A Study of the Leadership of High-Poverty, High-Performing Schools Through the Lens of Moral Leadership

Scott David Fech
Loyola University Chicago

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

A STUDY OF THE LEADERSHIP OF HIGH-POVERTY, HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOLS THROUGH THE LENS OF MORAL LEADERSHIP

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

PROGRAM IN ADMINISTRATION AND SUPERVISION

BY

SCOTT D. FECH

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

DECEMBER 2009
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indeed, a better person, because of my interactions with her. Dr. Vivian Gordon and Dr. Judith Docekal gave their gifts of time and talent, asked meaningful questions, all of which made my study better.

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This work is dedicated to my students, past and present, who continue to inspire me and challenge me to be better each and every day.
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This study examines the leadership of principals who work in schools which have been identified as having a large student population living in poverty and have a record of sustained academic success as measured on standardized tests. The goal of this study was to identify which sources of authority these principals demonstrate in these high-poverty, high-performing (HP HP) schools where students achieve at higher levels than expected. Another goal of this study was to identify commonalities in leadership style and traits, which would include the concepts of moral leadership, among these principals in HP HP schools. This study used Thomas Sergiovanni’s sources of authority as presented in Moral Leadership: Getting to the Heart of School Improvement (1992) as the interpretive framework for understanding the leadership of the selected principals. All of the schools studied were recipients of the Illinois Spotlight Schools Award in 2007. Illinois Spotlight Schools serve a school community where at least: 50% of students were identified as low-income; 60% of students met or exceeded standards in both reading and mathematics as measured on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT); 50% of students met or exceeded standards in both reading and mathematics in two previous years; made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the two previous years as required by No Child Left Behind.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Addressing American school children on September 8, 2009, President Barack Obama spoke about the importance of each student’s education, not just to their future but to the future of our country. “What you make of your education will decide nothing less than the future of this country. What you're learning in school today will determine whether we as a nation can meet our greatest challenges in the future.” Acknowledging the challenges which face many students, he continued, “Now I know it's not always easy to do well in school. I know a lot of you have challenges in your lives right now that can make it hard to focus on your schoolwork.” Regardless of the place from which students begin school, there is the potential to move above and beyond and achieve success in school and in the future.

With the belief that every student can achieve great things, I accepted my first principalship in an urban Catholic high school located near Chicago. The student population was quite diverse both racially and socioeconomically. Throughout my six years as principal, I noticed that the achievement of my students exceeded that of their counterparts in other schools when comparing state standardized test scores in any one subgroup of students. Whether we were comparing African-American student achievement, Hispanic student achievement or low income status student achievement, my students scored well above the same subgroups of students in other nearby schools.
One might believe that the reason for this difference rested solely on the fact that the school had selective enrollment and that because the parents had made the conscious decision to enroll their children in a private, tuition-based program, the parents were playing a more active role in their child’s education. However, I knew there were public schools that existed throughout the state and country that were succeeding with these same groups of students as well and that there is much to learn from these schools if all students, regardless of race, religion, socioeconomic status or geographic region, are to be provided an education which will provide future opportunities for success.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study examined the leadership of principals who work in schools which have been identified as having a large student population living in poverty and have a record of sustained academic success as measured on standardized tests. The Illinois State Board of Education has created a special category for these types of schools and designates them as Illinois Spotlight Schools.

This study examined if principals who lead high-poverty high-performing schools (HP HP) do so in ways that go beyond simply following the rules of accountability or policy and procedure manuals. Are leaders in HP HP schools practicing moral leadership and so lead in ways that place the school’s mission and core values at the center of what they do? The goal of this study was to identify which sources of authority these principals demonstrate in these HP HP schools where students achieve at higher levels than expected. Another goal of this study was to identify commonalities in leadership style and traits, which would include the concepts of moral leadership, among these
principals in HP HP schools. This study used Thomas Sergiovanni’s sources of authority as presented in *Moral Leadership: Getting to the Heart of School Improvement* (1992) as the interpretive framework for understanding the leadership of the selected principals.

According to Sergiovanni (1992), sources of authority attempt to define whom one should follow, what one should follow and why one should follow. Sergiovanni identified five sources of authority which include: bureaucratic, psychological, technical-rational, professional, and moral authorities. “Bureaucratic authority exists in the form of mandates, rules, regulations, job descriptions, and expectations” (p. 30). In this case, people must follow the rules to be rewarded otherwise they will face consequences. Psychological authority holds that people respond to the leader’s personality and the positive working environment that the leader creates and so they behave in a certain way which allows them to be rewarded for their work. Technical-rational authority derives its practice based on logic and research hoping that people will respond based on “what is considered to be true” (p. 31). The next source of authority is professional. With professional authority, people in an organization respond in ways that respect what are accepted best practices and the personal expertise that they have developed while practicing their craft (p. 31). Moral authority is the final source of authority that Sergiovanni identified. “Moral authority, in the form of obligations and duties derived from widely shared values, ideas, and ideals. When leadership practice is based on moral authority, teachers can be expected to respond to shared commitments and felt interdependence” (p. 31). Sergiovanni holds that there has been an overemphasis on the bureaucratic, psychological, and technical-rational authorities and that it is time for a shift
toward the professional and moral authorities. He believes that leaders need to create a response from within their followers rather than some external pressure which offers rewards to those who act appropriately and punishments for those who do not. Recognizing that people follow leaders for many different reasons, moral leadership moves that response to an emotional connection that people have to the organization and its core values and shared beliefs.

This study involved principals from high-performing schools in high-poverty areas of the state, be they urban, suburban or rural. Through interviews of principals, a document study of principal job descriptions, principal evaluation tools, and district/school mission statements, this study presents the data that describes the leadership as it represents the various sources of authority the principal uses in leading the school.

**Illinois State Board of Education’s Spotlight Schools**

In December 2001, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) commissioned a study of high-poverty high-performing schools to be completed by Glenn “Max” McGee at Northern Illinois University (NIU). While presenting the results of his study to ISBE, McGee (2003) recommended the development of an awards program for high-poverty schools which shared common characteristics. ISBE acted on the recommendation and the “Spotlight Schools” were created. The program was launched in the fall of 2003 as a way to recognize high-poverty high-performing schools as a part of the state accountability system. While other national organizations have created similar categories
such as the U.S. Department of Education’s Blue Ribbon Schools program, ISBE’s selection process is among the most rigorous.

All 2007 Spotlight Schools met the following criteria:

1. At least 50% of students were identified as low-income. Low-income is designated by eligibility for free and reduced lunch.
2. At least 60% of students met or exceeded standards in both reading and mathematics as measured on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT).
3. At least 50% of students met or exceeded standards in both reading and mathematics in two previous years.
4. Made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the two previous years as required by No Child Left Behind. Criterion to meet AYP include:
   a. At least 55% of students meeting and exceeding standards in both reading and mathematics.
   b. 95% participation rate in state assessments for all students and each subgroup. A subgroup is identified as having 45 or more students in an identified group such as race, socioeconomic status, learning disability or limited English language proficient.
   c. Attendance rates of at least 90% for elementary and middle schools and graduation rate of at least 72% for high schools (Northern Illinois University, 2008).
Spotlight Schools demonstrate that, despite significant challenges that stand in the way of improving student achievement in other schools, some schools are successful in showing excellent academic performance with these groups of students.

There has been impressive growth in the number of schools identified as Spotlight Schools since the designation’s inception in 2003. The number of schools identified as Spotlight Schools has grown from 27 in 2003 to 508 in 2007. There has been an increase in number in each of the five years the program has existed. The majority of the 2007 Spotlight Schools were elementary and kindergarten through eighth grade schools (467 schools) followed by middle schools (37 schools) and finally high schools (4 schools).

Of the 508 Spotlight Schools in 2007, 85 (17%) were located in Chicago. 148 (29%) were located in the suburbs of Chicago. 275 (54%) were located downstate. In 40% of the Spotlight Schools, enrollment is less than 300 students. 15 schools were designated a Spotlight Schools for the fifth time. 40 schools received the designation for the fourth time and 295 schools qualified for the second time.

The Problem

In 2002, President George W. Bush signed new federal legislation into law aimed at improving the academic performance of students in America’s elementary and secondary schools. The legislation, entitled No Child Left Behind (NCLB), emphasized a standards-based education placing a heavy emphasis on school accountability for the learning of all students and established a 12-year timetable for ensuring that all students would be proficient in the designated core subject areas. As of this writing, the schools are only five years away from that established deadline of 2013-2014. In order to meet
the requirements of NCLB, students’ standardized test scores were disaggregated and analyzed for the achievement of individual students as well as subgroups of students categorized by gender, race, learning disability, socioeconomic class and/or whether the students’ native language was English. It became clear in the early years of NCLB that certain subgroups of students were not achieving and/or improving at the same levels as other subgroups of students. Despite educators’ best efforts, “inequities in educational outcomes across racial and income groups are still large” (Harris, 2007, p. 367).

As a part of NCLB, schools and districts are required to demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) with all students across all subgroups. Hall and Chau (2008), at the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), reported that of the 73 million children in the United States, 57% live in low-income or poor families. 28.8 million (39%) live in low-income families while 13.2 million (18%) live in poor families. Further, NCCP (2008) reports that 22% of white children live in low-income families, while 60% of black children, 58% of Latino children and 18% of Asian children live in low-income families. With these statistics, clearly many children can be categorized in more than one subgroup. Harris (2007) reported that “Low-poverty schools are three times more likely to be high-performing than high-poverty schools. When there is also a high-minority population, low-poverty low-minority schools are six times as likely to be high-performing” (p. 384). Children from low-income families also do not start school with the same skills and preparation as their non-low-income counterparts. According to Klein and Knitzer (2007), children from low-income families are, cognitively, 18 months behind their peers at the age of four and by age ten, the gap remains. In fact, the average
cognitive scores of preschool children in the highest socioeconomic group are 60% above their low-income peers (p. 2). Schools have much work to do to ensure the improvement in academic achievement of these students in order to close the achievement gap between children who live in low-income families and those who do not. It is the job of school leaders to explore and implement strategies to bridge this gap. In the case of the Illinois Spotlight Schools, there are leaders who have demonstrated that this is possible.

**Research Questions and Design**

This study identified and examined the leadership used by principals in high-poverty, high-performing schools as they relate to Sergiovanni’s (1992) moral leadership theory. The main research question is:

*To what extent do the characteristics of moral leadership manifest themselves in the leadership, behavior, relationships and decisions of principals in high-poverty, high-performing schools?*

Related questions include:

1. In which types of situations does the principal function from a) moral authority, b) bureaucratic authority, c) technical-rational authority, d) psychological authority and e) professional authority?
2. Do principals have knowledge of moral leadership? If so, what is their perspective on moral leadership and their awareness of its application in their leadership?
3. Does moral leadership manifest itself in the work of principals?
4. What policies and structures has the district put into place to support the practice of moral leadership in a) Job descriptions, b) Evaluation tools, c) Mission Statements?

5. What policies and structures has the principal put in place in the school to support the practice of moral leadership?

This study used a qualitative approach using open-ended interviews with principals on their leadership in their buildings. The interviews provided an opportunity for principals to describe their leadership in various situations to see which, if any, of the sources of authority they use on a regular basis. Finally, the principal’s formal job description, evaluation tool, and district/school mission statements were studied to determine the representation of the various sources of authority. All of the data was coded and common themes identified and compared to Sergiovanni’s (1992) descriptions of the sources of authority.

The 2007 Illinois Spotlight Schools formed the basic pool of participants for this study. It was further limited by studying those principals who have been in their current positions for at least two complete school years so that the findings could be attributed to the current leader and not someone who is no longer in the building. The sample was comprised of three principals each in urban, suburban and rural communities so as not to limit the study to one specific population since poverty occurs across all geographic settings. Finally, as there were only four high schools selected as Illinois Spotlight Schools and some of these have selective enrollment, high schools were eliminated from the pool of participants as the high-performance on standardized tests may then be
attributed to the selected student population adding an additional variable which was not controlled and not the subject for this study. This left 37 middle schools and 467 elementary schools as possible study sites.

**Limitations of the Study**

There are several limitations to this study. First, the researcher is a former principal at the secondary level, and has formed his own ideas about what it means to be an effective principal. Also, the building-level administrative experience and doctoral coursework both took place in faith-based institutions. This also could have lead to biases in how the data was interpreted. This study of nine principals in HP HP schools is limited by the small sample size and the potential bias of the researcher. The sample size of nine participants is not generalizable. It can however, provide an interpretation of these principals’ lived experience of working in an HP HP school setting. The researcher kept field notes throughout the process to help maintain objectivity.

**Contributions of this Study**

This research adds to the knowledge in the area of school leadership and student achievement with a high-poverty population. While completing the work on this dissertation, the United States was facing severe economic challenges that some have called the worst since the Great Depression. Major banks and corporations were on the verge of closure or take-over. Unemployment numbers were the highest in over ten years. Home foreclosures were increasing. As a result, the number of children currently living in poverty will have increased. Some of these children will have experienced only short-term situational poverty. Situational poverty is caused by a
specific circumstance such as when a parent experiences a temporary job loss and the family experiences some financial difficulty meeting their daily living needs. The children who live in generational poverty, those whose families have been living in poverty for more than a generation, will have certainly struggled even more to get out of poverty (Payne, 2005, p. 3). Schools serve all populations of students, wealthy and poor and everything in between. School leaders will need to create learning environments which support these high-poverty communities and meet the needs of these students to help them succeed. Practically speaking, school leaders must also help these high-poverty student populations to achieve at the levels needed to fulfill the accountability achievement levels mandated by the federal legislation, *No Child Left Behind*, within the next five years. The information gathered in this study can be shared with principals in high-poverty low-performing schools so that changes can be made to help improve student achievement.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms will be used throughout this study and are defined as follows:

**Bureaucratic Authority** exists in the form of mandates, rules, regulations, job descriptions, and expectations (Sergiovanni, 1992).

**Core Values** are the underlying beliefs and guiding principles of an organization (Evans, 1996).

**Discourse Patterns** refer to the manner in which information is organized while communicating. Primary discourse refers to the first language that an individual acquired.
and secondary discourse refers to the language of the larger community and the language in which the individual must communicate to function in that community (Payne, 2005, pp. 28-29).

**Ethic of Care** is a series of human relationships that build connections between and among people within the organization which help to develop a sense of community (Sernak, 1998).

**Followership** is a role that people within the organization play in being committed to a cause, an idea or an organization. In the case of this study, followers are committed to the school and its mission to educate students (Kelley, 1988).

**Formal Register** is the standard sentence syntax and word choice or work and school. It has complete sentences and specific word choices (Payne, 2005, p. 27).

**Generational Poverty** is defined as being in poverty for two generations or longer (Payne, 2005, p. 3).

**Goal** is the overarching purpose, the big dream, the visionary concept, the desired state of affairs which the organization attempts to realize (Greenleaf, 1977).

**Hidden Rules** are the unspoken cues and habits of a group (Payne, 2005, p. 37).

**High-Poverty High-Performing School**: Schools designated as an Illinois Spotlight School in 2007. To be designated as a high-poverty high-performing, schools met the following criteria:

- At least 50% of students were identified as low-income. Low-income is designated by eligibility for free and reduced lunch.
- At least 60% of students met or exceeded standards in both reading and mathematics as measured on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT).
- At least 50% of students met or exceeded standards in both reading and mathematics in two previous years.
- Made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the two previous years as required by *No Child Left Behind*. Criterion to meet AYP include:
  - At least 55% of students meeting and exceeding standards in both reading and mathematics.
  - 95% participation rate in state assessments for all students and each subgroup. A subgroup is identified as having 45 or more students in an identified group such as race, socioeconomic status, learning disability or limited English language proficient.
  - Attendance rates of at least 90% for elementary and middle schools and graduation rate of at least 72% for high schools (Northern Illinois University, 2008).

**Leader** is someone people follow to achieve a purpose (Maccoby, 2007).

**Low-Income Family** is defined in 2008 as a family income of $42,400 for a family of four, which is double that established for the federal poverty level. In schools this is measured as being eligible for the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Program.

**Mission** refers to an organization’s basic purpose for existence (Evans, 1996).

**Moral Authority** is the form of obligations and duties derived from widely shared professional and community values, ideas, and ideals (Sergiovanni, 1992).
**Normative Rationality** is rationality based on what we believe and what we consider to be good (Sergiovanni, 1991).

**Organizations** refer to groups of people who are deliberately brought together for the purpose of attaining goals (Etzioni, 1964).

**Professional Authority** is formed from accepted tenets of practice, seasoned craft knowledge and personal expertise of the leader (Sergiovanni, 1992).

**Psychological Authority** is expressed in the form of motivational technology and human relations skills. When used, followers respond to the leader’s personality, and to the pleasant environment that is provided, by behaving appropriately and collecting the rewards that are made available (Sergiovanni, 1992).

**Purpose** induces clarity, consensus, and commitment through a continuous stream of actions in an organization (Evans, 1996).

**Purposing** is to build within the school a center of shared values that transforms it from a mere organization into a covenantal community (Sergiovanni, 1992).

**Registers of Language** are any of the varieties of a language that a speaker uses in a particular social context (register, 2009).

**Situational Poverty** is defined as being in poverty for less than two generations and is caused by current circumstances such as the death, illness, unexpected unemployment or the divorce of a major financial contributor in the family (Payne, 2005, p. 3).

**Story Structure** refers to the way in which an individual constructs and recounts the details of various experiences. In a formal structure, the story starts at the beginning
of the story and moves toward the end in a chronological or accepted narrative pattern. The plot is the most important part of the story. In a casual structure, the story begins with the end of the story or the part with the greatest emotional intensity. The characterization of the individuals in the story is the most important part of the story (Payne, 2005, pp. 30-31).

**Technical-Rationality** is rationality based on what is effective and efficient as defined by scientific research and logic (Sergiovanni, 1991).

**Vision** refers to the future direction of an organization (Evans, 1996). It articulates a view of a realistic, credible attractive future for the organization, a condition that is better in some important ways than what now exists (Bennis & Nanus, 1997).
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Demographics of Children in Poverty

To put this study in context, it is important to understand the extent to which children in the United States are living in low-income families and what the demographics of those families are. The National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University (2008) reported that according to the federal poverty level in 2008, a family of four with an income below $21,200 was considered poor. An income of $42,400 would bring that same family of four to the low-income designation. Current research indicates though that the actual cost of living for a family of four is twice the established level of $42,400. In schools, these levels are measured through student eligibility for the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Program.

As of October 2008, there are over 73 million children in the United States. Table 1 categorizes children by family income in number and percentage.
Table 1

*Children by Family Income*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Above Low-Income</td>
<td>44.5 Million</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-Income</td>
<td>15.3 Million</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>13.2 Million</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Data from Basic Facts About Low-Income Children Birth to Age 18 from the National Center for Children in Poverty (October 2008).

Combining low-income and poor children into one category means that 39% of all children in this country live in low-income families. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, the number of children living in poverty had been declining for a decade but since the year 2000, the number has been on the rise again. In Illinois, based on 2007 data, there are 3.2 million children of whom 35% (1.1 million) live in families that are low-income.

Children living in low-income families are not limited to a specific geographic location in the United States. Instead, they can be found in urban, suburban, and rural areas of the country. 49% (9.7 million) of children in urban areas live in low-income families. 31% (9.8 million) of children in suburban areas and 46% (5.2 million) of children in rural areas live in low-income families. Regionally in this country, these trends are similar. Table 2 provides information on the number and percentage of children living in low-income families by region.
Table 2

*Children in Low-Income Families by Geographic Region*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number of Children from this Region Living in Low-Income Families</th>
<th>Percentage of All Children from this Region Living in Low-Income Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>11.7 Million</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>7.0 Million</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>4.3 Million</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>5.8 Million</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Data from Basic Facts About Low-Income Children Birth to Age 18 from the National Center for Children in Poverty (October 2008).

Children living in low-income families also span all races and ethnicities. Table 3 provides information on the number and percentage of children living in low-income families by race/ethnicity.

Table 3

*Children in Low-Income Families by Race/Ethnicity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number of Children from this Race/Ethnicity Living in Low-Income Families</th>
<th>Percentage of Children from this Race/Ethnicity Living in Low-Income Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>.3 Million</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>9.4 Million</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>6.5 Million</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>.9 Million</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>10.9 Million</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Data from Basic Facts About Low-Income Children Birth to Age 18 from the National Center for Children in Poverty (October 2008).
According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (2008), 55% (15.7 million) of children in low-income families have at least one parent who works full-time year round. 26% (7.6 million) of children in low-income families have at least one parent who works part-time or full-time for part of the year while 19% (5.5 million) do not have an employed parent.

Parents’ educational attainment is also important background information in understanding children who live in low-income families. 25% (7.3 million) of children in low-income families live with parents who have less than a high school diploma. 36% (10.4 million) live with parents who have only a high school diploma while 39% (11.1 million) live with parents who have at least some college education. In those families, 54% (15.5 million) of children in low-income families live with a single parent. 46% percent (13.3 million) live with married parents (Douglas-Hall & Chau, 2008).

Children who live in low-income families experience more instability in their housing circumstances than their non-low-income counterparts. 18% (5.1 million) of children in low-income families moved in the last year while only 8% (3.5 million) of children in above low-income families moved in the last year (Douglas-Hall & Chau, 2008).

After reviewing the demographics, it becomes clear that all schools are impacted by children who come from low-income families. Since this is a significant percentage of the children who make up school populations, it is important to understand the culture of poverty to make sure that all children are provided opportunities for success.
Understanding the Culture of Poverty

In 1996, Dr. Ruby Payne, published an important work on understanding the culture of poverty. While it has been updated several times, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (2005) gives readers a context to understand some of the complexities on why students from low-income families are not as successful in school as their non-low-income counterparts. One of the traditional goals of education is to provide preparation for students’ futures so that they can lead healthy, successful, productive lives. For those who live in poverty and who want to move out of poverty, “an education is the key to getting out of, and staying out of, generational poverty” (p. 61). While low academic achievement in schools is closely related with a lack of resources, Payne notes that being poor is rarely about a lack of intelligence or ability (p. 62). In order to move out of poverty though, people need access to resources and not just financial ones. In fact, Payne holds that financial resources are not the most important ones to which people need access. Instead, education and relationships are the two things that help one move out of poverty (pp. 3-8).

Payne (2005) bases her work on the fact that each socioeconomic class brings with it a set of hidden rules and patterns of behavior and language. According to Payne, schools and business operate from the hidden rules and language of the middle class. “In middle class, the criteria against which most decisions are made relate to work and achievement” (p. 41). This is not the same for those in generational poverty. Instead, they make decisions based on entertainment and relationships. These are two very different approaches to living daily life. Schools then are one of the only places where
students can learn the hidden rules of the middle class which will help them to be successful in school and at work. In order to help students be successful then, schools must understand the hidden rules of those in poverty and then help them learn and operate within those of the middle class.

Through her research, Payne (2005) found that there are four reasons people are able to leave poverty.

1. A goal or vision of something they want to be or have.
2. A situation that is so painful that anything would be better.
3. Someone who shows them a different way.
4. A specific talent or ability (e.g., athletics or musical) provides them an opportunity (p. 61).

Schools then, need to find a way to tap into one or more of these reasons if they are going to help their students be successful.

While the hidden rules may address specific behaviors within a certain socioeconomic class of people, there are certain language structures that accompany those rules. According to Payne (2005), “To better understand poverty, one must understand three aspects of language: registers of language, discourse patterns, and story structure” (p. 27). While there are several registers of language, the important one for this discussion is the formal register, since this is the one used in schools and the workplace. In Payne’s (2005) research, she reported that Dr. Marcia Montano-Harmon (1991) found that “the majority of minority students and poor students do not have access to formal register at home.” Montano-Harmon also found that these same “students
cannot use formal register. The problem is that all the state tests – SAT, ACT, etc. – are in formal register” (Payne, p. 28). McGee’s (2003) study on the high-poverty high-performing schools noted a similar issue. “Impoverished students are more likely than their classmates to enter school linguistically disadvantaged, because they do not have experiences that will promote literacy and reading readiness” (p. 109). Klein and Knitzer (2007) agreed. They found that the better educated parents are, the more words a child knows from an early age. For example, a third grade, middle-income student with well-educated parents knows about 12,000 words while a low-income counterpart with undereducated parents knows about 4,000 words, approximately one-third that of the other student. Certainly, language and literacy skills are critical to school success (p. 2). Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997) reported that “The poorer children scored between 6 and 13 points lower on various standardized tests of IQ, verbal ability, and achievement. A 6 to 13 point difference might mean, for example, the difference between being placed in a special education class or not” (p. 61). Klein and Knitzer found that before entering kindergarten, the average cognitive scores of preschool-age children in the highest socioeconomic group are 60% above the average scores of children in the lowest socioeconomic group (p. 2). The achievement gap between socioeconomic classes then, begins at an early age.

Payne (2005) also emphasizes the importance of developing relationships to help students be successful. One of the routes out of poverty that she identified is that someone shows the students a better way. Developing positive relationships with these students is critical to their success. Payne states that to “honor students as human beings
worthy of respect and care is to establish a relationship that will provide for enhanced learning” (p. 111). Administrators and teachers then must see the development of these relationships as a high priority in the school. They become the ones that will demonstrate a new way for students to live and thus be successful in school and at work.

**Characteristics of High-Poverty Schools**

**Illinois School Funding and Its Impact on Student Achievement**

There are significant differences in the educational opportunities that are available to low-income students as opposed to their above-low-income peers. Differences in the certified staff and financial resources to fund programming show disparity between low-income and above low-income schools.

In Illinois, school funding reform is being called for by many throughout the state in order to equalize the educational opportunities for all students. Mortire, Mancini, and Kaslow (2008) found that the system for funding public education is creating significant inadequacies. In fact, Illinois is currently ranked 49th out of 50 states in the portion of education funded by public money. The majority of income used by school districts to fund schools comes from local property tax and so property-poor communities are significantly underfunded, “resulting in the children who live in those areas receiving inadequate education” (Mortire et al., p. 5). Illinois’ contribution to school revenue is just below 40% of the districts’ budgets with the federal government adding in approximately 10%. This means that approximately 50% of school funding comes from local sources such as property tax (Fritts, 2004, p. 1).
State funding of Illinois public schools comes in the form of general state aid (GSA). The GSA formula attempts to ensure that all students have access to an education at a basic foundation level. “The foundation level represents an amount of dollars that the state legislature believes should be available to educate each child” (Fritts, 2004, p. 25). This foundation level is funded from both state revenues and local property taxes. Illinois then places school districts into one of three distinct categories to determine funding based on the districts’ available local property wealth (Fritts, p. 25). A Flat Grant school district has the greatest amount of available local property wealth (Mortire et al., 2008, p. 5). Since the majority of funding for schools comes from this local property wealth, the schools are well-funded in these districts and they receive little GSA. The second category includes schools that fall below the flat grant districts in terms of local property wealth. If local resources can cover 93% - 175% of the foundation level set by the state, these districts are categorized as alternate formula districts. They receive some GSA but still rely a great deal on local property tax to fund the district (Fritts, p. 26). The districts that have the least amount of available property wealth are categorized as Foundation Formula districts. These districts have local property wealth that ranges from very low to just above average. 81% of school districts in Illinois fall into this category (Mortire et al., p. 6). This is important because Mortire et al. found that as spending levels in instructional expenses increase, so, too, did student performance. The Flat Grant and Alternative Formula districts have more funds available to spend on instructional expenses such as the ability to attract certified staff with higher salaries and smaller class sizes since they can afford more staff members. On average Flat Grant
districts spent $4,186 more in total per pupil spending than Foundation Formula districts. Of that, $2,324 was spent directly on instructional expenses (p. 11). How does that translate into student achievement? From the 2006-2007 administration of the Illinois School Achievement Tests (ISAT), achievement gaps are evident between Flat Grant and Foundation Formula Districts. Table 4 provides information about student achievement on ISAT disaggregated by the type of state funding the district receives and by grade level.

Table 4

*ISAT Student Achievement by Grade Level and District’s State Funding Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Type of District</th>
<th>Reading: % Meeting or Exceeding State Standards</th>
<th>Difference Between Flat Grant and Foundation Formula</th>
<th>Math: % Meeting or Exceeding State Standards</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Flat Grant</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>+11%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>+7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foundation Formula</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td></td>
<td>89%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Flat Grant</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>+11%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>+9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foundation Formula</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td></td>
<td>83%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Flat Grant</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>+10%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>+10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foundation Formula</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td></td>
<td>80%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Data from Mortire et al. (2008), Money Matters: How the Illinois School Funding System Creates Significant Educational Inequities that Impact Most Students in the State, Center for Tax and Budget Accountability.*

There is no significant change in the achievement gap between the higher poverty schools and the lower poverty schools across the grade levels. These achievement discrepancies also exist at the secondary level as measured on the Prairie State Achievement Exam.
(PSAE). Table 5 provides information on student achievement on the PSAE
disaggregated by the level of state funding the district receives.

Table 5

*PSAE Student Achievement by Grade Level and District’s State Funding Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level 11</th>
<th>Reading Average Score</th>
<th>Math Average Score</th>
<th>Science Average Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flat Grant</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation Formula</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Data from Mortire et al. (2008), Money Matters: How the Illinois School Funding System Creates Significant Educational Inequities that Impact Most Students in the State, Center for Tax and Budget Accountability.

Further, in the lowest poverty districts, 63.7% of students were meeting or exceeding state standards in 2006 while only 26.1% of students in the highest poverty districts were achieving at the same level (Mortire et al., 2008, p. 10). Harris (2007) reported that only 1% of high-poverty schools are consistently in the top third of academic achievement. Further, “a low-poverty, low-minority school is 89 times more likely to be in the state’s top third than a high-poverty, high-minority school” (p. 369).

While there are many variables that impact student achievement, the quality of the classroom teacher is certainly among them. Education level and commitment to student success both have an effect on student achievement. According to Klein and Knitzer (2007), children make the most achievement gains when they are provided an educational experience which is research-based and teachers are supported by professional development and mentoring programs (p. 3). During the 2006-2007 school year, 62.98% of teachers in Flat Grant districts while 37.27% of teachers in Foundation Formula districts held a Masters Degree. There is also a significant difference in salaries between
schools in these two categories. Teacher salaries in Flat Grant districts were, on average, $18,000 more per year than their counterparts in Foundation Formula districts (Mortire et al., 2008, p. 9). One way for a school district to attract the best teachers is to have a competitive salary. Teachers with advanced degrees who also have years of classroom teaching experience can command higher salaries. Foundation Formula districts simply do not have adequate funding to use salary as an incentive to attract teachers who hold advanced degrees or who have extended classroom experience. Reviewing student achievement as measured on standardized tests such as ISAT and PSAE, teachers’ educational attainment and teachers’ salaries, gives a fuller picture of the conditions of low-income schools.

The issue of teacher quality was one of several topics explored at the conference on high-poverty schools in America held in October, 2006 at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. According to Machtinger (2007), “high-poverty schools have significantly fewer highly qualified teachers and lose them at a greater rate over time” (p. 3). In fact, “an African-American 7th grader in North Carolina has a 50% greater chance of being taught by an inexperienced teacher” and also have more teachers who are not licensed in the subjects they teach (p. 3). Ultimately, many of the issues facing these schools come down to available resources. Simply, there is inequity in the system when it comes to education funding. Not only does this impact teacher quality, Machtinger also notes that it impacts principal quality, the school’s physical plant, teaching resources, and the availability of student support staff such as social workers and/or
guidance counselors (p. 3). Students in high-poverty schools do not have access to the same resources that low-poverty schools provide for their students.

It is not enough simply to identify the challenges facing these high-poverty schools. Instead, it is important to look at what it will take to bridge the achievement gap so that student achievement is the same no matter what the socioeconomic level is. Klein and Knitzer (2007) have made several recommendations for strategies which will help bring high-poverty schools’ student achievement on par with their low-poverty counterparts. First, schools need an “intentional curriculum.” They define an intentional curriculum as one that is content-driven, is research-based, has an emphasis on active student engagement, gives attention to social and regulatory skills, is responsive to cultural diversity, is directive without using rote memorization or endless skill drills, is fun, and promotes positive peer and teacher interactions. Klein and Knitzer also believe that “children make academic gains when they have teachers that encourage communication and reasoning, are sensitive to their interactions with children, and construct an atmosphere of respect, encouragement and enthusiasm for learning” (p. 3).

Machtinger (2007) agrees that students in HP HP schools need access to a rigorous curriculum. “A key strategy for implementing a successful rigorous curriculum includes the cultural responsiveness to recognize and nurture student strengths, not just understanding them through the lens of the middle class white norm” (p. 4). This does not mean that high-poverty schools are going to replicate the curriculum at the middle class school. Instead, a curriculum needs to be developed which meets the needs of the particular students in a particular location.
High-Poverty High Performing Schools and Leadership

Golden Spike Schools

While studying high-poverty high-performing schools in Illinois, Dr. Max McGee noted several key points. First, McGee (2003) noted that the achievement gap between high-poverty and low-poverty students is not about students who are failing but rather about a school system that is not meeting the unique needs of these students. The system, therefore, is failing the students (p. 101). Second, McGee noted that, as the educational system stands now, it “is perpetuating an underclass of citizens and creating a need for expensive and extensive remedial programs in upper grades and community colleges” (p. 118). If these statements are true, then the Golden Spike Schools must be doing something differently to overcome these institutional inadequacies.

McGee (2003) reported that in a study conducted on HP HP schools in Wisconsin by the North Central Regional Education Laboratory (NCREL), several common characteristics were identified in the findings. These characteristics were categorized as: leadership, professional development programs, curriculum and instruction, parent and community involvement and the structure and organization of the school and/or district (p. 107). Similarly after McGee completed his research, he identified three commonalities among the HP HP schools he studied. McGee reported that these schools shared:

1. Leadership that established a culture of high expectations.
2. An emphasis on early literacy and academic learning time during and beyond the school day.
3. School-wide use of data and parental involvement (p. 110).
In his study on HP HP schools, Elmore (2006) found that in HP HP schools, “school leaders had clearly articulated expectations for students’ learning, coupled with a sense of urgency about improvement; they adopted challenging curricula and invested heavily in professional development” (p. 44). He also found that school leaders expected that classrooms would be open to teacher colleagues, administrators, and outside observers to analyze current practice. Elmore also found that the teachers in these schools approached their work with an “internalized responsibility for students’ learning,” critically examining their practice and were willing to try new approaches when current methods were not successful (p. 44).

**90/90/90 Schools**

The Center for Performance Assessment conducted a study in the Milwaukee Public Schools using test data from 1995-1998. Reeves (2004) published his study on these 90/90/90 schools. Comprising both elementary and secondary schools, the 90/90/90 schools shared the following characteristics:

1. More than 90% of the students were eligible for the federal free and reduced lunch program.
2. More than 90% of the students were from ethnic minorities.
3. More than 90% of the students met or achieved high academic standards according to independently conducted tests of academic achievement (p. 185-186).

While the study did not focus on the leadership in these schools, it did reveal that these schools shared other commonalities. These schools shared a focus on academic
achievement with a particular emphasis on the improvement of a few areas. Second, these schools made clear curriculum choices. They spent more time on the core subjects of reading, writing and math. Interestingly, the students still showed gains in other areas such as science and social studies even though these were not emphasized in the curriculum. Next, these schools used frequent assessments of student progress and gave students multiple opportunities for improvement. When student performance was less than proficient, it was followed by multiple opportunities to improve performance. These schools placed an emphasis on nonfiction writing. Students were required to provide written responses on performance assessments, giving teachers better diagnostic information about students. Finally, among teachers, there was a collaborative scoring of work. These schools developed common assessment practices and reinforced those through regular exchanges of student work (Reeves, pp. 187-191). Since this study was originally published in 2000, the number of schools designated as 90/90/90 has more than tripled (p. 192).

Reeves (2004) also described the work that was being completed in the Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township near Indianapolis, Indiana. While there were some similarities in the findings, one difference is important to note for the purpose of this study. The principals were identified as having a critical role in the success of these schools. Reeves found that the principal was personally involved in the evaluation of students’ work and met regularly with students and parents to discuss student achievement in specific terms. Principals were also willing to devote time at faculty meetings for collaborative scoring. These leaders encouraged every teacher to
display exemplary students work in a highly visible manner in order to demonstrate to students what excellence looked like in practice (pp. 201-202).

**Palzet’s High-Poverty High-Performing Schools and Social Justice**

Palzet (2006) studied the leadership at the Illinois Spotlight Schools, wanting “to identify the leadership qualities that these principals possess that allow them to enact such profound change within a community” (p. 3). In studying these HP HP schools, Palzet found several themes that the schools had in common. Relationships emerged “as the most important factor in the success of the school” since principals believed that it was important for them to get to know the people they were serving (p. 72). In his study, Palzet found that these principals had an understanding of social justice and had developed their own personal mission of providing an environment where students could succeed (p. 112). In developing positive relationships and committing to student success, principals were able to lead the community in developing a shared mission/vision and goals for the school, focusing the school’s efforts on student success (p. 115). Once this vision/mission was developed, principals then went about developing and/or facilitating programs that promoted academic and social growth (p. 117). Principals in these schools did not limit the possibilities of their students. Instead, each of them set high expectations for themselves, their students, and their teachers as important for school success (p. 119). The last leadership theme Palzet identified was that of the principal’s personal experience. “Personal experiences shaped the way they make decisions and their views on social justice” (p. 72). Each one of these leaders had a special connection
to the community in which they served and cited a mentor who encouraged them to enter administration so that they could make a difference (p. 122).

**The Wallace Foundation Studies**

The Wallace Foundation (2007) conducted a study to answer two questions.

1. What makes an effective leader in a high-needs school?
2. How can we attract, train, retain and support more effective leaders of this kind? (p. 1)

In their findings, the researchers categorized some principals as “transformers.” A transformer is someone who “had an explicit vision of what their school might be like and brought a ‘can do’ attitude to their job...Transformers focused intently on creating a culture in which each child can learn” (p. 2). To achieve this, transformers spent the majority of their day on instructional leadership. These principals prioritized their work in evaluating, coaching and supporting their teachers. They spent time analyzing student achievement data and set goals and allocated resources which would address the areas needing additional attention (pp. 2-4).

**California’s High-Poverty High-Performing Schools**

In their study, Izumi, Coburn and Cox (2002) studied high-poverty high-performing schools in California. Eight schools were included in this study which focused on teaching methods, curriculum, content standards, test scores, teacher professional development, safety, discipline, local decision-making, parent involvement, emergency teacher certification, obstacles to student performance and reasons for success. The researchers found that these schools found their success not in “a unique
miracle-worker principal” but because they adopted research-based, data-driven methods which positively impacted student achievement. The principals played an important role though, in the success. “The principals who head these schools are strong leaders who have a clear vision of what works in the classroom. They also have the humility to put their beliefs to the test (literally) and to base their course of action accordingly” (p. 47).

So, what did that look like in practice? Principals were directly involved in the implementation of specific curricular programs and embraced the need for frequent assessments to discover strengths and weaknesses of both students and teachers (p. 48). These leaders also emphasized the importance of parental involvement in their children’s education and so programs were implemented to increase the home-school connection (p. 49).

The success of these HP HP schools in California was attributed to the following:

1. Use of empirically proven research-based curricula.
2. Use of empirically proven research-based teaching methods.
3. Comprehensive use of the state academic content standards as goals for student learning, guideposts for teaching, and tools for professional development.
4. Use of frequent assessment as a diagnostic tool for identifying student and teacher strengths and weaknesses, and for improving student and teacher performance.
5. Standards-based professional development that emphasizes subject matter.
6. Teacher quality and teacher willingness to use proven curricula and methods.
7. Strong discipline policies that emphasize sanctions and rewards.

8. Increased flexibility to use available funding and reduction in bureaucratic rules (pp. 49-50).

In summary, there are schools that show significant academic success with a high-poverty population. The goal is to learn from these successes to assist other schools with similar populations find ways to achieve similar academic achievement.

Role of the Principal

Now as never before, the public and all the organs of government are insisting that students’ academic performance improve – and fast. The federal government is putting ever-increasing pressure on the states to that end. The states, in turn are busy creating incentives for local boards and superintendents to raise school performance. And the local boards and superintendents are wasting no time in putting as much pressure as they can on principals (Tucker & Codding, 2002, p. 1).

A common theme in the literature today is that the primary role of the principal is that of instructional leader. The importance of overseeing the instructional program was emphasized with No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB established a 12-year timetable for closing the achievement gap among all students, bringing them each to a minimum level of proficiency in core subjects such as Math, English and Social Studies. There are some schools in America who will have little trouble meeting those goals for the majority of their students. There are, however, schools that will need to be transformed to meet this goal and these schools will need excellent leadership to do that. “If two decades of research into school effectiveness have reached any reliable conclusion, it’s that successful schools invariably have dynamic, savvy, and focused leaders – women and
men who are capable of rallying educators, parents, children, and community members to achieve shared goals” (Meyer & Feistritzer, 2003, p. 16).

The role of the principal has already seen significant changes since the beginning of American education. At first, principals were expected to be the teaching experts in their buildings, often being seen as the “head teacher” still responsible for a large class of students as well as the supervision and training of one or more beginning teachers (Hill, 2002, p. 43). For example, “At the beginning of the twentieth century, as Taylorism and modern factory methods of mass production began to permeate the economies of advanced nations, schools became larger and a separation emerged between the role of teacher and school administrator, with the latter focusing on management and administration” (p. 43). There are still many managerial tasks that face principals daily. They manage budgets, physical plants and supervise teachers and staff members (Meyer & Feistritzer, 2003, p. 17). In fact, a typical principal, who has no assistant principal, supervises 30 teachers and 14 staff members. This span of control is six to ten times more than private industry (Tucker & Codding, 2002, p. 2). Kelley and Peterson (2002) summarized the work of principals into a list of basic tasks. Principals set goals and develop plans; build budgets and hire personnel; lead the curriculum and instruction; evaluate staff and assess student learning; organize school improvement efforts and create positive organizational cultures. Effective principals are critical to sustaining high quality schools (pp. 253-255).

The role of the principal has been transformed from “the autocratic or benevolent dictator” to one of “building vision and consensus, developing teacher leadership, and
implementing and sustaining change” (Owings & Kaplan, 2003, p. vii). The managerial tasks remain, though, only adding to the many responsibilities of the position (Meyer & Feistritzer, 2003, p. 17). Currently in the research, there seems to be consensus that principals must both lead and manage and that these are complementary processes, not mutually exclusive (Hill, 2002, p. 59).

Recognizing that “For America to have the great schools it needs, those schools must have great leaders – and so must their school systems” (Meyer & Feistritzer, 2003, p. 5), the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation published a study profiling educational leadership in this country. The work summarized the essential qualities of effective leaders. Energy, a sense of direction, and a determination to succeed that inspires others to perform are identifiable in effective leadership (p. 27).

The Fordham study further identified important attributes for principals. The study defined principal’s leadership as inspiring and directing a team of diverse people and solving institutional problems to ensure students’ learning. Effective principals had a sense of urgency, creating and sustaining a sense of mission for the school, including high expectations for every student (Meyer & Feistritzer, 2003, p. 29). Principals then must bring together many people and to help keep them focused on the organization’s goal, student success. Part of this is leadership and part of this is management. The study agrees that there are some managerial aspects of the position and sees effective management as an important attribute for a principal. Effective principals “insist on operational excellence… and pride themselves on identifying talented staff and organizing them into an effective unit” (p. 28).
Since much of the work that a principal does is with teachers, it is important to understand what teachers expect from their principal. Harris and Lowery (2002) surveyed 123 teachers enrolled in a principal preparation program asking them to reflect on the most effective things that the principal does for students which contribute to a positive school climate. Harris and Lowery identified three themes: respecting students, communicating with students, and supporting students (p. 64). Similarly, LoVette, Holland and McCall (1999), completed a study regarding teachers’ perceptions of principals. From their data, it became clear that teachers respond well when principals use activities that share ownership and responsibility for the school and student success. Teachers were less likely to respond favorably when principals used coercive power (p. 2). Similarly another study reported that teachers wanted to see their principal working with them, in collaboration, exchanging ideas and sharing governance (Uchiyama & Wolf, 2002, p. 81). An important strategy to support teachers and to build a collegial relationship with them requires principals to be present in the classroom, observing lessons and listening to teachers (Keller, 1998).

Principals, of course, have their own view of the position and there have been numerous studies completed looking at the role through the lens of current building administrators. Cawelti (2003), Dubin (2006), and Hill (2002) found that, while the principal is the one who must ultimately assume the responsibility for the school’s effectiveness, the principal coordinates the varying stakeholders in accomplishing the mission. Dubin summarized the complexities of the role of principal as being the person who is “orchestrating the movements of all the players in the school. The principal
makes the decisions that affect people’s lives, directs considerable sums of money, creates a climate that impacts the community, and projects the appropriate philosophy and political vision that propels a school forward” (p. xiii). Hill’s summary is similar, noting that the principal is “the chief architect” overseeing that intended student learning outcomes are being met (p. 62). Hill stated that principals must be able to lead and manage change, motivate and manage people and design and align systems, processes and resources (p. 60). Cawelti affirms this same position. “Great leaders do just two things – they decide what to do, and then they seek support to get things done” (p. 47). Clearly, the principal must involve many in the decision-making process if they are to be successful in achieving the school’s goals.

Another theme which appears repeatedly in the literature is that of shared vision. Assuming all stakeholders wish students to achieve success in the classroom, there is common ground from the very beginning. How that success is achieved is where the principal must begin the work of bringing people together to build a common mission (Hill, 2002, p. 60; Kelley & Peterson, 2002, pp. 247-312). One way that principals build this shared vision is by creating a school culture that promotes and values learning and that sets high, realistic, expectations for all students and teachers (Hill, p. 61; Kelly & Peterson, 247-312; Sobol, 2002, p. 84).

Leading in this way establishes the climate in the organization. Principals make daily decisions about curriculum, school climate, student and staff discipline, communication and programming. “We listened closely (as they) spoke about leading with intentionality and heart as the way to implement standards in their schools”
(Uchiyama & Wolf, 2002, p. 80). Intentionality and heart imply a leadership that goes beyond simply following a set system of procedures or guidelines. Instead, there is something that underlies the leadership that places student success at the center of all that they do.

Focusing on improving student achievement may mean that schools will have to make significant changes in the way the teaching and learning process is implemented and evaluated. Change in any organization can be challenging and schools are no different. In reviewing the role of implementing change at the school building level, Fullan (2003) found that principals are the ones who “cause” school change to come about by bringing together everything needed for school improvement. “Schools must focus on a constellation of quality curriculum, instruction, and assessment of student learning. If they do this, they can have a powerful impact on student learning. In order to do this, they must have or develop the capacity to work together over periods of time, all the while attempting, monitoring, and refining improvements” (p. 33). To achieve this capacity, Fullan identified five mind and action sets that leaders must develop. First, leaders need to develop a sense of moral purpose. Second, leaders must have a solid understanding of the change process. Next, leaders must have the capacity to develop relationships across diverse individuals and groups. Additionally, leaders must be skilled in fostering knowledge creation and sharing. Finally, leaders must have the ability to engage with others in coherence-making amidst multiple innovations (p. 35). Leaders then play a critical role in making necessary changes in the school to meet the needs of all students.
But the complexities of school change and the leadership involved in change’s implementation, is further complicated by the sometimes diverging expectations of the various stakeholders involved in schools. Gantner, Daresh, Dunlap, and Newson (1999) found that in order to achieve and sustain high-quality instruction, the principal must “possess a wide range of leadership capabilities” (p. 2). Gantner et al.’s study revealed that visibility, compassion, trustworthiness, respect, and integrity were all necessary to building positive working relationships in the school and which ultimately, would impact the needed changes to meet the needs of all students (p. 8).

The divergent groups however, see those traits differently. Students want principals who are “sensitive to all students, regardless of race, culture, extracurricular participation, or academic participation” (Gantner et al., 1999, p. 14). Parents want principals who are “strong leaders…who will stand up for what is right, be willing to take ‘the flak’ and be a ‘pillar of strength’ for their school communities” (p. 8). Teachers had still another viewpoint. They wanted principals to address equity within the school, making “an effort to meet the needs of all students” (p. 14). Finally, the study revealed that school board members valued “the technical skills traditionally emphasized in principal preparation programs” (p. 8). This stands in contrast to the expectations of students, parents and teachers who “emphasized relationships over managerial skills, citing effective communication techniques as the avenue principals should use to strengthen bonds between and among groups of people” (p. 8). Principals, then, need to balance these competing interests while leading their schools.
21 Responsibilities of Principals

Marzano, Walters and McNulty (2005) completed a meta-analysis of 69 principal leadership studies covering 2,599 schools. A meta-analysis is “a quantitative technique that is used to integrate and describe the results of a large number of studies” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 86). This meta-analysis related principals’ leadership to student achievement. While this study was not attempting to show any correlation between principal leadership and student achievement, the researchers identified 21 responsibilities which provide some insight into school leadership. These responsibilities include:

1. **Affirmation**: The extent to which the leader recognizes and celebrates school accomplishments and acknowledges failures.

2. **Change Agent**: The leader’s disposition to challenge the status quo.

3. **Contingent Rewards**: The extent to which the school leader recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments.

4. **Communication**: The extent to which the school leader establishes strong lines of communication with and between teachers and students.

5. **Culture**: The extent to which the leader fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation among staff.

6. **Discipline**: Protecting teachers from issues and influence that would distract from their instructional time or focus.

7. **Flexibility**: The extent to which leaders adapt their leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and are comfortable with dissent.

8. **Focus**: The extent to which the leader establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school’s attention.
9. **Ideals/Beliefs**: Possessing and sharing well-defined beliefs about schools, teaching, and learning and demonstrating behaviors that are consistent with those beliefs.

10. **Input**: The extent to which the school leader involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies.

11. **Intellectual Stimulation**: The extent to which the school leader ensures that faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices regarding effective schooling and makes discussions of those a regular aspect of school culture.

12. **Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment**: The extent to which the principal is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction and assessment in the classroom.

13. **Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment**: The extent to which the leader is aware of best practices in these areas.

14. **Monitoring/Evaluating**: The extent to which the leader monitors the effectiveness of school practices in terms of their impact on student achievement.

15. **Optimizer**: The extent to which the leader inspires others and is the driving force when implementing a challenging innovation.

16. **Order**: The extent to which the leader established a set of standard operating procedures.

17. **Outreach**: The extent to which the leader is an advocate and a spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders.

18. **Relationships**: The extent to which the school leader demonstrates an awareness of the personal lives of teachers and staff.

19. **Resources**: The extent to which the leader provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for success in the classroom.

20. **Situational Awareness**: Addresses leader’s awareness of the details and undercurrents regarding the functioning of the schools and their use of this information to address current and potential problems.
21. **Visibility**: The extent to which the school leader has contact and interacts with teachers, students, and parents (Marzano et al., 2005, pp. 41-61).

While these responsibilities do not guarantee an improvement in student achievement, these responsibilities were demonstrated by school leaders in schools that realized improvements.

**Sergiovanni’s Sources of Authority in Schools**

**Sergiovanni’s Leadership**

Sergiovanni (1992) developed his theory about leadership toward a dimension that goes beyond a specific person and towards the ideas to which the organization is committed. This is a shift from what he felt was an overemphasis on style and decision-making, individual performance and organizational effectiveness. “First, we have come to view leadership as behavior rather than action, as something psychological rather than spiritual, as having to do with persons rather than ideas” (p. 3). In search of the right way to lead, theories abound about which style is better, “warm or cold, autocratic or democratic, task or relationship, directive or participatory” (p. 2). This has all led to overemphasis on doing things right as opposed to doing the right thing (p. 4).

Sergiovanni believes that leadership needs to be placed “in service to ideas, and to others who also seek to serve these ideas” and in so doing, the leadership style becomes unimportant (pp. 128-129).

Identifying four components of leadership, Sergiovanni (2000) believes each needs to be present in order to accomplish the mission of the organization. These four pillars are: leaders, followers, ideas, and action. Organizations need leaders. Leaders
need followers. Both leaders and followers commit to ideas. The commitment to the ideas brings about an action that brings those ideas to life. Leadership that does not result in action is incomplete (p. 168).

To understand the roles of leader and follower, it is important to understand what Sergiovanni (1992) believes about what drives human beings to act. Men and women are driven to act not only by self-interest but also by our emotions, values, and beliefs, and by the social bonds that emerge from our identification with and membership in various groups. It is not that material rewards are unimportant, or that our psychological needs can be ignored; it is only that neither factor is enough to explain fully what drives us (p. 57). In short, human beings are complex and function and respond on many levels.

Work then, is not just about the financial rewards that it offers. Instead, work has the potential for providing intrinsic rewards which enrich, challenge and help the individual to grow. The leader then, needs to find ways to meet the various needs of those he is attempting to lead. Sergiovanni holds that leaders can motivate their followers extrinsically, intrinsically or through a sense of duty or obligation. There are three ideas that flow from this. First, in the workplace, what gets rewarded gets done. Second, what is rewarding gets done. Finally, what is good gets done (pp. 26-27).

People cannot lead without others who will follow. According to Sergiovanni (1992), the leader works with others to get them to do what the leader wants them to do and in some cases, is able to get them to enjoy doing it (p. 43). The second part of that is the intrinsic reward that can help move the organization to be value-centered. He holds that there is a need for leadership that can compel people to respond on this intrinsic level
(p. 9). Tapping into the intrinsic though, requires the leader to base her practice on compelling ideas, and not the leader’s ideas but the purposes of the organization. “One of the great secrets of leadership is that before one can command the respect and followership of others, she or he must demonstrate devotion to the organization’s purposes and commitment to those in the organization who work day by day on the ordinary tasks that are necessary for those purposes to be realized” (Sergiovanni, 1991, p. 334). Whereas subordinates simply complete a task because they are required to do so, followers enter into the task because they are committed to the shared purposes of the organization. Effective leaders see their authority as a source of energy for engaging others in the task of achieving shared goals and purposes (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 133).

Once the organization moves toward a commitment to acting on their shared values, the organization is transformed into a covenental community (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 129). “A covenental community is a group of people who share religious or ethical beliefs, feel a strong sense of place, and think that the group is more important than the individual” (pp. 102-103). The role of the leader in this covenental community then, is to induce clarity, consensus and commitment to the community’s basic purposes. When the leader’s actions are constantly moving in this direction they are practicing purposing which helps restore meaning to the actions of the community (pp. 72-73).

In analyzing leadership, Sergiovanni (1992) described five sources of authority as legitimate expressions of leadership, understanding that different situations call for different kinds of leadership. In transforming organizations today, Sergiovanni believes that the professional and moral authorities ought to be the primary sources of authority by
which principals lead so that the school can move from an organization to a community and achieve the desired student success.

Applying Sergiovanni’s (1992) sources of authority to the role of school leader is important for this discussion.

**Bureaucratic Authority**

According to Sergiovanni (1992), “Bureaucratic authority exists in the form of mandates, rules, regulations, job descriptions, and expectations. When we base our leadership practice on bureaucratic authority, teachers respond appropriately or face the consequences” (p. 30). In short, there is a right way and a wrong way to do things in the school. For those who do things the right way, or the way the leader has mandated, there are rewards such as tenure or recognition among peers. For those who do things the wrong way, or not in alignment with the mandates, there are punishments such as disciplinary actions up to and including termination. Teachers should do what the leader says simply because of the position of power the leader holds. This relies on an extrinsic motivation for those being led. Table 6 below describes what this authority looks like in practice.
Table 6

**Bureaucratic Authority for Leadership/Supervisory Policy and Practice**

| Bureaucratic Authority | • Hierarchy  
|                        | • Rules and Regulations  
|                        | • Mandates  
|                        | • Role Expectation  
|                        | • Teachers comply or face consequences  

| Assumptions When Use of This Source is Primary | • Teachers are subordinates in a hierarchically arranged system.  
|                                               | • Supervisors are trustworthy, but subordinates are not.  
|                                               | • Goals and interests of teachers and supervisors are not the same, and supervisors must be watchful.  
|                                               | • Hierarchy equals expertise, and so supervisors know more than teachers do.  
|                                               | • External accountability works best.  

| Leadership/Supervisory Strategy | • “Expect and inspect” is the overarching rule.  
|                                  | • Rely on predetermined standards, to which teachers must measure up.  
|                                  | • Identify their needs and “inservice” them.  
|                                  | • Directly supervise and closely monitor the work of teachers, to ensure compliance.  
|                                  | • Figure out how to motivate them and get them to change.  

| Consequences | • With proper monitoring, teachers respond as technicians, executing predetermined scripts, and their performance is narrowed.  

**Source**: Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 36.

**Psychological Authority**

“Psychological authority is expressed in the form of motivational technology and human relations skills. When we base our leadership practice on psychological authority, teachers are supposed to respond to our personality, and to the pleasant environment that we provide by behaving appropriately and collecting the rewards we make available” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 30). Leaders who rely on psychological authority then rely on their...
own personality to build relationships with faculty members and then use that relationship as a way to get teachers to do what the leader wants them to do. Teachers should do what the leader says simply because they like the leader and know that if the leader likes them and sees them as cooperative, there will be rewards that follow. This authority also relies on an extrinsic motivation for those being led. Table 7 describes what this theory looks like in practice.

**Technical-Rational Authority**

“Technical-rational authority exists in the form of evidence derived from logic and scientific research. When we base our leadership practice on such authority we expect teachers to respond in light of what is considered to be true” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 31). Leaders who lead in this way may view themselves as the experts in the current research on best teacher practice or in student performance data analysis. Teachers should do what the leader says because they know what the research and data says is the right thing to do. This style of leadership also relies on an extrinsic motivation for those being led. Table 8 describes what this authority looks like in practice.
### Psychological Authority for Leadership/Supervisory Policy and Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological Authority</th>
<th>Assumptions When Use of This Source is Primary</th>
<th>Leadership/Supervisory Strategy</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| • Motivational technology  
• Interpersonal skills  
• Human relations  
• Leadership  
• Teachers will want to comply because of the congenial climate and the rewards. | • The goals and interests of teachers and supervisors are not the same but can be bartered so that each side gets what it wants.  
• Teachers have needs, and if they are met at work, the work gets done as required.  
• Congenial relationships and a harmonious interpersonal climate make teachers content, easier to work with, and more apt to cooperate.  
• Supervisors must be experts in reading needs and in other people-handling skills, to barter successfully for compliance and increases in performance. | • Develop a school climate characterized by high congeniality among teachers and between teachers and supervisors.  
• “Expect and reward.”  
• “What gets rewarded gets done.”  
• Use psychological authority in combination with bureaucratic and technical-rational authority. | • Teachers respond as required when rewards are available, but not otherwise; their involvement is calculated and performance is narrowed. |

*Source: Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 36.*
Table 8

**Technical-Rational Authority Leadership/Supervisory Policy and Practice**

| Technical-Rational Authority | • Evidence defined by logic and scientific research.  
|                             | • Teachers are required to comply in light of what is considered to be the truth.  
| Assumptions When Use of This Source is Primary | • Supervision and teaching are applied sciences.  
|                                                 | • Knowledge of research is privileged.  
|                                                 | • Scientific knowledge is superordinate to practice.  
|                                                 | • Teachers are skilled technicians.  
|                                                 | • Values, preferences, and beliefs do not count but facts and objective evidence do.  
| Leadership/Supervisory Strategy | • Use research to identify best practice  
|                                  | • Standardize the work of teaching, to reflect the best way.  
|                                  | • “Inservice” teachers in the best way.  
|                                  | • Monitor the process to ensure compliance.  
|                                  | • Figure out ways to motivate them and get them to change.  
| Consequences | • With proper monitoring, teachers respond as technicians, executing predetermined steps; performance is narrowed.  

Source: Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 36.

**Professional Authority**

Moving to an intrinsic motivation for those being led is professional authority. Professional authority is seen in the seasoned craft knowledge and personal expertise of each teacher. “When leadership practice is based on professional authority, teachers can be expected to respond in common socialization, accepted tenets of practice, and internalized expertise” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 31). Professional authority recognizes that teachers’ classroom experiences and expertise are valuable to the overall organization.
and that, instead of relying on rules or personality leaders can rely on accepted standards of practice which lead to student success. Table 9 below describes what this authority looks like in practice.

Table 9

*Professional Authority Leadership/Supervisory Policy and Practice*

| Professional Authority | • Informed craft knowledge and personal expertise  
|                       | • Teachers respond in light of common socialization, professional values, accepted tenets of practice, and internalized expertise. |
| Assumptions When Use of This Source is Primary | • Situations of practice are idiosyncratic, and no one best way exists.  
|                                                   | • Scientific knowledge and professional knowledge are different, with professional knowledge created in use as teachers practice.  
|                                                   | • The purpose of scientific knowledge is to inform, not prescribe practice.  
|                                                   | • Authority cannot be external but comes from the context itself and from within the teacher.  
|                                                   | • Authority from context comes from training and experience.  
|                                                   | • Authority from within comes from socialization and internalized values. |
| Leadership/Supervisory Strategy | • Promote a dialogue among teachers that explicitly states professional values and accepted tenets of practice.  
|                                                   | • Translate them into professional standards.  
|                                                   | • Give teachers as much discretion as they want and need.  
|                                                   | • Require teachers to hold one another accountable for meeting practice standards.  
|                                                   | • Make assistance, support, and professional development opportunities available. |
| Consequences | • Teachers respond to professional norms; their practice becomes collective, they require little monitoring, and their performance is expansive. |

*Source:* Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 38
Moral Authority

The final source of authority, also with an intrinsic motivation underlying it, is moral authority. Moral authority is seen as the obligations and duties derived from widely shared values, ideas, and ideals. “When leadership practice is based on moral authority, teachers can be expected to respond to shared commitments and felt interdependence” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 31). In this case, the school community has developed a shared vision of what they are trying to accomplish and the leaders know that everyone involved in student learning is committed to realizing that vision. Teachers in this instance do not need to be “monitored” to see if they are doing things the right way. Instead, they will simply do the right things for the right reasons. Sergiovanni believes that the moral dimension of leadership needs to be moved to the center of all the leader does. If the leader does this successfully, then the organization will transform into a community of people committed to shared values and people’s actions will be in concert with the shared values. Table 10 below describes what this authority looks like in practice.
### Table 10

**Moral Authority Leadership/Supervisory Policy and Practice**

| Moral Authority                                                                 | • Felt obligation and duties derived from widely shared community values, ideas, and ideals  
|                                                                              | • Teachers respond to shared commitment and felt interdependence.  
| Assumptions When Use of This Source is Primary                  | • Schools are professional learning communities. 
|                                                                              | • Communities are defined by their centers of shared values, beliefs, and commitments. 
|                                                                              | • In communities, what is considered right and good is as important as what works and what is effective; people are motivated as much by emotion and beliefs as by self-interest; and collegiality is a professional virtue. 
| Leadership/Supervisory Strategy                                      | • Identify and make explicit the values and beliefs that define the center of the school as a community. 
|                                                                              | • Translate them into informal norms that govern behavior. 
|                                                                              | • Promote collegiality as internally felt and morally driven interdependence. 
|                                                                              | • Rely on the ability of the community members to respond to duties and obligations. 
|                                                                              | • Rely on the community’s informal norms to enforce professional and community values. 
| Consequences                                                           | • Teachers respond to community values for moral reasons; their practice becomes collective, and their performance is expansive and sustained. 

*Source: Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 39.*

Understanding these sources of authority does not prescribe the leader’s expected behavior. “Leadership is a personal thing. It comprises three important dimensions – one’s heart, head, and hand” (Sergiovanni, 1991, p. 321). The first dimension, the heart, refers to the leader’s beliefs, values and dreams and their commitment to those. The head
of leadership refers to the theories of practice that the leader has developed through experience and the ability to reflect on those experiences through the lens of those theories. Finally, the hand of leadership indicates the leader’s actions, decisions, and management behaviors that become organizational programs, policies, and procedures (p. 321). When all three of these come together, purposing becomes possible. “When hope, faith, and action are joined, a covenant of obligations emerges raising the stakes from management commitment to moral commitments” (p. 116).

In a school setting, moral leadership is about placing the core values of the school community at the center of all the community does without giving thought to individual self-interest. This is one of the challenges of moral leadership in schools as people are engaged in the decision-making process (Sergiovanni, 1991, p. 331). In fact, when two choices are in conflict, the principal must choose the one that is good and effective for their schools not what is in the best interest of a single individual (p. 326).

In schools…instead of worrying constantly about setting the direction and then engaging teachers and others in a successful march (often known as planning, organizing, leading, motivating, and controlling) the “leader” can focus more on removing obstacles, providing material and emotional support, taking care of the management details that make any journey easier, sharing in the comradeship of the march and in the celebration when the journey is completed, and identifying a new, worthwhile destination for the next march (Sergiovanni, 1992, pp. 43-44)
In this situation then, the direction is already set, and the principal does everything she can to make reaching the destination possible.

When the leader and followers are unified around shared values, the traditional school administrative hierarchy is transformed. Instead of superintendents and principals being at the top and teachers and students at the bottom, the ideas, values and commitments are the focus of the school community (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 71). In this case, the principal’s job is to protect those values and to make sure that they are at the forefront of all decision-making around programs, instruction and relationships. In this way, people begin to respond out of their sense of duty and obligation and not from the legalistic viewpoint (Sergiovanni, 1991, p. 328). Leadership then is a responsibility and so its purpose is not to benefit the person filling the leadership position but rather to benefit the school and all those connected to it (p. 324).

Simplifying school leadership into two tasks, Sergiovanni (1992) holds that leadership is about two things. First, the leader needs “to figure out what needs to be done to make the school work” and “to figure out how to get people to do those things” (p. 69). What is the school’s job? Sergiovanni (1991) believed that a school’s job “is to transform its students not only by providing them with knowledge and skills but by building character and virtue” (p. 323). This basic premise underlies his beliefs about the role of the principal in a school. Since character and virtue are part of a school’s purpose, Sergiovanni sees the principal as holding the responsibility to put those values at the forefront and to make sure they are being lived in the school community (p. 328).
There are four essential roles and tasks for the principal according to Sergiovanni (1991).

1. Planning: Principals set goals and objectives and the strategies to achieve them.
2. Organizing: Principals bring resources together to accomplish goals.
3. Leading: Principals guide and supervise subordinates.

Sergiovanni realized that principals hold a great deal of power in the school setting because of the access to information they have as well as the positional power they hold. Because of this uneven balance of power, there is a moral responsibility that comes with it (p. 324). The principal must then, keep their own self-interests in check, while they work toward fulfilling the vision of the school community. When the principal functions at this level, they are working through their moral authority.

**ISSLC: State Standards for Principals**

In 1996, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) published the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISSLC) Standards for School Leaders. Bringing together representatives from states and professional associations and partnering with the National Policy Board for Educational Administration, guidelines for excellence in school leadership were established. Since their publication over ten years ago, education has undergone significant changes in policy and practice and so the ISSLC standards were updated to reflect those changes. “At the policy level, school
performance measures have been codified in state and federal law to hold schools increasingly accountable for raising student achievement among students from all population subgroups” (CCSSO, 2008, p. 3). While the revisions maintain the spirit of the original standards, they now reflect the current reality in American education. The six standards provide direction for states as they “set expectations for licensure, guide improvements in administrator preparation programs at colleges and universities, and influence the process for screening and hiring leaders” (CCSSO, 2008, p. 4).

As the standards were revised, there were several principles which guided the work of the committee. First, the standards needed to reflect student learning as the center of all that schools do. Next, the standards needed to acknowledge that the role of the school leader is changing. Improving the quality of the profession was another guiding principle. The standards needed to inform performance-based systems of assessment and evaluation for school leaders. The standards needed to demonstrate integration and coherence and finally, understanding that learning is a complex issue needing support from all stakeholders in the teaching and learning process, the standards needed to advance access, opportunity, and empowerment for all members of the school community (CCSSO, 2008, p. 8).

The first standard addresses the need for the school leader to develop a shared vision of learning. “An educational leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders” (CCSSO, 2008, p. 14). This standard requires that the school leader work cooperatively with board members,
teachers, staff, parents, and students to develop a shared mission and strategies for achieving that mission. The leader needs to focus all efforts on raising student achievement.

The second standard focuses on the actual teaching and learning process. “An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth” (CCSSO, 2008, p. 14). Leaders implementing this standard ensure a school environment which meets the needs of the individual students. As necessary, school leaders review and revise curriculum, instructional strategies, professional development opportunities for teachers and processes in the building to be sure they are supportive of student achievement.

The third standard is, “An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment” (CCSSO, 2008, p. 14). For many years, the term “instructional leader” seemed to be the dominant role that principals were to assume for the majority of their day. Realistically though, there are managerial areas that demand the principal’s attention which cannot be ignored. Monitoring budgets, supervising the maintenance of the school’s physical plant, and adhering to state laws around emergency drills may appear to be the furthest point from student achievement, but they are necessary to ensure that students are safe and that teachers have the necessary resources to provide appropriate learning opportunities.
“An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs and mobilizing community resources” is the fourth standard (CCSSO, 2008, p. 15). This standard understands that education is influenced by many factors outside of the school building. An administrator who is not in touch with the local community in which the students reside will not be able to connect the work in the school with the “real world” to which the students return each evening.

The next standard is, “An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner” (CCSSO, 2008, p. 15). An administrator acting within this standard demonstrates a commitment to each child in the building. Each child is provided the support they need to grow and learn. The building leader models the behaviors that she would like to see in her faculty, her staff and her students. The leader also understands the moral and legal ramifications of each decision.

Finally, the sixth standard is, “An educational leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context” (CCSSO, 2008, p. 15). According to this standard, the building leader has a responsibility to use his influence to impact decisions that affect student learning whether that is at the district level all the way through the federal level.

The role of the principal then is defined in numerous ways by numerous sources. Regardless of the theory which underlies it, leadership is a core component of this role. It is important then to review various leadership theories in order to put this into its proper context.
Leadership Theory

Perhaps Robert Ricken (2007) put it best when he wrote, “The qualities used to describe an excellent leader are akin to those of a near-perfect human being” (p. 1). There is a long history of literature analyzing what that excellent leader would look like in all types of organizations. The themes in the literature range from one end which emphasizes management to the other end which emphasizes leadership. Management places a heavy emphasis on monitoring the workforce to ensure that they are doing things the right way. Leadership places more of an emphasis on inspiring the workforce to do the right things for the right reasons. In this section, several leadership theories will be discussed including: Frederick Taylor’s (1947) scientific management, Amitai Etzioni’s (1964) human relations approach, Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal’s (2003) four frames of leadership, and Michael Maccoby’s (2007) theories on the leaders that organizations need. Also included in this discussion are Jim Collin’s (2001) theories on moving organizations from good to great, Warren Bennis’ (2003) theories on developing leadership capabilities, and James Kouzes and Barry Posner’s (2007) leadership theories.

Frederick Taylor’s Scientific Management

Frederick Taylor is one who saw the role of the person in charge as a manager. He defined management “as knowing exactly what you want men to do, and then seeing that they do it in the best and cheapest way” (Taylor, 1947, p. 21). Taylor’s theory came to be known as Scientific Management since he relied on a scientific study of the methods and time it took to complete various tasks in a factory. Taylor believed that, “in each element of each trade there is always one method and one implement that is quicker
and better than any of the rest” (p. 25). He even went so far as to state that the day’s work was to be planned at least one day in advance and that each worker should receive written instructions on how to complete their work and the amount of time it would take to complete each task (p. 39). According to Taylor, the result of this scientific approach to management would be that individuals would reach their highest state of efficiency and that companies would produce their highest possible profit (p. 11).

Taylor (1947) believed that there was a natural tendency in a worker to be lazy and that the only motivator for those in the workforce were the wages that they earned. Further, Taylor believed that employers only wanted to keep labor costs low in the process so that they could increase profits (p. 22). Although he believed that these forces complemented each other and would lead to the worker growing happier and more prosperous and the organization realizing its maximum prosperity, approaching the workplace from this angle sets up a confrontational relationship from the very beginning.

**Amitai Etzioni and a Human Relations Approach**

In 1964, Amitai Etzioni published his theory on leadership, *Modern Organizations* which took its lead from the Human Relations approach. The Human Relations approach held it was “necessary to relate work and the organizational structure to the social needs of the employees” (p. 39). Etzioni held that it was important for workers to feel satisfied in their work and in that satisfaction would begin to work harder and better (p. 2). He differed from Taylor in that, while Taylor believed that workers were motivated by economic reward for their work, Etzioni believed that non-economic rewards and sanctions affected the behavior of the workers. He held that social norms set
productivity levels because workers often functioned as a group and not as individuals. Leaders then, were to set and enforce those norms. He stressed the importance of communication between management and the workers and that decision-making should be participatory and demonstrate the virtues of democracy (pp. 34-38). While the goal of Scientific Management was to maximize the productivity and profitability of both the employee and the organization, Etzioni believed that there needed to be a balance between the organization’s goals and the workers’ needs. In fact, the organization’s goals were to be established by everyone within the organization and not established by any one person, such as the head of the organization (pp. 6, 40).

**Bolman and Deal’s Four Frames of Leadership**

Bolman and Deal (2003) believed that the most common strategy for improving organizations is to improve management but to improve organizations, organizations need to be understood. Bolman and Deal assert several basic assumptions about organizations. First, organizations can frustrate and exploit people. Second, Bolman and Deal stated that organizations infuse work with so little meaning that work has little value beyond providing compensation (p. 5). Additionally, Bolman and Deal noted several properties of organizations.

1. Organizations are complex. They are populated by people whose behavior is notoriously hard to understand and predict.
2. Organizations are surprising. What you expect is often dramatically different than what happens.
3. Organizations are deceptive. They defy expectations and then camouflage surprises.

4. Organizations are ambiguous. The sum of complexity, unpredictability, and deception is rampant ambiguity (pp. 25-26).

Bolman and Deal stated that, “The first step in managerial wisdom and artistry is to understand the situation at hand” (p. 24). In fact, when organizations face problems, it is common to blame people, the bureaucracy of the organization, or to blame a thirst for power as the main causes. This actually leads to a false sense of clarity and optimism (p. 35-39). Instead of falling back on these models for problem-solving, Bolman and Deal believe that leaders need multiple perspectives to deal with the complex organizations they are leading. “We need a revolution in how we think about leadership and how we develop leaders” (p. 174). In response, they consolidated major schools of organizational thought into four perspectives” (pp. 12-13). These four perspectives, or frames, are: structural, human resources, political and symbolic. Leaders need to be able “to understand and use multiple perspectives to think about the same thing in more than one way” (p. 5).

The core premise of the structural frame is that “clear, well-understood roles and relationships and adequate coordination are key to how well an organization performs” (p. 44). There are two issues that underlie organizational structure. The first is differentiation of work, or how work is allocated in the organization. The second is integration or the coordination of the work once responsibilities have been assigned (p. 49). Bolman and Deal (2003) hold that every organization develops its own structure and
those structures may help or hinder the work at hand. It is the leader’s job to vary the structure to adapt to the current situation (pp. 108-109).

In the human resources frame, “People’s skills, attitudes, energy, and commitment are vital resources that can make or break an enterprise” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 114). This frame moves away from looking only at the structure and looks at the people that make up the organization. In fact, “Organizations need people, (for their energy, effort, and talent), and people need organizations (for the many intrinsic and extrinsic rewards they offer), but their respective needs are not always well designed” (p. 132). In this frame, the leader must balance the needs of the people within the organization with the needs of the organization.

The third perspective is the political frame. This frame “asserts that interdependence, divergent interests, scarcity, and power relations inevitably spawn political activity” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, pp. 186-187). Understanding that organizations function in this way helps the leader to provide the environment where “goals, structures, and policies emerge from an ongoing process of negotiation among members of” the organization (p. 201). Using this frame, the leader must try to unify the varied perspectives of individuals within the organization to meet the organization’s goals.

The last perspective is the symbolic frame. “The symbolic frame seeks to interpret and illuminate basic issues of meaning and beliefs that make symbols so powerful” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 242). In this frame, the culture of the organization begins to take a prominent place. There are many symbols, practices or histories that place an
organization in its current situation. This is an “interwoven pattern of beliefs, values, practices, and artifacts that defines for members who they are and how they are to do things” (p. 243). In this frame, it becomes clear that the purpose of an organization is not simply to accomplish a task, but rather discovers that their “peak performance emerges as a team discovers its soul” (pp. 298-299).

Leaders must be able to move fluidly among each of these perspectives and the wise leader knows which one is needed at any given time. Bolman and Deal (2003) do not advocate that any one of these perspectives is better than the other. “For a given time and situation, one perspective may be more helpful than others…choosing a frame, or understanding others’ perspectives, involves a combination of analysis, intuition, and artistry” (p. 309).

**Maccoby’s Leaders We Need**

“The leaders we want are not always the leaders we need” according to Maccoby (2007, p. 93). He holds that the primary role of the leader is to create collaboration within the organization. Leaders are most effective when they and their followers have a shared sense of purpose. The leaders then have a responsibility in ensuring that there is a common purpose for the organization (p. xvii). To that end, Maccoby identified three kinds of leaders. Strategic Visionaries are leaders who can “envision a need for new strategy and organizational transformation.” Operational Implementers “systematically make sure the strategy is implemented turning purpose into results.” Finally, Bridge-Builders are “leaders with the ability to develop trusting relationships across organizational boundaries” (pp. 97-99).
Maccoby (2007) states that with the current crises that face the world today, from global-warming to weapons of mass destruction, a workforce of diverse specialists has developed. These workers “want to collaborate with a leader who makes their lives more meaningful” (p. 20). The leader needs to make the workplace an environment which enriches their followers’ lives intrinsically. In order to do this, there must be a common purpose for which all in the organization are working (p. 39). This purpose is what drives what human beings do. “People think that the qualities of the heart are opposite to those of the head…But in pre-Cartesian thought, the heart was the true seat of intelligence and the brain the instrument of logic and calculation” (p. 179).

Maccoby (2007) encourages those in leadership roles to develop the heart of leadership. It is not just about intelligence and knowing the right answer for a given question, it is about being wise. And to be wise ‘takes a heart that listens” (p. 179). Developing the heart takes “clearing the mind to see things as they are, deep thinking to get in touch with ourselves, and listening and responding to others” (pp. 182-183).

Collins’ Good to Great

Jim Collins (2001) completed a study of the companies that have gone from good to great. By his definition moving from good to great meant that a company had gone from “good results to great results and sustained those results for at least fifteen years” (p. 3). While Collins categorized these companies by their ratio of cumulative stock returns relative to the general market, through his research he found that the greatness was more than just profitability. Collins set out to identify the underlying reasons that these companies made the leap. While he hoped that he would find many reasons that these
companies made these leaps other than the leadership, the data kept directing him back to the leadership.

Collins (2001) identified five levels of leadership. At one end is a Level 1 leader who is a highly capable individual and is able to make productive contributions through talent, knowledge, skills, and good work habits. Collins continued through other levels of leadership which included: Level 2/Contributing Team Member, Level 3/Competent Manager, Level 4/Effective Leader and Level 5/Executive. Leaders who helped their companies move from good to great were all Level 5 leaders (p. 20).

Regardless if the company was developing pharmaceuticals or paper products, these Level 5 leaders shared many similarities. First, these leaders made sure that they had the right people hired and that they were in the right position within the company. Once the leader had appropriate personnel in place, then the vision and strategy for the company were developed (Collins, 2001, p. 13). In developing the vision and strategy, Level 5 leaders were able to develop a clear sense of what the organization could do better than any other organization while being passionate about it (pp. 95-96). Once the organization decided “what” they would do, the Level 5 leaders developed a culture of discipline within the organization. Collins found that within the organization, the leader established a framework of freedom and responsibility within which each individual worked. To do this though, took the right personnel who were self-disciplined and who would go to extremes to fulfill their responsibilities. This, of course, links back to his first precept which states that the leader hired the right people for the right position (p. 13).
Collins (2001) described Level 5 leaders as “self-effacing, quiet, reserved, even shy – these leaders are a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will” (p. 12). These leaders always believed that they would prevail in the end regardless of the challenges they were facing all while confronting the brutal facts of their current reality (p. 13). These leaders were committed to the success of the organization and its mission first, above any personal success they might achieve in the process.

**Becoming a Leader According to Bennis**

Bennis (2003) conducted a similar study of successful leaders in various fields from corporate America to filmmaking to non-profit organizations. Bennis identified three reasons why leaders are important to the success of any organization. First, leaders are responsible for the organization’s effectiveness. Second, the failure and scandal of major corporations such as Enron and WorldCom in the last ten years, demonstrates the need for a guiding purpose and effective leaders provide that for an organization. Finally, the integrity of many institutions in the United States is at question and leaders have the ability to restore that integrity (p. 4).

With those reasons in mind, Bennis (2003) believes that people can learn to be leaders and that, if one desires it, can take certain steps to be an effective leader. According to Bennis, the first step in becoming a leader is to recognize and understand the present situation facing the organization and, if it needs to be changed, find ways to break from it and not perpetuate it (p. 19). Once the leader is properly able to identify the situation, the leader needs a guiding vision for the organization. “The leader has a clear idea of what he or she wants to do – professionally and personally – and the strength to
persist in the face of setbacks, even failures” (p. 31). There must be a goal toward which the leader is directing the organization. The leader must demonstrate passion in the work. That passion comes through when the leader loves the work that he or she is completing (p. 32).

Another basic ingredient of leadership is integrity which is made up of self-knowledge, candor, and maturity. Throughout Bennis’ (2003) work, he returns to this idea of the importance of the leader knowing herself. Without a solid understanding of how one’s past experiences have impacted their current reality, the leader may make decisions that are not based on what is good for the organization in the present. “Candor is based in honesty of thought and action, a steadfast devotion to principle, and a fundamental soundness and wholeness…Integrity is the basis of trust” (pp. 32-33). In other words, the leader must remain true to herself instead of altering her beliefs and values based on what is “in style” today. Maturity is also important to the leader. Maturity indicates the growth and achievement the leader has experienced. She needs to learn to be dedicated, observant, capable of working with and learning from others, and truthful. Once the leader has found these qualities within, she can help develop those qualities in others (p. 33).

Leaders also need curiosity and daring, according to Bennis (2003). They “wonder about everything, want to learn as much as they can, are willing to take risks, experiment, try new things” and do not worry about failure, but learn from it (p. 33). That curiosity drives the leader to want to know the world as well as the leader knows herself. Knowing the world allows the leader to seek experiences which will promote
growth. It allows the leader to take risks with the knowledge that failure is valuable and inevitable since one learns from mistakes. It also allows the leader to see the future as an opportunity to do things that have not yet been done and to do things that need to be done (p. 91).

According to Bennis (2003), the essential task for leaders is “letting the self emerge.” This takes the leadership out of the realm of “proving” one’s self to “the spirit of expressing” one’s self (p. 105). By expressing oneself, the core values and guiding principles come to the forefront and the leader is able to articulate a vision or dream for the organization that keeps the leader true to himself. “Leaders manage the dream. All leaders have the capacity to create a compelling vision, one that takes people to a new place, and then to translate that vision into reality” (p. 186). It is when the person is faithful to himself and to his core values, that he is able to empower others to move toward “a place they have not been before” (Bennis, 1989, p. 19). “To become a leader then, you must become yourself” (Bennis, 2003, p. 46).

Kouzes and Posner’s Leadership Challenge

In their study of thousands of “personal-best” leadership experiences, Kouzes and Posner (2007) found that “Leadership is not about personality; it’s about behavior” (pp. 14-15). They were able to identify five similarities in each of these leadership experiences. These five practices of exemplary leadership are:

1. Model the Way
2. Inspire a Shared Vision
3. Challenge the Process
4. Enable Others to Act

5. Encourage the Heart (pp. 14-15)

“Exemplary leaders know that if they want to gain commitment and achieve the highest standards, they must be models of the behavior they expect of others” (p. 15). The leaders must be in touch though, with what they want that behavior to be. Leaders must have “guiding principles” which “clarify values.” These values though do not represent only the leader’s personal choices. Instead, these reflect the shared values of those in the organization (p. 15). In fact, Kouzes and Posner believe that the leader must set the example “through daily actions that demonstrate they are deeply committed to their beliefs” (p. 16).

Next, exemplary leaders inspire a shared vision. Leaders have “visions and dreams of what could be” and have complete personal belief that they can make it happen and thus invent the future (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, pp. 16-17). Leaders have an idea about what they want the end result to be and then work to develop the steps which will help the organization realize that result. The leader has a responsibility though, to understand the needs, dreams, hopes, aspirations, visions, and values of those they lead in order to create a commitment to a common vision (p. 17). The leader cannot impose their personal vision on the organization, it must be developed together which unifies the stakeholders toward a common good (p. 18).

Once the vision is set, then the leader will, no doubt, need to challenge the process by not accepting the status quo. “Leaders are pioneers. They are willing to step out into the unknown. They search for opportunities to innovate, grow, and improve” (Kouzes &
In fact, exemplary leaders create an environment that values experimentation, recognizes and supports good ideas and challenges the system to implement those ideas. They also recognize that mistakes and failures along the way are inevitable but will lead to future success (p. 19). “Try, fail, learn. That’s the leader’s mantra” (p. 20).

Leaders cannot do all of the work of the organization. It takes a team of people who help the organization reach its fullest potential. “To get extraordinary things done in organizations, leaders have to enable others to act” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 20). Leaders engage everyone needed to make the project work by building collaboration and trust within the group.

Finally, exemplary leaders create an environment where people are encouraged and not discouraged. Leaders must “show appreciation for people’s contributions” and “create a culture of celebrating values and victories” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 22). When all of these practices are viewed as a whole, it becomes clear that leadership is about relationships between the leader and those who follow. To achieve success requires a high-quality relationship that enables people to do their best (pp. 24-25).

**Summary**

“In the end, it is servant leadership, based on deep commitment to values and emerging from a ground swell of moral authority that makes the critical difference” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 122). It is this commitment to core values and beliefs that underlies many of these ideas and so Sergiovanni’s moral leadership and sources of authority become a natural lens through which the practice of current principals in HP
schools will be interpreted. Ruby Payne (2005) urges educators who work with students who come from low-income families “to honor students as human beings worthy of respect and care” which will “establish a relationship that will provide for enhanced learning” (p. 111). When this is accomplished, student achievement with a high-poverty population can improve. To accomplish this takes a commitment to the school’s core beliefs and values about those students.

The ISSLC standards, which define the current role of the principal, also indicate that same commitment to core values and beliefs. The articulation of each standard begins with the same phrase, “An education leader promotes the success of every student by” followed by descriptions of what is needed to achieve that success. Whether it is the development of a shared vision of learning, defining the commitment to student success through the establishment of a school climate which places student achievement at the center of all it does, establishing collaborative relationships with teachers, parents and community members, or treating students with fairness and leading from a place of integrity, a commitment to core beliefs and values must drive that work.

The 21 responsibilities of principals as defined by Marzano et al. (2005) also link to these core values and beliefs. One of those responsibilities was indeed, for the principal to possess well-defined ideals and beliefs about schools, teaching and learning and demonstrating behaviors that are consistent with those beliefs (p. 51). It is when decisions are made that are consistent with these core values and beliefs that the school’s efforts in impacting students’ lives come to fruition.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership of principals who work in schools which have been identified as having a large student population living in poverty and have a record of sustained academic success as measured on standardized tests. This study also examined if principals who lead high-poverty high-performing schools (HP HP) do so in ways that go beyond simply following the rules of accountability or policy and procedure manuals. Are leaders in HP HP schools mission-oriented and so lead in ways that place the school’s mission and core values at the center of what they do? It is the goal of this study to identify which leadership model these principals demonstrate in these HP HP schools where students achieve at higher levels than expected. Another goal of this study is to identify commonalities in leadership style and traits among these principals in HP HP schools. This study used Thomas Sergiovanni’s sources of authority as presented in Moral Leadership: Getting to the Heart of School Improvement (1992) as the interpretive framework for understanding the leadership of the selected principals.

Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the researcher interviewed principals who work in HP HP schools and synthesized the data obtained to answer several specific research questions. The main research question is:
To what extent do the characteristics of moral leadership manifest themselves in the leadership, behavior, relationships and decisions of principals in high-poverty, high-performing schools?

Related questions include:

1. In which types of situations does the principal function from a) moral authority, b) bureaucratic authority, c) technical-rational authority, d) psychological authority and e) professional authority?

2. Do principals have knowledge of moral leadership? If so, what is their perspective on moral leadership and their awareness of its application in their leadership?

3. Does moral leadership manifest itself in the work of principals?

4. What policies and structures has the district put into place to support the practice of moral leadership in a) Job descriptions, b) Evaluation tools, c) Mission Statements?

5. What policies and structures has the principal put in place in the school to support the practice of moral leadership?

This chapter outlines the methodology that was used to complete this study. It includes the research design, procedures, descriptions of the sample population, interview protocols, plan for data analysis, ethical considerations, and a copy of the letter of consent for the research participants.
Research Design

According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), “Qualitative researchers seek answers to their questions in the real world. They gather what they see, hear, and read from people and places and from events and activities. They do research in natural settings rather than in laboratories or through written surveys. Their purpose is to learn about some aspect of the social world and to generate new understandings that can then be used” (p. 4). For this reason, it is appropriate that this study was conducted using a qualitative approach. The researcher was trying to understand the leadership practice of those in the role of school principal and so the appropriate place to find those answers was in the field where the principals work. Since quantitative researchers seek their answers that rest primarily in numerical data and qualitative researchers seek their answers in non-numerical data such as words and pictures, this study lent itself to a qualitative approach given the proposed research questions (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 30).

As this study was seeking to learn about leadership practice from the perspective of the leader, it used a phenomenological approach to the study. According to Johnson and Christensen (2004), “Phenomenology refers to the description of one or more individuals’ consciousness and experience of a phenomenon, such as the death of a loved one, viewing oneself as a teacher, the act of teaching, the experience of being a minority group member, or the experience of winning a soccer game” (p. 364). Phenomenological research seeks to obtain an understanding of the research participants’ lives and how they have made meaning of it. This study asked the participants questions about their
experiences as principals in hopes of understanding the leadership in these HP HP schools. Interestingly, “Phenomenologists generally assume that there is some commonality in human experience, and they seek to understand this commonality. This commonality of experience is called an essence, or invariant structure, of the experience” (p. 365). This study hoped to find some commonalities across these experiences.

Using this qualitative method of conducting phenomenological research, I intended to study the lived experiences of nine principals in the Illinois Spotlight Schools, each of which is considered to be an HP HP school. My intent was to describe the commonalities (essence) and differences as they exist in the lived experiences of the research participants. I intended to interpret the multiple realities I constructed from the participants’ responses.

This study was exploratory. I investigated what it is like to be a principal in a high-poverty high-performing school in Illinois. While research has been conducted on similar populations in similar school settings, this study updates that research and offers a different interpretive lens by using Sergiovanni’s moral leadership theory and sources of authority by which the experiences were examined. The conducting of interviews, collections of documents, and maintenance of a field log and reflexive journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) helped me to describe experiences, find and interpret meaning, and uncover the essence of principal lived experience in the 2007 Illinois Spotlight Schools. Following a qualitative method of investigation, a variety of data was gathered to provide a richer, recursive means of research.
Sampling Strategy

Population

The 2007 Illinois Spotlight Schools formed the beginning pool of participants for this study. There were 507 schools in Illinois who received this designation in 2007. The majority of the 2007 Spotlight Schools were elementary and kindergarten through eighth grade schools (467 schools) followed by middle schools (37 schools) and finally high schools (4 schools).

Sample

The sample of participants in a qualitative study is smaller than that of a quantitative study in order to obtain data that is more in depth than what can be acquired in a larger sample. “Qualitative methods permit inquiry into selected issues in great depth with careful attention to detail, context, and nuance” (Patton, 2002, p. 27). In my research I wanted to identify certain types of participants for this study. According to Patton, “Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations” (p. 230). I used a non-probability type of purposeful (purposive) sampling instead of a probability type of random sampling. This allowed much to be learned from a smaller sample than less to be learned from a larger sample. Using purposeful sampling, I chose participants because they appeared to fit the definition of principals who lead HP HP schools.

Within this unit of analysis, I also applied the principle of stratification. According to Johnson and Christensen (2004), a stratified sample divides the population into mutually exclusive groups and then participants are chosen from within this group.
In this study, the stratified group consisted of principals in 2007 Illinois Spotlight Schools. A stratified variable, the variable on which the population is further divided, was also applied. This stratified variable limited participants to those principals in the Illinois Spotlight Schools who had been in their current position for at least two complete school years so that the findings could be attributed to the current leader and not someone who is no longer in the building. Further, the sample contained at least three principals each in urban, suburban and rural communities to broaden the data since poverty occurs across all geographic settings. The final sampling of participants was randomly selected from each geographic setting.

**Site Selection**

The site selection is multi-sited and will consist of the 2007 Illinois Spotlight Schools. These schools all share these same characteristics:

1. At least 50% of students were identified as low-income. Low-income is designated by eligibility for free and reduced lunch.
2. At least 60% of students met or exceeded standards in both reading and mathematics as measured on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT).
3. At least 50% of students met or exceeded standards in both reading and mathematics in two previous years.
4. Made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the two previous years as required by *No Child Left Behind*. Criterion to meet AYP include:
   a. At least 55% of students meeting and exceeding standards in both reading and mathematics.
b. 95% participation rate in state assessments for all students and each subgroup. A subgroup is identified as having 45 or more students in an identified group such as race, socioeconomic status, learning disability or limited English language proficient.

c. Attendance rates of at least 90% for elementary and middle schools and graduation rate of at least 72% for high schools (Northern Illinois University, 2008).

From these designated schools, there were only four high schools selected as Illinois Spotlight Schools and some of these have selective enrollment, therefore, high schools were eliminated from the pool of participants as the high-performance on standardized tests may then be attributed to the selected student population adding an additional variable which was controlled nor the subject for this study. This left 37 middle schools and 467 elementary schools as possible study sites. The remaining schools were categorized according to their classification as city, suburb, or rural. In 2006, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) worked with the United States Census Bureau to redefine these categories in light of changes in the U.S. population and the definition of key geographic concepts. These new categories are:

1. **City, Large:** Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population of 250,000 or more.

2. **City, Midsize:** Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.
3. **City, Small:**
   Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 100,000.

4. **Suburb, Large:**
   Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population of 250,000 or more.

5. **Suburb, Midsize:**
   Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.

6. **Suburb, Small:**
   Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 100,000.

7. **Town, Fringe:**
   Territory inside an urban cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an urbanized area.

8. **Town, Distant:**
   Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area.

9. **Town, Remote:**
   Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 35 miles from an urbanized area.

10. **Rural, Fringe:**
    Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.

11. **Rural, Distant:**
    Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster.

12. **Rural, Remote:**
    Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009)
Three sites were selected from urban, suburban and rural locations. This use of criterion-based sampling offered data that crossed geographic areas but still met the important characteristics of HP HP schools.

Each participating principal and their corresponding school were assigned a pseudonym as shown in Table 11.

Table 11

Participating Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Type</th>
<th>Community Population</th>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Principal Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>2,836,658</td>
<td>Paris Elementary School</td>
<td>Dr. France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>170,855</td>
<td>Madrid Elementary School</td>
<td>Mr. Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>26,608</td>
<td>London Elementary School</td>
<td>Mr. England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>53,711</td>
<td>Ottawa Elementary School</td>
<td>Dr. Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>50,334</td>
<td>Lisbon Elementary School</td>
<td>Mrs. Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>21,235</td>
<td>Rome Elementary School</td>
<td>Dr. Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>40,069</td>
<td>Athens Elementary School</td>
<td>Mrs. Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>17,324</td>
<td>Santiago Elementary School</td>
<td>Mr. Chile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>Brussels Elementary School</td>
<td>Mrs. Belgium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

The data I collected provided me with detailed and descriptive data on the principals’ lived experiences. Patton (2002) stated, “The primary focus of data collection will be on what is happening to individuals in a setting and how individuals are affected by the setting” (p. 228). Through my qualitative investigation, data was collected using open-ended interviews, document collection, a field log and a reflexive journal. Nine principals were interviewed. Participants who met the criterion-based sampling characteristics were individually recruited for voluntary participation.

Gaining Access

Data collection was achieved by gaining access to informants who were recruited via written correspondence from me. The participants were asked to participate on a voluntary basis. Using a letter of invitation (see Appendix A) and a synopsis of research (see Appendix B), I contacted all schools who met the selection criteria of being named a 2007 Illinois Spotlight Schools. Schools were contacted via regular mail as well as email. My contact information was created from public lists of the schools designated as 2007 Illinois Spotlight Schools. The introduction letter detailed the purpose of my study, my background as an investigator, and invited participants to participate in the study. Interested respondents were asked to contact me via e-mail or telephone.
Open Ended Interviews

The primary data collection method used was face-to-face interviews using an interview protocol (see Appendix C). The interviews were approximately 60-90 minutes in length and were conducted, as selected by the participant, at the participants’ schools with one exception. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed at a later time by the researcher. I met with participants at mutually agreed times that were convenient for them and in a location that provided privacy. Before the formal interview began, the participants were given an informed consent form (see Appendix D) to read and sign. The form detailed the purpose of the research, the scope of the principal’s participation (including the recording, transcription, and member-check of the interview, the principal’s voluntary participation in the interview, and the principal’s right to terminate participation in the study at any time).

Documents

Document collection was the secondary method of data collection used in this study. The principal’s formal job description, evaluation tool, and district/school mission statements were analyzed to determine the representation of the various sources of authority. I retrieved all documents from the school and/or district website and for those not available through this method, I requested them from the principal. Out of the nine schools represented in this study, only four schools had job descriptions and principal evaluation tools which were in current use.
Field Log

The next method of data collection was a field log that I maintained throughout my research. According to Rossman et al. (2003), the field log contains two major components. The first component is the descriptive data of what has been observed and the researcher’s comments on that data or on the project itself. Second, the field log contains a running commentary on the research including the researcher’s emotional reaction to events, analytic insights, questions about meaning, and thoughts about design modification (pp. 195-196). The log also contains a record of participants’ contact information, a file of participant correspondence, a calendar indicating dates, times, and locations of interviews, the interview protocol, letter of invitation to participants, synopsis of research, and informed consent forms.

Reflexive Journal

The fourth method of data collection used was a reflexive journal that was maintained throughout the data collection process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). At the completion of each interview, the reflexive journal was used to collect the researcher’s thoughts and feelings regarding the interview process, participant’s answers or behaviors, and the researcher’s behaviors and feelings. I added observation reflection notes to help “bracket, or suspend, any preconceptions or learned feelings” the researcher has about the phenomenon (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 364). This helped to reduce the researcher’s bias during the study.
**Data Analysis**

The data analysis was an ongoing process throughout the research. Both verbal and nonverbal information from the interviews was gathered, organized, and interpreted. The various documents that had been gathered were also analyzed for pertinent information about the roles and responsibilities of the principals in these HP schools. The notes in the field log and reflexive journal were also analyzed. “Analyzing and interpreting qualitative data is the process of deep immersion in the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials you have collected; systematically organizing these materials into salient themes and patterns; bringing meaning so the themes tell a coherent story; and writing it all up so that others can read what you have learned” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 270). Themes and patterns were then identified from the interview data, document analysis, field notes and reflexive journal.

The primary data collection method was interviews. Once the interviews were transcribed, the data was coded into categories. “Coding is the process of marking segments of data with symbols, descriptive words, or category names” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 505). Coding allowed the researcher to begin to make sense of the data and to organize it for comparison. Following this coding process, the data was examined for common themes and patterns. In the data analysis, the researcher described the findings and then interpreted those findings with explanations reflecting Sergiovanni’s sources of authority and more specifically, moral leadership. “A basic tenet of research admonishes careful separation of description from interpretation. Interpretation involves explaining the findings, answering “why” questions, attaching
significance to particular results, and putting patterns into an analytic framework,’ (Patton, 2002, p. 438). To ensure that there was a separation of description from interpretation, the researcher considered whether the data was solicited or not, and whether or not the participants were being lead in his/her responses. Immediately following each interview, the researcher recorded observations in a field log and recorded personal biases in a reflexive journal.

At the conclusion of each interview, a complete transcription was constructed from the digital recording. Each participant received the transcription of his/her interview for a member check and to validate the responses. Prior to any data interpretation, the researcher received approval confirmation about the validity and accuracy of the transcription from the participant. The final data description was constructed at the conclusion of all nine interviews.

Once the data description was complete, data interpretation began by consulting professional literature, especially the literature on Sergiovanni’s (1992) moral leadership and sources of authority, and searching for recurring themes and unanswered questions. After completing the data description, recommendations for further research were made.

**Document Analysis**

To create an understanding of the context in which these principals are working, the researcher conducted an analysis of the principal’s formal job description, evaluation tool, and district/school mission statements to determine the representation of Sergiovanni’s (1992) various sources of authority and moral leadership theory. These documents formed the secondary data source for analysis. The documents were
organized and coded in a similar fashion as the interview data was coded.

“Phenomenologic analysis requires that the researcher approach the texts with an open mind, seeking what meaning and structures emerge” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 296).

**Organizing and Reporting the Data**

According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), there are several options for organizing and reporting qualitative data. One option is to present the information chronologically, or the order in which it happened. This strategy may be most helpful when the focus of the study is on an individual. Another option is to organize the data thematically.

“Meaningful themes that have emerged from your data form the backbone – or structural framework – of your report” (pp. 344-345). A third option for presenting the information is to create a composite of the data bringing together different episodes, days or participants and creating one description which represents the typical case. The fourth option is to present only the critical events in the life of a person or program which define the understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Finally, the data can be presented as a portrait which offers a “rich and textured impression of the subject over an extended but limited period of time” (p. 346). The researcher decided that the most appropriate option for this study was to use the thematic approach suggested by Rossman and Rallis. As the time being spent conducting the interviews was limited and the order in which the information was shared is irrelevant, presenting the themes which emerged from the data analysis and interpretation seemed to be the most appropriate.
Trustworthiness

To acquire accurate data, the researcher must conduct a study that is trustworthy. According to Patton (2002), the study must be conducted in a way that is “balanced, fair, and conscientious in taking account of multiple perspectives, multiple interest, and multiple realities” (p. 575). “Qualitative research involves building and sustaining relationships with people” (Rossman & Rallis, 2004, p. 77). The researcher has a responsibility to develop this relationship with the participants agreeing to be a part of the study. Only by building this kind of relationship can the researcher hope to collect accurate data. The trustworthiness goes beyond the researcher though and applies to the study itself. “The trustworthiness of a qualitative research project is judged by two interrelated sets of standards. First, does the study conform to standards for acceptable and competent practice? Second, does it meet standards for ethical conduct with sensitivity to the politics of the topic and setting?” (p. 63).

Acceptable and Competent Practice

When evaluating the standards of practice for a particular research project, the study must stand up to questions about the accuracy of what is being reported, the methodology used to generate the findings, and the usefulness of the study. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), one way to ensure the accuracy of the data is to draw from several data sources to inform the same question or issue. In this research project, data was drawn from the interviews, the document analysis, the field log, and the reflexive journal.
The second criterion for evaluating the standards of practice was to review the methodology used to collect the data. For qualitative studies, this takes the form of “a consideration of how thoughtfully and dependably the researcher conducted the study – it focuses directly on implementation” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 67). Rossman and Rallis state that using multiple sources of data, as this study did, enhances what is learned in the field and so met this criterion as well.

The usefulness of the study is the final criterion to consider. It is important to see that the study has value beyond its immediate completion. Since this particular study only focused on a small number of principals in schools that have met set criterion, the findings of the study could be useful when analyzing other, similar populations, in schools with similar characteristics.

**Ethical Considerations**

As this study was being conducted with human subjects, there were several ethical considerations that were taken into account as the research was being conducted. Johnson and Christensen (2003) summarize the ethical responsibilities of a researcher while conducting a study. These responsibilities must be met to consider the study ethical. First, the researcher must obtain informed consent of the participants to participate in the study. The second ethical responsibility relates to deception of the participants. If participants are to be deceived, it must be justified by the study’s scientific, educational, or applied value. The third ethical responsibility is that participants must know that they are free to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice. Next, the participants are protected from physical and mental discomfort,
harm, and danger that may arise from the research procedures. Finally, the confidentiality or anonymity of the participants must be protected (p. 102).

Patton (2002) outlines a framework for conducting ethical qualitative research. His checklist of ten ethical issues includes 1) explaining purpose, 2) promises and reciprocity, 3) risk assessment, 4) confidentiality, 5) informed consent, 6) data access and ownership, 7) interviewer mental health, 8) advice, 9) data collection boundaries, and 10) ethical versus legal “disciplinary or professional code of ethical conduct,” (p. 408, exhibit 7.6).

Each of these concerns will be addressed here.

1. The purpose of this study was explained in a letter of invitation seeking participants and providing a synopsis of the research.

2. Each participant received a transcript of the individual interview in which they participated.

3. All responses will be kept confidential. Every attempt possible was made to remove information which might identify the data with the participant or the school with which he/she is affiliated.

4. Pseudonyms are being used to maintain privacy and confidentiality. Personal information will be kept secured in a file cabinet, not accessible by others, in the researcher’s home. Personal records and raw data will be destroyed within two years following the completion of the study (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). All electronic data will be stored on portable drives and not on servers where others could be able to access it.
5. Participants received an informed consent form and had the opportunity to read and sign it before the interviews began. The informed consent form stated that the participant had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or prejudice. The consent form also explained that the interviews would be digitally recorded and that transcriptions would be created but would not depict the identity of participants except through the assigned pseudonym. Transcriptions would be performed by the researcher.

6. The researcher will retain all ownership of the data and in the case of publication, will have review rights of any publication.

7. There were no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life and a loss of time taken in participating in the interview.

8. The researcher’s dissertation supervisor was a confidant and counselor on matters of ethics during this study.

9. The participant’s rights will be respected and no covert/overt methods were used to gain access to data.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

Throughout my journeys across the state of Illinois, I had the privilege of meeting nine dedicated principals who are leading high-poverty, high-performing schools in rural, suburban and urban locations. In each case, students in these schools academically perform better than schools with comparable socioeconomic demographics under the leadership of these men and women. As these schools were all designated as Illinois Spotlight Schools in 2007, they all met the following criterion:

- At least 50% of students were identified as low-income. Low-income is designated by eligibility for free and reduced lunch.
- At least 60% of students met or exceeded standards in both reading and mathematics as measured on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT).
- At least 50% of students met or exceeded standards in both reading and mathematics in two previous years.
- Made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the two previous years as required by No Child Left Behind. Criterion to meet AYP include:
  - At least 55% of students meeting and exceeding standards in both reading and mathematics.
95% participation rate in state assessments for all students and each subgroup. A subgroup is identified as having 45 or more students in an identified group such as race, socioeconomic status, learning disability or limited English language proficient.

- Attendance rates of at least 90% for elementary and middle schools and graduation rate of at least 72% for high schools (Northern Illinois University, 2008).

Additionally, each of these principals has led their schools for a minimum of four years, with the average tenure of the principals being 5.5 years. Men, women, veteran principals with over 20 years in education to those new to the profession, African-American, Hispanic, White, the principals on the surface could not have been more different from one another. One important thing they share in common though is that their students are achieving academically. These findings will address the initial research question, “To what extent do the characteristics of moral leadership manifest themselves in the leadership, behavior, relationships and decisions of principals in high-poverty, high-performing schools?”

Throughout my conversations with them during the interview phase of the research, and through the document study of available job descriptions, evaluation tools, and mission statements, there were several themes which emerged from the data. Direct quotations from the interviews and the stated documents will be used to present the themes of: relationships, commitment to professional development, community and cultural awareness, collaboration and support, and mission and vision.
1. **Relationships**: Throughout the data, building positive relationships was clearly an important factor in the leadership of each of these principals. Each one developed deliberate strategies to build relationships with faculty and staff, students, parents and district administrators. Each principal also understood that these relationships led to the success achieved by their students.

2. **Commitment to Professional Development**: Despite the financial constraints that some of these schools face, each principal has a commitment to professional development, not just for themselves but for their faculty and staffs as well. Each is committed to using student achievement data and research-based instructional methodology to meet the needs of their students. Ongoing professional development helps these leaders to provide direction and support to the faculty and students.

3. **Community and Cultural Awareness**: In each instance, despite the fact that the majority of the principals interviewed did not reside in the community in which they worked, each one had an acute understanding of the broader community outside the school walls. Each principal articulated an understanding of the culture of poverty, often quoting Ruby Payne’s (2005) research on understanding poverty. Each principal was able to identify the challenges that face the community they serve. From drug addictions to gang affiliation to crime-ridden neighborhoods to undocumented immigrants, these principals saw their role in providing an educational experience which would
lead to future opportunities for their students that would help them transcend their current realities.

4. **Collaboration and Support**: It is one thing to develop a relationship with someone. It is quite another to move to the next level in that relationship and work with them to achieve a common goal. Identifying and capitalizing on the strengths of those in the school community, recognizing the weaknesses and challenges that face the school community and creating and implementing support structures to build on the strengths and to overcome the weaknesses, was critical to the student success.

5. **Mission and Vision**: Each of the principals involved in this study, articulated a well-defined mission and vision for their school community. As defined earlier, mission refers to an organization’s basic purpose for existence (Evans, 1996) while vision refers to the future direction of an organization (Evans, 1996). It articulates a view of a realistic, credible attractive future for the organization, a condition that is better in some important ways than what now exists (Bennis & Nanus, 1997). Each of the principals articulated that mission and vision centering on students in terms of academic achievement, personal development, and safety and security. The mission and vision of what these principals believe their students can achieve link each of these themes together.
Relationships

Throughout the data, building positive relationships was clearly an important factor in the leadership of each of these principals. Each one developed deliberate strategies to build relationships with faculty and staff, students, parents and district administrators. Each principal also understood that these relationships led to the success achieved by their students.

Whether the principal was talking about faculty and staff, students, parents or other administrators, each identified the need to build positive relationships to achieve student success. The principals made it a priority to build relationships with each group. Because each of these school leaders had been in their school for at least four years, they have had plenty of time to establish relationships with the school community.

Relationships with Students

Building relationships with students can be challenging for principals. As discussed earlier, there are many demands on principals’ time as they juggle the management tasks in the building with the instructional tasks. It could be very easy to have one’s time be engulfed in paperwork. These principals made a deliberate effort to move management tasks to other personnel in the building so that they could be visible and accessible to the students. According to Mrs. Greece at Athens Elementary, “Get out of the office. You don’t belong in the office. You don’t belong here doing paper. How can I push paper when there are people here?” Ms. Portugal at Lisbon Elementary School agreed. “I do filter out my activity…I do try to make sure that my time is counting for either relationship building or assisting somebody whether it’s a teacher or a kid,” she
said. Dr. Italy, at Rome Elementary, said, “They see me when they come. They see me when they leave. They see me at lunch time standing there. I try to be there for the kids like I am for the staff.” Each of the principals mentioned the importance of their presence in the hallways before and after school, during the lunch periods and at various after school activities. Mr. Chile of Santiago Elementary works in one of the largest schools in this study, with 765 students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. He prioritizes, “Being accessible. Letting kids know that I am here since we are a very large school. Trying to be visible at traffic times is always a good thing to do and… remembering as many kids names as I possibly can so I can then identify them back as people.” This one to one interaction with the principal provides the opportunity for principals to provide direction to meet the needs of these students.

Dr. France at Paris Elementary felt that student success comes from being personally involved with the students. He believes that to build the right atmosphere in the school, kids must be comfortable talking to the principal. “Kids can actually come and talk to me. And I have…wonderful stories about troubled kids who have come and…well, I make a difference.” The principals talked not only of success in terms of behavior but also academics. These principals took the time to monitor individual student progress. Dr. Italy gave an example of her involvement in monitoring student progress. “I keep track of the grades….I look at all assessments. I know when they are, where they are improving. I know when they’re dropping. If I had a class list right now, I can almost tell you all 340 kids pretty much, what’s going on with them.” This direct
involvement in student achievement keeps the leader focused on what is needed to keep
the school moving in the right direction.

Relationships with students also become a major factor in hiring teachers. When
asked what was the most important quality for a teacher to possess, several of the
principals mentioned the ability to build relationships with students even over academic
and pedagogical knowledge. According to Mr. England at London Elementary, “There’s
two things. There’s relationships and passion. I don’t care; these guys are teaching
kindergarten through third grade. You don’t have to be that smart to teach third grade but
you do have to have passion and you have to have a desire to help kids and you have to
build those relationships so they can trust you.” The principals expect teachers to build
relationships with students. Mrs. Greece at Athens goes a step further in describing the
relationships she wants her teachers to develop with her students. “I was going to say, are
you going to love them, but it’s more than that. Can you build the relationships you need
to build and be able to provide a structured enough environment that they’re going to be
successful? You’re going to build positive relationships with my kids because that’s
what does it for my kids.”

These relationships help to build a school climate that is warm and welcoming for
the students. Several of the principals mentioned that they have a transient school
population. Often, the population of the school on the first day of school is very different
than the last day of school as poor families must move from place to place because of
financial constraints. Ms. Portugal from Lisbon Elementary told the story of a student
who relocated to Illinois from California: “He was just amazed how, like I learned his
name immediately. I’d say that the kids really do feel very welcomed and they can see
that they’re not a little automaton.” Perhaps Ms. Belgium from Brussels Elementary, said
it best: “Have that personal relationship with your kids so that they know I believe in
them and then they believe in themselves.”

**Relationships with Staff**

Building relationships with faculty and staff is also important for these principals.
Since the principals all admit that the successes their schools have achieved are the result
of many people working together, they recognize that building relationships with staff is
a critical component to that success. According to Dr. Canada at Ottawa Elementary, “It
takes time to build those relationships with teachers. But once you do, I mean, they will
do anything. They really will. They’re excellent.” Mrs. Greece at Athens Elementary
believes that the time spent in getting to know staff members helps her to support them
for success. “You have a relationship with someone. You can get to know someone and
then you can get to know their strengths and their weaknesses and their likes and dislikes
and set it up so that they can be successful.”

One way that principals build good relationships with staff is to show them
appreciation for the work that they do. According to Mr. England at London Elementary,
it is quite simple. “Get out a piece of paper (and write) ‘Thank you so much for what you
did last night. I really appreciate it.’” By recognizing the work they do, he has been able
to build relationships which support student success. Mr. Spain at Madrid Elementary
makes an effort every day to “have personal conversations with everybody on a
consistent basis. I get out there and schmooze everyone. I try to meet and greet every
staff member every morning and make eye contact with them. If there’s a possibility of “how are you” or “how was your night” something that I share with them. Like how’s the kid or dog or whatever it may be.” The focus of the relationships then, is not solely on a professional level, but also takes in the personal. That can cause challenges though when dealing with conflict.

After building both professional and personal relationships with staff members, it can become difficult when it is time to deal with a difficult situation. Dr. Canada at Ottawa Elementary described how building positive relationships causes him challenges. “Maybe it’s time for me to leave because I have now built good relationships. It gets harder then to say to someone, you know, I’m noticing your lesson plans aren’t coming in. Yet, I value you. I like you as a teacher. That gets really hard.” Dr. Italy shared that because of the relationship built between the principal and the teacher that one of the hardest things she has to do as a principal, is release teachers at the end of the school year, “Because you get this relationship with teachers, even if they’re here for one year.” But it is because of the relationships built at this level that the collaboration and support are able to happen on other levels.

**Relationships with Parents**

Principals also work toward building positive relationships with students’ parents. This poses significant challenges with the school communities that these principals serve. Communication and availability are the keys to building these relationships. The principals interviewed for this study have all found creative ways to get parents more involved in the school community so that there are other opportunities to interact with
them other than when there is a conflict. For example, Mr. Chile at Santiago Elementary involves parents on committees when making programmatic decisions. Mr. Chile also works with the district’s committee for gifted students. Recently, when proposing some changes to the gifted program, he received a call from his superintendent because some parents voiced concern that the needs of their gifted children were not going to be met. The solution was to put them as a part of the committee to explore the future direction of the program. At Ottawa Elementary, there is a successful parental involvement program for which Dr. Canada takes no credit. “We have a Tuesday night open LRC. Our libraries are called LRC. Started before me and it is simply, we open the doors and families can come to read with their kids and take AR tests. We have about 150 people a week who come.” By providing an open facility, the school is providing an opportunity for parents to feel welcomed and a part of the school, something that can be a challenge for those who live in poverty.

Because of the neighborhood in which some of these schools are located, safety is an immediate concern. Metal detectors, security guards and camera systems are the norm. At Athens Elementary, this is a more recent development. Mrs. Greece understands the need to keep the doors of the school locked, but also recognizes that it establishes another barrier between her and the parents. “The best way to see my parents, (is to) do car duty. The parents pick up on that side so I’m outside every day to see my parents, whereas before (the additional security measures were added) I could stand in the middle of the hallway. They would come in from all 3 directions and I’d get to see them.”
Greece also understands that conflicts arise with parents because “they care about their kids” but by building good relationships, they can work together for their child’s success.

At Brussels Elementary, Mrs. Belgium involves parents in identifying the steps needed to help children succeed. They hold problem solving meetings with the parent, the teacher and the school psychologist as part of the Response to Intervention (RtI) strategies the school uses. She believes that this has made a difference because she’s “had the parents involved the whole time.” When the school shows that it is committed to helping the child, the relationship between the school and the parent deepens.

Organizing special events also helps to build relationships with parents. At Brussels Elementary, for example, Mrs. Belgium has hosted guest speakers who will educate the parents on various topics. Concerts and athletic events are other ways schools use to draw parents in to a relationship with the school. Dr. Italy from Rome Elementary called on parents to be “witnesses” to the group reading of the Gettysburg Address during a commemoration of Lincoln’s 200th Birthday. “We found out like a day or two before that the district wanted us to do this. I was like, ok. We had to have all these people come in to be the witnesses and I was like, oh my God. How are we going to do this? We put a call out to our parents. I had more parents here that wanted to participate. I think they feel comfortable when they come into the school.”
Relationships with Other Administrators

The principals also recognized the need to establish relationships with other administrators in the district. From the superintendent through the assistant superintendent(s) and their fellow district principals, each principal saw these relationships as vital to their success. Mrs. Greece relies on other administrators to help her with challenging situations. She first looks to the other principals. “Hey this has happened. What do you do in this situation? What should I (do)?” If she cannot get an answer there she will move to the assistant superintendent level. Ms. Portugal from Lisbon feels that part of her job is to make the district look good. “The state audited our district because of not maintaining the proper balance of kids being fully included so you better believe she (the district special education director) sent them right over to my school to have a look at that group so they saw the counter balance to that.” Ms. Portugal believes that by supporting their efforts, they, in turn, support hers.

Document Analysis

The job descriptions and evaluation tools reference the need to develop good relationships. For example, in the evaluation tools used at Madrid Elementary School, the Paris Elementary, Brussels Elementary, and London Elementary School, the ISSLC standards are used as the basis for the tools. The fourth ISSLC standard states that “An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.” It further focuses the standard calling for the leader to “Build and sustain positive relationships with families and caregivers” (CCSSO, 2008, p.
15). The evaluation tools mention the need for working with the various stakeholders for student success.

This is also true of many of the mission statements. In fact, at Athens Elementary, the school community has created a list of expectations for school climate that all stakeholders in the school are expected to follow. The first expectation is “Building Positive Relationships With Students: All staff members believe that this is the foundation to help students get ready to learn.” London Elementary’s mission statement ends with the phrase, “Building Success Together,” implying the need for relationships.

The establishment of relationships in the school community supports the other themes that have been identified. Developing relationships allows principals to assess effectively their own need for professional development or the needs of their staffs to help students succeed. Relationships support the principal in developing an understanding of the community or the culture within that community. Collaboration and support come from the time and effort taken to build positive relationships with the various groups of stakeholder. Indeed, relationships support the implementation of a mission and vision.

**Commitment to Professional Development**

Despite the financial constraints that some of these schools face, each principal has a commitment to professional development, not just for themselves but for their staff members as well. Each is committed to using student achievement data and research-based instructional methodology to meet the needs of their students. Ongoing
professional development helps these leaders to provide direction and support to the faculty and students.

Continuing education has become the reality in most professions. Doctors, lawyers, and accountants must attend workshops regularly to update their knowledge and skills to keep up with changes in current research, law and technology. Educators are no different. While the State of Illinois dictates that educators continually update their knowledge and skills to maintain certification, the principals in the 2007 Illinois Spotlight Schools participate in ongoing professional development so that they can better meet the needs of their students and staff.

Each principal interviewed belongs to at least one professional organization and they have varying levels of engagement in those organizations. The Illinois Principals Association (IPA) is the most common, with all principals belonging. Several also belong to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). There are other miscellaneous organizations that focus on literacy. They each see the importance of belonging to these organizations as they are a form of support and a place to find information for dealing with various school challenges.

The principals see these organizations as supportive of their work outside of the regular workshops or conferences sponsored by these organizations. Additionally they read the various journals or electronic resources that each organization makes available. One source that several of the principals mentioned was the IPA listserv which connects them with other principals across the state. According to Mr. England at London Elementary, “A lot of times when you are a principal, you are on an island by yourself.
You are the one accountable for everything but you don’t get a lot of support unless you talk to your colleagues and they’re not always available. IPA sends you the bulletins that I read all the time whenever they come.” He also believes that by attending the workshops, he is able to network with other principals which helps him to see that his “problems are not unique. Other people have those problems and I like to pick their brains, not just at the workshops themselves but when we’re sitting at the table eating lunch.”

The principals mentioned that they use student data and current realities to determine the professional development they will pursue for themselves and their staff members. Professional development is not about personal preference as much as it is tailoring it to meet the real needs of the school they serve. For example, when two schools were being combined in Mrs. Belgium’s school district and she was chosen to lead the combined school, she attended workshops through the IPA to help her bring the two building cultures together to meet the needs of students better.

Using student data around academics and discipline also help to direct principals toward professional development opportunities. Whether it is finding new instructional methodologies or making decisions around scheduling, the principals are committed to researching to find the best answers for their school community. “What I have learned is that we are so data driven now that I have learned to look at that. What is assessment telling us that our kids are capable of or not capable of” according to Dr. Canada at Ottawa Elementary. It is through the use of data that principals shape decision-making around professional development. The data provides the direction so that the principal
does not simply go with the latest trend in education. Mr. Chile at Santiago Elementary believes in moving strategically. “It’s like anything else. There’s good and there’s things you wish you could improve upon. Before we say, ok, let’s just look at this piece of data…to really understand what we are wanting to improve…to really know what the need is calling for.”

At Santiago Elementary School, Mr. Chile was analyzing the student data and saw a pattern of students getting sick after recess. After doing some research, he suggested a procedural change and moved recess before lunch. “Colorado has documented this, you know, that it decreases…digestive problems. It was helping our staff that have never done this. They love it now. They don’t have as many carry over problems, as many kids throwing up right after they eat. It’s like, I saw the research on that end before we did that.” Dr. France also gave examples of the use of student data for driving professional development. After identifying the reading problems in his school, he began researching the best ways to address those with his staff. “I’ve gotten a book on guided reading and I hope to be more knowledgeable about it so when I go into the classrooms, I can have a nice conversation with teachers” and give them specific strategies for working with students’ reading skills.

Each principal adapts the professional development to the needs of their particular building. Mrs. Belgium at Brussels Elementary has done quite a bit of professional development with her staff on Smart Boards, an electronic, interactive whiteboard, since there is now one in each classroom. “Instead of sending the teachers to a workshop, I arranged for a day when they could go (to another school) with a teacher at their grade
level” and see the Smart Board in action. She also brought in one of the teachers from the other school to work with teachers on ways to implement the technology into their instruction. Principals use professional development time and funds to support their teachers and students.

Another form of professional development comes in the form of district committee participation. Many of the principals identified their participation in district-wide committees as another way that they grow professionally. According to Dr. France, “I involve myself more so in some of the committees that the school district has. I was on the committee to do the new evaluation for principals. I’m also on a committee that is our technology advisory committee.” There are also district initiatives in which the principals take part. Dr. Italy from Rome Elementary believes that her role in professional development with her teachers is to participate with them in the professional development. “Whatever the PD (professional development) is within the district, I’m involved. So I’m always right along side my teachers. Because I’m evaluating I need to now what I’m looking for.” Mr. Spain at Madrid Elementary is also involved at the district level. “Right now I’m trying to be more active in…the crisis plans, the building crisis plans, so I try to do my professional development based on that because this is a high-crime neighborhood.”

Mrs. Belgium at the Brussels Elementary sees her professional development as an opportunity to give back to the profession as well. In recent years she has become active with the new principal mentoring program in Illinois. While she has only a few years left
prior to retirement, she sees a future opportunity to mentor new principals even during her retirement.

**Document Analysis**

While the commitment to professional development is not seen in the mission statements for each school, it is certainly evident in the job descriptions and evaluation tools that were provided. One example of this is in the job description for the principal at London Elementary: “Keeps abreast of changes and developments in the profession by attending professional meetings, reading professional journals and other publications, and discussing problems of mutual interest with others in the field.” As stated earlier, the job descriptions and evaluation tools are linked to the ISSLC Standards. The second standard states, “An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.” The standard further clarifies that the leader will “develop the instructional and leadership capacity of staff” (CCSSO, 2008, p. 14). Similar language appears in the other job descriptions and evaluation tools that were provided.

**Community and Cultural Awareness**

In each instance, despite the fact that the majority of the principals interviewed did not reside in the community in which they worked, each one had an acute understanding of the broader community outside the school walls. Each principal articulated an understanding of the culture of poverty, often quoting Ruby Payne’s research on understanding poverty. Each principal was able to identify the challenges
that face the community they serve. From drug addictions to gang affiliation to crime-ridden neighborhoods to undocumented immigrants, these principals saw their role in providing an educational experience which would lead to future opportunities for their students that would help them transcend their current realities.

Understanding that schools serve a particular community who then send their children for an education, it is important to understand the reality of the children the schools are serving so that the school can tailor programs to meet their needs. Each of the principals interviewed showed an understanding of the communities’ history, the challenges facing these communities, and an understanding of the culture of poverty.

**Personal Experience**

Four of the principals interviewed for this study, live in the community where their schools are located. There was no noticeable difference in the depth of knowledge these principals had compared to those who did not live in the community. Each spoke with authority about the history and challenges that face their communities. In the case of four principals who live within their school community, this is a deliberate choice, each believing that it adds to their credibility with parents. Having grown up in the same town as he now works, Mr. England believes that he has a personal investment in the community beyond his school. “This is where I shop. This is where I see my people. This is our tax dollars are paying our school, paying my salary. I feel I should contribute to that by living in the district, paying school taxes.” While Mrs. Greece did not grow up in the town where she now works, she “grew up in a neighborhood like this. And so I understand some of the issues that my parents face and I don’t get as worked up about
what some of my kids do for themselves that other people may." She believes those experiences help her more in her current position than living there.

**Program Decisions**

Understanding the community provides direction for the principals in the development of programs. For example, Mr. England has implemented a program called *Brothers Helping Brothers*. Mr. England invites male community members from the business community to the school to read and interact with his male students. Responding to the test data that showed his male students were not reading as well as his female students, and knowing that many of the households in which his students live are without an adult male, Mr. England developed a program to provide male, successful role models for his students. Morticians, fire fighters, police officers, and athletes come to the school once per week to interact with the students.

These programs are not just about helping the students. Mr. Spain at Madrid Elementary has developed a program to meet the needs of people who are just arriving in this country and in the community in which he works. Partnering with one of the local churches that run an amnesty program, Mr. Spain runs a newcomers’ center in his school. We work with them to try and mentor the newcomers that show up…We get quite a few newcomers straight from Mexico that will show-up in their t-shirts in the middle of February. And we’re like, oh my gosh! No, you guys literally have nothing. So that's why we set up, I cleared out a closet downstairs and we filled it up full of stuff that people would need that are starting out with nothing. You know, coats, pots, pans, you know, basics.
Just enough to get them going. Then what we try to do is pair them up with somebody who is already established in the community that was an immigrant themselves so they kind of understand the immigrant experience and we follow through on that.

By responding to the needs of the larger community, he is able to understand the backgrounds of his students.

**Community History and Challenges**

Mr. Chile at William Elementary was able to describe the cultural divide which exists in his community. “There’s a division in our town almost like there is between Champaign-Urbana or Bloomington-Normal. Sometimes the two towns in our community get blended into one. We’ve had some blue collar type work. We are probably more blue collar than say what the other community is. The other community is more of a white collar community.” While there seems to be this differentiation of the two towns, he also identifies the fact that regardless of which part of town they are from, the “people are very passionate about their children.”

Understanding the community history helps these principals understand the current challenges that face their communities. The fact that these schools are Illinois Spotlight Schools indicates that there is a high-poverty population in each of these communities. In each instance, the principals identified poverty as the biggest challenge that faces their community but not necessarily from the financial standpoint. There are many other challenges that end up facing these communities as a result of the poverty. Mrs. Belgium for example, identified the drug problems that face her school community.
“In this community, children are coming to us that can’t sit still because their parents have used every drug that there is. And this is generational in this district. It’s in the neighboring communities. Their parents have used drugs. Their grandparents have used drugs. And I don’t know how to help these little guys. I know that their parents are using drugs and what we’re asking kids to do, well, they’re not physically able to do those things, or mentally able.”

For Dr. France, the problem he is facing in his school’s surrounding area is the regentrification of the housing. Regentrification is a refurbishing of neighborhoods that have been in disrepair and, in what used to be “affordable” housing, have now become high-priced real estate. “Our student population is drying up and then with the regentrification of this area, all of these homes, they’re being gutted and where before, I’d have five Hispanic parents living with five kids a piece, now I’m having two rich white young people with no kids buy those homes.”

Another challenge that accompanies poverty is the English as a second language piece and the limited education many of the parents have. For Dr. Canada at Ottawa Elementary School, there is a growing Hispanic population that his school is serving. He recognizes that his school faces challenges with parents not being able to help their child with their learning at home. “Our next big discussion is homework. What is the point of homework in the K to 5 building? You really wonder. And what is the point of sending kids home to parents who may have a second grade education or who, now the kids are doing so well in English that mom and dad can’t help them anymore and making the parents feel badly, making the kids feel badly.” Ms. Portugal identified the same issues.
“Really the second language issue is the biggest issue. There’s so many diverging opinions on how you teach kids that are Spanish speaking, or non-English speaking. That coupled with the poverty issue, go hand in hand. Because the second language issue is not a very big issue if you’re not from poverty. The kids who come from very literate homes, learn English easily. Generally if their parents are literate, the parents also know English. But in our case, or what is usually the case with us is, we have very few kids whose parents are really, even literate, never mind, very literate. And so the kid’s coming to school with poor Spanish.”

**Understanding Poverty**

Having an understanding of the culture of poverty helps these principals with supporting students for success. Students living in poverty come to school lacking the basic literacy, math, and social skills needed to be successful in school. According to Mrs. Greece at Athens Elementary School, “What they (the students) come into, what our kids come into school with. The baggage they carry. And the skills that they have. The skills that my kids come in with are not necessarily the same skills that help them survive in a middle class values education system.” So the school must fill those gaps if the students are to be successful.

It is not only the students who provide challenges to the middle class system. Their parents are also not able to navigate the system. Because of her background, Mrs. Greece understands and is better able to work with her students’ parents, even when there is conflict. “They’re upset because there’s a perception that their child is being wronged and they’re advocating for their kids and they don’t know how to advocate in a different
way. And if you keep that mindset, most of them, well, are carrying baggage too. Most of them, part of it’s about their kid. But they’re reliving all of their hurts and injustices in here. And this isn’t me, this is the office. You know, so they’re bringing their issues to the office.” For Mr. Spain at Madrid, parental attitudes are challenging to overcome. “I would say probably the biggest challenge would be twofold. Number one is the mobility rate. And the second would be if you took a look at like the SES, socioeconomic status of people kind of dictates the belief in education. ‘I don’t trust in education.’ I think that where education falls on a hierarchy of peoples’ needs at home is low to the bottom. And I think that you know, we take like the back seat to peoples’ priorities, and I think that’s one of the bigger stumbling blocks I guess.”

**Document Analysis**

Analyzing the principal job descriptions and principal evaluation tools finds this an area if importance as well. Again, since these documents find their base in the ISSLC Standards, this is no surprise. The fourth standard calls for the education leader to “promote(s) the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.” It further clarifies for the education leader to “Promote understanding, appreciation, and use of the community’s diverse cultural, social, and intellectual resources” (CCSSO, 2008, p. 15).
Collaboration and Support

It is one thing to develop a relationship with someone. It is quite another to move to the next level in that relationship and work with them to achieve a common goal. Identifying and capitalizing on the strengths of those in the school community, recognizing the weaknesses and challenges that face the school community and creating and implementing support structures to build on the strengths and to overcome the weaknesses, was critical to the student success.

Each principal recognized that the secret to their success lies in working with other people. While relationships have already been identified as being important to these principals, building relationships is the bridge to the actual work. Principals see the need to facilitate the structure and supports which provide for collaboration among staff members, parents and students. Building these systems of support and collaboration allows the principal to bring people together to achieve a common goal, the realization of the mission and vision.

“The first year or two, we focused pretty much just on, a lot of team building. People sharing. Learning how to share with one another. Trusting each other. People didn’t want to trust. It was like this side of the building and that side of the building,” were different schools, according to Dr. Italy at Rome Elementary. Each of the principals spoke of the need to get people talking to and working with one another. This creates an identity in the building, making the work meaningful. According to Mrs. Greece, it is not the structures that create the success. Instead, she believes, that they are “successful because who we are. I think who we are drives what we do.”
Creating committee or action planning teams are a common structure among these principals to help them achieve their goals. For example, Mr. Spain at Madrid Elementary School requires staff members to serve on one of the school’s task forces. When he first arrived at Madrid, “Everyone had to sign up for it (a task force) and that immediately got every staff member involved in some way in the school improvement process because it was always top down before I came here. And I said, you know what, there’s no buy-in. When a group gets together, makes a plan and says you’re going to do it. Then people (won’t) blow off the trainings and there’s value to it.” In each instance, the principals spoke of having staff members involved in decision-making which then leads to success.

In order to achieve that common vision, the principals have put structures in place that support teachers. Among the structures mentioned were hiring practices, goal setting, formal and informal observations, providing resources and professional development, support with parents and school culture and climate.

As teachers are hired in the school, the principals found that they were hiring staff members who shared their beliefs about the teaching and learning process. As staff members retire, transfer or are released from contracts, principals replace them with staff members who share their philosophy. Mrs. Portugal noticed that pattern in her hiring after several years. “So everyone I was hiring was of the same opinion that I was that we needed to address the cultural needs of the kids more and not be so generic in the way we were addressing that.” Most of the principals also noted that they involve other staff members in the hiring process. Dr. Canada stated, “I used to hire by myself and now I
“hire with a team.” He uses the team hiring process as a teaching tool with those on the team. For example, after interviewing several candidates for a teaching position, he said, “The teachers would have hired any of the three. But when the third person came in? Strategies. Strategies like crazy. And they said, oh, now I see what you’re talking about.” Other principals mentioned that since the current staff would be working with the new staff member, it was important for them to be involved in the hiring process.

The principals also spoke about their individual responsibilities in helping teachers to grow professionally. Each has structures in place to support teacher growth. Mr. Spain at Madrid Elementary School said he sets goals with teachers. “I do goal setting with teachers at the beginning of the year in trying to encourage them to choose goals that are going to help them grow either personally or professionally.” He then follows up with teachers both informally as well as through the formal observation cycle to see how they are progressing towards their goals.

Another common belief among the principals is the importance of providing teachers the necessary tools, resources and professional development so that they can do their job. Mrs. Belgium tries “to furnish whatever the teachers want. If it’s reasonable.” In her school, the staff undertook a fundraising campaign to raise money to put Smart Boards in every classroom. They reached their goal and then Mrs. Belgium arranged extensive professional development so that the teachers were well-versed in how to use it effectively to impact the teaching and learning process. She thinks it is important to help “teachers to find ways to get what they feel they need to help the kids be successful.”
The support is not limited to things one can buy. Support is also important when it comes to dealing with difficult parents. Mrs. Greece described her role as one that preserves the positive relationship between the teacher and the parent. Parents must “have a good relationship with the classroom teacher. So when it starts getting to be too much or mama needs to hear something she doesn’t want to hear. She needs to hear that from me. So she can still be friends with the social worker and friends with the classroom teacher. And then my teacher can do her job.” Each of the principals noted that they provided similar supports to teachers in dealing with parents.

Collaboration and support must be built into the school climate and culture. Each of the principals has structures in place which allow them to create a positive climate and culture within the building. First, each principal mentioned different ways that they show appreciation for the work that their staff members do in the classroom. From reward systems to thank you notes to staff appreciation weeks, these principals have established deliberate opportunities to show their appreciation to the staff. Two principals, Mrs. Portugal and Mrs. Greece both mentioned the collective expectation of their staffs not to gossip about one another or their students. Mrs. Greece stated, “Somebody was venting here in the office. And somebody else came up and said, in a very teasing, loving way, we don’t do that in this school. And that’s true. We don’t. We don’t have a teachers’ lounge. We have a SPA, staff planning area, because we found teachers’ lounges were often places where people go to vent and that wasn’t going to happen here. We are purposefully positive.”
These principals have also built in structures that celebrate success, recognizing achievement. In each case, when the Illinois Spotlight School Award was announced, there was some sort of celebration that accompanied it. Mrs. Portugal had water bottles with the Illinois Spotlight School logo on it for her staff. It became a “badge of honor” as it appeared on letterhead, schools signage and websites. Mrs. Belgium identified herself as the “cheerleader for the students and the teachers” supporting them in their achievements. Mr. England made cupcakes with 80% on top for the staff once they reached an 80% passing rate on standardized tests.

**Document Analysis**

As mentioned previously, the formal job descriptions and evaluation tools strongly reflect the ISSLC standards. Where collaboration and support are concerned, two of the standards apply. The first standard calls for the educational leader to promote “the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.” It further clarifies that the leader must work to “Collaboratively develop and implement a shared vision and mission” (CCSSO, 2008, p. 14). The fourth standard directly addresses collaboration and support: “An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources” (CCSSO, 2008, p. 15).
Mission and Vision

Each of the principals involved in this study, articulated a well-defined mission and vision for their school community. As defined earlier, mission refers to an organization’s basic purpose for existence (Evans, 1996) while vision refers to the future direction of an organization (Evans, 1996). It articulates a view of a realistic, credible attractive future for the organization, a condition that is better in some important ways than what now exists (Bennis & Nanus, 1997). Each of the principals articulated that mission and vision centering on students in terms of academic achievement, personal development, and safety and security. The mission and vision of what these principals believe their students can achieve link each of these themes together.

Academic Achievement

Being selected as a 2007 Illinois Spotlight school was a result of the academic achievement of the students in each school. Each principal was able to articulate their goals for the school academically. Aside from speaking directly about literacy, none of the principals mentioned specific subject-matter type goals. Instead the academic goals mentioned included: creating independent thinkers, creative thinkers, problem-solvers, and preparing them for the next level of education. Interestingly, one principal noted that during the course of the interview, she spoke very little about the academic programs that were in place in her school. When asked if that bothered her, she replied, “In a way because our academic success is based on what we do academically. But it seems like a lot of the leadership questions that are being asked are about our building culture and I think you have to have that set in place. So you can get to the academics.”
Mr. England at London Elementary believes that a relentless focus on the academic goals supports his school’s academic success. Pointing to a sign over his office door that read “80%”, he explained, “We accept no excuses. It is the relentless pursuit of excellence. And you see it over my door. I see it all the time. All the time. I don’t care if they’re poor. I don’t care if they’re minority. I don’t care if they’re from a single parent family. I don’t care of they’re raised by their grandma. This is the best we got. We have to take these kids from where they’re at and move it up.” Mrs. Portugal shared a similar belief, expressing that the students and teachers must set goals to succeed “because generally people don’t meet their goals without setting a goal.”

In every case, the principals described classrooms that were engaging and instructional methodologies which were tailored to meet the needs of students. As Mr. England described it, “I want some buzz going. I want some talking. I want kids interacting with kids and adults interacting with kids and adults interacting with adults.” Mrs. Portugal described it this way. “It looks like the kids are working in different ways. So, there might be some kids listening to something. Some kids viewing something. Might be some kids reading. Might be some kids writing. Might be two kids discussing something. Might be kids creating something. So I’d see a variety of learning styles.”

In order to monitor the academic program, the principals spend a great deal of time observing in classrooms. Each has placed this as a priority in their day, devoting several hours daily to both the formal and informal observations. This has meant that they have delegated tasks which do not directly impact the teaching and learning process to a support staff member or other administrator such as an assistant principal. According
to Mr. Spain at Madrid Elementary School, “One thing that I’ve really worked on doing is to try and be more visible is to be in the classrooms more.” By being in the classrooms often, the principals have a good understanding of whether or not the instructional methodologies are helping the students achieve academically.

Each principal also sees an important component of the academic program is to prepare the students for the next level of education once the students leave their building. According to Mrs. Greece at Athens Elementary School, she wants academic excellence for her students so that her students will “be able to function on a level playing field when they go to that great big 4-5-6 building. I don’t want anybody to say, oh you’re from that school. I want them to be on an even playing field with everybody else when they go there.” Similarly, Mr. Chile wants his students, “To come away with a skill set that they will be very successful in continuing their journey to the middle school.”

**Personal Development**

These principals also set goals for the school which included the development of the whole child. Each of the principals was asked to reflect on how a child would describe their experience in their schools. In every case, the principals want the school environment to be one where the students feel that they are cared for. In describing his school Mr. England said, “You would see people that care for you. You would see people that will protect you and keep you safe. That will do everything in their power to make you the best person you can be before you leave here. Just see a building full of caring adults.”
In each school, the principals have implemented character education programs to support student success. Dr. Italy at Rome Elementary School saw this as a key to supporting student success and not as something superfluous. “We have a really strong character ed. program in this building. They had parts of it when I got here but over the years, we have just expanded and just added all kinds of other things…you know, bulletin boards, contests, I mean, everything just ties.”

The majority of students in each of these buildings qualify for the federal free and reduced breakfast and lunch program. Not only did these principals oversee the academic and social growth of the children, they also made sure that basic needs are being met such as ensuring that the students have been fed. Mr. Spain at Madrid Elementary School sees this as a critical part of his job. “Even simple things such as making sure every kid is fed, regardless of if the parents paid for the week or not, or if it’s free or reduced.” In one school the principal went to the local school council and the teachers to make an adjustment in the school day to accommodate a universal breakfast program. Dr. France explained that “of the 300 kids eligible to eat breakfast, only 40 kids eat breakfast. Can you imagine how much better they would do if they all had a good breakfast in the morning? So what we did is, we sacrificed 15 minutes of instructional time and … now we serve about 270 breakfasts every morning. And what a great time to bond with your kids or do daily oral language or you could read to them while they’re eating breakfast and then they’d be a little more focused.”

Each principal also mentioned the desire to help students see their own potential and to develop as good people. Dr. Canada at Ottawa Elementary School said, “Most if
all, I want my kids to feel good about themselves. Really feel good about who they are as human beings and their potential. Whatever their potential is.” According to Mrs. Greece, “We want this to be a happy, safe structured 6 hours to be where you’re going to be accepted for the gifts and the talents and the strengths that you have. And it’s our responsibility to tap into that to help you achieve. That’s our job.”

**Safe and Secure Environment**

Finally, because of the populations that these schools serve and the neighborhoods in which these schools are located, each of these principals set the safety and security of their students as a high priority. Creating a positive learning environment meant that the students had to feel safe and secure while at school. Mr. England at London Elementary summarized it for all principals when he said that he wanted the students to feel, “Comfortable. Secure. Safe. Non-threatening.” Each school has security measures in place to create a safe environment in the building. Each school had cameras either throughout the building, at exterior entrances or both. In all cases, visitors must be “buzzed in” and are directed to the office.

Safety and security are not limited to violence prevention, although that is an important component. Each principal also envisions an environment where students are comfortable learning. Mr. Spain stated that in a safe and secure learning environment, “Kids are going to feel free to make mistakes.” According to Dr. Italy, she believes that school should be, “A place that they (the students) hopefully, want to come to every day.” All of the principals made similar comments.
Mrs. Greece at Athens Elementary was a staff member when her building was first opened and had the opportunity to work with the then principal and other staff members to establish a culture of expectations for student behavior. Knowing that students might have had a difficult morning at home, the school has created a morning program called *Blast Off.* “We have an all school celebration in the morning. Our kids come to school carrying a lot of baggage and if they have a rough morning at home, it would start a rough morning at school and so we decided instead of doing morning announcements, we all meet in the gym. Take 7 minutes. We sing a song. We have a song leader and a pledge leader and we do birthdays and make announcements and then sing once again and they all go to their classrooms. It’s fuel for the day.” Whether it is a program every morning in the gymnasium or announcements over the PA system, each school has established some way to begin each day on a positive note as an entire school community, involving students in the implementation of that.

Having a mission and vision about assisting students to achieve their potential means that there might need to be a shift in culture in the building. For example, several of the principals had to change the culture of discipline in their buildings. According to Dr. Italy, she had to switch the underlying philosophy from one of punishment to one of correction. “We were talking the other day, some of us. Someone brought up, I’m here to correct the children and we were talking about discipline. And it was so good to hear someone say, I’m here to correct the children and lead them in a right direction instead of hearing someone say, I’m hear to punish them or give them consequences.”
Another way that buildings establish a culture is through group study. At Athens Elementary, the entire staff has implemented *Love and Logic*®, a philosophy founded by Jim Fay and Foster W. Cline, M.D.. By using this kind of training, there is “a common language in the building” that allows students and staff to approach behavioral issues in a way that changes the behavior without demeaning the child.

In some ways, these principals are working against the environment in the homes in which the students live. In dealing with student discipline issues, all of the schools have adopted some form of Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies (PBIS) by rewarding students for good behavior rather than punishing them for inappropriate behavior. Mr. England explained a situation where his approach to student discipline differed from the parents. “They beg me to whoop their child. I say I cannot do that. When he gets home, you can deal with it how you want in the privacy of your own home but this is a school and I can’t do corporal punishment.” This is in keeping with the expectations for behavior that his school has set in place. Respect yourself. Respect others. Respect the environment. As part of their mission and vision, each of the schools has similar expectations to create an environment that provide an appropriate structure for student behavior.

**Document Analysis**

Analyzing the job descriptions and evaluation tools, this notion of having a mission and vision in leadership becomes evident. As referenced previously, these documents are based on the ISSLC Standards. The first ISSLC standard calls for the education leader to develop a shared vision of learning. “An educational leader promotes
the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders” (CCSSO, 2008, p. 14). This standard requires that the school leader work cooperatively with board members, teachers, staff, parents, and students to develop a shared mission and strategies for achieving that mission. The leader needs to focus all efforts on raising student achievement.

**Research Questions Answered**

This study was designed and conducted to answer several research questions.

**Main Research Question**

*To what extent do the characteristics of moral leadership manifest themselves in the leadership, behavior, relationships and decisions of principals in high-poverty, high-performing schools?*

Each of the principals who participated in this study, demonstrate characteristics of moral leadership. In a school setting, moral leadership is about placing the core values of the school community at the center of all the community does without giving thought to individual self-interest. This is one of the challenges of moral leadership in schools as people are engaged in the decision-making process (Sergiovanni, 1991, p. 331). In fact, when two choices are in conflict, the principal must choose the one that is good and effective for their schools not what is in the best interest of a single individual (p. 326). According to Sergiovanni, moral leadership “comprises three important dimensions – one’s heart, head, and hand” (p. 321). The first dimension, the heart, refers to the leader’s beliefs, values and dreams and their commitment to those. The head of
leadership refers to the theories of practice that the leader has developed through experience and the ability to reflect on those experiences through the lens of those theories. Finally, the hand of leadership indicates the leader’s actions, decisions, and management behaviors that become organizational programs, policies, and procedures (p. 321).

In each case, these principals keep the mission of their school community at the center of all they do and they demonstrate that on a regular basis. Whether they are making decisions about professional development, collaborating with teachers on analyzing student achievement data or providing support for the larger school community, these principals demonstrate moral leadership. Demonstrating the first dimension, the heart, these principals have a clear focus on what they believe, value and dream for their school community. Mr. England from London Elementary School explained it this way, “We accept no excuses. It is the relentless pursuit of excellence. I don’t care if they’re poor. I don’t care if they’re minority. I don’t care if they’re from a single parent family. I don’t care of they’re raised by their grandma. This is the best we got. We have to take these kids from where they’re at and move it up.” This same commitment to excellence for students exists in each principal and demonstrates the heart of their leadership.

Demonstrating the head of leadership, these principals are committed to professional development so that they can provide guidance on best practice and research-based, data-driven methodologies which support student success. The principals demonstrate an understanding of their school communities and the culture of poverty
which help them to lead their schools in ways that lead to student success. This dimension is demonstrated in these statements made by Mrs. Greece at Athens Elementary School. “The skills that my kids come in with are not necessarily the same skills that help them survive in a middle class values education system. My 5 year olds can make dinner. Change a diaper. Take care of the kids. Walk themselves to school. Be at home by themselves. No they’re not supposed to, but they can. And then you come into a school setting where they are supposed to have known their abc’s and their colors and sit at a table for however many hours a day and share and use quiet voices and look you in the face when I talk and wait my turn to talk and they just come in with a whole different skill set.” This understanding of her students’ backgrounds translates into her commitment to and focus on literacy. Knowing that her students do not have the requisite skills to be successful in school, Mrs. Greece seeks opportunities to develop her professional knowledge in these areas which then gives her the tools to provide her staff with what they need to support student success.

The final dimension, the hand of leadership, is also demonstrated in each of these principals. These principals make decisions and provide structures which are consistent with their beliefs and values and are supported by the theories of practice they have developed. Dr. Canada at Ottawa Elementary School demonstrated this dimension when he described the school’s approach to literacy skills. After observing the literacy programs and working with his teachers to analyze reading comprehension data, he found that changes were needed. “So what we’ve done is we’ve rolled out a schedule for next year. Uninterrupted literacy blocks. But we’re actually breaking it down and saying, ok,
here’s your 30 minute whole group. Here’s your 60 minute guided reading and so this is one of the leadership things then where you say, so lesson plans are going to change next year. I want to see what the 30 minute piece looks like and I want to see what the 60 minute piece looks like.” The decision was made in the best interest of students and gave teachers specific targets for which to aim. These decisions were developed as a group and not something that was mandated by the principal. Each staff member then committed themselves to providing appropriate and agreed upon structures for those literacy blocks.

In summary for the main research question, these principals all demonstrate the characteristics of moral leadership in their behaviors, relationships and decisions.

Related Research Questions

1. **In which types of situations does the principal function from a) moral authority; b) bureaucratic authority; c) technical-rational authority; d) psychological authority; and e) professional authority?**

   In varying situations, each of these principals functions within the different authorities. As it has already been discussed that these principal demonstrate moral leadership, it could appear that then would exclude the other authorities. In fact though, the principals demonstrate each of these authorities as a means to get to moral leadership.

   Moral authority has been defined as the obligations and duties derived from widely shared values, ideas, and ideals (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 31). Each of these principals has involved the larger school community in setting the direction for the
school. One example is the establishment of task forces for school improvement by Mr. Spain at Madrid Elementary School:

“We had three parts of our action plan and they were parent involvement, curriculum and bilingual education. So what I did was made a grid of those three columns and divided them up…and said, put your name on your grade level for which one of those task forces you would like to serve on. And we talked a little about what those task forces are going to mean. And then, everyone had to sign up for it and that immediately got every staff member involved in some way in the school improvement process. My school improvement team members lead the task force. Three of my members lead it up and make sure, you know, that everyone meets and that they’re talking productively when they are meeting. What they do is the first semester they work to make sure that that task force takes care of its portion of the school improvement plan so that we are really doing everything that we said we were going to do. Then the second semester, they work to kind of decide what we’re going to do the next year. Planning it. Adjusting it as necessary. That’s been powerful because people are really more comfortable now in talking about school improvement and they understand why we’re doing what we’re doing.”

Involving all members of the staff in the school improvement process provides opportunities for the school community to take ownership of the process, and thus of the student achievement. This type of involvement is consistent with moral leadership.
Bureaucratic authority could be seen as the antithesis of moral leadership as it relies on a traditional managerial approach to leadership. As was previously defined, “Bureaucratic authority exists in the form of mandates, rules, regulations, job descriptions, and expectations” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 30). In describing what a quality learning environment looks like, Mr. Chile at Santiago Elementary School expects to see student engagement in the teaching and learning process. “Sometimes people think they are engaging their kids when they’re not. And for them to see past it or through another lens and I say I’m concerned I’m seeing this. Some teachers who are not interested in the quality walk through, (do not) go into other rooms to see what other teachers are doing for just a 15 minute snapshot of learning. And you’re not opening up your room. What is the concern there? So, let’s look at that. What other ways can we teach differently?” On the surface, these statements are very bureaucratic. He wants to see a classroom look a certain way and he holds teachers to that those expectations. However, he wants that student engagement because it is best for the students and what the school community expects in the classroom. This bureaucratic action then supports the moral leadership by holding people accountable to the expectations, thus impacting student achievement.

“Technical-rational authority exists in the form of evidence derived from logic and scientific research” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 31). In this authority, the principal holds the knowledge and directs the teachers based on what the research says. What the teachers know to be true from their own practice is irrelevant in this authority. The technical-rational authority does appear in the leadership of these principals as well. The majority of the principals mentioned the implementation of various programs during their
interviews. This discussion can be seen through the lens of technical-rational authority. Often the districts provide training to the principals who in turn provide it to the teachers. Dr. Italy at Rome Elementary School described this as her district implements the *Understanding by Design* (UbD) model in the schools. “I have a workshop next week I’m going to. We started looking at, and using, the *Understanding by Design* this year.” The professional development will then be provided to the teachers so that they can implement it in their curriculum design. Since UbD is research-based, there is no need to question its effectiveness.

Again, this may seem contrary to moral leadership. Using technical-rational authority though does open the school community to the available research and provides an opportunity for continued dialogue for what is best for their students. This then supports moral leadership as the school community explores new ways to meet students’ needs. Schools do not need to begin their research from the beginning. Technical-rational authority allows schools to use existing research. If schools only used their own research, change would be even slower in coming. Given the deadlines established as a part of NCLB, schools must move swiftly and deliberately in making changes to improve student achievement. Principals often use technical-rational authority as a means to introduce new programs to the school such as Response to Intervention or Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies.

“Psychological authority is expressed in the form of motivational technology and human relations skills” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 30). Under this authority, principals use interpersonal skills to develop positive relationships which create a positive working
environment and thus, teachers do what is asked and expected because of that positive climate. As one of the themes discussed in this chapter is relationships, the connection to psychological authority is clear. All of these principals place high importance on developing relationships with staff, students, parents and fellow administrators. The majority of these principals mentioned creating some type of staff recognition system which allows them to develop a positive relationship with the staff and leads to a positive working environment. Dr. France at Paris Elementary School described his recognition system in this way. “We give teachers and we give staff these silly little plaques. They cost like $8. You know, it says educator of the month. You ought to see how they’ll do cartwheels just to get educator of the month. And I don’t want to you know, degrade them or but this is, seriously, this is like $8. It’s a little plaque. But you know what though? It makes them feel good. The Spotlight School. It makes them feel good. And that’s a good, good thing.” Each of these principals creates opportunities to get to know their school community, not just on a professional level but also on a personal level. These principals know about the challenges their staff members and students face at home. They know extended family members. In fact, this also translates into the theme of community and cultural awareness. They know their communities and by knowing and understanding their communities they are able to impact student achievement in a positive manner. This, then, is another means to moral leadership. The principals take the time to use their interpersonal skills and exercise psychological authority, but they do it so that they can bring the school closer to the achievement of their core beliefs and vision for the students.
“Professional authority is seen as the seasoned craft knowledge and personal expertise of each teacher” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 31). Professional authority takes technical-rational authority to the next level. While it does have its base in educational research, it does not stop there. Instead, it reflects on that research in practice and how that is adapted in the classroom to meet the needs of the students in a particular location. Members of the school community then, learn from one another and not just from the research. Mrs. Portugal at Lisbon Elementary School described how her teachers worked together. “I was at a meeting with 2nd and 3rd grade teachers and it’s a group that set this goal to work on vocabulary. And the person who is the leader of that group is really a good leader. So she had all of their activities that they were going to do. And they were kind of assessing themselves. Had they done all of those things.” Mrs. Portugal stepped out of the role of leader and allowed the teachers to lead themselves. This is an excellent example of how the expertise of the teachers is honored and respected and used to help improve student achievement. Each of these principals has implemented structures which provide opportunities for teachers to offer their own expertise to benefit the whole school community. Whether that is through a task force or a committee, these leaders respect how their teachers have developed in the profession. Using professional authority as a lens to lead is another means by which these principals are able to get to demonstrate moral leadership. By recognizing the seasoned craft knowledge these professionals have developed, the principals are able to achieve the fulfillment of the shared beliefs and core values.
2. Do principals have knowledge of moral leadership? If so what is their perspective on moral leadership and their awareness of its application in their leadership?

During the interviews, the principals were asked specifically about their knowledge of moral leadership. Each principal was asked, “How would you define moral leadership?” The answers to this question indicated that the principals do not have a direct understanding of moral leadership as it is defined by Sergiovanni (1991). “Moral leadership is about placing the core values of the school community at the center of all the community does without giving thought to individual self-interest” (p. 331). The answers usually focused more on what was “right and wrong” often citing examples of immoral behavior with students or staff members. It was also common to hear it explained in a way that spoke of their individual behavior, both professionally and personally. Mrs. Belgium at Brussels Elementary School stated it this way. “I’d say walking the walk. Talking the talk. In my life, I believed in doing best in school myself. I raised my children that way. I believe in being a productive citizen who doesn’t have the right to hurt other people. And that’s what I teach. And that’s what I live. So, living the life that I’m teaching the children or helping to teach the children to live. Living that life myself.” This same sentiment was echoed by the majority of principals.

Even though these principals were not able to articulate Sergiovanni’s (1991) definition of moral leadership, each of them demonstrated moral leadership. The work that they do in their buildings shows that they have an active knowledge of what it means to be a moral leader. The themes identified in the data also show an understanding of
moral leadership. Their commitment to building relationships, their commitment to professional development, their community and cultural awareness, their spirit of collaboration and support, and their commitment to mission and vision are different parts which demonstrate moral leadership. They build relationships so that they can achieve their mission and vision. They secure and provide professional development to achieve their mission and vision. They develop deep understandings of the school’s community and culture to achieve the mission and vision. And of course, their mission and vision is at the core of all they do, demonstrating moral leadership. While they may not articulate it, they have a deep understanding of its importance in the work they do.

3. Does moral leadership manifest itself in the work of principals?

“Moral leadership is about placing the core values of the school community at the center of all the community does without giving thought to individual self-interest” (Sergiovanni, 1991, p. 331). Each of these principals practices moral leadership in these high-poverty, high-performing schools. Moral leadership manifests itself in different ways with each principal.

For example, Mr. Spain at Madrid Elementary School, spoke about the need to make sure that students are having their basic needs met. “We care for the kids and we want the best for them and hopefully, we’re going to be providing them the academics that are going to help them to be successful in life…Even simple things such as making sure every kid is fed. Regardless of if the parents paid for the week or not, or if it’s free or reduced.” Mr. Spain has a professional obligation to make sure that families are paying their lunch fees as appropriate. If the fees do not balance, there may be
consequences for him either from the district office or, in the case of the free and reduced lunch program, from the government. While he respects that, he also sees the obligation to students’ basic needs as being more important. There were many examples of this throughout the interviews. These principals make decisions that are consistent with policies and procedures but are flexible to support the students for success. These principals see their obligation to students beyond academics. They provide assistance with health related issues, family disputes, and community challenges. This translates into principals spending their own money to provide incentives to staff and students. They spend time outside of the contracted day to achieve their vision and mission for the school. These principals have developed school climates that are supportive of students and staff members. They work with students’ families to make sure that they are a source of support for the students as well. They sacrifice time with their own families and personal life so that they can be supportive of their school community. Mr. Chile at Santiago Elementary School is married to a teacher. “There is sacrifice as you know, when you get into this position. I am fortunate to have a very caring and understanding wife who is a teacher. Who gets it and understands what it’s like working with kids. Who is compassionate, empathetic and also goes that’s not fair that you should have to go in and do this and it’s like, honey, you know, it’s just part of it.” These principals understand and demonstrate that their obligations go beyond a job description.
4. What policies and structures has the district put into place to support the practice of moral leadership in a) job descriptions; b) evaluation tools; c) mission statements?

As stated previously, of the nine principals that participated in this study, only four were able to provide a current job description and principal evaluation tool. The evaluation tools were directly related to the job descriptions and each had common themes taken directly from the ISSLC Standards. While the ISSLC Standards are generally meant to serve a national purpose of linking leadership expectations across the country, simply copying the standards into a job description and/or evaluation tool does not provide for the uniqueness of each school. Since the ISSLC Standards do, in some aspects, mirror the characteristics of moral leadership, these job descriptions and evaluation tools do provide a framework which supports principals in the practice of moral leadership.

The mission statements did not speak directly to the role of the principal in the school. Mission statements were available for every school/district. However, with three exceptions, these mission statements were for the district and not for the individual school. This also causes concern for the applicability of the statements for these HP schools. As described in Appendix E: School and Principal Descriptions, it is not uncommon for the poverty rates in the studied schools to be greater than the district average. The unique challenges that these individual schools face then, may not have their needs met by a district-wide mission statement. In general though, the mission statements have general statements about the outcomes of receiving an education in the
district. These statements speak of the mission to develop good citizens, to be successful later in life, to be lifelong learners and to develop a sense of self-worth. These statements do provide support and structure to the principals in the practice of moral leadership. Since the statements expand the work of the school from academic work to the personal development of students, principals have the leeway needed to develop programs and support structures for students that help them achieve success.

It is important to note the limited number of job descriptions and evaluation tools that were available. Since the students in these schools are successful, district office staff and/or boards of education, might not feel the need to offer that structure. If the schools had not been named Spotlight Schools or the students were not achieving and improving as they are, the district office and boards of education might approach this differently. By not providing these structures, the districts could be sending a message that they trust these principals and do not feel the need to offer that structure. This is dangerous though. These structures provide direction and support for the principal in doing his/her job. Structure, policy or procedure decisions made at the district level should not be based on certain individuals. These particular principals, while successful in their current positions, may take another position or retire and so the structure should be in place to support continuity in the expectations for a principal in these schools.
5. What policies and structures has the principal put in place in the school to support the practice of moral leadership?

Since moral leadership is about placing core values of the school community at the center of all the community does without giving thought to individual self-interest, there are many places where these principals have established structures that support the practice of moral leadership. The majority of principals were uncomfortable speaking about putting policy in place since officially, only the Board of Education sets policy. They instead spoke of structures that helped them to be successful.

Each of the identified themes in this study demonstrates the practice of moral leadership. Building and maintaining positive relationships emerged as a theme from the data. Each principal is deliberate in placing relationships as a high priority in their work. They develop relationships with students, staff members, parents, and fellow administrators. Each principal makes himself or herself available to the various stakeholders. Whether they are supervising the parking lot in the morning or afternoon to interact with parents, standing in the cafeteria to interact with students as they eat lunch, or move through the halls to interact with staff members, these principals are visible and accessible. These principals use either daily assemblies or special events to interact with the school community to set a positive climate for the day. Principals will not be able to identify the common shared beliefs or core values of the school community if they do not know the members of that community.

Having a commitment to professional development also emerged as one of the themes in the data. Each principal continues to grow in the profession. They are also
committed to the continual growth of their staff members. They provide support to staff
members so that they may continue to find better ways to meet their students’ needs. In
each case, the principals participate in the professional development provided by their
respective districts, learning alongside their staff members. These principals understand
that if they are going to support and evaluate the staff members as they implement the
professional development in their classrooms, they must be with them through the
training. These principals also understand that their role as the school leader calls for
professional development that goes beyond classroom instruction and addresses
leadership. Each one belongs to professional organizations and attends conferences and
workshops. Having a commitment to professional development demonstrates moral
leadership as well. These principals understand that they do not have all of the answers
for addressing the challenges that face teachers in the classroom and do not see it as a
threat to their leadership that they do not have all of the answers. Instead, they put self-
interest aside and guide teachers toward professional development opportunities which
are in keeping with the school’s beliefs and vision and to meet the needs of their students.

Another theme which emerged from the data was the deep understanding of the
school’s community and culture. Each of these principals has developed structures which
allow them opportunities to learn about the community and its culture. The majority of
these principals make home visits when they have concerns about a student. They see
that the relationship between the home and the school is critical to the students’ success.
This theme is also connected to professional development. These principals provide
professional development opportunities for staff members to learn about the culture they
are serving such as a group reading of Ruby Payne’s (2005), *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*.

These principals also see their role in providing supports for the community at large. Principals invite community members to the school to volunteer their services in literacy. They have created welcome centers for recent immigrants. They open the school doors in the evening to provide a safe place for families to gather and read together. Understanding the community and its culture demonstrates moral leadership. These principals are not trying to develop students into what they believe they can be. Instead, they provide opportunities for these students to develop to their fullest potential, whatever that might be.

Moral leadership is not possible without collaboration and support, another theme which emerged from the data. Since moral leadership is based in core values and shared beliefs, these must be developed as a school community and not imposed by the school leader. Once these are developed the school leader continues to keep the school focused on those. These principals work with their staff and students in groups. Working with a task force or committee on school improvement or curriculum, principals are able to help the school move toward the realization of those core values and shared beliefs. Each of these principals has created some structure for allowing members of the school community to provide input into the school’s direction.

Each of the principals involved in this study, articulated a well-defined mission and vision for their school community. Each of the principals articulated that mission and vision centering on students in terms of academic achievement, personal
development, and safety and security. This theme, in and of itself, is moral leadership. While these principals had a personal belief about what was possible for their students, they developed that through the relationships that they built, the professional development programs in which they participated and supported for their staff members, the community and cultural awareness that they developed and the opportunities for collaboration and support they provided. This theme which also emerged from the data is the culmination of each of the others. By working on each of the other themes, this one is developed and is the fullness of moral leadership.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In order to complete this study of high-poverty, high-performing schools, I traveled across the State of Illinois. I visited schools in rural towns of which I had never heard and I visited one of the nation’s largest urban cities. While each school was unique in its own way, they shared two things in common, a high-poverty student population and student success. In this study I identified five themes common to the leadership of principals in these schools. While their actual practices may have differed, all principals showed a commitment to building relationships, to understanding the community and the culture, to professional development programs, to creating structures and procedures for collaboration and support, all connected to providing a mission and vision for the school community.

Creating and communicating a mission and vision underlies everything that these principals do in their work. As defined earlier, mission refers to an organization’s basic purpose for existence (Evans, 1996) while vision refers to the future direction of an organization (Evans, 1996). It articulates a view of a realistic, credible attractive future for the organization, a condition that is better in some important ways than what now exists (Bennis & Nanus, 1997). It is on the mission and vision that the other themes rest.

The relationships that the principals build help them to achieve the mission and vision. Their commitment to professional development provides them the research base
and the tools necessary to realize their mission and vision. Having an understanding of the community and culture in which they work, helps them to create a mission and vision that realistically meets the needs of their students. By collaborating with their staff members, parents and other administrators, they are able to bring the mission and vision to fruition. Having and communicating a mission and vision brings it all together.

Relationships

Findings

Throughout the interviews, the principals emphasized the importance of developing positive relationships with students, teachers, parents and other administrators. The positive relationships that they built created an atmosphere where students were supported for success. The principals developed deliberate strategies which built and maintained these relationships. Principals made themselves available to each group. The management aspects of the principalship were either delegated to another staff member or were completed at times when people were not in the building.

To develop the necessary relationships with the school community, these principals were visible and accessible at key moments throughout the day. Before school, these principals made themselves available to greet students as they arrived at school, often welcoming them by name and inquiring about family and activities. These principals also spoke about being visible in the main office to answer parent questions and concerns. Many principals stated that it was not uncommon that as they were entering the school each morning that parents would follow right behind them to ask
questions or raise concerns. These principals also greeted staff members as they came to school each day, asking questions about their life outside of school.

These principals were also visible and accessible during the school day. Each one designated time throughout the day to be in classrooms. While sometimes these visits to classrooms were related to formal observation processes, most often these were drop-in visits. These informal visits were seen as a way to support the teaching and learning process. These principals viewed these visits in many ways. Whether they involved themselves directly in the classroom, offering instructional support, or simply observing and then informally offering feedback, these principals believed that their presence in the classroom helped to place an emphasis on the importance of the teaching and learning process.

Visibility and accessibility during the school day was not limited to classroom visits. These principals were deliberate about being out of their offices at high-traffic times during the day. Passing periods, lunch periods, library time, computer lab time, and recess, all provided opportunities for principals to interact with students and teachers in an informal setting. These were the times and places that these principals were able to learn the personal stories of those with whom they work.

There were many opportunities after school of which principals took advantage to be visible and accessible to the school community. These principals were either in the parking lot interacting with parents at dismissal time and/or near the exits as students were leaving for the day, interacting with them. These principals were also deliberate in attending grade-level team meetings, parent meetings, and athletic or special events.
Their presence in these places helped them to build and maintain the positive relationships necessary for student success.

These principals also mentioned the importance of working with other administrators in their district. They understood the need to develop positive working relationships with district administrators so that they would have the necessary support and resources for student success. They viewed their relationships with fellow district principals as critical to their success. These colleagues provided an understanding of the challenges they were facing that others could not. They accessed their colleagues for advice in challenging situations and provided the same to them.

Whether it was before, during or after school, these principals always spoke of these relationships in terms of personal interaction and not through the use of memos, newsletters or electronic communication. Each time they spoke of relationship building, they described either the interactions they had with individuals or groups of stakeholders.

Conclusions

Based on this research, high-poverty high-performing schools must make relationship-building a priority. Since each of these principals has been at their school for a minimum of four years, they have had an extended time period to build these relationships and establish a level of trust with students, teachers, parents and other administrators.

As stated earlier, Ruby Payne (2005) explains that education and relationships are the two things that help one move out of poverty (p. 3-8). These principals are clearly providing both. By building positive relationships, the students are able to take better
advantage of the educational experiences they are being provided. Payne clarified further that one of the ways that people move out of poverty is because “someone shows them a different way” (p. 61). These principals are clearly building relationships which show their students the way to success.

ISSLC Standard 4 states, “An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources (CCSSO, 2008, p. 15). This standard defines the functions of this as building and sustaining positive relationships with families and caregivers. Embedded in this standard is the notion of relationship building. As so many of the job descriptions and principal evaluation tools studied are ISSLC-based, the structures within the district, recognize this need as well. These principals have put this standard into action and the relationships they have built support the success of every student.

According to Sergiovanni (1992), moral authority is seen as the obligations and duties derived from widely shared values, ideas, and ideals (p. 39). Developing positive relationships with each of those groups lays the groundwork for the commitment to these shared values, ideas, and ideals. If these relationships did not exist, there would be no way to know if there was any commonality in the work that the school community was doing. These principals did not develop these relationships for personal gain but for the good of students. They often spoke of working side by side with the teachers to support student success. It was not about having the power or authority in the position, but about
the position providing them the opportunity to keep the organization focused on what they believed to be important about teaching and learning and students.

Implications for Leadership in High-Poverty Schools

- Principals in high-poverty schools must develop strong relationships with staff members, students, parents, district administrators and community members.
- In order to build strong relationships, principals must be visible and accessible to all stakeholders before, during and after school.
- Principals must develop deliberate strategies for developing relationships. Being in the classrooms, cafeteria, computer lab or library and attending special or athletic events are critical to being accessible and visible to stakeholders.
- Management tasks of the principalship must either be delegated to another staff member or be done at times that do not detract from the principal being visible and accessible.

Commitment to Professional Development

Findings

Principals in this study demonstrate a commitment to professional development. Principals seek out opportunities to expand their knowledge and skills and provide support and encouragement for teachers to take advantage of the same sorts of opportunities. Professional development manifests itself in different ways including membership in professional organizations, reading current educational research related to local student achievement data and understanding the culture of poverty, attending
workshops and conferences and analyzing student achievement data to develop interventions to improve student achievement.

The principals who participated in this study all belong to various professional organizations, with the Illinois Principals Association (IPA) being the one they all have in common. Citing the need to connect with other principals, IPA was seen as a connection to others who face similar challenges. These professional organizations also provide them with current education research resources so that they can continue to develop their own knowledge base which will help them set direction and offer appropriate support to teachers and students in the teaching and learning process.

These principals regularly accessed current educational research which, after analyzing student achievement data, would provide them strategies and methodologies for addressing the deficiencies in student achievement. These principals also conducted book studies on relevant topics, especially on the culture of poverty so that their teachers would understand the backgrounds of their students. With such large populations of low-income students in their schools, they saw the importance of addressing this directly as opposed to hoping teachers would glean it on their own through personal experiences.

These principals took advantage of local workshop or conference opportunities and also encouraged their teachers to do the same. It was clear that these principals were not looking for the fad of the day, but rather strategies and methodologies which were research-based, data-driven which were sustainable and would positively impact student achievement. They were supportive of teacher requests for professional development, building into the budget sufficient funds for this and when teachers were not seeking out
these opportunities, these principals went directly to teachers and asked them to attend professional development opportunities.

Conclusions

This study found that successful principals in high-poverty, high-performing schools have a strong commitment to professional development, for themselves and for their teachers. These principals are committed to helping their students achieve and so provide structures and opportunities for professional growth which will give teachers the necessary tools to help their students.

Previous studies of high-poverty, high-performing schools also found this same commitment to professional development. For example, in his study on HP HP schools, Elmore (2006) found that in HP HP schools, “school leaders…invested heavily in professional development” (p. 44). In the meta-analysis completed by Marzano et al., 2005), they also found that successful principals placed an emphasis on professional development as necessary for success in the classroom (pp. 41-61).

ISSLC Standard 2 also advocates for professional development. “An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth” (CCSSO, 2008, p. 14). The standard further clarifies various foci including developing the instructional and leadership capacity of staff. One way to build their capacity is through the implementation of high-quality professional development programs.
In Payne’s (2005) work on the culture of poverty, she believes that in order to help students be successful, schools must understand the hidden rules of those in poverty and then help them learn and operate within those of the middle class. Understanding the culture of poverty requires professional development. It is not enough to interact with students from low-income families. These principals provided opportunities for teachers to complete book studies on understanding poverty as well as attending workshops and conferences. These principals were deliberate in crafting professional development and expectations for their staffs so that they would have the background information necessary to help students to be successful. By understanding the culture of poverty, teachers will be able to differentiate their instruction to make up for the deficiencies with which many children in poverty arrive in the classroom. Each of these principals mentioned their plans for implementing Response to Intervention (RtI) programs in their schools. RtI is an intentional instructional approach which targets instruction to the areas of weakness identified in individual students.

On the surface this commitment to professional development could be seen through the lens of Sergiovanni’s (1992) technical-rational authority, “Technical-rational authority exists in the form of evidence derived from logic and scientific research. When we base our leadership practice on such authority we expect teachers to respond in light of what is considered to be true” (p. 31). However, these principals are committed to professional development not because this is what the research says is true but because of their commitment to do what it takes to create an environment that supports student success. The moral leader believes, “Schools are professional learning communities” (p.
This description is not one that limits the learning to the students. Instead, the whole community is committed to learning and so continues its own professional growth in support of students.

**Implications for Leadership in High-Poverty Schools**

- Principals in high-poverty schools must be committed to participating in professional development which will help them to provide the necessary resources to support students and teachers for success.

- Principals in high-poverty schools must be committed to providing professional development opportunities to their teachers so they are successful in their work with students.

- Principals must advocate for professional development funds to be built into district budgets to support the professional development of all administrators and teachers.

- Principals must use student-achievement to make appropriate decisions about the professional development opportunities to be provided to teachers.

- Principals must make understanding the culture of poverty a regular professional development opportunity for teachers to understand the background of their students.
Community and Cultural Awareness

Findings

When speaking about the communities in which these principals worked, they each showed an acute understanding of the history, strengths and challenges of their respective communities. Regardless of whether the principal lived in the same community in which they worked, they showed the same level of understanding. This understanding helped them to set a direction for the school which provided students appropriate supports for their success.

These principals have personal experiences in the community which help them to be successful school leaders. These principals see their role in serving the community in which they work. Four of the nine principals interviewed live in their school community. Because of the number of years the others have worked in their school, they too have personal experiences with the community. These principals do not see their job as having a set schedule. They attend special and athletic events outside of the regular school day. The amount of time they spend in the school community then gives them an understanding of the challenges that face their community, allowing them to develop programs which help support student success.

Each of the principals spoke of community partners in one way or another. Forming these community partnerships helps them to help their students. Whether they bring in community members to read to the students or provide necessary resources for recent immigrants, these principals feel a responsibility for connecting with the community. Local businesses may supply volunteers or donate supplies that the school
can afford. Some principals form partnerships with local churches to work together on projects which support and school and community.

Regardless of income levels, every community faces its own challenges. In order to understand their students better, these principals have made it a priority to understand the community. These local communities face drug problems, gangs, domestic violence, and unemployment. Each of these impacts students in the classroom. These principals and their schools must then first address these challenges before students can be ready to learn. These principals freely acknowledge these challenges and directly address them as opposed to ignoring them. Their awareness and their willingness to address the issues help support their students for success.

Conclusions

Ruby Payne (2005) urges educators who work with students who come from low-income families “to honor students as human beings worthy of respect and care” (p. 111). To honor one’s students one must understand their backgrounds. It is too easy to dismiss these outside influences as irrelevant to the teaching and learning process but in fact, life outside of the school impacts life in the school. A teacher cannot assign a traditional “poster board” project and expect that students will be able to obtain the necessary materials to complete it. Respecting these students means that adjustments need to be made in the way that schools do business. These principals provide the necessary supports for students to be successful.

The third ISSLC standard states, “An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a
safe, efficient, and effective learning environment” (CCSSO, 2008, p. 14). Each of these principals spoke of the need to provide a safe environment for their students. The communities in which these schools exist face significant dangers to students whether due to domestic, gang, or drug issues. These principals are deliberate in addressing these. The standard further clarifies that principals must “obtain, allocate, align, and efficiently utilize human, fiscal, and technological resources and promote and protect the welfare and safety of students and staff” (CCSSO, 2008, p.14). As previously mentioned, since the provided job descriptions and evaluation tools are ISSLC-standard based, the expectations of many of the districts is that principals make this a high priority as well.

According to Sergiovanni (1992), moral leadership requires the principal to understand the community to provide the appropriate direction. “Communities are defined by their centers of shared values, beliefs, and commitments” and so moral leaders must “Rely on the ability of the community members to respond to duties and obligations” (p. 39). The school then reflects who the community is and the principal responds in a way that honors and respects this while challenging students to achieve success.

**Implications for Leadership in High-Poverty Schools**

- Principals in high-poverty schools must understand the community in which they work and provide appropriate training for staff so that they can adapt their instruction.
- Principals in high-poverty schools must understand the culture of poverty and provide appropriate training for staff so that they can adapt their instruction.
• Principals in high-poverty schools must provide appropriate structures for their students to help them overcome the challenges they face outside of school.

• Principals in high-poverty schools must involve the community in the educational process.

• Principals in high-poverty schools must develop programs which provide students the necessary supports to overcome the challenges that exist in the community.

**Collaboration and Support**

**Findings**

Out of the relationships that these principals built come a commitment to collaborate with the school’s stakeholders and provide structures which supported them for student success. Recognizing that they cannot do the work alone, these principals involve various stakeholders in decision-making and planning through work on committees. These principals also provide support for students and teachers when facing the challenges associated with their school communities. The support may come in the form of professional development opportunities as mentioned earlier. Principals also demonstrate support by being a mediator with difficult parents. This study also found that these principals are deeply grateful for the work their teachers do with the students and so find ways to express their gratitude to them. They have also established structures that support the students directly. Whether it is through programs, assemblies or
announcements over the PA system, these principals offer their support for student success.

In each case, these principals credit the overall success of their students to the work of many people. Each principal has established some structure for teachers to work collaboratively with the principal and one another to help make decisions for student success. Whether it is through common planning time, school improvement committees, or hiring teams, teachers are directly involved in sharing the leadership and success of the school.

While professional development has been identified as a theme unto itself, it supports the need for collaboration and support. These principals tailor professional development opportunities to meet the needs of their students. For example, by providing training on understanding the culture of poverty, principals are providing the necessary knowledge and skill base for teachers to be successful with that type of student population. By advocating for professional development funds from the district, principals are supporting their teachers for success.

A common way that these principals support their teachers is to be a mediator between the teacher and the parent. These principals see that both teachers and parents desire success for the students but do not always speak the same language. These principals often facilitate the conversation between them and in some cases, will place themselves as “the bad guy” to maintain a positive relationship between the parent and the teacher. This maintains the integrity of that relationship so that the relationships between the student and the teacher remain positive as well.
This study also found that these principals were deliberate in expressing their gratitude to their teachers for the work they do in the classroom to help students succeed. Often this gratitude came in the form of written notes or recognition at a staff meeting. These principals also used their own financial resources to provide small gifts from candy to water bottles to trophies. These principals also celebrate success with their school communities as a sign of support and gratitude. In each case, when the Illinois Spotlight School designation was awarded in 2007, some celebration followed. Some announced it at a staff meeting. Some added the logo to letterhead or to school signage. These principals recognize that their teachers’ hard work is key to the success for students.

These principals also create programs that support students for success. Morning or special assembly programs, community member involvement, reward systems for academic or behavioral success are all ways that these principals offer their support to their students. It was also common to hear that these principals interacted with large numbers of individual students. These principals had a solid understanding of the individual successes and challenges of their students. The principals are directly involved in tracking academic progress for all students.

**Conclusions**

Collaboration and support is critical to student success in high-poverty high-performing schools. Marzano et al. (2005) found in their meta-analysis that successful principals provide opportunities for teachers to give input. “The extent to which the school leader involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies” leads to student success. Each of these principals provides many
opportunities for teachers to be a part of the decision-making process from curriculum and instructional methodology to involvement in the hiring of teachers. Marzano et al. also found that there is a need for principals to be affirming with their teachers. Principals were successful when they recognized and celebrated school accomplishments and acknowledged failures (pp. 41-61).

The fourth ISSLC standard also calls for principals to collaborate with others for student success. “An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs and mobilizing community resources” (CCSSO, 2008, p. 15). While the principal may be called the instructional leader in the building, they are not the ones providing the day to day instruction in the classroom. Parents, teachers and community members all need to be drawn into the teaching and learning process if students are to be successful. Each of the principals in this study has done just that.

Moral authority is again apparent in this leadership which demonstrates collaboration and support. According to Sergiovanni (1992), principals leading from the moral authority, “Promote collegiality as internally felt and morally driven interdependence” teachers’ practice becomes collective, and “teachers respond to shared commitment and felt interdependence” (p. 39).
Implications for Leadership in High-Poverty Schools

- Principals in high-poverty schools must create structures whereby they are supporting their staff and students for success.
- Principals in high-poverty schools must provide opportunities for stakeholders to collaborate with one another in achieving the mission of the school.
- Principals in high-poverty schools must support their staff members when they are facing significant challenges with students and/or parents.
- Principals in high-poverty schools must be deliberate in expressing the gratitude they feel for the work the teachers are doing to help students succeed.

Mission and Vision

Findings

It is Mission and Vision which connect all of the leadership practice that has been identified by this study. The principals make decisions about relationships, professional development, developing a community and cultural awareness, and collaboration and support out of their sense of mission and vision. Principals in this study show a commitment and belief that all students can achieve excellence, no matter what their circumstance. Decision-making is based on this belief. It is a shared belief of the school community, for parents send their children to school to be educated, teachers practice their craft to educate the children and the principals provide the support needed to achieve that vision.
Regardless of the backgrounds of these students, they are achieving. Looking at the student achievement data as measured on standardized tests, these students show that they can and do achieve. The principals in these schools show a deep commitment to that student success and provide appropriate professional development time and support of their teachers to provide the type of instruction needed to meet the needs of these students. These principals have a concentrated focus on the academic achievement of their students and put interventions in place to help them achieve. While some of these interventions may not be directly academic, providing the necessary social supports helps the student move beyond their challenges so that they can achieve academically.

To support the teaching and learning process, principals are able to articulate what is needed to help their students succeed. These principals are in the classroom helping guide the instruction. They gather data about the teaching and learning process to provide teachers what they need to help students succeed. These principals see their primary role as creating an environment where students can succeed.

Success is not only measured in academic terms. These principals see the social and personal development of these students as important as well. These principals have created environments where students are developing a positive self-image. These are schools where students are comfortable making mistakes and learning from them. These principals have worked to create programs which help support the student with the challenges they face at home by bringing in counselors and social workers.

The programming is not just for the students. These principals have created programs which open the school doors to the community as well. By being a support in
the community, the community can support the students in turn. Addressing the needs of recent immigrants or of parents who do not know appropriate ways to support their child’s learning, shows that these principals are committed to the mission and vision they have for their students.

Conclusions

Believing that all children can learn and succeed regardless of the challenges they bring to school each day, must be the starting point for mission and vision if it is to support student success. These principals did not see the limitations in their students. They saw the possibilities in them. They created structures and programs which supported the fulfillment of that mission and vision.

Each of the ISSLC standards begins the same way, “An education leader promotes the success of every student by…” This is the beginning of mission and vision. The studied job descriptions and evaluation tools use this as the underlying theme, the support for student success. Each of these principals has indeed placed this as the highest priority. The first ISSLC standard is of particular interest here. “An educational leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholder” (CCSSO, 2008, p. 14). This standard alone ties in the majority of the themes identified in this study, from relationships to professional development to collaboration and support to the need for understanding the community and culture of the school.
The 21 responsibilities of principals as defined by Marzano et al. (2005) also link to these core values and beliefs. One of those responsibilities was indeed, for the principal to possess well-defined ideals and beliefs about schools, teaching and learning and demonstrating behaviors that are consistent with those beliefs (p. 51). This is consistent with Ruby Payne as well. As referenced earlier, Payne (2005) urges educators who work with students who come from low-income families “to honor students as human beings worthy of respect and care” which will “establish a relationship that will provide for enhanced learning” (p. 111). When this is accomplished, student achievement with a high-poverty population can improve. To accomplish this takes a commitment to the school’s core beliefs and values about those students.

Finally, moral authority is defined as “Felt obligation and duties derived from widely shared community values, ideas, and ideals” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 39). It is these shared values, ideas and ideals that form the mission and vision for these principals in their schools. By articulating these beliefs and by using them as a guide for all decision-making, these leaders are providing the environment, support and structures which impacts their students to achieve beyond what their peers in other schools are achieving.
Implications for Leadership in High-Poverty Schools

- Principals in high-poverty schools must develop, articulate and communicate a clear mission and vision for the expected outcomes for students and staff.
- Principals in high-poverty schools must work with all stakeholders to develop a mission and vision which is consistent with community expectations and challenges students to excellence.
- Principals in high-poverty schools must use the mission and vision as the lens by which all decisions are made.

Entering into this study, I was open to whatever I would find. What I found was a dedicated group of educators who were committed to doing whatever was necessary to help their students succeed. There was a profound belief that these students of poverty needed a level playing field if they were going to successful in the future, regardless of the career path they chose. Looking back at Sergiovanni’s (1992) theory on moral leadership, the leadership, behavior, relationships and decisions of the principals who participated in this study reflect that they place the core values of the school community at the center of all the community does without giving thought to individual self-interest.

Discussion

Conducting this study was a positive experience for me. With the number of schools that are now designated as Illinois Spotlight Schools, gaining access to the schools was at times, difficult. With over 300 schools in the initial sample, I encountered difficulty with getting principals to respond. I also found that, as trends show, there is high turnover in the principalship. From the schools that responded, there were several
that were eliminated from the study because the principal had not been in their role for
the requisite number of years. I do believe that the nine principals that were interviewed
as a part of this study, while limited, provided enough data to draw important conclusions
about leadership of high-poverty, high-performing schools.

A second limitation occurred as well when two principals who originally agreed
to be a part of the study decided, prior to the interview, to withdraw from the study.
Being that the interviews were conducted at the end of a school year, this is a busy time
for principals and they may have seen their participation as inconvenient. While it may
not have been a limitation, there was a difference in interviewing principals if, while I
was interviewing them, school was still in session. The responses during these interviews
tended to be shorter than those who did not still have students in the building. From my
own experience as principal, I found that when students were in the building, it was
difficult to focus on various tasks when I felt I should be in the hallways or classrooms or
available to teachers, students or parents. I attributed these limited responses to that.

Implications for Future Research

This study was carried out in the 2007 Illinois Spotlight Schools. Since the
inception of the recognition in 2003, the number of schools receiving this designation has
grown from 27 in 2003 to 508 in 2007. 2008 saw the first decrease in the number of
schools receiving the designation with 499 schools being named Illinois Spotlight
Schools. While this decrease is minimal, it will be important to continue monitoring the
program to see if a downward trend begins now that the No Child Left Behind deadline of
2014 is quickly approaching. I would recommend that this study or a similar study be
conducted with the schools that have received the designation every year since its inception. I further recommend that this study or a similar study be conducted with schools that have maintained the designation despite leadership changes. In the case of this particular study, each of the school leaders had been in the school for a minimum of four years.

Finally, the number of high schools that are designated as Illinois Spotlight Schools remains quite low, ranging from a high of four high schools receiving the designation in 2007 to a low of two high schools in both 2004 and 2005. For the purposes of this study, the high schools were eliminated from the sample of schools because the high schools had selective enrollments and added a variable in student achievement that was not controlled and not the subject for this study. There may be value in studying the leadership in these high schools to see if the findings would be transferable to traditional high school programs.

**Conclusion**

Even in our youth, we learn to “follow the leader;” do as “Simon Says;” and ask “Mother May I?” As we play sports in the backyard, we name captains who then get to choose who will be their teammates. We learn early on that leadership matters. Even when a researcher like Jim Collins (2001) sets out to discover what makes a company great, initially ignoring the leadership, he eventually concedes that leadership is what takes the company from good to great.

As of this writing, all schools are only five years away from the deadline of 2013-2014 for all students to achieve as mandated by *No Child Left Behind*. While each of
these leaders acknowledges that this deadline has them worried, that is not their focus. Instead their focus is on achieving their mission of providing the support for their students to succeed. With the current achievement data, they are on their way to achieving these federal mandates.

In his address to students across the country, President Barack Obama (2009) reiterated the importance of education to the future of this country. It is because of education that the United States has achieved all it has.

The story of America isn’t about people who quit when things got tough. It’s about people who kept going, who tried harder, who loved their country too much to do anything less than their best. It’s the story of students who sat where you sit 250 years ago, and went on to wage a revolution and found this nation. Students who sat where you sit 75 years ago who overcame a Depression and won a world war; who fought for civil rights and put a man on the moon. Students who sat where you sit 20 years ago who founded Google, Twitter and Facebook and changed the way we communicate with each other.

As the work on this study concludes, the United States continues to face significant economic challenges. Today’s students must be equipped to think differently, creatively. They must develop problem-solving skills that will help them overcome challenges that have not yet been encountered. Schools must provide them the opportunity to develop these critical skills for future success. Schools will continue to need school leaders who will answer the call for leadership. These leaders will need to create school environments
that support student success for all regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status or
geographic region. The principals who participated in this study demonstrate that these
leaders do exist. They should serve as reminders of all that is good in our schools and
offer us lessons on leadership to be modeled across the country. This study confirms that
good, strong, leadership provides a school with the direction it needs to support students
for success and so leaving no child left behind.
APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INVITATION SEEKING PARTICIPANTS
Dear ______________________,

I write to invite you to participate in a research study involving principals in the 2007 Illinois Spotlight Schools. My name is Scott Fech and I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Administration and Supervision program in the School of Education at Loyola University Chicago.

For this study, I seek individuals who are principals in a school that was designated a 2007 Illinois Spotlight School and who has served as the principal of that school for at least two complete school years. I am looking for three participants each from urban, suburban and rural schools who have received this designation. The purpose of my study is to examine the leadership of principals who work in schools which have been identified as having a large student population living in poverty and have a record of sustained academic success as measured on standardized tests. It is the goal of this study to identify which leadership model principals demonstrate in these schools where students achieve at higher levels than expected. Another goal of this study is to identify commonalities in leadership style and traits among principals in these schools.

If you are willing to be considered for this study, please contact me via email at sfech@luc.edu or via telephone at (219) 743-3324. If you are chosen to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 60-90 minute interview conducted by me at a time, date, and location convenient for you. The purpose of the interview is to identify your perspectives on your role as a principal in your school. The identity of participants in this study will not be revealed and your responses will be kept confidential. In the report of this study, a pseudonym will be assigned to you and your school in order to protect your privacy.

Your participation in this research is strictly voluntary. Under no circumstances will the names of any participant in the study be revealed to anyone else except me, the researcher. If you have any questions regarding your participation, please contact me at (219) 743-3324 or via email at sfech@luc.edu.

Sincerely,

Scott D. Fech

Encl.
APPENDIX B

SYNOPSIS OF RESEARCH
Principal Leadership Characteristics in High-Poverty High-Performing Schools

A study by Scott D. Fech, Ph.D. Candidate at Loyola University Chicago
sfech@luc.edu

Who I am:
My name is Scott Fech and I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Administration and Supervision program at Loyola University Chicago. I am also the Director of Staff Services at Grayslake Community High School District 127 in Grayslake, Illinois. You may contact me with any questions at the email address above, or by calling 219-743-3324.

What I am doing and why:
As part of my dissertation research I am conducting a qualitative study to examine the leadership of principals who work in schools which have been identified as having a large student population living in poverty and have a record of sustained academic success as measured on standardized tests. It is the goal of this study to identify which leadership model principals demonstrate in these schools where students achieve at higher levels than expected. Another goal of this study is to identify commonalities in leadership style and traits among principals in these schools. The schools I have chosen to study have been identified as a 2007 Illinois Spotlight School. I am collecting information in two ways: 1) conducting interviews with 2007 Illinois Spotlight Schools’ principals who have been in their current position for at least two complete school years; and 2) collecting and examining the principal’s formal job description, evaluation tool, and district/school mission statements.

What I will do with the data:
All information will be kept confidential and secure. Personal names will be kept separate from data and each participant will receive a pseudonym. Interviews will be digitally recorded and later transcribed to facilitate data analysis. The data will be analyzed and reported as part of my dissertation. A summary of the results of the study will be available upon request.

How sites and participants are selected:
The school has been selected because it has been designated a 2007 Illinois Spotlight School. Participants are selected based on the role they hold in the school, principal, and the longevity with which they have held that role, with the minimum being two complete schools years. Finally, three participants will be selected to represent each of the following geographic areas, urban, suburban, and rural.

Possible risks to participants:
There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. The only identifiable risk is the possibility of breach of confidentiality and measures will be taken to minimize the risk. Data will be coded so
that no actual names of participants, schools, or locations, will appear in the study results. Actual names will be replaced by pseudonyms. No one besides the researcher will have access to participant personal information. Digital recordings will be made during the course of the interview process. Digital recordings and all information collected will be kept safely secured in a locked file cabinet by the researcher and destroyed within two years of completion of this study.

**Possible benefits to participants:**
There are no direct benefits to you from participation, but the results may be helpful to you in your professional life as a principal and to other educators who are interested in high-poverty high-performing schools. The results may also be helpful to those in higher education who prepare and train school administrators.

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

**What I am requesting from participants:**
I will conduct one-on-one, face-to-face interviews with principals. Interviews questions pertain to topic areas on the principal’s role including your background, your opinions and beliefs about education, your feelings about being a principal, programming in your school, the relationships you have within the school community, and your experiences as an educator. The interview will take 60-90 minutes and will be held at a location, date and time that are mutually agreed upon.

I will obtain permission from each participant to digitally record the interviews and later transcribe them to facilitate data analysis. In the weeks following the interview, I will ask participants to check their responses in their transcripts and verify the accuracy of their responses.

In addition to the interviews, I will ask participants to share with me any documentation pertaining to the position and duties of a principal in their school (the principal’s formal job description, evaluation tool, and district and/or school mission statements).

**Voluntary participation:**
Participation in this study is fully voluntary and respondents do not have to participate if they do not want to be in this study. Even if they do decide to participate, they are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. Before we formally begin, I would like to remind you of your rights as a research participant. At this time I would like you to read the Informed Consent form that was discussed in my contact letter. After you have read it, I am going to invite you to state your rights as a participant in this study. Then I am going to ask you to sign two copies of the Informed Consent form, one which will be given to you and the other which will be kept in my research files.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to end your involvement at any time and for any reason. You can decline to answer any question at any time. To protect your privacy and confidentiality your name will not be used as you will be assigned a pseudonym. Please sign the Informed Consent form and I will give you a copy of the countersigned form.

I will now begin to digitally record the rest of the interview. Here is your copy of the consent and the other is for me. I’m going to ask you about different areas. You will be asked questions about your background, your opinions and beliefs about education, your feelings about being a principal, programming in your school, the relationships you have within the school community and your experiences as an educator.

**Demographic Questions:**
1. Please describe your professional preparation to be an educator.
2. How long have you been a principal?
3. How long have you led this school?
4. Were you a classroom teacher? If so, how long were you in the classroom and what did you teach?
5. Do you live within the district boundaries?
6. Do you belong to any professional organizations?
7. Describe your own continuing professional development.
8. Gender
9. Ethnicity

**Opinion and Values Questions:**
1. What do you believe is the biggest challenge facing your school or community?
2. What is your goal or vision for the school?
3. How would you define your leadership?
4. What are some ways that you help students and teachers to be successful?
5. Describe how NCLB impacts your decision-making.
6. What is the most important quality for a teacher to possess?
7. What is the most important quality for a principal to possess?
8. What is your overall vision of what a principal does for a school?
9. How do district policies and structures support you in achieving that vision?
10. How would you define moral leadership?

**Feeling Questions:**
1. How do you feel about dealing with conflict?
2. Please expand on a conflict with which you recently dealt.
3. What do you desire for your students?
4. Were you expecting to be awarded the Spotlight School designation? How did it make you feel?
5. In your opinion, what is the single most important thing you do to help your students succeed?

**Knowledge Questions:**
1. What new programs or initiatives have you developed in this school?
2. What has been your most successful program?
3. What is a typical day like at this school?
4. What other services would you like to provide to the school community?
5. Who helps you to achieve these successes? How do you create and maintain relationships with these people?
6. What policies or procedures have you put into place to achieve these successes?

**Sensory Questions:**
1. What would I see if I were a child enrolled in this school?
2. What type of feedback do you get from parents?
3. What does a positive learning environment look, sound, and feel like?

**Experience Questions:**
1. Tell me how you handled a particularly difficult situation.
2. How do you go about proposing new programs to staff, students, and parents?
3. What do you look for when you hire a new teacher?
4. Is there a particular experience that has helped you shape the way you make decisions? What do you take into account before making decision?
5. What is the greatest difficulty for a person in your position?
6. What is the greatest challenge you have had to face in your professional career?
APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY
Informed Consent to Participate in Study

My name is Scott Fech and I am requesting your participation in my dissertation research project at Loyola University Chicago. The purpose of my study to examine the leadership of principals who work in schools which have been identified as having a large student population living in poverty and have a record of sustained academic success as measured on standardized tests. It is the goal of this study to identify which leadership model principals demonstrate in these schools where students achieve at higher levels than expected. Another goal of this study is to identify commonalities in leadership style and traits among principals in these schools.

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to meet with me for an interview that will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and be digitally recorded and later transcribed. In addition to the interviews, I ask you to share with me any documentation pertaining to the position and duties of a principal in your school (the principal’s formal job description, evaluation tool, and district and/or school mission statements).

Following your interview, I will forward you a copy of the transcript for your review so that you can verify its accuracy. All of the recordings and documents will be stored in a secure location in my home office with access only available to me. The recordings will be destroyed within two years of the conclusion of the study.

To protect your privacy and confidentiality, the original data from the interview and any documents you provide will not be shared with anyone. In my study, any references to you, your school, or any persons referred to during the interviews will be protected using a pseudonym. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to terminate your involvement at any time, for any reason. There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. The decision to participate or not participate in this study will not affect your employment at your school, within your district, or status of your school within the Illinois Spotlight Schools. There are no direct benefits to you from participation, but the results may be helpful to you in your professional life as a principal and to other principals. You will not be compensated for your participation in this study. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the researcher, faculty sponsor, or Loyola University Chicago’s Compliance Manager at (773) 508-2689. The undersigned freely and voluntarily consents to participate in this research project.

Signed: ________________________________________________ Date: __________________
Printed Name: _________________________________________________________________

Researcher’s Contact Information
Scott D. Fech
2758 Arran Quay Terrace
Valparaiso, IN 46385
sfech@luc.edu
(219) 743-3324

Faculty Sponsor’s Contact Information
Janis Fine, Ph.D., Associate Professor
School of Education
Loyola University Chicago
Lewis Towers, Room 1058
820 N. Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60611
(312) 915-7022
APPENDIX E

SCHOOL AND PRINCIPAL DESCRIPTIONS
Paris Elementary School

Principal – Dr. France
Race – Hispanic

Location: Urban
Grade Level: Pre-Kindergarten – 8th Grade
Number of Students: 296
Percentage of Low Income Children: 92.2%
Percentage of Students Meeting of Exceeding State Standards: Reading: 69.4%; Math: 73.8%

Paris Elementary School is located in the city of Chicago. The city has 2,836,658 residents. The student population is 5.4% White, 72.3% Hispanic, 9.5% Black, 5.1% Asian/Pacific Islander and 7.8% Multiracial. The school has a 95% Attendance Rate. In 2007, there were 390,243 children enrolled in the district with 84.9% of those living in low-income families. The state average is 40.9%. The estimated median household income in this city in 2007 was $45,505.

The school has a 90% parental contact rate as measured by attendance at parent-teacher conferences, parental visits to school, school visits to home, telephone conversations, and written correspondence. Average class sizes are as follows: Kindergarten - 15; 1st Grade – 31; 2nd Grade – 30; 3rd Grade – 25; 4th Grade – 30; 5th Grade – 32; 6th Grade – 33; 7th Grade – 30; 8th Grade - 34. These are all above the district and state averages by as many as 15 students. At all grade levels, the school devotes 60 minutes per day on Mathematics. In Science, 3rd Grade students spend 24 minutes while 6th and 8th Grades spend 40 minutes. In English/Language Arts, 3rd Grade spends 144 minutes per day while 6th and 8th Grades spend 106 minutes. In Social Science, 3rd Grade spends 28 minutes while 6th and 8th Grade spend 40 minutes.

Dr. France holds a Bachelors Degree in Music Education, a Masters Degree in Special Education and a Doctorate in Administration and Special Education. He spent five years as a classroom teacher and then spent 15 years in Special Education Administration. He is in his 6th year as principal. With the exception of his first year of teaching, all of his experience in education has been with the Chicago Public Schools.

Dr. France believes that his extensive background in Special Education has helped him be a successful instructional leader. He has an understanding of the struggles that kids have in the classroom and has definite strategies to help them overcome those challenges. When asked questions about his most successful program, Dr. France immediately told stories about being successful with students as opposed to detailing the programs he has implemented.

According to Dr. France, “So much of my time is dedicated to making sure that kids do well. To making sure that teachers have all the resources that that they need to be successful.”
Madrid Elementary School

Principal – Mr. Spain
Race – White

Location: Urban
Grade Level: Kindergarten – 5th Grade
Number of Students: 333
Percentage of Low Income Children: 75.7%
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding State Standards: Reading: 73.0%; Math: 73.9%

Madrid Elementary School is located in an urban city in northeastern Illinois with just under 171,000 residents. The student population is 1.5% White, 91.3% Hispanic, 5.1% Black, and 2.1% Multiracial. The school has a 95.2% Attendance Rate. In 2007, there were 12,496 students enrolled in this district of which 68.1% were from low-income families. The state average is 40.9%. The estimated median household income in this suburb in 2007 was $62,160.

The school has a 98.7% parental contact rate as measured by attendance at parent-teacher conferences, parental visits to school, school visits to home, telephone conversations, and written correspondence. Average class sizes are as follows: Kindergarten – 33.5; 1st Grade – 22.8; 2nd Grade – 24.5; 3rd Grade – 18.7; 4th Grade – 18.5; 5th Grade – 26.5. The average class sizes are greater than the state averages in Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, and 5th grades with the Kindergarten average 13 students above the state average. The average class sizes at 3rd and 4th grades are lower than the state averages. The school devotes 70 minutes per day on Mathematics, 16 minutes per day on Science, 130 minutes per day on English/Language Arts, and 16 minutes on Social Science. These are all below the state average with the exception of Mathematics which is 12 minutes greater than the state average.

Mr. Spain holds a Bachelors Degree and a Masters Degree. Mr. Smith is fluent in Spanish. Prior to entering administration Mr. Spain worked as a bilingual elementary teacher, a bilingual coordinator, and a school district network coordinator. He is completing his fourth year as a principal, all at Madrid.

Perhaps the program of which Mr. Spain is the most proud is the Newcomers’ Center that he has created in the school. Partnering with a local church that runs an amnesty program, the center provides recent immigrants with appropriate clothing, kitchen utensils, and other basic necessities. The center pairs up the new immigrant with a former immigrant who is now established in the community and who can assist the new immigrant with the transition to life in the United States.

In hiring his teachers, Mr. Spain said, “I want somebody who’s not going to give up on the kids. They’re here for the kids and though you’re going to be discouraged. You’re going to be disappointed. You’re going to be disillusioned. You can’t give up on the kids. Because we’re their last hope.”
London Elementary School

Principal – Mr. England
Race - White

Location: Urban
Grade Level: Pre-Kindergarten – 3rd Grade
Number of Students: 395
Percentage of Low Income Children: 87.6%
Percentage of Students Meeting of Exceeding State Standards: Reading: 63.6%; Math: 72.7%

London Elementary School is located in an eastern Illinois city with over 26,000 residents. The student population is 12.7% White, 25.1% Hispanic, 59.2% Black and 3% Multiracial. The school has a 94.3% Attendance Rate. In 2007, there were 5,374 children enrolled in the district with 79.8% of those living in low-income families. The state average is 40.9%. The estimated median household income in this city in 2007 was $34,054.

The school boasts a 100% parental contact rate as measured by attendance at parent-teacher conferences, parental visits to school, school visits to home, telephone conversations, and written correspondence. Average class sizes are as follows: Kindergarten - 20.5; 1st Grade – 18.5; 2nd Grade – 20.5; 3rd Grade – 16.0. These are all below the district and state averages for these same class sizes. The school devotes 58 minutes per day on Mathematics, 28 minutes per day on Science, 174 minutes per day on English/Language Arts, and 30 minutes on Social Science. These all match the state averages with the exception of English/Language Arts which exceeds the state average by 29 minutes.

Mr. England holds a Bachelors Degree and a Masters Degree. He is completing his 7th year as a principal, all at London Elementary. He spent 13 years as a classroom teacher. At the high school level, he taught physical education, science and health. At the middle school level he taught physical education. At the conclusion of the 2008-2009 school year, Mr. England will be moved to one of the district high schools as the principal. This same opportunity was presented to him several years prior, he declined the transfer.

Mr. England grew up in the city in which he works and attended the elementary school where he was principal at the time of this study. Perhaps the program of which he is the most proud is *Brothers Helping Brothers*. This program brings male community members into the school to read to his male students. These community members also serve as role models for his male students as many of them do not have a male adult living in the home. Mr. England has formed a strong partnership with a local retail chain. This retail chain has “adopted” the school as its own and makes generous donations of money, volunteerism and school supplies and holiday decorations.

According to Mr. England, “I am in it to win it.”
Ottawa Elementary School

Principal – Dr. Canada
Race - White

Location: Suburban
Grade Level: Kindergarten – 5th Grade
Number of Students: 370
Percentage of Low Income Children: 51.4%
Percentage of Students Meeting of Exceeding State Standards: Reading: 77.0%; Math: 89.5%

Ottawa Elementary School is located in a suburban town in northeastern Illinois. The town has 53,711 residents. The student population is 37.3% White, 48.9% Hispanic, 4.3% Black, 9.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and .3% Multiracial. The school has a 95.1% Attendance Rate. In 2007, there were 6,120 children enrolled in the district with 33.3% of those living in low-income families. The state average is 40.9%. The estimated median household income in this city in 2007 was $65,433.

The school has a 100% parental contact rate as measured by attendance at parent-teacher conferences, parental visits to school, school visits to home, telephone conversations, and written correspondence. Average class sizes are as follows: Kindergarten – 14.2; 1st Grade – 17.4; 2nd Grade – 19.3; 3rd Grade – 17.8; 4th Grade – 19.6; 5th Grade – 22. These are all very near or below the district and state averages by as many as 6 students. The school devotes 50 minutes per day on Mathematics and 23 minutes per day on Science. In English/Language Arts the school spends 158 minutes per day on English/Language Arts and 23 minutes on Social Science. These are all at or near the state averages.

Dr. Canada holds a Bachelors Degree in Spanish, a Masters Degree in Pastoral Studies, a Masters Degree in Educational Administration and a Doctorate in Educational Administration. He spent 14 years in a Catholic high school as a teacher, a curriculum coordinator and assistant principal. His first principalship was in a Catholic elementary school where he spent six years. He is in his 13th year as a principal and just completed his 7th years as principal of this building. He does not live in the community in which he works.

Dr. Canada sees schools as an opportunity for kids to feel good about themselves by providing them opportunities to be successful. Dr. Canada often references how he has grown as a school leader in the 13 years he has been in administration. While he is not able to single out one particular program that has been the most successful, he believes that anytime staff are collaborating for the success of students, success follows.

Dr. Canada feels as if he is a champion for those living in poverty. “I was the one at the table going, what about the kids of poverty? What are we going to do? We have to stop saying our district is changing. It’s changed.”
Lisbon Elementary School

Principal – Mrs. Portugal
Race - White

Location: Suburban
Grade Level: Kindergarten – 5th Grade
Number of Students: 441
Percentage of Low Income Children: 90.9%
Percentage of Students Meeting of Exceeding State Standards: Reading: 71.4%; Math: 77.3%

Lisbon Elementary School is located in a suburb in northeastern Illinois with just over 50,000 residents. The student population is 10.7% White, 79.4% Hispanic, 3.4% Black, .5% Native American, 2.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 3.6% Multiracial. The school has a 94.3% Attendance Rate. In 2007, there were 3,547 students enrolled in this district of which 76.5% were from low-income families. The state average is 40.9%. The estimated median household income in this suburb in 2007 was $50,173.

The school boasts a 100% parental contact rate as measured by attendance at parent-teacher conferences, parental visits to school, school visits to home, telephone conversations, and written correspondence. Average class sizes are as follows: Kindergarten – 23.7; 1st Grade – 24.7; 2nd Grade – 26; 3rd Grade – 23.7; 4th Grade – 27.7; 5th Grade – 25. While these are each equivalent to the average class sizes throughout the district, these are all higher than state averages by as many as 5 students in 2nd and 4th grades. The school devotes 80 minutes per day on Mathematics, 30 minutes per day on Science, 150 minutes per day on English/Language Arts, and 30 minutes on Social Science. These all approximately match the state averages with the exception of Mathematics which exceeds the state average by 22 minutes.

Mrs. Portugal holds a Bachelors Degree in Early Childhood Education, a Masters Degree in Special Education and an Advanced Certificate in Educational Leadership. She also holds National Board Certification in Special Education. She has completed her 5th year as a principal, all at Lisbon Elementary School. She taught 1st grade for 6 years. She taught early childhood special education and kindergarten for 6 years. She worked in the district office for one year before being assigned as principal at Lisbon. This is her 13th year in her current district. Mrs. Portugal does not live in the suburb where she works but does live nearby.

Mrs. Portugal serves as a mentor for teachers who are working on their National Board Certification. One of the programs of which she is the most proud is the goal setting she does with her students. She has students set a reading goal at the beginning of each trimester. The students are responsible for tracking their progress toward that goal. If the students meet their goal, there is an agreed upon reward

According to Mrs. Portugal, “You can’t reach your goal if you don’t set a goal.”
Rome Elementary School

Principal – Dr. Italy
Race – African American

Location: Suburban
Grade Level: Kindergarten – 2nd Grade – 3rd Grade
Number of Students: 311
Percentage of Low Income Children: 78.5%
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding State Standards: Reading: 66.2%; Math: 82.4%

Rome Elementary School is located in a suburban town in northeastern Illinois with just over 21,000 residents. The student population is 2.9% White, 23.8% Hispanic, and 73.3% Black. The school has a 94.6% Attendance Rate. In 2007, there were 1,578 students enrolled in this district of which 74.5% were from low-income families. The state average is 40.9%. The estimated median household income in this suburb in 2007 was $68,960.

The school has a 99.0% parental contact rate as measured by attendance at parent-teacher conferences, parental visits to school, school visits to home, telephone conversations, and written correspondence. Average class sizes are as follows: 2nd Grade – 22.4; 3rd Grade – 21.9. The average class sizes are approximately the same as the state averages. The school devotes 60 minutes per day on Mathematics, 30 minutes per day on Science, 150 minutes per day on English/Language Arts, and 30 minutes on Social Science. These are all approximately the same as the state averages.

Dr. Italy holds a Bachelors Degree in Music Education, a Masters Degree in Elementary Education and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership. She also has completed the required coursework for, and thus holds, her Chief School Business Official certification. She taught for 7 years between high school and elementary school. Her first principalship was in a Catholic elementary school. She has been a principal for 23 years. She has led Rome for the last 7 years.

Dr. Italy is particularly proud of the character education program in her building. While the program existed prior to her arrival as principal, they have spent a great deal of time revising it to meet the needs of their students. The teachers, the social worker, the librarian and the principals are all involved in the delivery of the program. The social worker is in the classroom once per week teaching the character traits. The librarian features and reads books to the students that focus on the trait that the students are studying at the time.

According to Dr. Italy, “The principal really sets the climate of the school. And administrators have to understand, you want to be respected because you give respect. You don’t want to be respected because there’s the word principal over my office door.”
Athens Elementary School

Principal – Mrs. Greece
Race - White

Location: Rural
Grade Level: Kindergarten – 3rd Grade
Number of Students: 188
Percentage of Low Income Children: 70.7%
Percentage of Students Meeting of Exceeding State Standards: Reading: 70.0%; Math: 92.5%

Athens Elementary School is a rural town located in central western Illinois city. The town has 40,069 residents. The student population is 86.2% White, 1.1% Hispanic, 9.0% Black and 3.7% Multiracial. The school has a 95.1% Attendance Rate. In 2007, there were 6,431 children enrolled in the district with 43.8% of those living in low-income families. The state average is 40.9%. The estimated median household income in this city in 2007 was $39,200.

The school boasts a 100% parental contact rate as measured by attendance at parent-teacher conferences, parental visits to school, school visits to home, telephone conversations, and written correspondence. Average class sizes are as follows: Kindergarten - 15; 1st Grade – 14.7; 2nd Grade – 14.3; 3rd Grade – 13.7. These are all below the district and state averages by as many as 8 students. The school devotes 77 minutes per day on Mathematics, 15 minutes per day on Science, 193 minutes per day on English/Language Arts, and 15 minutes on Social Science. Math exceeds the state average by 19 minutes. English/Language Arts exceeds the state average by 48 minutes. Science and Social Studies are below the state averages.

Mrs. Greece holds a Bachelors Degree in Elementary Education and a Masters Degree in Educational Administration. She is in her 4th year as a principal, all at Athens Elementary. She spent 9 years as a classroom teacher, 6 of which were at Athens. Mrs. Greece was a selected as one of the first teachers for this school when it first opened. She was also on staff when the building received its first Spotlight designation.

Mrs. Greece lives in the community in which she works. She believes that she would never accept a principalship in any other building because Athens is where she belongs. She believes that the use of Love and Logic by everyone in the building has truly shaped the culture. Everyone has a common language to talk about expectations for behavior. Each school day begins with Blast Off. This is a program that brings all students together in the gym to sing, and celebrate birthdays and accomplishments. This helps acclimate the students to the school environment each morning to compensate for whatever challenges the students faced at home prior to coming to school.

Mrs. Greece believes that the key to success for students comes when teachers “build positive relationships with my kids because that’s what does it for my kids. If you don’t have that, your life is going to be very difficult.”
Santiago Elementary School

Principal – Mr. Chile
Race - White

Location: Rural
Grade Level: Kindergarten – 5th Grade
Number of Students: 765
Percentage of Low Income Children: 51.1%
Percentage of Students Meeting of Exceeding State Standards: Reading: 79.1%; Math: 89.7%

Santiago Elementary School is located in a rural town in southeastern Illinois. The town has 17,324 residents. The student population is 91.1% White, 1.6% Hispanic, 4.3% Black, .4% Asian/Pacific Islander, .3% Native American, and 2.4% Multiracial. The school has a 94.9% Attendance Rate. In 2007, there were 3,259 children enrolled in the district with 39.2% of those living in low-income families. The state average is 40.9%. The estimated median household income in this city in 2007 was $36,315.

The school has a 99.3% parental contact rate as measured by attendance at parent-teacher conferences, parental visits to school, school visits to home, telephone conversations, and written correspondence. Average class sizes are as follows: Kindergarten – 22.3; 1st Grade – 21.8; 2nd Grade – 20; 3rd Grade – 20.2; 4th Grade – 24.2; 5th Grade – 26.2. These are all above the district and state averages by as many as 5 students. The school devotes 50 minutes per day on Mathematics and 30 minutes per day on Science. In English/Language Arts the school spends 142 minutes per day on English/Language Arts and 40 minutes on Social Science. These are all at or near the state averages.

Mr. Chile holds a Bachelors Degree, a Masters Degree and an Educational Specialist Degree. He spent seven years as a Kindergarten through 12th Grade Art Teacher. He has been in administration for eight years and is completing his 4th year as principal of this school. Mr. Chile lives in the community in which he works. He finds this important because he can get to know the community.

Mr. Chile spoke a great deal about building relationships with students and sees that as a major factor in hiring teachers. As he interview candidates, he considers three things. What is their personal mission and purpose? What are their relationship skills? What do they know how to demonstrate about teaching and learning?

Mr. Chile lives by the motto, “Kids don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”
Brussels Elementary School

Principal – Mrs. Belgium
Race - White

Location: Rural
Grade Level: Kindergarten – 8th Grade
Number of Students: 143
Percentage of Low Income Children: 52.4%
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding State Standards: Reading: 71.1%; Math: 85.6%

Brussels Elementary School is located in a rural town in southern Illinois. The town has 683 residents. The student population is 96.5% White and 3.5% Multiracial. The school has a 95.8% Attendance Rate. In 2007, there were 1,500 children enrolled in the district with 47.1% of those living in low-income families. The state average is 40.9%. The estimated median household income in this city in 2007 was $41,607.

The school has a 100% parental contact rate as measured by attendance at parent-teacher conferences, parental visits to school, school visits to home, telephone conversations, and written correspondence. Average class sizes are as follows: Kindergarten – 16; 1st Grade – 15; 2nd Grade – 16; 3rd Grade – 19; 4th Grade – 18; 5th Grade – 14; 6th Grade – 16; 7th Grade – 13; 8th Grade - 14. These are all well below the state averages by as many as 8 students. In 3rd Grade, the school devotes 65 minutes per day on Mathematics while in 6th and 8th Grades it is 48 minutes. 3rd Grade students spend 40 minutes per day on Science while in 6th and 8th Grades it increases to 48 minutes. In English/Language Arts, 3rd Grade students spend 135 minutes per day on English/Language Arts while 6th and 8th Grade students spend 120 minutes. 3rd Grade students spend 40 minutes on Social Science and in 6th and 8th Grades they spend 48 minutes. Math and Science time is on par with state averages. There is considerably more time spent on English/Language Arts and Social Science than the state averages.

Mrs. Belgium holds a Bachelors Degree in Early Childhood and a Masters Degree in Educational Administration. She taught elementary school for 15 years before entering administration. She has now completed her 10th year as a principal, the last 6 in this school. Mrs. Belgium lives in the district in which she works. While she did not work there at the time, her children attended the school where she now works.

Mrs. Belgium spoke with great pride about how her school came together to raise funds to purchase Smart Boards for every classroom in the school. The district purchased one but instead of waiting for future funds, the staff took the challenge and they have reached their goal.

Mrs. Belgium described why she entered administration. “I had an excellent principal and I saw how she set the tone of the whole building. You know with her upbeat personality, her drive, you know, she really inspired all of us to be the best teachers we could be. And I thought, you know, I want to get a masters degree and I want that. I want to have that ability to do that.”
REFERENCES


VITA

The author, Scott Fech, was born in Griffith, Indiana on August 3, 1967. He attended St. Mary School in Griffith for elementary school and Bishop Noll Institute in Hammond, Indiana for secondary school.

He earned a Bachelor of Science in Secondary French Education from Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana in 1989. After completing one year of teaching, he entered the Roman Catholic seminary. He completed his postulancy and a second year of teaching in Rochester, New York. He completed his novitiate in Houston, Texas and then began his theological studies at the University of St. Michael’s College in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. After four years studying for the priesthood, he left the seminary. He completed his Master of Theological Studies in 1995. He continued his graduate work by completing a Master of Educational Administration through Purdue University – Calumet in Hammond, Indiana. He then entered the doctoral program in Administration and Supervision at Loyola University Chicago in the fall of 2005.

Scott Fech taught French I and English II and IV at Andrean High School in Merrillville, Indiana during the 1989-90 school year. He taught French I, Business Communications and Theatre Arts at The Aquinas Institute in Rochester, New York during the 1990-91 school year. He taught French I through IV at Mt. Carmel High School, in Chicago, Illinois from 1994-1997. He then taught French I through IV and served as the World Languages Department Chair at Griffith High School in Griffith,
Indiana from 1997-2000. He served as Campus Minister and Theology Teacher at
Mother Guerin High School in River Grove, Illinois during the 2001-2002 school year.
He accepted his first principalship at Bishop Noll Institute in Hammond, Indiana where
he served from 2002 through 2008. He was then named Director of Staff Services for
Grayslake Community High School District 127 in Grayslake, Illinois and then
subsequently promoted to Assistant Superintendent for Personnel Services the following
year, where he is currently employed.
DISSECTATION APPROVAL SHEET

This Dissertation submitted by Scott D. Fech has been read and approved by the following committee:

Janis Fine, Ph.D., Director
Associate Professor, School of Education
Loyola University Chicago

Judith Docekal, Ed.D.
Clinical Assistant Professor, School of Education
Loyola University Chicago

Vivian Gordon, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, School of Education
Loyola University Chicago

The final copies have been examined by the director of the Dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the Dissertation is now given final approval by the committee with reference to content and form.

The Dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Date

Director’s Signature