A  
5ESSENTIALS DATA REPORT

[Report Home](#)

**5Essentials**

[Ambitious Instruction](#)

[Effective Leaders](#)

[Collaborative Teachers](#)

[Involved Families](#)

[Supportive Environment](#)

[All Measures](#)

[About the Survey](#)

[Downloads](#)

## 5Essentials Overall – **WELL-ORGANIZED** for improvement ?

Summary of performance on each essential ?

- Most Implementation
- More Implementation
- Average Implementation
- Less Implementation
- Least Implementation
- Low Resp Or N/A

Performance ?

In 2015, students and teachers in The State of Illinois participated in the **2015 Illinois 5Essentials Survey**, which asked questions about their school's culture and climate. **Elem School's** performance on the 5Essentials (see diagram) summarizes the participants' answers to those survey questions as they relate to the 5Essentials.

**Survey Response Rates for Elem School ?**

Respondent	Response(Illinois) Rate
Students	0.0% (70.7%)
Teachers	84.1% (75.7%)
Parents	6.5% (10.5%)

[Explore Performance](#)  
View current performance

[Downloads](#)  
Download reports & visualizations

**Elem School Comparative Performance on 5Essentials Overall**

Compare Elem School to the Illinois and similar schools' average ?

Not Yet	Partially	Moderately	Organized	Well-Organized
Elem School				
Similar schools				
Illinois				

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT LETTER AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Date:

Dear Principal,

You were selected as a potential participant in this research because you have been identified as the leader of a school that is strong on three or more indicators on the 2015 5Essentials survey. These data imply that you are an effective leader in the area of school improvement and overall school success.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please read the consent to participate form, sign it, and return it to me via the self-addressed stamped envelope.

Sincerely,

Jennifer L. Ferrari  
Doctoral Candidate  
Loyola University Chicago

Enclosures:

- CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH FORM
- DEMOGRAPHIC INPUT FORM
- OVERVIEW OF McREL BALANCED LEADERSHIP SURVEY
- McREL BALANCED LEADERSHIP PROFILE PERMISSION
- SELF-ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**Project Title:** Leading Effective Change in Schools of the 21st Century: The Attributes, Behaviors, and Practices of Effective School Principals

**Researcher:** Jennifer L. Ferrari

**Faculty Sponsor:** Dr. Adam Kennedy

Please read this information and ask questions before you agree to participate in the study.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to identify the attributes, behaviors and practices of effective school principals. It will be conducted in two phases and will include both a self-assessment survey and a face-to-face interview.

**Procedures:**

If you decide to participate and are selected for the study, you will be asked to complete the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey online and to participate in a follow-up face-to-face interview that will last approximately one hour.

The McREL Balanced Leadership® survey will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. A link to the electronic survey will be shared after consent to participate has been signed and returned using the self-addressed stamped envelope.

The self-assessment survey is intended to frame the conversation, which will take place during the interview. Results from the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey will be used during interview to serve as a resource and a reminder as you discuss your leadership attributes, behaviors and practices.

**Risks and Benefits of Participating in the Study:**

There are no foreseeable risks beyond those experienced in everyday life or daily use of the internet.

You may directly benefit from this study by completing the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey. The self-assessment survey is intended to provide building principals with multiple perspectives on their fulfillment of the 21 leadership responsibilities identified in McREL's leadership research (McREL Balanced Leadership Profile®®, n.d.). Indirectly, your participation also adds to the body of research in the area of principal leadership. The current research will contribute to the body of research in the area of principal leadership, and such knowledge might be applicable to improving leadership.

**Compensation:**

You will not receive direct compensation for your participation.

**Confidentiality:**

Any information obtained in connection with this research study that can be identified with you will remain confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable.

Research results will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home, and only the researcher and her research advisor will have access to the records while working on this project. Upon completion and publication of the dissertation, the researcher will destroy all original reports, recordings, and identifying information that can be linked back to you.

Self-assessment data, collected electronically, will only be accessible to the researcher. Once research is complete, survey data will be deleted.

Audio files of the interview will be maintained on a dedicated audio recording device, which will be locked in a file cabinet in the researcher's home. Only the researcher and her advisor will have access to the recordings while working on this project. A professional transcriber who will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement will transcribe audio files. Transcriptions will be stored securely in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home throughout the study. The only individuals that will have access to the interview data will be the transcriber, and this researcher.

Upon completion of the published dissertation, survey data, audio recordings, and interview transcripts will be deleted and/or destroyed.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Participation in this research study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Loyola University of Chicago. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without affecting these relationships and without penalty.

**Contacts and Questions:**

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Jennifer L. Ferrari, by email at [jlferri128@gmail.com](mailto:jlferri128@gmail.com) or by phone at 847-508-5406. You may also feel free to contact faculty advisor, Dr. Adam Kennedy

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign and return the enclosed Consent to Participate in Research form using the self-addressed, stamped envelope.



If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

**Statement of Consent:**

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have reviewed this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

---

I consent to participate in this study.

---

Signature of Participant

Date

---

Signature of Researcher

Date

APPENDIX C

OVERVIEW OF MCREL'S BALANCED LEADERSHIP® SURVEY

## OVERVIEW OF MCREL'S BALANCED LEADERSHIP® SURVEY

The Balanced Leadership survey is a self-assessment tool based on the leadership practices identified in *School Leadership that Works*. Based on over 30 years of research, the Balanced Leadership Framework provides 21 leadership responsibilities and the correlating practices, knowledge, skills, strategies, and tools that successful leaders demonstrate (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Through a series of questions, principals are asked to reflect on their practice as they consider their school conditions in a variety of areas.

Survey responses provide principals with valuable information about and opportunities to reflect on their leadership practices.

The actual survey is copyrighted and unable to be published.

APPENDIX D

PERMISSION TO USE THE MCREL BALANCED LEADERSHIP® SURVEY  
SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL



4601 DTC Boulevard, Suite 500 • Denver, Colorado 80237 • 800.858.6830  
[www.mcrel.org](http://www.mcrel.org)

January 11, 2016

Jennifer L. Ferrari  
Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning  
North Shore School District 112  
1936 Green Bay Road  
Highland Park, IL 60035  
[jferrari@nssd112.org](mailto:jferrari@nssd112.org)

**Permission to Use McREL Material**

Permission is hereby granted to Jennifer L. Ferrari to use McREL's Balanced Leadership survey in the dissertation that she is writing.

When the survey is distributed please mark the instrument "Copyright McREL International. Reprinted and distributed with permission." We ask that you do not reprint the survey in the text of your dissertation.

We understand that the dissertation containing these figures is for satisfying program requirements only and will not be commercially distributed. This permission is limited to the use and materials specified above. Any change in the use or materials from that specified above requires additional written permission from McREL before such use is made.

Please send McREL a copy of the completed dissertation for our records.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maura McGrath".

Maura McGrath  
Knowledge Management Specialist

APPENDIX E  
DEMOGRAPHICS INPUT FORM

Dear Research Participant:

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research study about principal leadership. Please complete the demographic input questions below. This information will help the researcher select a diverse participant pool for the study.

If you are selected to participate in the study, you will be contacted to schedule a one hour face-to-face interview with the researcher about your practice. To help frame the conversation that will take place during the interview, you will be asked to complete a thirty minute McREL Balanced Leadership® survey, an electronic self-assessment survey.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Jennifer L. Ferrari by email at [jlferrari128@gmail.com](mailto:jlferrari128@gmail.com) or by telephone at 847-508-5406. Additionally, feel free to contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Adam Kennedy at [akennedy@luc.edu](mailto:akennedy@luc.edu).

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

## Demographic Information:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your gender? \_\_\_\_\_ What is your race? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the complete name of your current district? \_\_\_\_\_

How many years have you served as a principal in your current district?  
\_\_\_\_\_

How many total years have you served as a principal? \_\_\_\_\_

How many total principalships have you held? \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

By signing this sheet you understand that the general demographic information provided will be used in this research study. Your name will not be used in this study, nor will identifying characteristics be used. Your confidentiality will be maintained.

Thank you again for your participation in this important research. Feel free to ask questions or provide comments on the back side of this form.



APPENDIX F

RECRUITMENT LETTER AND CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW

Date:

Dear Principal:

Thank you for offering your consent to participate in the research study being conducted by Jennifer L. Ferrari. You were selected as a participant in this research study because you have been identified as the leader of a school that is strong on three or more indicators on the 2015 5Essentials survey. These data imply that you are an effective leader in the area of school improvement and overall school success.

To complete this next phase of the study, I am inviting you to continue your participation in this research by completing the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey (<https://goo.gl/611R2a>) and by completing an in person interview. The interview should take no longer than one hour and will be scheduled during a time and in a location convenient to you. The focus of the interview will be on your leadership attributes, behaviors and practices as a school principal.

In this letter, you have been provided an advance copy of the questions that will be used during the interview. Receiving an advance copy of the questions is intended to help you feel more comfortable and informed about the interview content prior to meeting with the researcher. The interview will be audio recorded, transcribed, and coded. Identified themes will be shared with you for correction or adjustment as necessary prior to being used for publication.

If you are interested in participating in this next phase of the study, please read the interview consent form and return it to me via the self-addressed stamped envelope.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jennifer L. Ferrari  
Doctoral Candidate  
Loyola University Chicago

Enclosures:

- INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
- CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE INTERVIEW FORM
- SELF-ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH INTERVIEW

**Project Title:** Leading Effective Change in Schools of the 21st Century: The Attributes, Behaviors, and Practices of Effective School Principals

**Researcher:** Jennifer L. Ferrari

**Faculty Sponsor:** Dr. Adam Kennedy

Please read this information and ask questions before you agree to participate in the study.

**Procedures:**

If you decide to participate in this next phase of the research, please use URL link provided below to access the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey, and complete the self-assessment survey according to the directions. The McREL Balanced Leadership® survey will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. The self-assessment survey is intended to frame the conversation, which will take place during the interview.

<https://goo.gl/611R2a>

Upon completion of the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey, you will be contacted by the researcher to schedule a one hour interview to discuss your leadership skills and experiences. The researcher will arrange a time and location that is convenient for you. In this letter, you have been provided an advanced copy of the questions that will be used during the interview.

Additionally, your McREL Balanced Leadership® survey will also be reviewed to encourage additional conversation about your leadership attributes, behaviors and practices. Prior to beginning the interview, you will be read a Consent to Participate in Research Letter and asked to sign it. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. The audio recording will be sent to a professional transcribing service for transcription. The transcription service provider will sign a confidentiality agreement. Interview transcriptions will be coded, and identified themes will be shared with you for correction and adjustment if necessary. Once you have reviewed the identified themes, all identifiers will be removed before using the transcription in the research study.

**Risks and Benefits of Participating in the Study:**

There are no foreseeable risks beyond those experienced in everyday life or daily use of the internet.

Your McREL Balanced Leadership® survey results will remain confidential. Your identity as a research participant will not be used.

The intent of the interview is to have an open dialogue about your leadership attributes, behaviors and practices as a school principal. The interview will also attempt to identify the leadership responsibilities you utilize in your school improvement efforts.

Your identity, as a research participant, will not be used. The researcher cannot fully know what information shared during the interview is known publicly or privately and will therefore minimize the risk to the participant by allowing him or her the opportunity to review the interview transcript and suggest revisions.

You may directly benefit from this study by completing the McREL Balanced Leadership® survey. The survey is intended to provide building principals with multiple perspectives on their fulfillment of the 21 leadership responsibilities identified in McREL's leadership research (McREL Balanced Leadership Profile®, n.d.). The current research will contribute to the body of research in the area of principal leadership, and such knowledge might be applicable to improving leadership.

**Compensation:**

You will not receive direct compensation for your participation.

**Confidentiality:**

Any information obtained in connection with this research study that can be identified with you will remain confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable.

Research results will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home, and only the researcher and her research advisor will have access to the records while working on this project. Upon completion of the dissertation, the researcher will destroy all original reports, recordings, and identifying information that can be linked back to you.

Self-assessment data, collected electronically, will only be accessible to the researcher. Once research is complete, survey data will be deleted.

Audio files of the interview will be maintained on a dedicated audio recording device, which will be locked in a file cabinet in the researcher's home. Only the researcher and her advisor will have access to the recordings while working on this project. A professional transcriber who will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement will transcribe audio files. Transcriptions will be stored securely in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home throughout the study. The only individuals that will have access to the interview data will be the transcriber, and this researcher.

Upon completion of the published dissertation, survey data, audio recordings, and interview transcripts will be deleted and/or destroyed.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Participation in this research study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Loyola University of Chicago. If you decide to participate you are free to stop at any time without affecting these relationships and without penalty.

**Contacts and Questions:**

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Jennifer L. Ferrari, by email at [jlferrari128@gmail.com](mailto:jlferrari128@gmail.com) or by phone at 847-508-5406. You may also feel free to contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Adam Kennedy, at [akennedy@luc.edu](mailto:akennedy@luc.edu).

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

**Statement of Consent:**

You are making a decision whether or not to participate in phase II, the interview portion, of this study. Your signature indicates that you have reviewed this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

---

I consent to participate in phase II, the interview portion, of this study.

---

Signature of Participant

Date

---

Signature of Researcher

Date

APPENDIX G  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How long have you been in education?
  - a. Did you always know you wanted to become an educator?
2. How did you become a principal? Share your leadership story.
3. Tell me about an improvement initiative that you have led in your building about which you are proud.
4. Of the 21 leadership responsibilities outlined in the McREL Balanced Leadership Framework, which do you perceive to be your greatest areas of strength?
5. How did you develop your leadership strengths? Did you *learn* to be a leader or would you say you were born a leader?
6. According to your self-reflection survey results, your most prevalent leadership responsibilities are: (Results will be shared at interview)
  - a. Does this seem accurate?
  - b. Does this surprise you?
  - c. Do you think your staff members would agree?
  - d. Can you share some examples of how you've demonstrated these leadership responsibilities?
7. According to your 2015 5Essentials data, your school is strong on three or more indicators: **effective leaders; collaborative teachers; involved families; ambitious instruction; supportive environment** Tell me about your school's strengths.
  - a. How do you support the development of these strengths?
8. As you look toward your future, what is one area of improvement that you aspire to make in your practice?
9. When it comes to your leadership in your school, about what are you most proud?
10. What advice has been offered to you that has contributed to your success?
11. If you could share advice with a new principal, what is the most important piece of advice you would offer to him/her to ensure his/her success?
12. Is there a question you wish I would have asked you about your leadership and your success as a school principal? If so, what is it, and what would your answer be?

APPENDIX H

MCREL'S PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES



<b>McREL's Principal Leadership Responsibilities</b>	
Responsibilities	The extent to which the principal...
Culture	Fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation
Order	Establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines
Discipline	Protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus
Resources	Provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs
Involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment	Is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices
Focus	Establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention
Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment	Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices
Visibility	Has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students
Contingent rewards	Recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments
Communication	Establishes strong lines of communication with teachers and among students
Outreach	Is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders
Input	Involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions

	and policies
Affirmation	Recognizes and celebrates school accomplishments and acknowledges failures
Relationships	Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of the teachers and staff
Change agent	Is willing to and actively challenges the status quo
Optimize	Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations
Ideals/beliefs	Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling
Monitors/evaluates	Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning
Flexibility	Adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent
Situational awareness	Is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems
Intellectual stimulation	Ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture

APPENDIX I

TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I, \_\_\_\_\_, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentation received from Jennifer L. Ferrari related to her doctoral study titled “Leading Effective Change in the Schools of the 21st Century: The Attributes, Behaviors, and Practices of Effective School Principals.”

Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of recorded interviews, or in any associated documents;
2. To not make copies of any audio files or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Jennifer L. Ferrari;
3. To store all study-related audio files and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;
4. To return all audio files and study-related documents to Jennifer L. Ferrari in a complete and timely manner.
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any backup devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber’s name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Transcriber’s signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher’s signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX J

TEXT AND ANALYSIS FOR PRINCIPALS A-J

<b>Principal A Text &amp; Analysis</b>		
<b>Text</b>	<b>Leadership Responsibility</b>	<b>Theme Framework Component</b>
<p>But I was more drawn to working with the kids in the schools and interviewing them and sitting on the floor.</p> <p>And then all of a sudden I was volunteering my time and I was just really drawn to that environment</p> <p>I felt like I could make a difference, make an impact.</p> <p>I realized once you're in a school, you actually can have more impact long-term, over a full year. I was just really drawn to that.</p> <p>And I was going home over the holiday, and my parents are sitting me down and saying, "Tell us about what you're doing and how your classes are," and again, my whole body ... I would just light up.</p> <p>And so those, my support system around me, kind of helped make me realize I should really follow my passion,</p> <p>other administrators were coming to me and saying, "I want to make you ... I want to put you on leadership teams.</p> <p>I was only teaching for a couple of years, and they had me as a suburban teacher going to Detroit schools, and guide and be a researcher and help them. As an outsider, how can you help? How can I help you develop your system for school improvement?</p> <p>I was just drawn to that problem-solving piece. And I think I just loved that before I even thought about administration. You know? It was just, Give me more of these opportunities. I'm loving this.</p> <p>Join the curriculum team. Join the district committee. Join this and that." Then I started, after a few years, I thought, I'm going to get my master's. I got my master's at Loyola in administration.</p>		Leadership Journey

<p>And I came back from my maternity leave, that second year, Max McGee was the superintendent at the time. And I went to him and I sat down and I said, "I want to be an administrator. I want to be an assistant principal. But I only want to do part-time, because I just had a baby and my husband's traveling and ... Can you make that for me?" He did! And he's like, "Actually, our elementary schools are growing," and he said, "I think we need this, and this is a great idea. I'm going to make this work for you."</p> <p>So I kind of slowly had that progression toward the principalship</p> <p>I was always a leader of the group or on student council, like I was just drawn to those leadership positions. But I don't know that I was always a leader. I didn't feel like I had to be in the forefront. I was happy to also sit back, growing up. And I guess it was kind of situational. In terms of being a principal leader, I was drawn to the problem-solving piece. I wasn't necessarily drawn to the entitlement or the having to be acknowledged or rewarded. To be honest, it makes me a little uncomfortable, just because deep down I feel like ... I use "we." It's a "we." You know? So I would rather my staff be celebrated and not myself.</p> <p>Nudging me along, having the confidence in me and believing that this was the right thing to do, letting me know that he had my back, that, "You're not going to make everyone happy." He probably gave me the biggest push, and I felt comfortable going to him saying, "This is what I want to do," and he supported me on that.</p>		
<p>I definitely didn't think I'd start out being an administrator.</p> <p>It's been kind of an interesting experience for me just continuing to try different things throughout my career.</p> <p>From there I started taking up some roles with it. At Herrick, Department Chair, a Team Leader. Coaching, club sponsorships, lunchroom, those kinds of things. Then my principal started pushing me a little bit. He said, "You probably should go back and get a master's." I was like, "Yeah, I probably should."</p>		Leadership Journey

<p>I felt like it was time for me to try something different. I've kind of always looked at things in altitudes. Your passion altitude, team leader. I wanted to try to make an impact beyond my classroom and my team</p> <p>I mean going from a classroom teacher, team leader to an associate principal at a 1,000 kids school with no dean and only the principal and me and thank God it was such a wonderful, awesome place. The people were great. They were very welcoming. I learned so much in the two years I was there. I learned more in two years than I had probably in the previous five.</p> <p>Then had an opportunity to come here. There was a principalship open here. The same principal that had pushed me to get my Type 75 in the first place.</p>		
<p>And it's something I'm pretty proud of, because it's something we did collaboratively as a staff and as a parent community and as students.</p> <p>And so it was just really the best scenario, because I had the parents, I had the staff, and I was involved and invested.</p> <p>And getting the parents and all the stakeholders invested, so we were all literally all leading the parade and holding up banners. We need this for our kids. Right? The children themselves got involved, too, in the planning, because they're going to be living in the space, so they're an important stakeholder that we didn't forget, and managed to be in the forefront.</p> <p>So one way I was able to maintain that is I had a committee. And I had parents and I had staff at each grade level on this committee, from that inception of that pilot space. And we talked about ... Things worked and things didn't work.</p> <p>I still meet with my committee, and we talk about how can the kids take ownership, what is our philosophy and vision for this space, and we've been able to maintain the momentum. And so if there's ever any roadblocks or obstacles, they're addressed through the representatives.</p> <p>The shared belief, sense of community, and cooperation, I feel like I have that.</p>	<p>Input</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>Input</p> <p>Input</p> <p>Input</p> <p>Input Ideals/Beliefs Culture</p> <p>Culture</p>	<p><b>Purposeful Community Affirmation Communication Culture Ideals/Beliefs Input Relationships Situational awareness Visibility</b></p>



<p>I have committees, not only for my learning commons, but my school improvement, I have a principal advisory, and I feel like people can volunteer and have input, they can share their passion and have impact where they feel they need to, and then I meet and touch base with each of these groups. It's a very collaborative atmosphere, so people feel like they have input if they want, or they have a rep who they can give input to. There's a place for them. And the same with the parents, the community extends beyond the staff. So I feel like culture and input kind of go hand in hand.</p>	<p>Input Communication Culture</p>	
<p>Involving teachers in the design implementation and important decisions... We were collectively deciding "This is how each space needs to be used and why. This is our vision for the space." So everyone had input from the start, and I think that's why they are all invested in its success.</p>	<p>Input Ideals/Beliefs</p>	
<p>not only am I creating a culture and collaborative nature through my committee work, but we do things together, so they see us as a team. And then again, I'm not an island. I really need somebody to help me manage, and we do it together.</p>	<p>Ideals/Beliefs Input Culture</p>	
<p>But I guess my approach is a "we" approach with that too, so when we meet as a union team, they bring me concerns, and I bring them concerns, and I always think with, "Okay, what are we going to do about that?"</p>	<p>Culture Ideals/Beliefs</p>	
<p>Doing the right thing doesn't always mean making everyone happy. You can't make everyone happy. I am a people-pleaser, and so I think that was probably advice I needed to hear. And that sometimes even in our committee work, we'll walk out (and say), "Well that's going to upset this grade level or this group, but this is the right thing to do and this is why we all feel that way."</p>	<p>Culture</p>	
<p>Try to focus your attention and your vision and your time on the bigger picture, molding, growing the vision."</p>	<p>Culture</p>	
<p>And it just happened to be coincidence that at the same time we were exploring this improvement idea, we had parents who are on the CRC committee and they were leading this change and they were coming to me and saying "(Principal A), what do we need? I have this idea," and I said, "Oh! I have the same idea. I'm going to join the committee. You join the committee. We're</p>	<p>Outreach</p>	<p><b>Focus</b> Contingent rewards Discipline Involvement in CIA Focus</p>

<p>all going to do this together!"</p> <p>We're a district system and not individual schools. So getting them on board was hard, and then I did some presentations to the board. I had to collect some data about how kids were using the space and why-it's important.</p> <p>I also share them with the parents and we talk about how ... and I try to pick books or studies that we do as a staff and you can do at home. You can use this as adults or as kids. So it's kind of universal in its theme. And so they feel tied to that.</p> <p>They have over a hundred volunteer possibilities. I helped, from an assistant principal to now, helped them kind of create those volunteer opportunities, from serving lunch to volunteering at recess, to reading books in the class, to helping plan our enrichment program, and field trips and things, environmental awareness ... I could go on.</p> <p>there's lots of opportunity for parents to find their passion, where they can provide input, and then as a school we only benefit because we have everyone's passions.</p> <p>The school leadership team sets high standards, teachers for teaching and student learning. I mean we do ... In terms of instructional leadership, I do meet with each grade level on a regular basis and we look at instruction, we look at assessment scores, and we target kids who aren't meeting, and I ask questions. Like, "What do we need to do differently?"</p> <p>I try to balance doing too much, because there's so many initiatives, and I think we all do, and so sometimes these committees help me balance that. Over time we have gotten rid of a few things.</p> <p>We observe each other's practice -work together to review assessment data development, instructional strategies.</p> <p>We look at our data together, and we develop instructional strategies together. So we meet as a grade level team, and everyone talks about kids that aren't making progress, and everyone feels equally invested in those kids, even though they're not in their classroom.</p>	<p>Outreach</p> <p>Outreach</p> <p>Outreach</p> <p>Outreach</p> <p>Focus Involvement in CIA</p> <p>Discipline</p> <p>Involvement in CIA</p> <p>Involvement in CIA</p> <p>Involvement in CIA</p>	<p>Order Outreach Resources</p>
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<p>It was just a combination of things that made me realize, there's change that's going to happen here. Something needs to give, right? This is an opportunity here.</p>	<p>Change Agent</p>	<p><b>Magnitude of Change</b></p>
<p>I was kind of diving deep into some research and ideas, learning commons and innovation, and STEM was getting kind of popular, and I noticed I was starting to read books on it and kind of dabbling in it,</p>	<p>Intellectual Stimulation</p>	<p>Change Agent Flexibility Ideals/Beliefs Intellectual Stimulation Knowledge of CIA</p>
<p>"We think we've got something bigger." And so they actually came to me with the idea and I thought, "You just solved our problem. We need a learning commons. We have outdated spaces. We shouldn't have two separate spaces, we should have one space. Our population is down a little bit. Maybe we can also somehow morph that into this new space."</p>	<p>Optimizer</p>	<p>Monitor/evaluate Optimizer</p>
<p>So bottom line is the three of us, it's the tech teacher, librarian, and myself, joined a community review committee in this district and they study topics of interest.</p>	<p>Intellectual Stimulation</p>	
<p>And so we studied the topic of Learning Commons for a year or so, and we ended up converting an empty classroom into a makerspace, like a mini learning commons.</p>	<p>Intellectual Stimulation</p>	
<p>I went to the superintendent and said, "I'm doing this." I just started it without asking for approval. This is what's happening." Our superintendent now is [REDACTED] and I said, "I really need to ... We have to go this direction. We're going to have to innovate and remodel some of these spaces anyway. They're old. [REDACTED] has the oldest library in the district. It's going to happen. We need it to happen, but let me tell you how it has to happen and why."</p>	<p>Change Agent</p>	
<p>And there are some people who are the thinkers, and they mull over things for a long time. We are more of the "Let's go for this. Let's try this."</p>	<p>Change Agent</p>	
<p>I think you just have to allow yourself the flexibility, and as a leader I think you have to let go that the micromanagement piece.</p>	<p>Flexibility  Optimizer</p>	
<p>So I think that once you get the investment, it can start with a few, but then as long as it continues to boil over and bubble into everyone else, then the momentum should continue. I</p>		

<p>should be able to sit back and let that keep going.</p>	Monitor/Evaluate	
<p>So one way I was able to maintain that is I had a committee. And I had parents and I had staff at each grade level on this committee, from that inception of that pilot space. And we talked about ... Things worked and things didn't work.</p>	Monitor/Evaluate	
<p>And so if there's ever any roadblocks or obstacles, they're addressed through the representatives.</p>	Change Agent	
<p>I challenge the status quo. I'm also willing ... The change doesn't always have to come from me. It could either come from a community member or a staff member or myself because I see it in the kids, but I'm willing to try new things</p>	Flexibility	
<p>I feel like you have to be flexible, and I'm okay with things not going my way. I'm not going to lie, sometimes it's hard to hear difficult feedback, or hard that you don't go in a direction you want to go in, but I think I've learned over time, like I said, the collective wisdom of the whole is better than individual. I do feel like I have the trust of the staff, that they will listen to me if I really comes down to it, I feel like something has to happen. I will stand my ground, and they'll be behind me because of our past success, or whatever, but for the most part I'm pretty flexible and I'm willing to try and adapt and do new things that the situation warrants.</p>	Intellectual Stimulation	
<p>So those are two books that we've been reading the last two years, and so I've been sharing them with the staff and I have book studies and groups with the staff, and then I also share them with the parents and we talk about how ... and I try to pick books or studies that we do as a staff and you can do at home. You can use this as adults or as kids. So it's kind of universal in its theme. And so they feel tied to that.</p>	Monitor/Evaluate	
<p>While we all had good intentions, it just wasn't really standing up to what we had hoped, and implementing it became something else we had to do, and it didn't have the outcome we wanted. So it was something that came to me, like, "We just need to scratch this."</p>	Knowledge of CIA	
<p>I think the district also does quality professional development, where we have some days where we bring in professionals from outside, and they come in and they spend time with grade</p>	Optimizer	

<p>level teams to make sure the questions are being answered in a small group setting.</p> <p>"Where do you fit? And what's your passion? And where are you going to take off? And I'm going to be okay with that."</p> <p>There's some autonomy here that I don't micromanage. I'm not a micromanager. But, so for example, PE teacher came in and she's like, "I've got a great solution. I'm going to put in a grant to put in some projection system to improve our assemblies in the big gym and it's going to look like this, and I'm letting you know I'm doing that." Great! Have at it. Go for it. Or that they feel like they need to let me know or keep me posted or have me sign off on things, but to be able to have the leadership, the delegation, the autonomy, to take on some projects that will enhance the collective good, is so, so wonderful.</p> <p>They got together, the teachers wanted it, the kids needed it. She had the idea. She came to me. Great. Have at it!</p> <p>I'm sure we'll take data and try and see if it works, and it's a risk, and it's a change, but it could be for the better.</p>	<p>Optimizer</p> <p>Optimizer</p> <p>Monitor/evaluate</p>	
<p>I think you just have to allow yourself the flexibility, and as a leader I think you have to let go that the micromanagement piece. Let go and trust that your staff could have ideas that could be better than yours, or the collective wisdom is better than an individual's wisdom.</p> <p>I've learned that time and time again, I might have an idea in my head that I think something's going to go as , but it's only when you come together that it gets to be this big thing that you could not have dreamed up on your own.</p> <p>I still meet with my committee, and we talk about how can the kids take ownership, what is our philosophy and vision for this space, and we've been able to maintain the momentum. And so if there's ever any roadblocks or obstacles, they're addressed through the representatives.</p> <p>The shared belief sense of community, cooperation, I feel like I have. I have committees, not only for my learning commons, but my school improvement, I have a principal advisory, and I feel like people can volunteer and have input, they can share</p>		<p>Shared Leadership</p>

<p>their passion and have impact where they feel they need to, and then I meet and touch base with each of these groups. It's a very collaborative atmosphere, so people feel like they have input if they want, or they have a rep who they can give input too. There's a place for them. And the same with the parents, if the community extends beyond the staff. So I feel like culture and input kind of go hand in hand.</p> <p>Involving teachers in the design implementation and important decisions...We were collectively deciding "This is how each space needs to be used and why. This is our vision for the space." So everyone had input from the start, and I think that's why they are all invested in its success.</p> <p>I challenge the status quo. I'm also willing ... The change doesn't always have to come from me. It could either come from a community member, a staff member or myself or even the kids, but I'm willing to try new things</p> <p>I feel like you have to be flexible, and I'm okay with things not going my way. I'm not going to lie, sometimes it's hard to hear difficult feedback, or hard that you don't go in a direction you want to go in, but I think I've learned over time, like I said, the collective wisdom of the whole is better than individual.</p> <p>In terms of being a principal leader, I was drawn to the problem-solving piece. I wasn't necessarily drawn to the entitlement or the having to be acknowledged or rewarded. To be honest, it makes me a little uncomfortable, just because deep down I feel like ... I use "we." It's a "we." You know? So I would rather my staff be celebrated and not myself.</p> <p>not only am I creating a culture and collaborative nature through my committee work, but we do things together, so they see us as a team. And then again, I'm not an island. I really need somebody to help me manage, and we do it together.</p> <p>I think the thing I'm most proud of is just that the school is successful and I'm proud to see that the school is successful because of the collective wisdom of the group, and that means staff, parents, students, administration. I guess it all goes back to that culture.</p> <p>I trust in the leadership of individuals who are willing to take</p>		
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<p>on a little bit more. I think you have build up those trusts, and you have to play to teachers' strengths. So I had to take time over the last six years to get to know people's strengths and kind of figure out, "Where do you fit? And what's your passion? And where are you going to take off? And I'm going to be okay with that."</p> <p>There's some autonomy here that I don't micromanage. I'm not a micromanager. But, so for example, PE teacher came in and she's like, "I've got a great solution. I'm going to put in a grant to put in some projection system to improve our assemblies in the big gym and it's going to look like this, and I'm letting you know I'm doing that." Great! Have at it. Go for it. Or that they feel like they need to let me know or keep me posted or have me sign off on things, but to be able to have the leadership, the delegation, the autonomy, to take on some projects that will enhance the collective good, is so, so wonderful.</p>		
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<p>teaching, all of the mistakes I made and all the things I did wrong. A lot of that I think was in part, I was young. It was also due to the fact that I was very isolated. I was working by myself. I didn't have a colleague. I didn't have a lot of people to bounce ideas off of.</p> <p>I think over time, learning about leadership, watching other leaders, having opportunities to be a part of leadership, structured, whether it's a team leader or whatever it might be.</p> <p>Getting outside of the school and seeing the community more closely and learning and watching other people watching some of the community leaders and people like that, I think you learn it. I learned a lot from reading guys like Benis and John Maxwell I think it's really leadership is a cultivated skill.</p>	<p>Learning through others</p> <p>Learning from others</p> <p>Cultivated</p>	
<p>There were cultural issues within the building. Staff. Communities. Different communities. We had some gang issues. There were no clear, consistent school-wide expectations. I kind of looked, I didn't call them greatest area needs then but I kind of looked at that, talked with our superintendent and came to the conclusion in talking with staff that we really first and foremost needed to focus on culture and getting some clear expectations down and starting to really build a positive culture within our building.</p> <p>That first year was me being visible and then getting to know everyone</p> <p>Also really purposefully leading discussions and looking at what can we do, what can we bring to [redacted], what can we implement that would help establish a more positive place, a more respectful place, a more collaborative place. A place that people are proud of.</p> <p>Ultimately, my line is always I'd want my kid to go there or I'd want my kid to have that teacher.</p> <p>Our surveys now indicate 100%, 98% of our parents say their kids are safe here, 95% plus of our kids say they're safe here, 90% plus of our middle schoolers who can lie in an anonymous survey, like you know, say they like coming here. Like being here.</p>	<p>Culture</p> <p>Visibility &amp; Relationships</p> <p>Input &amp; Culture</p> <p>Ideals &amp; Beliefs</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>Visibility Input Communication</p>	<p><b>Purposeful Community Affirmation Communication Culture Ideals/Beliefs Input Relationships Situational awareness Visibility</b></p>

<p>I was visible. I listened. We had open discussions. I asked them for input my very first staff meeting. I sat down and I said, "I want you to determine your working groups. We're going to create, what are we proud of and figure out, what do we need to work on?" They came up with all the things that I knew, for the most part, that we needed to work on.</p>	<p>Communication Visibility Input</p>	
<p>I think communication should be open door and being visible and supportive for everybody was really key in that. It worked for me.</p>	<p>Input Communication</p>	
<p>I'm really proud of the work that they've done. I'm really proud of the design that we made. We not only said here is the direction that we want to move, but here's your resources. PD is devoted to that coaching connected to that where people like [redacted], again, providing their resources, the support, the ability to collaborate and talk together has been great.</p>	<p>Relationships Relationships Communication Input</p>	
<p>I think I have really good relationship skills overall.</p>		
<p>none of that happens without a good relationship and trust.</p>		
<p>The resource of listening. I think that being willing to be open, listening, asking for feedback. Take the feedback. Apply it and use it.</p>	<p>Communication Culture Input</p>	
<p>I think leadership is about being able to bring a lot of people together and take a tough situation and find a way to make sure people feel valued, heard, and that their opinions are worthwhile and somehow come to a consensus in a way that may not please everybody but you still felt valued and heard.</p>	<p>Affirmation</p>	
<p>That was to make sure I was recognizing the staff and being available for them because I felt like things had ... I think there were some results in there that indicated ... I can't remember if it was there or another survey. It's just something I wanted to do to make sure that I was acknowledging my staff.</p>	<p>Communication &amp; Input Communication &amp; Input</p>	
<p>Communication. We do a lot of communication. We ask for feedback. We do surveys. We do parent forums.</p>	<p>Culture</p>	
<p>I think you listen and then act on some suggestions and the</p>		



<p>I think I focused on a couple things.</p> <p>Then we prioritized and that was their focus. Their focus was culture. Their focus was behavior. Their focus was better community relations and perception.</p> <p>We not only said here is the direction that we want to move, but here's your resources. PD is devoted to that coaching connected to that where people like [REDACTED], again, providing their resources, the support, the ability to collaborate and talk together has been great.</p> <p>It's just I remember those 7 preps and not having the things that I needed or a mentoring program or I look now, I'm like, "Holy cow." Jealous in a lot of ways. The kinds of supports that staff get to do what they need to do. I ran block for teachers so they could do what they needed to do.</p> <p>Time. I think if there's one thing that everybody tells me they need more of, it's time. I rotate and go through and meet with teams but it's their time. They're able to focus on their area improvement plan. They're able to focus on their strategies and the things that they're working on. I think I also, we give them every Wednesday is academic collaboration day. For that team time period you can meet with your subject-like partner. Or you can meet in teams and talk interdisciplinary kinds of activities. They have those opportunities to meet and collaborate. I think that's probably the best resource I can give them.</p> <p>Then resources in terms of what do you need? What do you need in your classroom that you think is going to make you more successful with kids? That could be everything from physical kinds of things to supplementary materials, other resources that they use.</p> <p>Some of the work that we've done with the unit work has really helped us with that because the pre's and the posts and looking at greatest area needs, kids being able to identify where they're at, what they need to work at. A teacher having clear vision of that and being able to group and identify those areas better. Kids working with kids.</p> <p>The responsiveness to questions and concerns I think is really</p>	<p>Focus</p> <p>Focus</p> <p>Resources Involvement in CIA</p> <p>Resources Discipline</p> <p>Involvement in CIA Resources Discipline Focus</p> <p>Resources</p> <p>Involvement in CIA</p> <p>Outreach</p>	
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<p>important. If a parent calls and says, "I'm really worried about this," how you respond, the speed you respond, and the thoroughness with which you respond I think builds. If you do it well for you, at the weekend barbecue, oh yeah, [REDACTED] handled this really well and then the next parent has an issue or concern or they want to talk to you about their kid's progress.</p> <p>First you have probably the structures and then you have to make sure that you model and provide some training in how to meet together and how to collaborate, which we did.</p> <p>Do one thing or a few things really, really well. You can't do everything at one time. I think that's why we've focused on the things we've focused on. We didn't try to do ten different things at one time and do them all really well.</p>	<p>Order &amp; Resources</p> <p>Focus</p>	
<p>All that had to be created, developed, trained. People thought it was going to be another prep.</p> <p>then like with any good school, the kids can tell you what our expectations are. Community can.</p> <p>Nothing else we tried to do would work because the kids wouldn't trust the adults. The adults wouldn't have confidence in the system. Creating the kind of a more of a focus on middle school. What is a middle school? Why does it exist? What's a team? Why do we do that? What's advisory?</p> <p>I think that I have the ability to both push people as well as support them through that process. I would hope people here would say that they're willing to stretch. That they're willing to try new things like this whole SMART process.</p> <p>Thinking about our SMART goals. What did we miss or what are we not hitting really well on that level of change.</p> <p>It's something I try consistently to do, to reach out, get feedback, ask for other people's ... Use survey data to try to identify kind of where we're at.</p> <p>I think also just consistently referring back to it, having a way to measure it and having a way to have a conversation about it are the ways that have helped with that quite a bit.</p>	<p>Change agent</p> <p>Ideals &amp; Beliefs</p> <p>Intellectual Stimulation Optimizer</p> <p>Optimizer Change Agent</p> <p>Monitor/Evaluate</p> <p>Monitor/Evaluate</p> <p>Monitor/Evaluate</p>	<p><b>Magnitude of Change</b></p> <p>Change Agent</p> <p>Flexibility</p> <p>Ideals/Beliefs</p> <p>Intellectual Stimulation</p> <p>Knowledge of CIA</p> <p>Monitor/evaluate</p> <p>Optimizer</p>

<p>We had a couple of really good discussions about that. Hard discussions because all the kids are, are they attending or are they engaged? We had a lot of conversations about that. We used the Danielson rubric to help us identify some behaviors and attributes that we might be able to connect with our own behaviors in classes and what we would see kids doing.</p> <p>Again, a commitment to we kind of flipped over the common core standards, stretching our kids a little bit, pushing our kids a little bit more, expecting a little bit more then raising our expectations. The kids responded well with that. Now our results are a lot different in terms of yeah, I've got to study hard for that test. Or math class is tough but she's supportive. That growth mindset piece, that's not just for our kids, that's for everybody.</p> <p>Folks seeing that in the continuous proven model. I think we've also done a better job of implementing kind of a planned new study model or we're looking at what we're doing, measuring it and analyzing it. Rebooting and then moving forward again.</p> <p>What I've found is that lately I mean I have teachers who say two things. On the one side they say, "Just kind of give me what I need to do." On the other side, "I don't like that. I really want to do this." You kind of get in both and I don't think you can live in the middle there. Trying to make sure that we're making sure that I'm a solid, instructional leader but also able to communicate that and coach my staff through those things as things change for me, and I need to stay ahead of that curve. I think that's just something I need to continually get better at.</p> <p>I'm really proud that my motto is I always want to leave something better than when I found it.</p>	<p>Intellectual Stimulation</p> <p>Optimize Ideals/beliefs</p> <p>Monitor/Evaluate Optimize</p> <p>Knowledge of CIA Flexibility</p> <p>Ideals/Beliefs</p>	
<p>I think the people that I identified for team leadership positions, I think the people that I identified as my kind of informal building leaders and people that I could communicate with</p>		<p>Shared Leadership</p>

<b>Principal C Text &amp; Analysis</b>		
<b>Text</b>	<b>Leadership Responsibility</b>	<b>Theme Framework Component</b>
<p>I do think you grow into leadership. I don't think that anything is just innate. I think leadership in that term is so broad, so vague. I think you do need to work really hard and I don't think anyone just has this talent ...</p> <p>I had a Principal my very first year and as I'm trying to figure out this classroom and teaching and what it's all about. You know, student teaching's a blur that first year is staying a couple pages ahead of the kids. He kind of tapped me on the shoulder early on and he said, you know, I see something in you. I see things in you that I don't see in first year teachers. At that time he said have you ever thought taking on more leadership?</p> <p>Between the end of my first teaching year and my second teaching year and they put me in as a team leader of the seventh grade team. Here I was a second year teacher, 22, 23 years old and having people on my team that had 25, 30, 35 years of teaching experience. The Principal kind of chuckling saying you're going to do great and kind of like tapping me and saying, here you go. That was probably one of those year where you learn a ton trying to gain respect from my colleagues who though here's this, this kid that thinks he ... for whatever reason, they don't really understand why all of a sudden is he leading our team and really having to work incredibly hard. You start thinking about what does it take to be a great leader?</p> <p>would I have been ready to jump into the Principal's chair after five years of teaching, absolutely not and I've seen that happen in buildings where you never know if you're ready, but I felt good after two years of the Assistant Principalship that I was ready.</p>	mentor	Leadership Journey
<p>In a true leadership role, taught me just about relationships that if you can't formulate and cement those really solid relationships, I feel like you're spinning your wheels.</p>	Relationships	<b>Purposeful Community</b> Affirmation Communication

<p>We're in this together, I'm here to help, I'm not your boss.</p>	<p>Relationships</p>	<p>Culture Ideals/Beliefs Input</p>
<p>I decided to change the structure for walk throughs. Why should it just be about me walking through? It's not about trying to catch people on their best days, their worst days, it's about building capacity and growing from one another.</p>	<p>Culture</p>	<p>Relationships Situational awareness Visibility</p>
<p>I involved every teacher in the building gets to go on a walk through with me throughout the school year so we do three walk through days and basically what happens is we do a morning walk through group.</p>	<p>Visibility Affirmation</p>	
<p>when we're on our way out, five minutes in every classroom we take two positives from every room and we log it, and we celebrate by sharing the great things we saw with the whole school.</p>	<p>Culture Input Culture</p>	
<p>We have to own this together.</p>		
<p>Kids love when we walk into the rooms and they're like itching to say come over here and talk to me because we do ask them pointed questions about what they're doing, what application are you working on, tell me how do we know you're working on this and kind of just dialogues with them</p>	<p>Input</p>	
<p>With the School Improvement Team, I shared some things that I would like to bring to the school, but I was more interested in the staff's ideas. I wanted their voices to shape our plans</p>	<p>Input Affirmation</p>	
<p>I couldn't even do it just with the SIP Leadership Team. Everyone needed to be a part of this--to share their perspectives. We needed that time for people to really invest in it and say what are we going to get out of it, because ultimately that was probably the biggest selling point of the walk-throughs is hey, you've got an opportunity to go into 25 rooms this year and pull out the two best things you see out of every single classroom in a school.</p>	<p>Culture Relationships Ideals/Beliefs Culture</p>	
<p>I think teachers felt that they were beaten down and there was very little if any trust. It was a tough place to be, and I think they were looking for someone to help them. It was then I knew I was going to give it my best, and that I had to start</p>	<p>Relationships</p>	



<p>with repair, start with building a strong culture around stuff that really mattered, start with getting to know people and what mattered to them.</p>		
<p>These are people that want to, they just don't know yet what they don't know and trying to figure it all out. We kind of ... was just one of the things that I wanted to attack early on was just build trust and build that credibility piece that I had talked earlier because they needed it.</p>	<p>Relationships Culture</p>	
<p>Leadership is just like teaching. It starts with the people. You can have all the content knowledge in the world and you can be the all knowing about the Constitution or US History or whatever it was that I was teaching, but until you show these kids that I'm a real person and that I care about you and that I know something about you, it seemed to me totally irrelevant like they didn't care unless they were kind of a hard core history buff. To them it was just another 40 minute period. Teachers are no different.</p>	<p>Input</p>	
<p>Until they realized this person cannot only make it fun and entertaining, but they can also know something about me and hey maybe even show up at my basketball game after school or ask about my family. Those are real things and I think that's what matters. I feel like this school and the school that I was previously in, I always referred to it as we're a family. It doesn't mean that families can't go through disagreements and little spats, it's going to happen, but in the end, we all ... and I care about every single member of this staff. I feel like I know who their families are and we've taken time to do a lot of things together, but until they truly even know that, it's just going to be a place of work. I want it to be so much more than that I guess is kind of what I'm thinking.</p>	<p>Culture  Visibility</p>	
<p>We've got a constant rotation of people that are essentially seen as leaders in the building by name, by role, by title, but also by every month when I'm going in to their team meetings and when we're doing our focus groups, they help lead our focus groups after school. There are many voices.</p>	<p>Visibility</p>	
<p>When I say at the end of the year okay, applications for team leader are due and I've got people trying to get back around the table, that tells me we're doing something right.</p>	<p>Outreach</p>	

<p>this is a guy who's door's going to be open and I have truly, and you just see the way that my office is set up, every parent that walks into this office, if I'm in my office they can make eye contact with me as soon as they hit our front counter.</p> <p>As soon as they make eye contact, if anyone has got something that they want to share, I've always tried my best to say come on in, let's just, you know what I mean?</p> <p>I guess, for the most part I've just tried to be transparent for them and I think the more that I've been able to share my philosophy and at parent meetings I've always tried to be an open book and talk about an area of the school</p> <p>To me I think if you went into any classroom, you just ask a child do you like [redacted] School? Do you like your teacher? They do and to me that's what I want for my son when he goes to school.</p> <p>I want every kid in this school to love coming here. Kindergarten orientation night, that's my first thing that I tell the kindergarten parents. Whether you're a first time kindergarten parent or this is your fourth, fifth, sixth kid, it's important to me that we bear that responsibility. Our kindergarten teachers are going to do a lot, but the one thing we're going to do is get your child to love school and that's going to follow them all the way through.</p> <p>I want to be surrounded by people that are going to push me and challenge me. We'll have conversations about how does that look appropriately, but I've always said if you're just nodding along in agreement at everything I say in a meeting, something either I'm the best person out there which I know I'm not, but I need someone at times to stop me and say [redacted] I don't understand that or isn't there a better way to do that or flat out, I don't think that's going to work.</p> <p>I mean this job is all about relationships, culture, you know, being able to lead people.</p>	<p>Culture</p> <p>Ideals/beliefs Culture</p> <p>Communication Input</p> <p>Culture Relationships</p>	
<p>Then we took a whole year for them to understand the process and practice it. There was a clear structure, and everyone understood it.</p>	<p>Focus Order</p>	<p><b>Focus</b> Contingent rewards Discipline</p>

<p>when we started walk-throughs, very little of our forms had anything to do with teacher behavior. We were clearly focused on what the kids were doing, and wanted to see high level learning. We set a goal to find 21st century learning skills in action. Are they communicating, are they problem solving, are they working on teams, are they using technology?</p> <p>We have a clear system, and because there is no mystery in our process, people are open to walk-throughs and might even enjoy them.</p> <p>The teachers' load is great, and that wears on me and kind of eats at me to think gosh, what more can I be doing to take some of that away from the teachers. I try my best to run cover on some of the minutiae so they can do what they do best-teach.</p> <p>Additionally, we've worked really hard at systems Our school runs like a well-oiled machine.</p> <p>I brought in the President of the RFA and the Vice President and said let's just meet. Let's sit down and let's talk. I think, I feel like parents want to help. They want to be heard. . They just sometimes don't know how to help or they just kind of need to be told sometimes. They also need to hear from me what's going on so they feel like they're in the know.</p>	<p>Focus</p> <p>Order</p> <p>Discipline</p> <p>Order</p> <p>Outreach</p>	<p>Involvement in CIA</p> <p>Focus</p> <p>Order</p> <p>Outreach</p> <p>Resources</p>
<p>I do briefing session and we have specific things that we look for relative to our applications of learning</p> <p>We talk with kids and we record data on iPads and then the final part of the walk through</p> <p>We meet back in our conference room and we've got the iPad data's been uploaded into Google Forms and we talk about what we've seen.</p> <p>We collected data on our focus areas and shared information like, 50% of our classrooms were using technology, or 25% of our rooms were observed working on teams . We then broke down data further so we could see what trends were occurring in our building.</p>	<p>Knowledge of CIA</p> <p>monitor/evaluate</p> <p>monitor/evaluate</p> <p>monitor/evaluate</p>	<p><b>Magnitude of Change</b></p> <p>Change Agent</p> <p>Flexibility</p> <p>Ideals/Beliefs</p> <p>Intellectual Stimulation</p> <p>Knowledge of CIA</p> <p>Monitor/evaluate</p> <p>Optimizer</p>

<p>What I'm doing is here's we have our SIP goals, how are we going to prove that the applications of learning are living and breathing in the school? What evidence can we collect to show what best-practice looks like? How can we further grow our curriculum and instruction model?</p> <p>At staff meeting they're kind of taking the lead. Here's what the data group is researching right now, here's what we're sharing, here's kind of the things that we're doing in our PDS group, here's what the 21st Century Walk Through group is doing.</p> <p>I hope to lead to staff is always going to be a professional development type meeting. Like, we're all going to get something out of it. We're going to learn something.</p> <p>We get all that out of the way and we really focus in on whatever, curriculum, instruction, assessments, task force, focus groups, strategic planning, whatever it might be. I think they respect that. I think they want to be a part of that.</p> <p>I feel like you always have to have something that's kind of pushing you, always wanting more, and I like that. That's what I've tried again with our staff is identify who those people are and take ideas and push ideas. We can't do it all at once, but there's little things that we can do and I feel like again, finding that focus really helps people.</p> <p>I don't have to know more about fourth grade ELA than my fourth grade teachers, but I do need them to know that I'm going to be asking questions about assessment and how, you know, pacing. Are we on track and what do kids know? Can we look at the data? Now, when we look at the data, can you help me figure out where our holes and gaps are.</p>	<p>Knowledge of CIA</p> <p>monitor/evaluate</p> <p>Intellectual stimulation</p> <p>Knowledge of CIA</p> <p>Optimize</p> <p>Monitor/Evaluate</p>	
<p>We're in this together, I'm here to help, I'm not your boss.</p> <p>I didn't want to come in my first year and just dump this on them and say we're doing it. I wanted them to understand what are you going to get out of it, why is this a great tool. This isn't [redacted] idea ... you know, it came from me, but it's not my thing. We have to own this together.</p>		<p>Shared Leadership</p>

<p>I think this almost sounds like it's coming across as it's all me, me, me and it truly hasn't been about just me, but I think the one thing that I can do really well is I can help facilitate and bring about a change in culture of a building.</p> <p>it's not me, me, me, what is important to me is I have basically rotated every person in this building into the SIP Team Leadership role that we put people on two year kind of like terms. Like term limits or whatever and so it's a rotating thing so my team of ten team leaders essentially half come off every year.</p> <p>We've got a constant rotation of people that are seen as leaders in the building by name, by role, by title, and by action. There are many voices that shape what this building is.</p> <p>Where people fall short sometimes is I think they're nervous sometimes or they're scared of putting people in positions where it's almost like they view the smartest people in the room or they view people that they've delegated things to as almost like a threat to their authority and I think you have to be comfortable in your leadership that I want to be surrounded by the best.</p>		
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<b>Principal D Text &amp; Analysis</b>		
<b>Text</b>	<b>Leadership Responsibility</b>	<b>Theme Framework Component</b>
<p>I had a good relationship with my department chair. Maybe he saw something in me. Don't know. I was asked to be a team leader for this interdisciplinary team. English, math, science, social studies.</p> <p>It always felt good but circumstances gave a gentle push.</p>		Leadership Journey
<p>Well number one was respecting the reasons for their push back. Okay, let's understand what your concerns are.</p> <p>We addressed the push back by really understanding what the nature of the push back was and allowing people to get comfortable with doing something in a new way.</p> <p>Then you can report to the rest of the staff your experience with it. We can fix whatever problems are discovered.</p> <p>If there's not going to be input and buy-in from the people who are going to be living it, it could be the most brilliant plan in the world, but it's just not going to work.</p> <p>I work hard to keep at the forefront of what we're doing.</p> <p>Everything is about building and expending political capital.</p> <p>I spend a lot of time observing, listening, watching, trying to get a sense of where people are successful, where they're not.</p> <p>It's embedded in the culture, where teachers have a voice and they have a say. They have an opportunity to express themselves, and there really is actual influence over what happens in the district.</p> <p>I try to be humble and allow people to flourish. Teacher voice is awesome when it is in service of helping us move forward as an organization. I just let that go and get out of the way. Be humble and have no ego. It's all about the vision of the school.</p>	<p>Situational awareness</p> <p>Input</p> <p>Input</p> <p>Input</p> <p>Situational Awareness</p> <p>Situational Awareness</p> <p>Input</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>Ideals &amp; Beliefs</p> <p>Situational</p>	<p><b>Purposeful Community</b> Affirmation Communication Culture Ideals/Beliefs Input Relationships Situational awareness Visibility</p>

<p>When teacher voice is maybe not orienting us in a way that is our best interest long-term, I have to recognize that and be sensitive of any kind of change. Tread very carefully and lightly on change. Accept small changes done gradually over time is more effective than big abrupt changes.</p> <p>I had regular meetings with the union representation, the union leadership. We'd have monthly meetings and we would dialogue about things. They would say where the staff has questions about me and where they had some concerns. I listened to those and understood that I'm not a perfect person or a perfect leader. I don't want to give everything up. Okay, I'm going to try to improve. Please understand that I am going to continue to be a leader that I think is ethical and just. If people break the rules, I'm going to pursue that.</p> <p>Through that listening and exchange, they were getting to know me and I was getting to know them and we would try to figure out how to go forward, it worked itself out.</p> <p>Through that constant dialogue, we got to know each other. They know where I stand on things.</p> <p>Take time to learn about the organization and the people within it before you do anything.</p> <p>Just get to know the people, get to know the organization, get to know the community.</p>	<p>awareness</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>Ideals &amp; Beliefs</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Ideals &amp; Beliefs</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>Relationships</p>	
<p>The team was responding to students in ways that were a little bit blind. We didn't know that all this was going on. We eliminated all of that and we started to retrain the staff on, "Let's use PowerSchool for minors. Let's not have separate forms." We want one place to record all of our information. That way you have a single place to learn what you need to about a student and make a decision.</p> <p>You can see it. It's organized neatly in terms of time frame.</p> <p>Now we really had everything recorded and developed the procedures for things to exist in PowerSchool. We have just one data world.</p>	<p>Order</p> <p>Order</p> <p>Order</p>	<p><b>Focus</b>            Contingent rewards            Discipline            Involvement in CIA            Focus            Order            Outreach            Resources</p>

<p>In order to make informed decisions about what is appropriate for the student, I need to know what, if anything has been done. In order to get that, I would have to look in three different places. Some people weren't looking at all. They weren't looking any place because it was too cumbersome. If you look at the response sheet, it's a mess. We embarked on this process to engage the staff in this conversation about our efficiency. I suppose that's the best word, efficiency. We didn't know that all these detentions existed for these students until the end of the year, when we discovered lo and behold that staff was recording data in one place and it was never put in another place.</p> <p>think that's been really helpful, to help the staff become a little bit more data-driven in terms of their decision making.</p> <p>"The data is going to be messy for a while. Let's be comfortable with the fact that it's going to be messy. We're not proposing we're going to cancel one thing and then do a new thing and that's going to be perfect. It's going to be messy either way. Let's be comfortable with mess and let's continue to live in both worlds. Those of you who are comfortable, start moving towards PowerSchool and see how it goes.</p> <p>Tread very carefully and lightly on change. Small changes done gradually over time is more effective than big abrupt changes.</p> <p>We thought that we'd land in this spot, but we pursued it organically. We were open about our reason for change, and we assured people that we'd fix things along the way. Step by step, we problem-solved together, and step by step, we implemented the system together.</p>	<p>Monitor/Evaluate</p> <p>Monitor/Evaluate</p> <p>Change Agent</p> <p>Flexibility</p> <p>Flexibility</p>	<p><b>Magnitude of Change</b></p> <p>Change Agent</p> <p>Flexibility</p> <p>Ideals/Beliefs</p> <p>Intellectual Stimulation</p> <p>Knowledge of CIA</p> <p>Monitor/evaluate</p> <p>Optimizer</p>
<p>If there's not going to be input and buy-in from the people who are going to be living it, it could be the most brilliant plan in the world, but it's just not going to work. You have to let go, and let people be a part of planning. More minds are better than a few, and It usually turns out better anyway.</p> <p>It's embedded in the culture. All teachers have a voice and a say. They have an opportunity to express themselves and something comes from it. There really is actual influence over what happens in the school, and that matters.</p>		<p>Shared Leadership</p>



<b>Principal E Text &amp; Analysis</b>		
<b>Text</b>	<b>Leadership Responsibility</b>	<b>Theme Framework Component</b>
<p>I think it was to broaden my understanding of systems and inner workings and theories about education. It wasn't to become or to be placed in a specific role within education.</p> <p>An internship position opened in the district in [REDACTED] that was essentially being an AP at an elementary school, but serving as an administrative intern.</p> <p>I remember talking to my principal at the time about it and she encouraged me to try it.</p> <p>I remember interviewing and I remember not thinking anything would come of it and not even being sure why I was doing it. Other than maybe itching for a change.</p> <p>Then I was recommended for the position and so I spent a year as an assistant principal at an elementary school and worked very, very hard and cried a lot.</p> <p>It was hard. It was lots of work and not very, at times not very meaningful work and at times really thankless work. So coming out of a first grade classroom and doing that, is a real change.</p> <p>In the assistant principal role in that school in that district at that time, your day was just drastically different. You're dealing more with adults who sometimes are pleased with you and sometimes are not pleased with you, or sometimes they are not pleased with other people and they're telling you about it. Just problem after problem after problem.</p> <p>So then the assistant principalship opened at [REDACTED] and again I thought, why don't I just go for it. I don't remember why.</p> <p>So perhaps that was a good match, but really sort of being scared and nervous about even the possibility of being at a middle school, and being at a middle school sounded not enjoyable, to be frank.</p>	<p>Theory</p> <p>Push from colleague</p> <p>Personal challenge</p>	<p>Leadership Journey</p>

<p>I remember talking to some administrator colleagues at the time about it and I remember meeting with some of them help me to learn about middle school and elementary school philosophy versus junior high philosophy and reading and learning a lot about that before the interview and finding that the middle school philosophy was really more empowering than the elementary approach.</p> <p>I remember I applied. I remember the interview process. I remember the last stage of the interview process was Superintendent [REDACTED] at the time was talking to me about steering the ship, like I'm going to totally turn the ship at that school. It totally needed to be steered in the opposite direction. It needed to be totally turned and it was a big job and did I think I was up to it? Like that kind of talk, very serious, and I thought, "yeah, I'm for it. I can do this."</p> <p>I appreciated it. She gave specific reasons why. I mean, she was very detailed and specific. I remember appreciating her candor and I remember appreciating this is a big job and I remember thinking, "Yeah, I can do that."</p> <p>I learned a lot from my mentors. Lots and lots of little things and big things, too many to name.</p> <p>Then I was hired there and I did that for a year. Then the principalship opened and then they appointed to the principalship. So that's my foray into the principalship.</p>	<p>Personal challenge</p> <p>Greater purpose</p> <p>mentor</p>	
<p>I think the most important part is having most of the people understand what we're doing and why we're doing it and then how we're going to do it. The more that that's in place, the better it seems to go.</p> <p>The people who are doing the best are doing so because they understand why what we're doing is important. They understand why it's meaningful. They understand all the nuances around the initiative and how all the pieces fit together, because they were already using that as a best practice.</p> <p>I think with any change we talk about. What's the status quo?</p>	<p>Culture</p> <p>Culture</p>	<p><b>Purposeful Community</b> Affirmation Communication Culture Ideals/Beliefs Input Relationships Situational awareness Visibility</p>

<p>Is it working or not? How do we know? What are some things we can do about it? What would it take to do all of these things? Which one do we like the best? How are we going to do it? How are we going to know it's working? We go through a multi step process and we ask lots of feedback.</p>	<p>Input</p>	
<p>I guess one of the things I'm proud of here is building up teaching capacity so we have lots of different leadership positions now and lots of different ways for people to get involved and be a leader and have their voice be heard.</p>	<p>Input</p>	
<p>So with any change we do lots of feedback loops.</p>	<p>Input</p>	
<p>I think, people have been empowered to speak up.</p>	<p>Communication/ Input</p>	
<p>I pay attention. I listen. I feel you learn about people and what they need and what their perspectives are. If I'm going to communicate about something, or ask something of someone, I'm going to think what is that person going to think? What is that person going to say? What does that mean that person's going to do? I get to be aware of all those things at any one time.</p>	<p>Situational Awareness</p>	
<p>So selfishly at the end of the meeting, knowing what I know about the superintendent and some things that she likes and some things that she didn't like, I chose to take that moment at the end of the meeting when everyone else was leaving to ask her if she had a few minutes and I wanted to sit down and talk with her about an idea that I had had and was planning to talk with her about, but chose that time on purpose about this idea I had that matched with what I know she likes and wants to see.</p>	<p>Situational Awareness</p>	
<p>So I feel like I used that to my advantage a little bit then in a selfish way because I want her to appreciate and be satisfied with my performance. I also wanted her to say yes to my request and I felt if she was feeling bad about the meeting and if I was bringing something to her attention that she wants to see and likes, then she would be more likely to, "Yes, that's what I'm after. Yes, go ahead do that, yes."</p>	<p>Situational Awareness</p>	
<p>As a leadership team, we develop a purpose statement together and then we ask a series of questions to our teams. We identify the feedback that is comparable to the others</p>	<p>Input</p>	

<p>teams and we come back and use that data to make decisions.</p> <p>I know our culture is good because of the feedback I've received from staff and more importantly just the way the students operate and behave in the building.</p> <p>The way staff interact with one another, the way problems are solved or not solved. The voice of people, the majority of people, who were previously silenced are now the leaders. The way people choose to solve problems with kids.</p>	<p>Culture</p> <p>Culture</p>	
<p>I feel that I'm very clear with staff around the district and school goals, and I feel like I keep moving them back and moving them back and moving them back and connecting them to different initiatives or project surveys or evaluations that we do.</p> <p>When someone or something skirts outside that, I feel like I stomp it out.</p> <p>We got an email from the high school the other week from the secretary of the math department asking her 8th grade math teacher to input all this placement data into a spreadsheet for them. I wrote back and said absolutely not are we doing that. Absolutely not. It's not a good use of my 8th grade math teacher's instructional plan time and five days is not enough notice. I'm more than happy to send you the class list with the different math levels and you can have someone on your class side staff enter the data yourself.</p> <p>So while it feels overwhelming often, all of these things really do fit together quite well. If we are doing half of these things well, the the other half will fall into place because they all build on each other.</p> <p>I try to focus most on professional development areas, like instructional strategies. Our most important work is helping teachers learn and grow in developing structural know how and how to help students. I like to partner with teachers in their planning and in their execution.</p> <p>We still have a lot of work to do, but the rules, the system, the procedures of the school, the way those look and operate are in place.</p>	<p>Focus</p> <p>Order</p> <p>Discipline</p> <p>Discipline</p> <p>Focus</p> <p>Resources</p> <p>Order</p>	<p><b>Focus</b></p> <p>Contingent rewards</p> <p>Discipline</p> <p>Involvement in CIA</p> <p>Focus</p> <p>Order</p> <p>Outreach</p> <p>Resources</p>

<p>So my point is, deep down this year I was celebrating when the data points were low. I was saying, “Right! Now you're actually scoring yourselves accurately. It's true you don't do these things and we need to and we're having more authentic and real conversations about how we can improve. We can do this. You can do this.” The teacher leaders are encouraged to lead, and they engage in conversations with colleagues about how we can do better.</p>	<p>Monitor/Evaluate  Optimizer</p>	<p><b>Magnitude of Change</b> Change Agent Flexibility Ideals/Beliefs Intellectual Stimulation Knowledge of CIA Monitor/evaluate Optimizer</p>
<p>I guess one of the things I'm proud of here is building up teaching capacity so we have lots of people who take on leadership roles and lots of different ways for people to get involved and be a leader and have their voice be heard.</p> <p>We develop a purpose statement together, the building leadership team, and then we deliver the purpose statement to each of our teams, the teacher leader does. Then asks a series of questions that we all agree on and the building leadership team will identify the feedback that is comparable to the others teams and we come back and use that data to make decisions.</p>		<p>Shared Leadership</p>

<b>Principal F Text &amp; Analysis</b>		
<b>Text</b>	<b>Leadership Responsibility</b>	<b>Theme Framework Component</b>
<p>The summer between my sophomore and junior years in college, I became a camp counselor at a residential camp out in Pennsylvania. It was at that point when I realized that I just loved working with kids. Then I married the math and the kid piece together to become a teacher. It was at that moment, there was definitely a moment where I'm like, "Now I know what I'm supposed to do.</p> <p>I loved teaching so much that I really never had an interest to get out of teaching.</p> <p>It really, quite honestly, was less to do with a passion in education leadership and more to do with just getting the degree, which I think a lot of educators find themselves in that position.</p> <p>My supervisor said, "I think you'd be great for the department chair job." Again, it just kind of fell into my lap, and so I said, "All right. I'll take a stab at it." I interviewed, got that job. That got me into educational leadership, and loved that role and felt like you can dabble in leadership but still have your feet in the classroom, which was kind of the perfect thing for me.</p> <p>In 2003 principal retired. The assistant principal got the principal's job and she was at my door like, "Come on, you can do this-be our assistant principal." It was just a real challenge to say I needed to take a step out of teaching, or I was willing to take a step out of teaching, but I did. 2003 I became assistant principal. I was assistant principal all the way up until, this is my third year now as principal at [REDACTED].</p> <p>I've developed my leadership over time. I haven't gone through training, necessarily. I think some of it is innate.</p> <p>I was encouraged and nudged along by peers. I don't know that I necessarily got permission or acceptance, but I definitely got my share of, "Hey, yeah, that's something that you'd be good at. You should consider doing that," that kind of thing. Is that what</p>	<p>Found education</p> <p>Encouraged to lead</p> <p>Mentor</p> <p>Developed over time</p> <p>Encouraged</p>	<p>Leadership Journey</p>

<p>you're asking?</p> <p>I have come from kind of these examples that I've watched of people who value these strengths and the expertise of those who they have hired to do certain jobs. They've given them the freedom and kind of the confidence to go out and do those. Then the support them along the way. I think those are probably kind of some of the core things that I have taken from those that have come before me.</p>	<p>Shared leadership</p>	
<p>There was a lot of stuff that we were doing for the first time or having to tweak and figure out what is tradition going to look like? How do we want to handle these programs? What's the best course of action moving ahead? What could we become? There was definitely a lot of energy towards developing something out of relatively nothing. That was fun. That was exciting. It was inspiring, and it forced us to articulate our beliefs and values.</p> <p>"You guys go. Do what you want to do." A lot of faith and trust. They knew that we would do it in kind of a first class way. We had some autonomy to do what we wanted to do. It was fun.</p> <p>We're working with some of our teacher leaders to identify needs that our staff has, and then using kind of internal leadership and internal skills and kind of the giftedness of some of our own staff to lead professional development.</p> <p>It was that kind of decision, and then finding the people who were passionate about it, because we knew they were there, and then letting them kind of run and develop some momentum moving forward.</p> <p>Decisions are made by a team of folks that are constantly looking at, "All right, what are we doing, and how are we doing it? Can we be doing it better?"</p> <p>I think we live in a situation where there are a lot of people in our buildings who really, to me, I want to tell them, "Go. Get out of here and go lead," but they love it here, and they don't want to leave. They got a good thing going, and they're just</p>	<p>Culture Ideals &amp; Beliefs</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>Input</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>Culture Ideals &amp; Beliefs</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>Culture</p>	<p><b>Purposeful Community</b> Affirmation Communication Culture Ideals/Beliefs Input Relationships Situational awareness Visibility</p>

<p>waiting for opportunities to lead.</p>		
<p>I became the leader of a building that had a very positive culture. It is a culture where the teachers love to teach here, because they know they're going to be supported. They know they're going to be respected. They know that what they're doing in the classroom matters. They know that we value their input. They know that we respect what they do with our kids. I also know that they're encouraged to and expected to develop good, trusting relationships with kids and adults. It has less to do always with kind of the instruction and the material, the content, as much as it has to do with the relationships that they have with their kids. We foster that, and I speak to that often.</p>	<p>Ideals &amp; Beliefs Input</p>	
	<p>Relationships</p>	
<p>We are all about celebrating our kids, creating environments where they are safe, where they can maximize their learning, whether that's school-wide initiatives or just how they're treated in the classroom or treated by our staff, our student services staff, those kinds of things.</p>	<p>Ideals &amp; Beliefs</p>	
	<p>Culture</p>	
<p>I don't like the pronoun "I". I just don't feel like there's a lot that I just do. We're a healthy organization not because of the principal, but because of kind of the group effort. When I say "we", I really do feel like yeah, it's a leadership thing, but it's because we share common beliefs.</p>	<p>Ideals &amp; Beliefs</p>	
	<p>Situational Awareness</p>	
<p>I'm big in relationships. I like to think that I kind of have my ear to the ground, and people feel confident in our leadership. People feel comfortable in my relationship with them that I hear these things. I have what I call principal round table. That's done at least twice a year where I will sit during lunch periods in an open room, and bring cookies. Staff comes and shares things. I hear a lot of things through that. I hear a lot of things through our leadership team, because I think kind of the first ones at ground level with teacher are the department supervisors. I've hired a great set of department supervisors who kind of have the heartbeat of what's going on.</p>	<p>Communication Input</p>	
	<p>Situational Awareness</p>	
	<p>Relationships</p>	
	<p>Culture</p>	
<p>To me it's probably taking a little bit of advantage of some of the stock that we've built with trust, not taking it for granted, but using it and building on it, and making sure that people still believe in it, and people still understand that, hey, we can go through tough times. We can have to do state mandated things, but it's not about top-down bureaucracy, but it's about, all right,</p>	<p>Ideals &amp; Beliefs</p>	
	<p>Situational Awareness</p>	



<p>we're going to do what we have to do, continue what our mission is and move forward.</p>	<p>Resources</p>	
<p>To me, it is tremendously important for me to understand where people are coming from. Teachers, we ask a lot of teachers, we put a lot on their plate. For me to understand that is to inform decisions moving forward, and be able to put supports and resources in such a way that they don't feel like there's just this team up top who's making decisions and asking us to do, but doesn't really get what we're dealing with.</p>	<p>Culture Situational Awareness</p>	
<p>there's probably a certain part of me that wants us to get along at a certain level. I do things very intentionally to make sure, not that good friction isn't here at times, but I'm definitely trying to be ahead of problems and making sure that we kind of keep this positive vibe going.</p>	<p>Situational awareness</p>	
<p>I think you gain a lot of perspective and understanding, that whole idea of seek to understand is something that I have kind of practiced and something that I would say to a new principal, "You have got to do that before you start solving problems, because if you don't understand the underlying issues and where people are coming from, then you're probably solving the wrong problem, which is just creating another problem." That and developing a rapport and a respect and kind of a mutual understanding, again, before you start implementing change or wanting to solve problems.</p>	<p>Relationships</p>	
<p>I'm most proud of the kind of trusting relationships that I built over time. I think you can be a successful internal candidate, only as long as the trust and respect for the people who you're working with is there.</p>	<p>Ideals/Beliefs Culture</p>	
<p>I do think what we had been intentional about is making sure that we have people on the bus that have the same values, the same core values. Those go back to a very healthy love for kids, a very kind of belief that all kids matter, all kids can learn. What we talk about on our leadership team quite a bit is making sure the right people are on the bus. If that means that as we go through supervision and evaluation we do that in a way that says, "Look, if this person isn't fitting what we're all about, then this person needs to find a different place." It's hard to have those discussions without feeling like kind of a hatchet man, but I think if you were to ask the average Joe teacher out there,</p>		

<p>they would say, "No, the administration has been very careful to make sure that the people that we bring into this organization have the same shared values."</p>		
<p>We're in year two of what we call tech coaches. Again, we're blessed in that we have resources to be able to do this, but we've had about five teachers from different curricular areas come together to form this lit coach team. We get them a release of teaching or two, in some cases, to man what we call our hot spot. It's like a drop-in area for teachers who are looking for either support in all things technology,</p> <p>To start the school year, I meet with every student through PE classes, health, driver's ed, PE. Over the course of eight periods, I met with every kid, and kind of recalibrated that theme, especially as it related to all the craziness going on in our culture with the election, and Black Lives Matter, and a lot of uneasiness with our Muslim kids about kind of where some of the rhetoric was. Again, that was another opportunity for me to be in front of kids talking about that theme, talking about the importance of understanding where someone is coming from before you talk, before you judge, those kinds of things.</p> <p>We look at collaborative teachers. We have spent gobs of time working with PLCs, but I think for some places, PLC is just kind of an acronym that means if you have time, meet with your colleagues. Whereas we have been intentional to say, "Look, we're going to use that time to continue to develop relationships, to continue to kind of develop some synergy within departments to say, 'All right, what can we do to move ahead?'" It's not just, "What's your lesson on this look like?" Those kind of things.</p>	<p>Resources</p> <p>Visibility</p>	<p><b>Focus</b> Contingent rewards Discipline Involvement in CIA Focus Order Outreach Resources</p>
<p>I was a principal for curriculum instruction for some time. Especially early on, we had a lot of work with our district office and our sister school in developing kind of district-led PD. We'd bring in consultants, or we'd kind of catch the new wave and see where that took us, that kind of thing.</p> <p>we have moved to kind of what we call this organic PD. We're working with some of our teacher leaders to identify needs that our staff has, and then using kind of internal leadership and internal skills and kind of the giftedness of some of our own staff to lead professional development.</p>	<p>Knowledge of CIA</p> <p>Intellectual Stimulation</p>	<p><b>Magnitude of Change</b> Change Agent Flexibility Ideals/Beliefs Intellectual Stimulation Knowledge of CIA Monitor/evaluate Optimizer</p>

<p>It was me supporting them doing the things that they do best.</p> <p>What we've found is that our teachers, I think, both appreciate that we are kind of keeping things in-house and understand that we've got a lot of greatness here.</p> <p>Then they do a lot of what we call lunch and learns, and half day seminars for new teachers, those kinds of things, working on instructional literacy skills for our teachers.</p> <p>those are in large part teachers teaching teachers with support from us kind of behind the scenes, and development of programs, and purposes, and evaluation of such as we go. It's kind of caught fire and I think really helped our teachers.</p> <p>I think it's kind of understanding best practices. Like I said, we had come from this, "Hey, we're going to bring in this-- expect to help us do this." We came to the point where we've got to allow that within. It was kind of those defining moments of, "Look, we could do exactly what we see [redacted] doing in house, or we could bring them in and have them help us kind of ... Let's just do it ourselves."</p> <p>It was that kind of decision, and then finding the people who were passionate about it, because we knew they were there, and then letting them kind of run and develop some momentum moving forward.</p> <p>we know that we have good people here, and it's a matter of tapping the right people.</p> <p>I put a lot of trust and faith in my leadership team, which is my assistant principals, instructional leaders, and department supervisors. I think a lot of our teachers are some of our best leaders.</p>	<p>Optimizer</p> <p>Optimizer</p> <p>Intellectual Stimulation</p> <p>Optimizer</p> <p>Knowledge of CIA</p> <p>Optimizer</p> <p>Optimizer</p> <p>Optimizer</p> <p>Optimizer</p>	
<p>We're working with some of our teacher leaders to identify needs that our staff has, and then using kind of internal leadership and internal skills and kind of the giftedness of some of our own staff to lead professional development.</p> <p>Decisions are made by a team of folks that are constantly looking at, "All right, what are we doing, and how are we doing it? Can we be doing it better?"</p>		<p>Shared Leadership</p>

<p>I'd love to be able say it was me leading the charge, but really not. It was me supporting them doing the things that they do best.</p> <p>I don't like the pronoun "I". I just don't feel like there's a lot that I just do. We're a healthy organization not because of the principal, but because of kind of the group effort. When I say "we", I really do feel like yeah, it's a leadership thing, but it's because we share common beliefs.</p> <p>We're in this together," I think about it from support staff all the way up. When I talk about culture kinds of things, I guess I am talking about our leadership team, relative to some of the programs and initiatives that we're pushing, but it takes our teachers, our classroom teachers, to be able to pull those things off. I definitely say "we" in a kind of global way.</p>		
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<b>Principal G Text &amp; Analysis</b>		
<b>Text</b>	<b>Leadership Responsibility</b>	<b>Theme Framework Component</b>
<p>I was always drawn to education. I think I fought it a little bit in college, but I was a babysitter and lifeguard and swim lessons all growing up, and had a natural attraction to it. My mom was a teacher, so I think it college I flirted with, should I do something else, but quickly steered toward education. My bachelors was in education, and my masters degree was in education administration. Yeah, I knew pretty early.</p> <p>My leadership story is an organic one. I just got tapped for things. I knew even in my first teaching job.</p> <p>I just found I got either presented with opportunities or asked to be part of things.</p> <p>I loved the leadership at middle school, so then I just became a leader naturally ... I would really say naturally.</p> <p>I actually didn't know my last year in teaching was going to be my last year. In our curriculum department, we were in the middle of a middle school literacy review, and our assistant superintendent for curriculum instruction became ill, so they recruited an elementary teacher and then myself to come and help support in district office.</p> <p>I was supporting all kinds of different roles, which I loved that, but really missed the building and the hustle and bustle. Then they appointed me to be an assistant principal at one of our elementaries, and then asked me to come over because of my middle school experience.</p> <p>I had an edge, for sure, coming internal, so that was part of why. They really did abruptly, I only had two years in my other building, it wasn't really your normal journey.</p> <p>I feel like all of my different roles did help to cultivate my leadership skills.</p>	<p>Always knew education</p> <p>Happened naturally</p> <p>Encouraged</p> <p>natural</p> <p>Internal</p>	<p>Leadership Journey</p>
<p>I think I was lucky with change because the staff identified a</p>	<p>Input</p>	<p><b>Purposeful Community</b></p>

<p>need for it--they knew we had to do something.</p> <p>They knew the world was changing, and that we had to rally together to stay current and lead the way.</p> <p>When I had some staff members that really took a risk with me, because they were like, I'm not tech-y at all. I'm like, we kind of need that perspective at the table.</p> <p>We started to see what "could be."</p> <p>the celebrations followed. We took time to really recognize the trailblazers and thank them for their professional risk-taking and going the extra mile.</p> <p>Well, in this building, because they had been through so many transitions, I had to spend time helping the staff figure out what we stood for--what we want to line up together for. We had to set systems and expectations for how we'd work together, and how we'd collaborate to get the best outcomes.</p> <p>I think it's also really important to communicate and be transparent. I try to be a resource and to provide all pertinent information.</p> <p>I just charge my team with trying to keep things smooth for them, and just no surprises, here we go.</p> <p>we'll do some staff celebrations to force them together, to what I want to do for opening, a lot of warm up kind of things to get them talking and sharing.</p> <p>We go to team meetings at least twice a week, and I'll go three times if I can. I prioritize being with the teachers, even if it does get you in the muck of things. But I think for this building, they need that.</p> <p>I definitely am a relationship kind of person. I spend time getting to know people...encouraging others to get to know one another.</p> <p>I think being in it, being around, matters. We keep our hands in everything.</p>	<p>Culture</p> <p>Input</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>Affirmation</p> <p>Culture Ideals &amp; Beliefs</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>Visibility</p> <p>Relationships</p> <p>Visibility</p> <p>Situational Awareness</p>	<p>Affirmation Communication Culture Ideals/Beliefs Input Relationships Situational awareness Visibility</p>
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<p>The thing I would say is just working with the teams and doing lots of stuff at the different levels, at that team level, at the leader level, matters so that you can get a pulse on things. Like, hey, this conversation is bubbling up, did you hear some of that?</p> <p>When the right mix of people are in the room, and a lot of different voices contribute and offer perspective, we can solve anything.</p> <p>Well, I think the face to face time is essential, whenever there's a doubt or a struggle, I really try and get face time and work through it as colleagues</p> <p>We were also really strategic about modeling during staff meetings--we learned together and researched current best-practice, went to workshops, and tried things as a team, and I was right there with them.</p>	<p>Input</p> <p>Visibility Relationships</p> <p>Relationships</p> <p>Visibility</p>	
<p>Well, I try to keep efforts really focused.</p> <p>Time is so precious so we're super strategic about our use of time. We were really focused and we didn't let things get in our way.</p> <p>I think the focus is really important, especially in trying to protect the plate of everyone while letting new ideas surface up, but keeping people feeling secure in what we're moving forward with our work.</p> <p>We were really strategic about modeling during staff meetings--we learned together and researched current best-practice, went to workshops, and tried things as a team, and I was right there with them.</p> <p>I think, sometimes with the parent community, helping them to know the higher thinking things that we're doing is important. School is hard work, and our staff is doing great stuff. I find it's my role to make sure our community knows what our professionals are accomplishing.</p> <p>One of the things I'm proud of too is, experimented with Twitter to show what we do</p>	<p>Focus</p> <p>Focus Discipline</p> <p>Discipline</p> <p>Involvement in CIA</p> <p>Outreach</p> <p>Outreach</p>	<p><b>Focus</b> Contingent rewards Discipline Involvement in CIA Focus Order Outreach Resources</p>

<p>We were also really strategic about modeling during staff meetings--we learned together and researched current best-practice, went to workshops, and tried things as a team, and I was right there with them.</p> <p>The group took control, and I just got behind them and cheered! They helped really plan out our PD and helped shift our culture around technology.</p> <p>Sometimes, teachers just need a little pushing and need to know that I believe in them. That if they put their heads together, great things can happen.</p>	<p>Intellectual Stimulation</p> <p>Optimize</p> <p>Optimize</p>	<p><b>Magnitude of Change</b></p> <p>Agent Flexibility</p> <p>Ideals/Beliefs</p> <p>Intellectual Stimulation</p> <p>Knowledge of CIA</p> <p>Monitor/evaluate Optimizer</p>
<p>The second half of the year I was able to get a larger team together. I had been working closely with strictly tech people in the building, just helping to know where to meet people at the need, but it was great to then include a bigger group. Then I had some staff members that really took a risk with me, because they were like, I'm not tech-y at all. I'm like, we kind of need that perspective at the table. That was a nice cross section. The group took control, and I just got behind them and cheered! They helped really plan out our PD and helped shift our culture around technology. We started to see what "could be."</p>		<p>Shared Leadership</p>



<b>Principal H Text &amp; Analysis</b>		
<b>Text</b>	<b>Leadership Responsibility</b>	<b>Theme Framework Component</b>
<p>I always knew I wanted to go into education. I had worked with special needs students in high school and then again in college, beginning of college at a camp.</p> <p>It was at through the process of program investigation and serving on that team that I was encouraged to get my Type 75.</p> <p>I became a Special Ed Coordinator. I was a Special Ed Coordinator, gosh I think five, six years. Then I was a Special Ed Director for one year and then that's when I took the turn into building leadership. Then I was an Assistant Principal for three years and now a Principal for four years.</p> <p>I often tell teachers education is not a linear path. My path has taken me in such very different places and to me that's been a very exciting thing because I've been able to tap into different parts of my personality by doing that.</p> <p>I have always been a leader. I was always a good kid, I was always president of the whatever. Part of it comes naturally to me. Part of it, I feel like I have good intent with what I do and I think that people recognize that with me. I'm an honest person. People recognize that.</p>	<p>Always education</p> <p>Encouraged</p> <p>Internal</p> <p>Non-linear path</p> <p>Natural Leader</p>	<p>Leadership Journey</p>
<p>I have good relationships with kids and families here. I know who their younger siblings are and when they're coming in and parents trust me. It's neat to see how that evolves.</p> <p>I think that my presence in addition to the district people, in addition to coaches, we all have to be on the same page and in the classrooms.</p> <p>I would say relationships are my strongest suit. That really comes back from my special ed base. Typically I would become involved in situations where teams were frustrated. Parents were frustrated. I would come in and be the calming factor, making sure I have good listening skills, making sure people's concerns are heard, that input is valued, but always</p>	<p>Relationships</p> <p>Visibility</p> <p>Relationships Input</p>	<p><b>Purposeful Community</b> Affirmation Communication Culture Ideals/Beliefs Input Relationships Situational awareness Visibility</p>

<p>through the lens of what can we do to make a change or what can we do to support this in a different way? That carries over here as well.</p> <p>I feel like both with families, teachers and kids I have very strong relationships here.</p> <p>I feel too like my door is always open. Everyone knows they can come talk to me. I'm out front most mornings so I know kids by name. I walk the building regularly and do my best to get to know people. People know I care about them. Again, I feel like relationships go a long way.</p> <p>Our focus areas come from within the staff, which that excites me. That's what I like to see. I don't want it to be something that's coming from me and they're like, "Oh gosh, here's something else we have to do." If it comes from people see the benefit of it and then bring it back to staff, and it will stick.</p>	<p>Relationships</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Visibility</p> <p>input</p>	
<p>We sat together and poured over the data. That was hard for them because they had to open up. The data was ... We were honest ... We're looking at this grey bubble because we're just not happy with how these kids are progressing.</p> <p>Making sure that we have a common understanding of what good literacy instruction and good math instruction looks like and then determining what pieces we are missing or what extra supports we need so we can plan our professional development.</p> <p>Our schedules are set up very strategically. The nice thing about our district is there are expectations that come from the district level down to us so scheduling is one of them. We're a multi-grade school so my third and fourth grade is together but when I set up their common plan time I make sure that anyone who teaches third grade math can plan at the same time. We set up the schedule very strategically to make sure that we carve out those common plan times so the teams can work as a PLC for that.</p> <p>I think our focus has helped because they don't feel overwhelmed by too many things that are happening at one time.</p> <p>I'm keeping initiatives to a minimum...protecting people's time.</p>	<p>Involvement in CIA</p> <p>Focus</p> <p>Order</p> <p>Focus</p> <p>Discipline</p> <p>Outreach</p>	<p><b>Focus</b> Contingent rewards Discipline Involvement in CIA Focus Order Outreach Resources</p>

<p>Three times a year we go to district and we talk about the things that we've done. I see this as my opportunity to make sure that people know how hard our teachers are working and the great progress they're making. I also try to bring different voices to the table, so the story is richer.</p> <p>Making connections are important. In my weekly communications one of my goals is to consistently share our focus areas and show how all our work is connected. They see the reason why we're doing what we're doing.</p>	<p>Outreach</p>	
<p>Last year we found ourselves at this time looking at our winter map data. Our first/second grade data we just were not happy with so we really had to do some digging to do to see what was going on instructionally with our first/second grade team.</p> <p>We let go of one person. It was a time we really had to revisit our values and beliefs and what we are aiming to accomplish in our school. It was a little tumultuous last year but I feel like we had a job to do, and it was time to do something different.</p> <p>My staff was distrustful. I think their feeling was, "We were honest about our problem, and now we feel like we did something wrong. Like, we're being punished because something didn't work." I had to help them work through this. We had to talk through things, and conversations were sometimes heated. However, we relied again on what we commonly believe, what we're here to do--help kids grow. I saw my job as pushing my staff to solve problems and take charge of their outcomes.</p> <p>My style tends to be that I take in what people say to me and I really do try and empower staff to accomplish great things.</p>	<p>Monitor/Evaluate</p> <p>Ideals &amp; Beliefs</p> <p>Change Agent</p> <p>Ideals &amp; Beliefs</p> <p>Optimize</p> <p>Optimize</p>	<p><b>Magnitude of Change</b>            Change Agent            Flexibility            Ideals/Beliefs            Intellectual Stimulation            Knowledge of CIA            Monitor/evaluate            Optimizer</p>
		<p>Shared Leadership</p>

<b>Principal I Text &amp; Analysis</b>		
<b>Text</b>	<b>Leadership Responsibility</b>	<b>Theme Framework Component</b>
<p>I definitely always wanted to be an educator. I knew that I wanted to be in special education since I was in freshman year of high school. I knew. Devoted all my free periods, study hall, gym periods, everything to the special education class in high school.</p> <p>I took a lot of leadership opportunities when I was teaching. We didn't have teacher leaders or teams as middle school does in the elementary at the time, but I really took a lot of those roles on.</p> <p>I guess I've always been a planner. I've always been an organized person. I've always been able to take charge.</p> <p>I definitely developed as a leader. Oh, there's things I look back I'm like, "Oh, wow. I do that so much better now," but I definitely think born. Not everyone can do this.</p>		Leadership Journey
<p>My team leader minutes are 100% transparent. I share everything with them, and this improves my communication. People are welcome to ask me anything, and they know that my door is open.</p> <p>We took apart each one of these and we did a needs assessment in every area. That's where we started. Really where the building needed to grow and I found out that there was no trust.</p> <p>I think I build really really good relationships with staff. This has been told to me by numerous people that I am very cautious and definitely try to rack up chips in the bank that I can use when times get tough, like with the team leaders.</p> <p>I'm very visible in the school and take a hands on approach. Let me know what you need. It's not let me know what you need and I'll figure out somebody to do it for you. I'll sub. You want to go see another classroom? Let me get in there. I'll take your</p>	<p>Communication</p> <p>Input</p> <p>Relationships</p> <p>Visibility</p>	<p><b>Purposeful Community</b> Affirmation Communication Culture Ideals/Beliefs Input Relationships Situational awareness Visibility</p>

<p>class.</p> <p>We do a lot of just fun relationship building things. I'll do giveaways of free sleep-ins or free leave earles. Random Twitter challenges, like, If you know whose boots these are, come get a prize. Funny things like that all the time. My staff knows that we're here for business, but we should be happy where we work.</p> <p>I go to every grade level meeting and I go to every problem solving team meeting and now I go to specific data meetings.</p> <p>I'm most proud of my communication and how transparent I really am.</p> <p>I think I've built the relationship with my teachers that if a parent's complaint comes my way or a student issue comes my way and it involves a teacher, I can sit down and have that conversation without them feeling worried.</p> <p>It's so important to be quick with your communication. To be responsive. To be open, transparent. Let people see what meeting agendas and meeting minutes were. Let people see the brainstorming sessions that people had. Why are we hiding it? Communicate very regularly and quickly and proactively with parents, too.</p>	<p>Relationships</p> <p>Visibility</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Relationships</p> <p>Communication</p>	
<p>We have an unbelievable system for our district goals. There is more teacher feedback than I ever thought was possible and how our superintendent gets that feedback is a long process.</p> <p>By level, elementary, middle we fine tooth comb that information, boil it down to our targets and our standards. Everyone has a hand in it. We know exactly what goals are going to be. We have a lot of district initiatives that this school has been very rigid about.</p> <p>These district initiatives, although they seem like a lot, they're what we all want and what we all need. Structures are put in place, and we all carry them out in our buildings.</p> <p>To carry out district initiatives, we have to make sure our teachers have the support they need. We have six instructional coaches in the building.</p>	<p>Focus</p> <p>Focus</p> <p>Order</p> <p>Resources</p>	<p><b>Focus</b> Contingent rewards Discipline Involvement in CIA Focus Order Outreach Resources</p>

<p>My staff, they need a template, they need a protocol, they're black and white. It's just a very different staff. It always has been. So that's how I support them. I provide structure and routine and concrete expectations. Our focus is crystal clear.</p> <p>Everything is based on the district goals.</p>	<p>Order Focus</p> <p>Focus</p>	
<p>There were some coaches who felt strongly that my school was catering to the strong voices that didn't want to do things. I had to make some unpopular decisions about staffing. I made some shifts in coaching and I changed the team leaders line-up. Both were highly contested, but people have come around. I think they respect my decision now that they see how much better things are.</p> <p>When you got down to it, egos were hurt. The people who are not longer leaders have either stepped up and are doing everything in their power to do well, or they've completely holed up and mind their own business--they've lost their power. It wasn't easy, but the status quo could not continue.</p> <p>I made some huge switches, but I knew where we needed to be.</p> <p>Now they are true leaders on our team, they're leading specific initiatives to thinking maps to Kagan, to learning walks. We push professional learning with articles and book studies, and program fidelity.</p>	<p>Change Agent</p> <p>Change Agent</p> <p>Change Agent</p> <p>Intellectual Stimulation</p>	<p><b>Magnitude of Change</b>            Change Agent            Flexibility            Ideals/Beliefs            Intellectual Stimulation            Knowledge of CIA            Monitor/evaluate            Optimizer</p>
<p>I want to build capacity. I want to continue to build capacity as a leader in the building. I don't like to do things just myself. Way more brains are better than one or me and the Assistant Principal.</p> <p>My professional goal this year is to continue to build capacity with my team leaders and I have it laid out.</p>		<p>Shared Leadership</p>

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## VITA

Jennifer Lynne Ferrari was born on January 28, 1973, and was proudly raised by her single mother, Patricia Lynne Franklin. From an early age, great priority was placed on education. Jennifer attended public elementary school in in the southwest suburbs of Chicago and later attended Reavis High School. Jennifer earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from Lake Forest College with a major in political science and concentrations in biology and Spanish. She studied abroad in Madrid, Spain where she worked in international business and became proficient in Spanish. Jennifer earned her Master's degree from National Louis University in the area of curriculum and instruction. She later attended Loyola University, Chicago where she earned her administrative certificate through the Supervision and Leadership program. Jennifer also studied abroad at Loyola's Rome Center in Italy. Jennifer is the first in her family to earn an undergraduate and graduate degree.

For over two decades, Jennifer has proudly served as a public educator. She began her career as a middle school English teacher on the north shore of Chicago where she also served as an assistant principal, principal, and assistant superintendent for teaching and learning in North Shore School District 112. Recently, Jennifer accepted a new position as the Chief Schools Officer and Vice President at Distinctive Schools, an innovative school and charter management organization and national practice leader in the area of school transformation. Jennifer leads the network's strategic planning,

leadership development and coaching, professional learning, and all functions of the academic team. Jennifer is a contributing author for *EdWeek* and has presented at the state and national levels. She aspires to help broaden the definition of success in public schools and aims to inform policy on public education transformation.

Jennifer lives in Highwood, Illinois with her husband of 21 years, Matthew, and their two sons, Joseph (15) and Nathan (11).

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