

Following a Legend: Leadership Succession
in a Rural Georgia High School, an Historical Case Study

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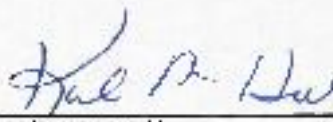


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ABSTRACT

Principals are retiring in greater numbers each year. If schools are to improve over time, it is important that leaders understand leadership succession as a process in order to provide the needed planning and support. This historical case study presents the opportunity to learn about one particular succession event at a rural Georgia high school. This dissertation presents a portrait of two principals who led the school during the process of leadership succession. The foci for the study were the process of leadership succession, the experiences of both principals during the transition, the importance of school culture, and the resulting profile of school performance.

This is a qualitative research study that combines elements of portraiture and case study methods. I used a series of in-depth phenomenological interviews to develop the portrait of each leader. I reviewed documents and conducted several site visits to make observations during the course of the study.

Topics of focus during this project included (a) the process of leadership succession, (b) the experiences of both principals with transition, (c) the culture of the school, and (d) the resulting profile of school performance.

Findings in this research project included the importance of school culture as embodied in (a) organizational metaphors, (b) the pace of change, (c) the role of transition support structures, and (d) legacy management. I conclude with recommendations for implementation of a leadership succession plan.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my wife, Michele, and my son, Bradley.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

If it is true that *the more things change, the more they stay the same*, then Georgia schools are in for hard times. Two important factors now converge to make this especially critical. Every year, school leaders are retiring at an increasing rate (Garchinsky, 2008) and yet their replacements are expected to advance gains in student achievement (Kelly & Saunders, 2010). School districts are tasked with the responsibility of hiring new leaders and ensuring students master more rigorous curriculum than ever before. Transitioning principals face a steep learning curve if they are to do more than manage their schools. Researchers must examine the public education system's readiness for transition in order to implement routines that will ensure continuous school improvement.

Leadership occurs in a particular time and context (Garchinsky, 2008; Kelly & Saunders, 2010). Moving into a new school presents distinct challenges for a leader (Kelly & Saunders; Weindling, 2000). Chief among these challenges is developing an understanding of the school in its context (Garchinsky; Kelly & Saunders). Just as people are different, performance quality and school culture varies from one institution to the next. Leaders therefore, must develop an understanding of the situation in which they operate, set goals, and take action (Garchinsky). This research explores the phenomenon of leadership succession by presenting the case of one high school over a period of 6 years. This case study will detail the leadership of two successive principals at a

rural South Georgia high school, tell the story of the transition, and examine measures of school performance during their leadership.

Statement of Problem

Leadership authors have sounded the alarm regarding substantial leadership turnover rates as the baby boom generation retires (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves, 2005; Levitz, 2008; Riddick, 2009; Simkins, Close, & Smith, 2007). We can anticipate a “massive exodus” from the principalship in the coming years (Fullan, p. 34). School researchers in England expect a “looming leadership crisis” from a reduced number of leadership applicants coupled with a “demographically driven retirement bulge” (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2005, p. 15). Likewise, Hargreaves noted in 2005 that the average tenure of a principal is growing shorter for three reasons: (1) “demographically driven retirements,” (2) the “practice of moving around principals to plug leaks in failing schools,” and (3) the “intensified work demands that exhaust dedicated professionals” (Hargreaves, p. 171). Moreover, the Maryland State Department of Education (Cary & Foran, 2006) projected a leadership shortfall as increased time constraints and accountability issues make retirement more appealing. Correspondingly, Riddick noted an increase in succession planning in response to a potentially higher “turn over rate with Baby Boomers aging into retirement, the modern day deterrents to the principalship, and the need to avoid the potential performance lag that often accompanies a change in leadership” (Riddick, p. 4).

School performance research during times of transition is still incomplete. Some school systems change principals to improve school performance, yet there are plenty of schools where improvement efforts suffer after the change. Gray, Goldstein, and Thomas

(2001) stated that relatively few schools “have yet managed to lock into cycles of continuous improvement” (p. 404). Gray et al. found most schools incapable of sustaining improvement for more than 3 years before regressing. Therefore, over time, improvement patterns resemble “bobbing corks, with many schools rising under one set of leaders, only to sink under the next” (Fink & Brayman, 2006, p. 63). In 2008 Levitz stated, “The need to focus on leadership development as a key element in planning for the replacement of school leaders is critical. A systematic and deliberate plan for leadership continuity and development is essential for sustaining school improvement efforts” (p. 3).

Every school year begins with new local, state, and federal mandates for school improvement. Annual improvement has become a standard expectation (Gray et al., 2001). Because each principal is responsible for improving his or her school, he or she must avoid what Fink called “attrition of change” (as cited in Barker, 2006, p. 288). According to Barker, Fink coined this phrase to indicate that after the initial implementation of a change gradually teachers stop abiding by program requirements and revert to former ways of teaching. While change initiatives can fade away under the leadership of one person, Fink and Brayman (2006) found changes were more likely to be abandoned when the leadership did change as opposed to when there was no change. Fink and Brayman observed that a change of leader often signaled the end of previous initiatives, as “change efforts tended to be superseded by new initiatives under a new principal” (p. 71). Therefore, Fink and Brayman indicated that change-resistant teachers seize transition as an opportune time to revert to comfortable ways of teaching. Also Fink and Brayman found that schools with frequent leadership succession suffered from change overload as each new leader attempted to make his or her mark on the school.

After a year of observation in three different schools that underwent leadership changes, the authors noted, “many staff members have become reluctant to invest their energies in new school structures and practices that they anticipate will change again in 2 or 3 years” (p. 71). Calling this circumstance a “revolving door of principalship” (p. 84), Fink and Brayman found the development of “staff cynicism, which subverts long-term sustainable improvements” (p. 84). This finding supports Gray’s (2003) assertion that long-term school improvement is “the exception rather than the rule” (p. 26).

Succession does not have to disrupt achievement gains. Rather, as Jones and Webber (2001) asserted, succession may “rejuvenate and revitalize a school community” (p. 6) if educational policy makers understand the process of leadership succession. Chief among their recommendations for improvement, Jones and Webber called for finding “ways to invite school communities into the work of planning for their schools. This includes planning for succession...” (p. 12). After a successor is selected, time is required to achieve the following: “to make visits to work with the departing principal” and to “work closely with members of the school community” in order to begin establishing relationships, as well as, to “dispel rumors and allay fears” (Jones & Webber, p. 12). Jones and Webber asserted that by understanding stages of succession, principals will be able to better interpret school culture.

In order for researchers to understand the stages of succession during leadership transitions, case studies were conducted by Barker (2006), Fink and Brayman (2006), Hargreaves (2005), Jones and Webber (2001), Kelly and Saunders (2010), and Stine (1998). Barker noted the gap in existing research in 2006 stating:

There is an urgent need for government agencies, governors and school leaders themselves to recognize the limitations of the *guy on a white horse* conception of change and to work towards a deeper understanding of the complex lifecycle relationships that unfold between leaders, followers, and their internal and external contexts. (p. 290)

Similarly, Kelly and Saunders noted that two themes emerged from their research, “the continuing influence of professional and organizational socialization, and the need to lead... school improvement” (pp. 139-140).

The Study

I conducted an historical case study of a rural Georgia high school that not only led to portraits of the two principals who led the school, but also examined the process of leadership succession. The foci for the study consisted of the following: (a) the process of leadership succession, (b) the experiences of both principals with transition, (c) the culture of the school, and (d) the resulting profile of school performance. By investigating school performance under two successive school principals, I hoped to expand the body of knowledge regarding the impact of a school’s culture on a school’s continuous improvement.

Therefore, in this study, I examined how leaders responded to unique conditions and made their mark on school culture. My aim is to provide insight to future leaders as they transition into new roles. Hopefully, the resulting transitions will position leaders to build upon the efforts of their predecessors and sustain school improvement.

Furthermore, continued research should explore ways to build upon the improvements

made by outbound principals so that schools can avoid regressing in the wake of leadership succession.

Regional Context

As recently as 2006, the Division for Educator Workforce Recruitment Research and Development noted most Georgia school superintendents could retire at any time because 78% are over 51 years old and 76% have more than 25 years experience (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2006). Similarly, 70% of assistant superintendents are over 51 years of age and have greater than 25 years of service. Almost half of Georgia's principals have the years experience or age required for retirement. While budget cuts in recent years eliminated updated reports from the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GAPSC), it is reasonable to assume that current age and experience figures are consistent.

During the 6-year period I discuss, one Georgia county had two school superintendents, six county directors, and seven principals to serve in the county's five schools (Nix, personal communication, November 10, 2011). In 2006, the superintendent of schools retired and the Board of Education promoted the assistant superintendent to take his place. Thereafter, three principals decided to retire in 2007, and two more retired in 2008. At the district offices, several senior directors retired. In 2008, when two principals retired, the superintendent noted the vacancies represented an opportunity to hire replacements who would support improvement initiatives that were stalling out due to resistant school cultures. Also during this time, the School Board election brought in five new members in 2008. Putting this situation into perspective, one is even more surprised to learn that every chief executive in the district and central office changed, and

from 2006-2009, one school saw three different leaders. In terms of school principal vacancies, except for one elementary and one high school principal, each replacement served as an assistant principal in the district. In all six cases of director's vacancies, the Board of Education promoted leaders from within district. Of the principals, five came from within the district and two came from outside the district (one of whom is one of the central subjects of this study). Therefore, leadership turnover within this particular district created an opportunity to study the experiences of the principals who served the same high school in succession and the impact the change had on school culture and school improvement.

By the time this study concluded, the superintendent hired in 2006 was not rehired and the Board of Education hired a new superintendent in 2011, one with previous experience within the district. When the new superintendent came into office in 2011, he reorganized the district office and moved the high school principal—who was the inbound principal in this study—to the district office and replaced him with the assistant principal who applied but did not get the principalship in 2008.

Research Questions

This research is limited in scope to the case study of leadership succession at a rural South Georgia high school. The intent is to discover information that can assist aspiring principals, and school superintendents, as well as those interested in the role a school's culture plays in school improvement. The following overarching research questions were used as a guide throughout the case study:

1. How did the leadership of the outbound principal shape the culture at the high school?

2. How did the inbound and outbound principals describe their experience of the leadership succession process? What were some critical events that impacted the succession?
3. How did the quality of the relationship between the two principals impact the inbound principal's experience during his first year of leadership? What structures were in place at the school to manage leadership succession? What did the school district do to sustain the legacy (innovations) from previous leaders?
4. How did each principal approach school improvement?
5. How did the inbound principal assess the school upon arrival?
6. What were the relevant school performance indicators that the inbound principal intended to change, and what were the consequences of those changes?
7. Ultimately, how did this leadership succession impact school performance?

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following chapter presents a review of the literature on leadership succession. The first section presents a review of ways school districts measured school performance. During the course of this review, school culture emerged as a major variable in the results of leadership succession. Therefore, I reviewed elements of the work of several authors (Brown, 2004; Deal, 1987; Hargreaves, 1995; Sarason, 1982; Schein, 2004; Weindling, 2000) that contributed to my understanding of the impact of school culture on leadership succession. The subsequent section presents the literature on leadership succession, and then reviews several case studies of schools that have had leadership succession events. The final section presents the work of several researchers who developed or evaluated leadership succession plans.

School Performance

The first section outlines ways in which school performance has been conceptualized. The different elements that establish the basis for measuring school performance define and ultimately shape the initiatives for improving schools. In order to satisfy the guidelines of Federal Title I requirements for school improvement programs, school districts must measure certain categories of school performance (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged, 2008a, para. 3). For example, academic achievement results must be disaggregated by gender,

ethnicity, and intellectual ability, is one such requirement. The state of Georgia allows school districts local flexibility to determine how they will develop and measure school improvement plans, but plans must address disaggregated student achievement data and include initiatives to address deficiencies.

In 1966, James Coleman produced a report for the U.S. Department of Education that asserted public schools did not make a significant difference in the academic success of their students (Coleman et al., 1966). The response to this report sparked a movement in educational research to document and determine aspects of schools “where kids from low income families were highly successful, and thereby prove that schools can make a difference” (Center for Effective Schools, 2011, para. 3). Referenced collectively as *Effective Schools Research*, the efforts of early researchers produced one of the early school improvement models that systemically examined school performance (Center for Effective Schools).

The *Effective Schools Model* for school improvement identified common traits of high performing schools (Center for Effective Schools, 2011). Effective schools were deemed to be high performance schools when they incorporated key elements of school leadership into the day-to-day operation of the school. According to the Association of Effective Schools (1996), researchers using this model, such as Edmonds, Brookover, Lezotte, and others, determined that “there are unique characteristics and processes common to schools where all children are learning, regardless of family background. Because these characteristics are found in schools where all students learn, correlated with student success, they are called *correlates*” (Association of Effective Schools, para. 4). The seven correlates are: (1) clear school mission, (2) high expectations for success,

(3) instructional leadership, (4) frequent monitoring of student progress, (5) opportunity to learn and student time on task, (6) safe and orderly environment, and (7) home – school relations. Actions a principal takes to address the correlates are often multi-year initiatives written in the school improvement plan. An example of a school improvement goal that targets safe and orderly environment is implementation of a school-wide program that emphasizes desired behaviors such as cooperative learning (Lezotte, 1991). Another example of an improvement goal that targets frequent monitoring of student progress that Lezotte provided was a school-wide staff development program on formative assessment that equipped teachers to use curricular-based performance data to adjust instruction. The degree of emphasis a school placed on behaviors aligned with each of the correlates was linked to positive outcomes and overall school improvement (Center for Effective Schools).

The correlates continue to be an important approach to school improvement (Lezotte & Mckee Snyder, 2011). In 1991, Lezotte added support to the correlates by examining school responses to student performance in the pursuit of learning for all students. Among other points of emphasis, Lezotte wrote “schools as cultural organizations must recognize that schools must be transformed from institutions designed for *instruction* to institutions designed to assure *learning*” (p. 11). *Effective Schools Research* remains a current basis for implementing strategies that bring about continuous school improvement (Lezotte & Mckee Snyder).

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of more than 5000 studies in order to determine if principals had a measurable impact on student achievement and, if so, verify which practices had statistically significant correlations to

student achievement. The authors discovered that “principals can have a profound effect on the achievement of students in their schools” (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 38). They identified 21 responsibilities (Appendix A) demonstrated by principals providing school-wide leadership that had significant correlations with student academic achievement. According to the authors, “these 21 responsibilities are not new findings within the literature on leadership[;] others may have given them different names ... [However] our findings validate the opinions expressed by leadership theorists for decades” (p. 41). Among the highest effect-sizes was the principal’s responsibility for school culture, with an average effect size of .25 (p. 48). Marzano, Waters, and McNulty explained that “Although a culture is a natural byproduct of people working in close proximity, it can be a positive or negative influence on a school’s effectiveness. An effective leader builds a culture that positively influences teachers, who, in turn positively influence students” (p. 47). A principal fulfills this responsibility by “developing an understanding of purpose ... and shared vision among staff” (p. 48). This correlation indicated an increase of greater than 10 percentile points in academic performance on standardized norm-referenced tests (p. 42). Marzano, Waters, and McNulty explained that leaders used a different approach to school improvement based on the magnitude of the change. The researchers distinguished school change as either first order (incremental) or second order (deep) change, based on the degree of deviation from current practice:

Incremental change fine-tunes the system through a series of small steps that do not depart radically from the past. Deep change alters the system in fundamental ways, offering a dramatic shift in direction and requiring new ways of thinking and acting. (Marzano et al., p. 66)

Many school improvement initiatives are first-order changes such as implementing a program that was similar to existing instructional models, or reorganizing the daily schedule. In first-order change, Marzano Waters, and McNulty (2005) recommend principals continue to emphasize all 21 responsibilities equally. Conversely, when attempting second-order change, the authors suggested that greater emphasis be placed on the following seven responsibilities: (1) knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (2) optimizer; (3) intellectual stimulation; (4) change agent; (5) monitoring/evaluating; (6) flexibility; and (7) ideals/beliefs (p. 70). These responsibilities focus the principal on his role to lead the implementation of change. Change wouldn't be considered second-order unless it represented a significant departure from the status quo. The authors explained that few staff members are prepared to support change that is radically different and requires them to develop a new skill set. Marzano et al. noted that in times of second order change, "culture has the strongest negative relationship with second-order change" (p. 73). Norms, routines, and values are called into question as the faculty work to find new solutions to complex problems. The authors explained that the principal is not trying "to subvert these responsibilities" (p. 74). Instead, the principal may have to endure negative perceptions of staff relating to culture. They concluded that "to successfully implement a second-order change initiative, a school leader must ratchet up his idealism, energy, and enthusiasm. Additionally, the school leader must be willing to live through a period of frustration and even anger from some staff members" (p. 75).

In 2005-2006, Georgia published a book containing a unified system to evaluate school quality called *The School Keys: Unlocking Excellence through the Georgia School Standards* (Georgia Department of Education, 2008). This became the "foundation for

Georgia's comprehensive, data-driven system of school improvement and support" (Georgia Department of Education, 2008, para. 1). This new evaluation system was based on common areas of emphasis in Marzano's book *What Works in Schools* (2003) and Marzano et al.'s book *School Leadership that Works* (2005), as well as in the requirements of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) (Georgia Department of Education, 2008). These areas are: (a) curriculum and instruction; (b) assessment; (c) planning and organization; (d) student, family, and community support; (e) professional learning; (f) leadership; and (g) school culture. The result was a collection of descriptors of "effective, high impact practices for schools," (p. 3) and led to the development of Georgia's "comprehensive, data-driven system of school improvement and support" (Georgia Department of Education, 2008, p. 3), called *The School Keys*. The department then produced "performance standards, linguistic rubrics, and elements/descriptors to assist schools in the process of school improvement" (p. 3). The resulting system for school measurement became a required element of school monitoring in the 2007-2008 school year and remains the current evaluation tool for schools and leaders in Georgia.

In January 2002, George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (Georgia Department of Education, 2012, para. 1). This law reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary School Education Act of 1965 (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: 2008a). The purpose of this law was to establish guidelines for monitoring and to ensure a high quality system of public education. Among the provisions are the requirements for state education agencies to meet the educational needs of low achieving students in high-poverty schools, migrant students, students with

disabilities, and to close “the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers” (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged, 2008a). Since NCLB took effect, states have monitored high school performance by judging passing rates on standardized tests and graduation rates. NCLB stipulated that “not later than 12 years after the end of the 2001-2002 school year, all students in each group ... will meet or exceed the state’s proficient level of academic achievement” (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Improving basic programs operated by local education agencies, 2008b). Simply put, states were to implement a timeline to ensure all students would be on or above grade level by 2014.

Each year the state of Georgia sets criteria for performance in academic disciplines of English/Language Arts, Mathematics, and the high school graduation rate. Reaching the required performance level is called making Adequate Yearly Progress, (AYP). Performance targets are a combination of the graduation rate and the performance rates of first-time takers of the High School Graduation Test (HSGT). As required by provisions of NCLB, Georgia requires schools to disaggregate student performance data based on subgroups with membership greater than 40 students.

Each school (or system) as a whole and each student group with at least 40 members must meet or exceed the State’s Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) regarding the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on selected state assessments in ... English/Language Arts and Mathematics. (Georgia Department of Education, 2011a)

It is important the reader understand that a student's performance is measured in each subgroup that he or she represents. For example, a poor, black, student with a disability, will have his performance reflected in the following subgroup analyses: All students, Black students, Students with Disabilities, and Economically Disadvantaged students. Students such as this are considered high impact students. An important reason that schools must disaggregate performance data is that a school may have good overall performance rates but members of a particular subgroup may underperform. After passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, satisfying this requirement became a primary focus in school improvement.

School Culture

Many authors have cited the impact of culture on school improvement (Brown, 2004; Hargreaves, 1995; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Henstrand, 2006; Sarason, 1982). Schein (2004) boldly moved beyond the relationship of school improvement and culture to emphasize the role of the leaders should play in a school's culture when he argued that "the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture" (p. 11). To qualify his perspective, he continued, "culture is the result of a complex group learning process that is only partially influenced by leader behavior" (p. 11).

First published in 1968, Schein's *Organizational Culture and Leadership* contributed to a common understanding of the elements of group culture and, since then, has been cited in many studies of school change and effectiveness (Brown 2004; Hargreaves, 1995; Weindling, 2000). Schein defined *culture* as "shared patterns of thought, belief, feelings, and values that result from shared experience and common learning" (pp. 87-88). He recognized the function of culture and its lasting impact and

stated, “Culture thus not only fulfills the function of providing stability, meaning, and predictability in the present, but is the result of functionally effective decisions in the group’s past” (p. 109). Because a school’s culture shapes the experience of leadership succession and conversely leadership shapes culture, it is important for leaders to attend to account for school culture in their transition.

Barth (2002) identified school culture as a “complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the organization” (p. 6). He indicated that all cultures are resistant to change. School cultures come with non-discussables, “sort of land mines with trip wires that people walk carefully around and try not to detonate” (p. 7). Barth maintained that these hot button topics are the very issues that leaders need to enable teachers to acknowledge and address in order to bring about improvements. According to Barth, “the challenge for leaders is to transform the non-discussables of school culture into elements that support school purpose” (p. 7).

Brown (2004) provided a general definition of school culture: “it refers to a set of common values, attitudes, beliefs, and norms, some of which are explicit and some of which are not” (p. 2). He indicated the challenge for those who wish to change the culture in schools is to “develop a set of values, beliefs, stories, and means of operating that will... focus everyone more on the central tasks of learning” (p. 3). Brown wrote “like organizations with multiple tasks, schools develop... an equilibrium that both stabilizes them and makes them extremely resistant to change” (pp. 3-4). Brown (2004) and Schein (2004) offered a thorough description of cultural artifacts present in schools. Brown enumerated several artifacts of school culture that would support high achievement and

included, “an inspiring vision, challenging mission, curriculum and instruction linked to the vision and mission that are tailored for the needs of students, supportive relationships, leadership, data-driven decision-making systems, parental support, and flexibility granted and honored by the school district” (p. 4). Brown’s list aligns with Schein’s description of cultural artifacts:

Visible products of the group, ... its language; its technology and products... its style, as embodied in clothing, manners of address, emotional displays, and myths and stories told about the organization; its published lists of values; its observable rituals and ceremonies, etc. (Schein, 2004, pp. 25-26)

In ideal cases, a principal’s transition to school leadership features a review of cultural artifacts such as school visions and improvement plans (Garchinsky, 2008, p. 7).

Weindling (2000) found that new principals began the work of school improvement by conducting “curriculum review ... to set out its aims, objectives, schemes of work and in some cases, methods of assessment” (p. 9). Likewise, Henstrand (2006) advised “leaders in reform should take the time to study and understand each school’s culture. . . . Using that knowledge, the needs of both adults and students can be addressed during the process of change” (p. 8).

The importance of understanding school culture in relation to school improvement was also indicated in David Hargreaves’s 1995 study on school effectiveness, which stated that improvement was “more a matter of diagnosing school culture and tracing a route to what school members regard as a more optimal position” (p. 29). Hargreaves emphasized a collegial school culture in which a level of interaction between the leader and faculty allowed for the negotiation of the school’s direction through dialogue that

refined the purpose of the organization (p. 35). Hargreaves indicated that school “culture persists as a legacy, shaping values and defining reality for many teachers” (p. 37). He postulated that schools hold on to experiences with past improvements, recorded in the folklore of stories retold in faculty lounges, marking them as badges of honor or scars of painful experiences. He further suggested that such experiences with change crystallize into lenses through which changes by future leaders are viewed. According to Hargreaves, “school culture may be a cause, an object, or an effect of school improvement” (p. 41), yet he didn’t speculate that changing school culture was the sole means toward a school’s improvement. He asserted that while “no school or teacher culture can be shown to have a direct impact on student learning... the effects of culture can be conceptualized as trickling down ... to impact what goes on in classrooms” (p. 43). Hargreaves concluded with a call for new research that maps out school cultures and the processes of change.

Sarason (1982) referred to “school culture” (p. 104) to differentiate a school from other settings. From this perspective, a school’s culture impacts not only how stakeholders view their work, but also how changes may be introduced. He observed that “the existing structure of a setting or culture defines the permissible ways in which goals and problems will be approached” (p. 27). Sarason further asserted that change is context-dependent and is based on three types of “social relationships: those among professionals within the school setting, those among the professionals and pupils, and those among professionals and the different parts of the larger society” (p. 59). The dynamics of each of these relationships will affect any proposed change. Rules, rituals, and routines are primary elements of school culture and serve as mechanisms to enforce

consistency. These routines, called *regularities* by Sarason, are so much a part of school life that they essentially become second nature. Sarason contended that “a central problem to the understanding of the school culture is how to describe it so that the regularities that characterize it can become apparent” (p. 117). These regularities impact more than just daily operations; many times, they shape the outcome of changes intended to improve student achievement. When implementing changes, Sarason advised leaders to remain conscious of how “changes will impact regularities” (p. 137).

Deal (1987) added to the traditional view of *routines, or the way we do things around here* by articulating other dimensions of school culture. These dimensions include: “shared values, heroes, rituals, ceremonies, stories and the cultural network” (p. 6). Most significant to the current study is the latter dimension, *cultural network*. The role of the cultural network is to reinforce and protect existing ways. Deal stated schools are hard to change because school “culture provides stability, certainty, and predictability” (p. 7). He further argued that change upsets the status quo because it requires a school to discard the old and implement something new. Therefore, change inevitably “involves loss” (p. 7). Deal noted that “unhealed wounds following change can weaken individuals, classrooms, or schools” (p. 8) and called for transition rituals to allow stakeholders to grieve and move on. One example of such a ritual is a retirement ceremony during which accomplishments are honored and successors are named. Another transition ritual he observed occurred in a school that fired teachers due to budget shortfalls. In this example, the staff spent part of the next faculty meeting discussing feelings of loss concerning staff and programs cut because of the budget. Deal stated that following this expression of grief, the mood of the group changed and people

began to extol emerging strengths such as “school spirit, top people, and adequate facilities” (p. 8). Deal concluded “in this transition event, they let go and were ready to move ahead” (p. 8). When the existing school culture needs review and renewal, “the common interest in education provides an interesting opportunity—if we can only figure out what to do” (p. 12). Deal stated that it “takes a collective look backward, inward, and ahead ... in education on the part of administrators, teachers, parents, students, and other members of a school community” (p. 12). He further explained this kind of transition ritual by reviewing the experience of several elementary schools in New York City. Deal found that the principals engaged the school community in a dialogue that can establish the basis for changes and “created a shared sense of new direction” (p. 13). Deal reported that “these schools showed dramatic improvements in ... measures of school performance” (p. 13). Through this process of dialogue, the articulation of a compelling reason for change results in faculty *buy-in* and broad based support for the change initiative.

Adding to Deal’s (1987) analysis of school culture, Brady (2008) indicated that “cultures ... are developed and nurtured within a framework imposed by a variety of tangible and intangible organizational structures” (p. 1). Specifically, Brady included “the institution’s sense of purpose or mission, its various rituals and traditions, school size, internal organizational structures, [and] program delivery” (p. 1). He asserted “these factors... define the parameters within which secondary school culture develops and functions, but also have a significant influence over the actions of the constituent members of the school community” (p. 1).

Fullan is an accomplished author and researcher who studied school leadership and educational reform for more than 25 years. In fact, he led the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in England from 1998-2003, a period that coincided with studies on leadership succession by Barker (2006) and institutional effectiveness by Gray et al. in 2001. With his book titled *Leading in a Culture of Change*, Fullan (2001) observed that the first decade of the 21st century was to be one of rapid and frequent changes, and coined the phrase *culture of change* to refer to the impending climate of reform. He encouraged principals to work with staff to identify the central calling of their work, the compelling goal toward which all parties strive, which he called a *moral purpose*. Fullan referenced diverse prescriptions for leading changes from both the top-down (Kotter, 1996) and the bottom-up (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990) perspectives to point out the importance for leaders to *understand the change process* in order to provide the faculty needed guidance and support. Fullan emphasized that an effective principal must approach school improvement initiatives in a way that “develop[s] capacity and commitment to solve complex problems” (p. 37). He also observed, “One of our most consistent findings and understandings about the change process in education is that all successful schools experience implementation dips as they move forward” (p. 40). Whenever a school implements change, teachers must learn new methods. These new methods may be new teaching strategies or new school processes. Fullan explained, “The implementation dip is literally a dip in performance and confidence as one encounters an innovation that requires new skills and new understandings” (p. 40). The resulting teacher and student performance over the short term will likely be worse than their performances had been prior to the change. Changes involve a learning curve during

which teachers learn new ways of adapting their activities. He argued, however, that the implementation dip can be overcome when leaders provide needed resources, including training, resources, and support. Fullan advised leaders to plan for this implementation dip and provide support and encouragement. He also advised leaders to focus on relationships within and outside the organization because he believed the establishment of trusting and collegial work relationships was crucial to implementing school-wide change. He further claimed that without trusting relationships staff members will not be comfortable taking risks and trying new strategies. Fullan asserted the leader who sets the context of professional conversations and designs learning experiences that aid teachers in tackling performance problems together will be more successful than one who does not. Fullan wrote that leaders must reorganize the work of the improvement team as an experimental group that is able to create and share knowledge with their colleagues. This process of making the school community tolerant and successful during changes is what he called *reculturing*. According to Fullan, “effective leaders know the hard work of reculturing is the sine qua non of progress. Furthermore it is a particular kind of reculturing for which we strive: one that activates and deepens moral purpose” (p. 44). Fullan advised principals who which to reculture the school to attend to several key elements, including faculty relationships, distributed leadership, and development of a professional learning community. He explained how principals had to work on relationships when he wrote “new relationships (as found in a professional learning community) are crucial, but only if they work at the hard task of establishing greater program coherence and the addition of resources” (p. 66). In this way, when a principal focuses on building relationships rather than creating structures for change, he or she can

begin to reculture their institutions thereby, re-inventing the way school is conducted by incorporating continuous improvement in its routines. Fullan explained the next task for leaders is coherence making, whereby leaders set the focus and direct the conversation regarding change. Fullan focused the work of leaders toward developing leadership throughout the organization. He stated that “leaders in a culture of change create these conditions for daily learning ... leaders are not born; they are nurtured” (p. 131). Fullan wrote that “leaders, then, look for opportunities to cause and reward leadership at all levels of the organization. When there is widespread learning in context, leadership for the future is a natural by-product” (p. 133). Fullan stated that by “cultivating leadership in others,” principals “realize that they are doing more than planning for their own succession—that if they lead right, the organization will outgrow them” (p. 134).

Since leaders are the stewards of school culture (Schein, 2004), it is appropriate to summarize the importance school culture plays in school leadership. School culture includes a variety of tangible artifacts, such as vision statements and improvement plans (Brown, 2004), as well as intangible elements, like how people expect to be treated, rituals and routines, and the chemistry of professional relationships (Barth, 2002). School culture permeates every process and activity in a school. It guides teaching activities in the classroom, and shapes interactions among teachers during planning. School culture influences the priorities on a daily and even hourly basis. As such it is imperative that an incoming principal become well versed in the school culture before trying to implement school-wide changes (Garchinsky, 2008). Learning to effectively blend personalities into cooperative teams and coordinate school-wide improvement efforts takes time. Sarason (1982) indicated that existing school culture establishes permissible ways to introduce

change. An incoming principal must take time to observe the school processes in action so that he or she may accurately interpret how procedures and current improvement initiatives influence student performance. Indeed, Fullan (2001) recommended that principals tap into the heart of their faculty to clarify their moral purpose, the very core of their beliefs about teaching and learning. Literature on leadership supports the notion that school culture is the foundation from which principals can set a course to implement changes.

Hargreaves (1995) observed that culture persists as a legacy, therefore, principals who wish to implement change must make a compelling case that aligns with that legacy to achieve faculty buy-in. Hargreaves' implication is that an inbound principal must learn what sort of expectations the school faculty holds for engaging in problem solving, what priorities they hold in common, and how the school has fared with previous change initiatives. As Schein (2004) observed, problem solving expectations of the school faculty are based upon previous ways they have implemented successful changes. School faculties expect to continue to use the *way we have always done things* to solve future performance issues (Schein). While an established principal would know what worked in the past, a new principal must invest considerable time to set the stage for change. Brady (2008) observed that school culture shapes the behavior of a faculty. It is therefore critical that the inbound principal matches any change initiative with corresponding professional development. By giving encouragement, support, and on-going training, the principal will begin to reculture the school to expect continuous improvement (Fullan, 2001). The studies that follow will show the significance of school culture in leadership succession.

Leadership Succession

Studies that focus on school leadership have long been preoccupied with the leader himself (Stanford & Simons, 1999), the traits which make a good leader (Maxwell, 2007), or the tactics used by leaders who brought about dramatic improvements (Bennis, 2003; Kouzes & Posner, 2008). However, under-represented in the literature on leadership is a focus on the process of leadership succession, which has been a growing concern of researchers for more than 20 years (Barker, 2006; Miklos, 1988; Ogawa, 1995; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2005).

One of the early succession-related studies was Miklos' (1988) exploration of how one's career orientation impacts leadership succession. Important to his findings were factors concerning administrator selection and socialization. His review of research asserted "characteristics of the succession and the conditions under which succession occurs are significant in determining the impact of the event" (p. 63). Also, the role of school culture was presented as a process of socialization for new administrators, "the major dimensions of the socialization process appeared to be learning to carry out tasks and responsibilities and accepting the role internally" (p. 68). In addition, the way the new principal engages in the business of administration, routines, and tasks is judged and ultimately shaped by the faculty and school community. In his concluding remarks, Miklos issued a call for in-depth case studies that "penetrate the depths of how these processes are actually experienced by people who aspire to or actually hold administrative positions" (p. 69).

Likewise, Ogawa (1995) categorized existing research as it related to the following five factors: (1) outcomes of succession, (2) responses to succession, (3) the fit

between the leader and the context, (4) succession processes, and (5) antecedents to leadership succession. Ogawa discovered that early research had been informed by studies in non-educational settings, though a few studies of the succession of elementary principals had been completed. He noted, “the inconclusive and spotty nature of research on administrator succession makes it difficult if not risky to draw clear-cut implications for policymakers and practitioners” (pp. 381-382). Ogawa endorsed additional research in schools and school districts in anticipation of wholesale replacement of school administrators in the future.

Gray (2003) also studied patterns of school improvement and found that performance gains were unlikely to last longer than 3 years. He observed that schools had yet to lock into cycles of improvement. According to Gray, “after a period of movement schools seemed to plateau. Three years of year-on-year improvement represented a good run for a school, four years an exceptional one” (p. 24). He concluded that “to succeed in sustaining improvement is the exception rather than the rule” (p. 26).

As recently as 2005, Rhodes and Brundrett cited a lack of literature on leadership succession as a “mechanism directly impacting school improvement” (p. 15). They referenced the impending *retirement bulge* as a pressing need to establish succession plans in schools. Rhodes and Brundrett stated without a clear process for attaining promotion to a principalship, mid-level leaders focused on positioning themselves, “knowing who they have to convince, *that they know what it takes*, to progress to senior leadership” (p. 17). The authors renewed the call for additional research “to establish better conceptual and practical understandings of succession and succession planning as a basis for improved leadership learning in the U.K.” (p. 18).

Hargreaves, Moore, Fink, Brayman, and White (2003) studied the effects of leadership succession in a Canadian school district that used principal rotation as a method of school improvement. They found that the pattern of changing principals every few years lead to a change resistant culture. They observed:

In many schools leadership succession is not an episodic event or an unexpected exception. It is regular and recurring ... teachers sometimes develop long-term responses ... cynicism towards change efforts, devise strategies to wait their principals out, exploit changes in direction for their own ends, or become determined to survive a poor principalship... (pp. 4-5)

As a result, teachers became exhausted when trying to buy-in to new programs of change that often reversed strategies from previous administrations. Hargraeves et al. emphasized the importance of leadership sustainability. They recommended that school systems develop a pool of leaders prepared to connect “the actions of leaders to the ones that preceded them and those who will take up their legacy” (p. 36). They suggested a system whereby inbound principals link planned improvement initiatives to their predecessor’s legacy in order to build upon past achievements. They asserted, “Sustainable leadership makes succession central to the process of continuing school improvement” (p. 36). Principals who plan for leadership succession take steps to ensure the continuation of school improvement results beyond their tenure.

Hargreaves and Fink (2003) presented seven principles of sustainable leadership. They distinguished sustainable leadership actions as those that “spread beyond individuals in chains of influence that connect the actions of leaders to their predecessors and successors” (p. 4). Leaders make lasting improvements on student learning by

establishing systems to support continued change, and leaders distribute leadership functions to include faculty members. The authors encouraged leaders to implement systems to “plan and prepare for succession, regulating the rate and frequency of successions so that a staff does not suffer from the cynicism” (p. 4) that results from excessive leadership turnover. Hargreaves and Fink concluded that “sustainable leadership demands serious attention be paid to leadership succession” (p. 5).

Individually, Hargreaves (2005) emphasized the importance of the preceding principal’s influence on the new principal’s experiences; and wrote that principals “lay the foundation for those who will follow” (p. 163). He believed the cultural legacy of change established by the outgoing principal will have everything to do with the faculty’s receptiveness to future changes. Hargreaves named “leadership succession planning” (p. 164) a central issue and often credited planning with determining whether successions “established continuity or provoke discontinuity” (p. 164). He described *planned continuity* as a situation in which a new principal was hired to sustain and build upon goals of a predecessor. Hargreaves observed that “more often than not, leadership successions were intended to create discontinuity—to move a school in a different direction than under its predecessors” and “represented efforts to get complacent or drifting schools to meet their students’ needs more effectively” (p. 165). He noted “planned discontinuity was effective at shaking things up, but not at making changes stick” (p. 166) because leaders either were transferred before their *change agendas* were complete or promoted based on the results of the turnaround. He encouraged incoming principals to blend their inbound knowledge with the outbound knowledge of the departing principal. Hargreaves noted that while the new principal’s “inbound knowledge

can inspire great change,” it “cannot be sustained after they have gone” (p. 169).

Hargreaves asserted that when school systems use “succession as an improvement strategy to rectify school underperformance ... this strategy only entrenches resistance” (p. 170).

Similarly, Fink and Brayman (2006) contributed to the *Change Over Time* study of leadership succession. They noted that “succession is now a chronic process rather than an episodic crisis” (p. 62). Fink and Brayman described schools that experience frequent succession as unable to sustain improvement efforts, in which “school improvement becomes like a set of bobbing corks, with many schools rising under one set of leaders, only to sink under the next” (p. 63). They cited the research of Hart (1993), who illustrated principal succession as a process of organizational socialization. Fink and Brayman applied Hart’s construct to explain “from this perspective, the new leader is inducted into school culture by means of socialization tactics, stages, context, and outcomes” (pp. 65-66). This socialization progresses through stages characterized by the quality of working relationships between the faculty and new principal. Fink and Brayman concluded that “for a school leader, the question of legacy and of sustainability of important changes requires renegotiating relationships with the former community” (p. 66). Fink and Brayman asserted that the work of new principals is constrained by change resistant school cultures that result from continuous cycles of leadership turnover.

Thus far, a review of existing research on leadership succession has revealed several commonalities. First, schools that experience frequent leadership turnover tend to develop cultures that are resistant to change (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Hargreaves et al., 2003). Second, because many school leaders are nearing retirement age (Rhodes &

Brundrett, 2005), it is important to outline plans to make inbound leaders successful in their transition to school leadership and avoid outcomes that require replacing the new principal with another new principal in quick succession (Fink & Brayman). Third, researchers have observed the role school culture plays on socializing inbound leaders to school norms (Miklos, 1988). Based upon this, sustainable school improvement is supported by blending the knowledge of outbound principals with that of inbound principals (Hargreaves, 2005). An outbound principal is frequently the expert on his or her school's culture and has established relationships with faculty members that could assist the inbound principal in adjusting to the new setting and planning for school improvement. Finally, authors from the past 35 years acknowledge we have much to learn about supporting various aspects of leadership succession and recommend continued exploration (Miklos; Ogawa, 1995; Rhodes & Brundrett). Next, I will present studies that examine leadership succession in particular schools and explore stages of principal development as he or she became established as a school leader.

Case Studies

There are several poignant case studies that examine the experiences of principals in the context of school leadership (Barker, 2006; Garchinsky, 2008; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003; Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Stine, 1998; Weindling, 2000; Weindling & Earley, 1987). Weindling and Earley studied leadership succession in secondary schools in the United Kingdom. The purpose of the study consisted of four aims: (a) to document demands on leaders in their first years of leadership, (b) to describe strategies leaders used to meet job requirements, (c) to identify required skills and knowledge for leadership, and (d) to provide guidelines for in-service agencies. Weindling and Earley

used the term *head* to refer to the principal and *deputy head* to refer to an assistant principal. Among the participants of the study, the authors found general agreement “that the most important learning period was as a deputy head” (p. 204). They noted that preparation during this career stage should include a rotation of job responsibilities to “ensure that deputies encountered all aspects of school management” (p. 204). Weindling and Earley identified the adjustment period, the time when the new leader is first named principal, as a critical time for support: “The move from deputy to head was felt to be a very large step, and the initial experience of being head was problematic for most people” (p. 204). The authors further asserted, “The research indicated that the relationship between the previous head and staff was a particularly important factor and emphasized that new heads do not start with a clean slate” (p. 207). They suggested that new leaders should communicate with the immediate predecessor, learn the manner of relationships their predecessor had with the faculty, and establish good systems of communicating with stakeholders. Weindling and Earley recommended careful consideration be given to “methods of improving communication and mechanisms to establish consultation” (p. 206). They found that “heads were given a *honeymoon period*, and ... it was important to show that something positive could be achieved as well as starting the process for major changes” (p. 208). Finally, Weindling and Earley advised new leaders to closely manage changes because “it was difficult for heads to judge the correct pace of change” (p. 208). They recommended a “careful appraisal of the change, using a periodic review to obtain the opinions of staff” (p. 208).

Conducting similar research, Stine’s (1998) case study of a middle school in southern California examined “the stages of leadership succession with an eye on the

factors leading to success” (p. 2). Stine applied Gabarro’s (1987) five stages of leader succession to her case study of principal succession. These five stages are: (1) taking hold, (2) immersion, (3) reshaping, (4) consolidation, and (5) refinement. Stine described the first phase of succession, as the time when the new principal began to meet with the staff and grasped “the new situation, but [engaged] in continual sense making because of reflection and staff involvement” (p. 5). Stine noted the principal moved into the second stage—immersion—by conducting faculty meetings, forming committees, and “beginning to change the decision-making process of the school itself” (p. 6). Stine detailed the third stage—the process of reshaping—by noting that during the first month of succession, the principal tried to formulate a strategic plan. However, “it was seen that reshaping could not take place ... until the membership of the school fully believed in the process and grappled with it” (p. 8). The faculty had to get to know the new leader in order to see the alignment between his vision and actions. After working with the faculty for a year, the principal held a 2-day strategic planning meeting with key staff members of the community and key teachers from the feeder school. Reshaping was outlined in the new strategic action plan developed at this meeting. Stine noted “this retreat provided a jolting of habits, attitudes and behaviors, to accommodate the change through a commitment to a new direction” (p. 9). Stages 3 and 4—reshaping and consolidation—of the organization was the focus of the strategic plan. Stine explained that Stage 4—consolidation—referred to “the entire range of learning during succession, from the concrete experience to the active experimentation by the new manager” (p. 13). Finally, Stage 5—refinement—was demonstrated when the new principal used a staff development day at the end of his second year to “review the strategic plan, celebrate

accomplishments, identify and prioritize new action plans and create a preliminary budget...” (p. 15). Stine indicated that each of the activities on the staff development day “represented impacts this principal succession had, in a short time, on the school” (p. 15). Stein observed the principal moved through distinct stages of leader succession and addressed three factors that led to a successful transition. First, the principal assessed the organization and diagnosed its’ problems. Second, through collaborative meetings, the principal was able to focus efforts upon shared expectations. Finally, Stein observed that the principal was able to bring about change that addressed organizational problems.

Weindling (2000) returned to the members of his previous study with Earley, in order to add a longitudinal perspective to his findings. Based on Schein’s (1968) concept, Weindling explained *organizational socialization* is the process during which leaders learn “knowledge, values, and behaviors required to perform a specific role within a particular organization” (Weindling, p. 12). According to Weindling, principals must first learn how to accomplish their goals by working with others, before they can implement changes. Weindling and Earley (1987) proposed a model called *Transition to Headship: Stages of Socialization* to explain the timeline of the principal’s adaptation to his or her school. Weindling cited the work of Gabarro (1987) and Ribbins (1998), which indicated that individuals experience seven stages as principals. These seven stages vary, depending upon the major tasks and amount of changes implemented by each principal. The principal’s career begins with Stage 0, which Weindling called *preparation* and refers to the time prior to one being named principal. Stages 1 and 2 — *entry* and *taking hold* — generally occur during one’s first year as principal. Stages 3 and 4 are when the principal takes action to *reshape* and *refine* the school’s instructional program. A

principal reaches these stages during the second to fifth years. Weindling acknowledged “school improvement ... is obviously the major quest for all heads It seems that most of the ground work is put in to place during the first five years or so, and then further refinements are made” (p. 11).

Furthermore, Weindling (2000) explained that leadership style and methods have a formative and summative impact on the school by “curricular and organizational restructuring, modeling appropriate behavior, and most importantly appointing key staff members” (p. 11). Weindling acknowledged the importance of school culture on school effectiveness: “The main task of the head is to create a shared vision and provide the necessary leadership to shape the culture of the school” (p. 11). Weindling cited Schein’s 1992 research to clarify the relationship between leadership and school culture:

Organizational cultures are created by leaders, and one of the most decisive functions of leadership may well be the creation, the management, and if and when it becomes necessary, the destruction of culture...In fact, there is a possibility underdeveloped in the leadership research that the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture and that the unique talent of leaders is their ability to work with culture. (Weindling, 2000, p. 10)

Weindling called Stage 5 *consolidation* and Stage 6 *plateau*. These stages are reached after one’s fifth year as principal and refer to the time when improvement efforts become part of the established culture, thereby, translating into part of the principal’s legacy. Weindling found that most principals in his study *leveled off* after their first 5 years, reporting that they had “initiated most of the changes they wanted” (p. 13). Weindling emphasized the importance of continued research on leadership succession, especially

endorsing designs that would be “sufficiently long time frame[s] to see all the phases of development” (p. 11). Weindling asserted when the previous school leader retired, he or she had “shaped the school in [his or her] image,” impacting not only the form of structure, but also school culture (p. 8). Therefore, Weindling indicated the new principal encountered difficulties based upon the “style and practices of the previous” principal (p. 8).

Kelly and Saunders (2010) conducted three case studies of transition and development during the first year of service as principal. They used a three-phase transition model as informed by the research of Weindling (2000). They categorized principals’ experiences, in terms of the leaders’ professional development, under the titles: (a) Preparation for Headship; (b) Entry, Orientation, and Immersion; and (c) Control and Action.

Their explanation of *Preparation for Headship* indicated it encompasses the time of a leader’s career in which he or she took classes, and obtained credentials, and gathered “social and social and technical experiences to qualify [him or her] for the job” (Kelly & Saunders, 2010, p. 131). They noted that principals defined their “vision of headship by moral-ethical considerations and personal constructs about the nature of contemporary education and school leadership” (p. 131). Though each person brought individual priorities to the office of principal, he or she was in education as a calling rather than a job. Although each member of the study gained many in-school experiences prior to being named principal, he or she reported “the degree of personal accountability associated with the headship meant that it was impossible to simulate the reality of it in any meaningful way prior to appointment” (p. 132).

Kelly and Saunders (2010) called the second phase of a principal's career *Entry*, which begins after the interview for principalship. Entry includes: "formal induction, networking, and building professional alliances to reflect the state of the process of professional and organizational socialization" (p. 132). In the authors' study, the differences among the principals were based on the context of the school and the degree of change each school required: "This led to marked differences in how each head teacher managed this phase of transition and...how fast they moved toward the next phase" (p. 132). Learning about and becoming accepted in their schools was time consuming, and "in all three cases, leading school improvement was closely linked with leading cultural change by providing appropriate opportunities for staff learning" (p. 133).

Control was marked by one's transition to "his or her formal leadership and reflected a personal assessment ... of the point where they felt confident and competent in the job" (Kelly & Saunders, 2010, p. 135). During this phase, principals developed a level of work efficiency that required "a nexus ... [among] knowledge, experience, skills, and qualities" (p. 135). Principals also established a professional identity in their new role based on their personal values and an *inner standard of excellence*. Each principal focused on relationships and built "buy-in from key people and a network of support for initiatives" (p. 138).

Subsequently, Barker (2006) conducted a case study of Felix Holt School in England, which experienced three leadership transitions from 1986 to 2003, "to consider how different leaders, styles, and strategies have contributed to the school's transformation and to reflect on the conditions that sustain or constrain enduring success" (p. 279). The first of the three leaders in this study retired as the school enrollment began

declining and test scores began slipping. The second leader served as a *mould breaker*, but retired after 6 years, his faculty suffering from *innovation overload*. This leader increased enrollment and began capital improvements that revitalized the school. The third leader was overshadowed by his charismatic predecessor, but eventually made his own improvements at the school. Under this third leader, changes were brought about by replacing key staff with trusted people who allowed for a more participatory style. Barker presented a rich description of the school during each administrative period, discussing the *leaders' [professional] life cycle*, as well as the school's responses to internal and external forces that "enabled and constrained leadership efforts" (p. 289). Barker found that emphasis was "placed by official transformational models on leadership characteristics, styles, and habits as formative influences on organizational climate and culture" (p. 288). Barker also found that school leaders were *successively enabled and constrained* by aspects of the school's context, including: enrollment, facilities, faculty turnover and recruitment, and national policy changes. He noted the way "individuals and groups progress through their organizational life cycles and form cultures" that reflect established relationships: "They find change more difficult to introduce and sustain" (p. 289). Seen in one light, "leadership succession ... provides an important opportunity to refresh an established culture," (p. 290) but Barker warned the "process of changing the head is hazardous and can be disruptive" (p. 290). He went on to advise, "stakeholders in headship appointments should engage in evaluation activities that include mapping climate, culture, and the enduring features of the school" (p. 290).

Like Barker's (2006) case study, Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) conducted an historical case study of 8 high schools in the United States and Canada examining

performance during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Hargreaves and Goodson's study distinguished between schools based upon the pedagogy and leadership principles each employed. This distinction is what Tyack and Tobin (1994) called the *grammar of schooling*. *Grammar* refers to a set of mental models applied in schools and includes practices such as how students are assigned to classes, student evaluation based on letter or numeric grades, procedures for and uses of standardized testing, and how teachers are assigned duties and responsibilities. Some schools in the study are best described as *experimental*, because the leadership deliberately sought to use innovative processes to improve student performance. One example of an experimental school in their study was a magnet school that focused on the creative arts. This school had a unique class schedule that integrated computer-based instruction with classes in the arts (Hargreaves & Goodson). Other schools in the study were considered traditional because they had a college preparatory curriculum. Faculty members in traditional schools "welcomed the academic emphasis of subject-based reforms, ... especially science and mathematics, [because their] ... identities, and careers aligned with the substance of the reforms" (Hargreaves & Goodson, p. 15). Reforms similar to existing strategies succeeded because teachers resisted changes that challenged their beliefs about schooling, and these did not. Administrators themselves are often the driving force behind improvement initiatives, and when they depart, the reform agenda is often changed by the incoming principal (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Therefore, the principal's impact was limited to short term changes, leaving sustained improvement undermined by frequent turnover and lack of continuity. Incoming leaders tended to initiate new changes rather than solidify those changes that were already underway. Over 3 decades, policy reversals served to

galvanize teachers against future policies (Hargreaves & Goodson). When combined, the trauma of different leadership and the abandonment of existing practice caused considerable upheaval. It is no wonder that achievement scores could suffer under these conditions (Fullan, 2001). Hargreaves and Goodson found in their research that school culture became the deciding factor of the success or failure of reform initiatives.

Garchinsky (2008) conducted a case study of four exemplary principals with the purpose of informing new principals of practices that would help them plan for continuity of culture and vision beyond their tenures. He suggested a change of focus from the role of the successor to the role of the predecessor, as it is the predecessor that sets the stage to support leadership succession. Garchinsky cited the cumulatively negative effect of successive turnovers of principals on stakeholders (Hargreaves, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003) and encouraged principals to serve at least 5 years in their positions. Finally, Garchinsky encouraged the use of distributed leadership practices to develop a culture that facilitates future leaders. He explained “exemplary principals thought about succession events” and began distributed leadership “from the onset of their tenure” (p. 215).

Findings of the case studies I presented reinforce and highlight important aspects of leadership succession. Several case studies referred to stages of socialization, and divided experiences of inbound principals into time periods based on leadership tasks. As such, stages were used to describe the time prior to assuming the principalship—preparation, the time of getting settled in as principal—entry, and the time of accomplishing goals—action (Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Stine, 1998; Weindling, 2000; Weindling & Earley, 1987). Case study findings also reinforced the notion that inbound

leaders do not start with a clean slate, but must contend with the school culture inherited from the outbound principal (Barker, 2006; Garchinsky, 2008; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Weindling & Earley). Negotiating the cultural legacy of the predecessor was the primary challenge for the inbound principal. In fact, Barker recommended inbound principals carefully study school culture, so as to better match tactics with faculty readiness for change and select the correct pace to implement reforms (Barker; Weindling & Earley). Such careful study may allow inbound principals to avoid the pitfall of rapid change and radical policy reversals that make faculty members resistant to change (Hargreaves & Goodson). Additionally, several authors noted that it took several years for an inbound principal to maximize his or her effectiveness, develop a shared vision, and prepare the school's culture for sustained improvement (Garchinsky; Kelly & Saunders; Weindling).

Since sustainable improvement depends on managing leadership successions over time (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003), it is appropriate to review several approaches to leadership succession plans. These plans place transition support within a larger context of succession planning.

Leadership Succession Plans

Given the degree of complexity one faces when leading a school, implementing change initiatives, and adhering to district, state, and national expectations for annual school improvement, it is logical that school districts consider ways to support school performance when leadership is in transition. This section presents succession plans reflecting approaches that can be applied at the state or school district levels.

In 2006, Andy Hargreaves assisted the Maryland State Department of Education in developing a *Leadership Succession Planning Guide* (Cary & Foran, 2006). The intent of this guide was to “increase the quantity and quality of potential candidates for the positions of principal and assistant principal” (p. 7). Principle authors Cary and Foran endorsed the importance of planning for leadership succession and suggested an outline of topics for Maryland school districts to address when writing succession plans. Also, the planning guide emphasized that the outline and succession plan should serve as “an example, not a model; it is an explanation of possible succession actions” (p. 1). When districts begin planning for leadership succession on a policy level, they move from having a list of potential applicants toward strategically ensuring that staff members participate in appropriate development activities in order to fulfill leadership roles in the future.

Cary and Foran (2006) advised school systems to assess the current status of leadership and formulate a plan to address the following six Succession Considerations: (1) a statement of the district philosophy, (2) approach to identification, (3) development, (4) promotion, (5) movement, and (6) retention of leaders in the school system. Each of these considerations would be supported by detailed action steps in separate sections of the resulting school district Leadership Succession Plan.

In the philosophy section, the school district should specify its approach to leadership development as it relates to the role of “principal, assistant principal, aspiring and potential leaders” (Cary & Foran, 2006, p. 7). The related action steps should list what the system will do to “build leadership capacity” and how the system will implement a “comprehensive, transparent succession plan” (p. 9).

Next the district should outline how school district leaders will identify leadership candidates. One element that contributes to self-identification of leadership candidates is the articulation of an attractive incentive structure. The identification sections should also include a plan for differentiated professional development, use of a pool approach that builds leadership capacity across the entire system “rather than a narrow group of candidates” (Cary & Foran, 2006, p. 9), and addresses how and when leadership candidates from outside the district will be considered for hire.

In the development section, the school district outlines “mechanisms to establish and sustain the culture for a professional learning community for aspiring and potential principals” (Cary & Foran, 2006, p. 10). Also, the district should identify elements of the professional development program that give leadership candidates constructive feedback, as well as processes that ensure principals provide opportunities for assistant principals to receive specific job experiences.

The promotion section of the plan is where the district should plan for an equitable, consistent, and transparent promotion process. Districts are prompted to identify a “timeline that allows for planned succession and effective transitions” (Cary & Foran, 2006, p. 11) and specify “mechanisms that ensure a successful transition to the position of principal” (p. 11).

One key element addressed in the movement section includes the explanation of “how the school system matches a principal to a school based on the specific needs of the school and the specific strengths of the principal” (Cary & Foran, 2006, p. 11). Another component of the movement section is planning “the process for involving the school community in the selection of the candidate for a specific vacancy” (p. 11).

The final section of the succession plan should address retention of current and potential leaders in the system. The district should reach out to its staff in order to determine what people value and incorporate these elements in the overall incentive structure. The succession planning process should demonstrate the value placed on career accomplishments and allow participants to give input on professional learning initiatives. Furthermore, district leaders should provide leadership opportunities with “a sense of fairness and purposeful challenge” (Cary & Foran, 2006, p. 12) and follow such experiences with supportive feedback. Cary and Foran emphasized the importance of transparency by prompting districts to explain “how a transparent and well-communicated process assists in retention of principals and potential principals by increasing understanding, building trust, and promoting morale” (p. 12).

Normore (2007) examined a school district’s 4-stage continuum approach for developing school leaders in a large urban school district in the southeastern United States. The study focused on “succession planning, recruitment, and socialization of aspiring and practicing school leaders” (p. 3). He defined socialization as:

Implicit and explicit pre- and post-appointment opportunities to learn about leading. These leaders learn about culture and change, leadership and management skills, knowledge, and dispositions required to perform their social role in the organizational culture. (pp. 8-9)

Normore (2007) explained different aspects pertaining to socialization in leadership succession, which included socialization to the profession and socialization to the organization. Professional socialization included: on-the-job learning, university coursework, and observation of other leader’s behaviors. Organizational socialization

included development of relationships, cultures, and priorities. Efforts in this district included a focus on the following: leader recruitment, professional development, and benchmarked assessments that rate participant readiness for leadership roles.

The district Normore (2007) studied implemented a support structure called the *Leadership Development Continuum*, which included four phases: (1) *Leadership Experiences and Administrative Development*, which consisted of professional development for teachers aspiring to become leaders; (2) *Interim Assistant Principal*, which supported a cohort of new assistant principals with mentors as they performed job duties during the first 3 years of service; (3) *Intern Principal*, which allowed current assistant principals to fulfill principal leadership roles as a formal preparation to becoming a principal; and (4) *First Year Principal Support*, which assigned mentors to new principals to assist them as they performed their job responsibilities.

Along the same lines, Levitz (2008) studied leadership succession in a Delaware school district. The district used an open application process for filling leadership vacancies, but Levitz recommended adopting a broader succession planning process that featured identification and development of potential leaders.

Levitz's (2008) first recommendation was to identify "what leaders must know and be able to do" (p. 54). Levitz called districts to use licensure standards to implement learning centered leadership strategies to develop traits desired of school leaders. Secondly, Levitz recommended the use of a leadership development team to identify and select high potential candidates to a leadership development cohort. Her third recommendation advised districts to implement a leadership development program that provides participants with academic and clinical leadership experiences. The clinical

leadership experience refers to an internship program with a highly qualified mentor principal. During the internship, the candidate would participate in professional learning experiences, and complete a leadership project. Finally, districts should establish protocols for monitoring and evaluating candidates' progress and "the effectiveness of the leadership development program" (p. 55).

In similar research, Riddick (2009) evaluated leadership succession plans in three school districts. Succession plans addressed professional development needs of individuals from each level of the district, which included non-certified employees, teachers, assistant principals, principals, and district leaders.

Riddick (2009) made three recommendations for school districts intending to implement succession plans. First, districts should "assess current status in various leadership positions and available internal pipeline of talent" (p. 131). Following this assessment, districts should plan and implement professional learning strategies to develop the talent pool. Secondly, Riddick advised districts to use cohort models and conduct socialization activities, which provide support to aspiring employees at all levels of the organization. Cohorts, or groups of colleagues working toward similar learning goals, allow participants to develop networks for ongoing support as they learn new leadership skills. Riddick suggested the importance of ongoing support for leaders that transition into new roles and stated that "socialization activities should extend beyond the induction programs and be integrated into all professional growth opportunities to allow professionals experienced in the various roles to hone and enhance their skills based on the successes of their colleagues" (p. 131). Riddick's last recommendation was to "make the district succession plan transparent to all stakeholders" (p. 131). Riddick indicated "it

is important for people to understand the system, where they currently are within it, and how to move through it to meet their career goals” (p. 132).

It is clear from the literature on succession planning that districts are advised to undertake a self assessment of potential leadership needs and begin to identify potential candidates for professional development. It is advised that this needs assessment look at various levels of leadership, beginning with teacher leadership, mid-level and building leadership, and district level leadership. Once complete, the results of the needs assessment should prompt the district to develop a system of recruitment, development, and retention to satisfy its projected leadership succession needs.

Summary

Literature on leadership succession, school culture, and school improvement is diverse in purpose and in prescription. I have attempted to point out the nexus that leadership succession presents. According to the literature an inbound principal will benefit from synthesizing the initiatives of past leaders, expectations concerning practice and processes from faculty and community members, and directives from school district leaders. The benefits that result from such synthesizing have been demonstrated to positively impact student achievement goals. Without the direct connection between established school culture, historical student performance results, and planned improvement initiatives, faculty buy-in has been shown to be less likely and in most instances in the literature initiatives failed.

Authors such as Brown (2004) and Fullan (2005) recommended that inbound leaders take time to carefully study the existing school culture in order to match tactics, develop consensus, and implement change. Numerous studies pointed out the negative

impact of frequent leadership succession on schools (Garchinsky, 2008; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). All too often district leaders seemed to embrace the “guy on a white horse” (Barker, 2006, p. 14) approach to hiring the next principal. In so doing, this inbound leader was rewarded for or encouraged because of knowledge and skills he or she brought to the school (Hargreaves & Goodson), as opposed to being encouraged to map the existing school culture (Barker) and align improvement strategies with a comprehensive knowledge of the change process (Fullan).

The literature further categorized behaviors and adjustment events into stages through which the inbound principal often transitioned while becoming familiar with the school, faculty, and community (Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Stine, 1998; Weindling, 2000; Weindling & Earley, 1987). These stages were characterized by general leadership tasks and reflected the development of the credibility for successfully implementing school improvement initiatives. Leadership succession literature strongly suggested that a successful transition to leadership hinged upon the inbound principal accurately gauging the amount of change the faculty can tolerate and providing needed support and professional development to allow the faculty to implement improvement initiatives effectively (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Weindling & Earley).

Although I have reviewed the work of many authors (Barker, 2006; Garchinsky, 2008; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Stine, 1998; Weindling, 2000) who studied leadership successions, there continues to be a need for further case studies that describe and document the process of leadership succession. Since, Kelly and Saunders emphasized that the transition of a new principal begins with a concerted effort to “make sense of context, and develop an understanding of the culture of the inherited

organization...” (p. 140), it is important that I depict the participants in the context of the school and district. The focus on the process of succession and the desire to report the unique experiences of each principal, led me to select tools such as phenomenological interviews, open-ended survey techniques, and participant observation as the primary data collection strategies in this historical case study.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

As reviewed in the previous chapter, literature on leadership succession is still incomplete. Merriam and Associates (2002) wrote “researchers undertake a qualitative study because there is a lack of theory or an existing theory fails to adequately explain a phenomenon” (p. 5). Those interested in improving individual schools, school districts, or even the entire system of education need to capture and build upon lessons learned by veteran leaders as they pertain to school improvement. Now that the United States finds itself on the verge of massive retirements from members of the Baby Boom generation, leadership succession has become an important topic of inquiry.

The literature has established the need for more detailed accounts of leadership succession. This dissertation is designed to meet that need. I used qualitative research techniques to present the case of leadership succession at a particular school. I approached this research topic from a phenomenological perspective, in that I used methods that allowed me to present the experiences and interpretations of the principals involved.

Qualitative Research

Stated simply, qualitative data are words not numbers (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Patton (2002) wrote “qualitative data consist of quotations, observations, and excerpts from documents” (p. 47). Bringing this data together in order to produce a meaningful explanation of the topic is the hallmark of good research. People communicate what they

find important by using stories (Patton). Patton observed that “understanding the ... participants’ stories is useful to the extent that they illuminate the processes and outcomes of the program for those who must make decisions about the program” (p. 10). Since I am particularly interested in the process of leadership succession, I asked participants to tell their stories of this process and to highlight aspects they felt were important. Miles and Huberman stated that “qualitative data, are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives ... and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them” (p. 10). So, qualitative research methods are well suited for the interests of this study.

Thus it is my intention to relate the stories of these two principals in a way that allows their experiences to help us better understand leadership successions in the future. Furthermore, Merriam and Associates (2002) noted “the key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (p. 3). Since I wish to explore the phenomenon of leadership succession as it applies to two successive school principals, qualitative inquiry methods of participant observation and interviews are a natural fit.

Patton (2002) explained the importance of using qualitative data to describe when he wrote:

They take us as readers into the time and place of the observation so that we know what it was like to have been there. They capture and communicate someone else’s experience of the world in his or her own words. Qualitative data tell a story. (p. 47)

Since I am a current school administrator, I am uniquely positioned to provide an insider perspective on what principal's experience. My particular focus is to present an insider's perspective on the lived experiences of each principal involved in this transition. Merriam and Associates (2002) described qualitative researchers as those who "strive to understand the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences" (pp. 4-5). Only after understanding this meaning can a researcher make judgments concerning the nature of the experience.

Case Study

In selecting a research design, I decided to match the unit of study with the topic of interest. Patton (2002) wrote: "A case can be a person, an event, an organization, a time period, a critical incident, or a community. Regardless of the unit of analysis, a qualitative case study seeks to describe that unit in depth and detail, holistically, and in context" (p. 55). Merriam and Associates (2002) indicated that it is "the unit of analysis, not the topic of investigation, [that] characterizes a case study" (p. 8). This particular case explores the experience of leadership succession from the perspective of the two successive principals at one high school. Maxwell (2005) wrote that qualitative researchers are "able to understand how events, actions, and meanings are shaped by the unique circumstances in which these occur" (p. 22).

Yin (2009) wrote that "the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena...the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (p. 4). Principals certainly do work in a complex social setting. It is my belief that in order to understand the experience of a principal, one must first understand that the role of the principal

differs based on the particular context of the school. One contributing factor to the context of a school is the relative quality of the school culture. Barth (2002) indicated that “every school has a culture, some are hospitable and others are toxic” (p. 7). School culture is a complex set of conditions that are simultaneously created by and respond to the actions, values, and beliefs, of the school principal, staff, and stakeholders. In this case, the principal is the central figure and is, likewise, portrayed in the context of this school’s unique cultural setting. Thus, understanding the experiences of these two principals requires an understanding of the dynamic relationship between the principal and school culture that they both inherited and created. Qualitative methods are ideally suited to in depth description and analysis of context and culture (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Patton, 2002).

Applying the case study methodology to a study of leadership succession, Barker (2006) wrote: “The case study provides an opportunity to consider how different leaders, styles, and strategies have contributed to the schools transformation and to reflect on the conditions that sustain or constrain enduring success” (p. 279). This case study presents a portrait of the two principals, details of the school culture, and school performance data as a reflection of the impact of this succession on long term school improvement efforts.

Portraiture

One particular style of case study research is portraiture. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explained that “portraits are designed to capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences” (p. 3). The decision to

use a portrait of each leader makes this study even more revealing. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis indicated:

The portraitist seeks to document and illuminate the complexity and detail of a unique experience or place, hoping that the audience will see themselves reflected in it, trusting that the readers will feel identified. The portraitist is very interested in the single case because she believes that embedded in it the reader will discover resonant universal themes. (p. 14)

Over the years, there have been many articles and books published on the topic of school performance. What works in one school doesn't always work in another. Schools are not *one-size fits all* phenomena. Learners have unique needs; faculties have particular strengths; leaders have specific styles; and schools have unique cultures. Because of this convergence, appreciation of the context of leadership succession will help readers draw their own conclusions about how successful it was. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) noted "the portraitist insists the only way to interpret people's actions, perspective, and talk is to see them in context" (p. 11). I present the school culture at South Georgia High School (SGAHS) in order to place leadership actions in context because I believe actions in context have greater potential to inform those who wish to improve student performance. Moreover, it is my hope that the reader may discover in these specific portraits some "universal themes" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 14)

Another aspect of portraiture is particularly appealing to me. In searching for the essence of a particular experience, person, or context, the researcher deliberately looks for what is good (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Lawrence-Lightfoot explained, "the researcher who asks first 'what is good here' is likely to absorb a very different

reality than the one who is on a mission to discover the sources of failure” (p. 9). The goodness I pursued in this study is defined by the two principals. I used this focus on goodness to frame the study and in selecting participants as Lawrence-Lightfoot did in *The Good High School*, not to analyze the resulting data. Lawrence-Lightfoot went on to say “the portraitist does not impose her definition of ‘good’ on the inquiry....rather tries to identify and document the actor’s perspectives” (p. 9). Following the identification of each principal’s perspectives, data analysis was conducted based on emergent themes. Each principal is a leader whose stated purpose is supporting the welfare of students. Each is motivated to do what’s best for kids. The proper focus of this study is to document the experience of leadership succession, rather than thinking in terms of finding fault. This study presents an examination of the impact this transition has had on school culture and student achievement.

Sampling

I used purposeful selection when choosing this case to study (Patton, 2002). This is a case of a particular kind of leadership succession that features the selection of a person from outside the system to succeed the retirement of the previous principal. As Patton noted, “purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 231). Examining this case provided the opportunity to chronicle experiences from the standpoint of the principals involved and presents the possibility to gain insight on leadership succession.

This study described school culture as it was fashioned by one long serving principal. The fact that a 15-year veteran was retiring, made it appropriate for study. As

noted in the literature review, previous research in schools or businesses have been too short to see all of the “phases of development” (Weindling, 2000, p. 12).

Since I selected a specific leader whose tenure was sufficiently long to include multiple graduating classes, I was able to ensure that the principal had time to make his mark on student achievement and school culture. Schein (2004) observed “it is leadership in the history of the group that has created the particular culture content that the group ends up with” (p. 86). Henstrand (2006) advised:

Leaders of reform should take time to study and understand each school’s culture, including the variations in ideational systems of teacher groups and individuals.

Using that knowledge, the needs of both adults and students can be addressed during the process of change. (p. 8)

In light of Fullan’s (2001) concept of *reculturing*, I use the idea of school culture as a medium in which the new principal takes action as well as a force that affects the principal. In this frame of reference, school culture is a sort of court of public opinion, in that members of the school culture not only judge the changes made, but shape the results of those changes.

Data Collection

In 2009, I was granted approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Valdosta State University to conduct an historical case study. I used multiple ways to collect data, including interviews, observations, surveys, and documents, in order to gain multiple perspectives on the experience of leadership succession (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Maxwell (2005) explained that one strength of using open-ended questions in a study was that results and theories were “experientially credible, both to the people

you are studying and to others” (p. 24). With each source of data, I considered what each particular source would tell me about leadership succession, school culture, and student achievement, in order to construct a thorough representation of leadership succession in this particular context.

In-depth Phenomenological Interviews

I used in-depth phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 2006) as the primary data collection technique. Seidman’s technique is characterized by using a series of three interviews; each of which contain a different focus. The first interview was a focused life history. I asked each participant to describe himself in the context of his career as a school teacher and leader. This interview “established the context of the participants’ experience” (p. 17). The second interview elicited details of the experience of leadership succession, school culture, and change. As Seidman advised, the purpose “is to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants’ present lived experience” (p. 18). The third interview centered around such issues as: school improvement, leadership style, school culture, leadership succession, and legacy. I asked questions that allowed participants to evaluate their accomplishments and the experience of transition. According to Seidman, “when we ask participants to reconstruct details of their experience, they are selecting events from their past and in so doing imparting meaning to them” (p. 19). The series of three interviews established the frame of reference for such reflection. Seidman noted “the combination of exploring the past to clarify the events that led participants to where they are now, describing the concrete details of their present experience, establishes conditions for reflecting upon what they are now doing in their lives” (p. 19).

I conducted three formal interviews, guided by a semi-structured interview guide that featured open-ended questions and thereby created the opportunity for each participant to share what he found most important. Open-ended questions ensure each participant expresses his unique perspective with his answers (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2006). The semi-structured guide allowed me to plan questions linked to topics discussed in the literature and ideas from previous interviews surrounding leadership succession, school improvement, and school culture.

As I conducted each interview, I used an active listening technique (Weiss, 1994; Seidman, 2006), to be sure I gathered the necessary detail. The way each participant explained himself provided insight into his decision making process (Seidman). Occasionally, I asked questions that were not on the interview guide (Weiss). This allowed me to pursue unanticipated topics of interest as they came up (Seidman). By following participant's trains-of-thought I investigated new lines of inquiry that revealed greater details of their experiences.

Interviews were designed as a series of three with each principal, and each ranged from 1 hour to 90 minutes. I conducted an additional interview with the outgoing principal because I needed to develop specific elements of the transition. Seidman (2006) advised scheduling the series of interviews spaced over a 2- to 3-week period to allow participants to "mull over the preceding interview, but not enough time to lose the connection between the two" (p. 21). Due to schedule conflicts, however, I was unable to do this. Instead, interviews were completed over a 6- to 7-month period. With each participant, I conducted session 1 and 2 at the beginning and end of the summer term. Interview session 3 was scheduled at the end of the fall term. The timing of these

interviews fell in natural breaks of the school year, breaks that administrators are accustomed to reflecting on the preceding school term. In fact, one participant addressed this practice of routine reflection in his interview sessions (Dunn 2, p. 19). In order to allow the participants an opportunity to prepare for our interview, I shared tentative interview guides with them prior to each session. Despite exceeding the timeline recommended by Seidman, I did not experience a significant loss of momentum, as the participants were able to communicate their reflections and share stories freely.

Following the first interview, each interview guide was adjusted by adding follow-up questions. As I planned future interview sessions, I referred to my research questions, issues discussed in the literature, field notes taken during interviews, and emerging themes. Copies of interview questions are included as Appendix C. The number of interviews differed because of response styles of participants. I needed a total of four interviews with the outgoing principal to ask questions on a range of topics. He was very conversational and gave detailed narratives that made the interview sessions longer than planned; therefore, the second interview ran particularly long and was divided into two sessions.

The incoming principal was more direct, and I was able to complete the interview schedule in three sessions. Taken as a whole, I asked fewer questions to follow up the outgoing principal's answers than I did with the incoming principal.

I used a digital voice recorder during each interview session. A written transcript was generated after each interview. Due to time constraints, I hired an experienced secretary to type each transcript. I provided the secretary with the following guidelines for generating transcripts: (1) list the speaker using initials; (2) add a header on each page

noting date, title, session number and page number; (3) note interview time parenthetically as each minute passed; (4) make specific notes of questions with minute and second time stamps in the text of the transcript; (5) remove vocal crutches such as “ah and um;” and (6) delete sentence fragments and type the restatement as the only version of the answer. The rationale for providing the preceding guidelines is based upon my intended use for the transcripts. According to Patton (2002), transcripts can be used to support different kinds of analysis. Narrative Analysis is a style of qualitative research that examines “in-depth interview transcripts, historical memoirs, and creative non-fiction” (p. 115). He continued to observe that “narrative studies are influenced by phenomenology’s emphasis on understanding lived experience and perceptions of experience” (p. 115). My interests differ from those of Hermeneutic analysis that emphasizes “constructing reality based on their interpretations of data with the help of participants who provided the data in the study” (p. 115). In this study I was interested in gathering the principals’ stories. I was not interested in conducting a fine-grained, Hermeneutic analysis as is used with legends, literature, and historical documents. Therefore, the guidelines I provided allowed me to document the stories, made note of time stamps so I could return to the audio to verify accuracy, and keep transcripts organized by date and page number during analysis. A sample of this transformation process is attached in Appendix B.

In addition to the recording device, I wrote field notes during each interview (Seidman, 2006). This allowed me to make note of interesting comments for follow up during the interview session. I worked hard to avoid interrupting the participant’s train of

thought, so notes allowed me to ask for clarification and probe for further examples after a natural pause occurred in conversation.

I also used field notes to prepare for subsequent interviews. Topics covered in the interview guides were based on current literature on leadership succession, school improvement, and school culture. I adjusted the planned interview guides as themes emerged from each transcript and to include queries written on field notes. I used a deliberate strategy to tack between personal interest in the topic of leadership succession, themes in current literature, and participant responses. For example, after reading about processes recommended for supporting leadership successions in the work of Riddick (2009), and Garchinsky (2008), I planned question 41 to ask the inbound principal about support structures and routines present in this school district (Appendix C). Another example occurred when I planned question 58, to ask Nix if the concept of context as used by Sarason (1982) was useful in terms of framing issues of school improvement (Appendix C).

At the beginning of each successive interview, participants were asked to review the transcript from the prior interview and make comments. While participants did not edit for content, they were asked to verify that the transcripts accurately represented their experiences. This verification process, called “member-checking” (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007), gave participants a view of how their comments looked in print and allowed them to determine if they wanted to clarify anything they reported. Additionally, this allowed me to validate answers before pursuing more detailed analysis.

Survey Data

I surveyed members of the School Improvement Team to develop additional perspectives on this leadership succession. The survey was based on comments made by principals and topics highlighted in the review of literature. It was written to allow faculty members to give their impressions of elements of leadership succession, school culture, and school improvement. As with the interview process, I posed open-ended survey questions that allowed participants to respond in their own words, rather than having to choose pre-determined responses (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002). The survey had three sections: the first focused on the outgoing principal, the second focused on the incoming principal, and the third focused on comparing the two principals. A copy of the survey is included in Appendix D.

Survey respondents were sent the survey via email. I asked them to type their answers and print their responses. I gave instructions to send the printed survey to a collection point at the Board of Education office. By printing the survey rather than emailing it, respondents were able to remain anonymous.

Each survey was coded with a participant code based upon the order in which it was received. A survey code, which consisted of respondent number and page number, was written on the top of each page. This numbering system allowed analyses by question and by respondent. I sent out 15 surveys to the School Improvement Team, and received three responses. While the responses did not allow for calculations of statistical significance, answers did allow me to confirm my interpretation or raise new issues that could be used in later interviews with participants.

Artifacts

Another data source I used was a collection of research artifacts focused on SGAHS. I use the term research artifact to include performance reports and documents I collected during the course of this study. Each artifact type was reviewed for the period 2005-2011, which encompassed the last 3 years of the outbound principal's tenure and the first 3 years of the inbound principal's service.

The first type of research artifact I reviewed was a collection of state reports concerning academic performance of SGAHS. Georgia applies an accountability measurement to every school. According to the Governor's Office of Student Achievement and Accountability, each school must demonstrate performance in the domains of English/Language Arts, Mathematics, and Graduation Rate as required by the 2002 re-authorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, commonly referred to as *No Child Left Behind* (Georgia Department of Education, 2011a). For the purposes of this study, I focused on the following areas: AYP status (met or did not meet), student performance on the Georgia High School Graduation Test in Language Arts and Math, participation in college entrance exams, Advanced Placement (AP) exams, and graduation rates. I chose these areas because schools use data from these specific domains to plan for school improvement. I reviewed school performance data to describe and evaluate school performance under each principal in terms used by state and local educational leaders.

A second type of research artifact that I reviewed was staff perception survey results. Each year this school district uses results of a locally developed staff perception survey as part of its school improvement efforts. Like members of School Improvement

Teams, I also used survey results and staff comments to gain understanding of the school culture of SGAHS. The conceptual foundation for the locally developed staff perception survey changed over the course of this study. As a result, I categorized results into general categories that represent similar perceptions represented in the two surveys.

During the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years, the staff perception survey was based on Lawrence Lezzotte's (1991) *Correlates of Effective Schools*. It measured domains including: Safe and Orderly Environment, Instructional Leadership, High Expectations, Clear and Focused Mission, Monitoring Student Progress, Opportunity to Learn, and Home/School Relationship. Respondents were asked to choose ratings along a 5-point scale: very negative, negative, average, positive, and very positive.

In 2005-2006, Georgia published a unified system to evaluate school quality called *The School Keys: Unlocking Excellence through the Georgia School Standards* (Georgia Department of Education, 2008), which the school started using during the 2007-2008 academic year. This became the "foundation for Georgia's comprehensive, data-driven system of school improvement and support" (Georgia Department of Education, 2008, para. 1). Georgia recognized a national shift from evaluating schools based on what teachers are teaching toward evaluating schools based on what students learn. This outcomes-based approach to appraising school performance is aligned with the work of Marzano (2003), and Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005). This new evaluation system was based on current research on school improvement and school accreditation agencies. Performance domains include: curriculum, instruction, assessment, planning and organization, student, family, and community support, professional learning, leadership, and school culture. Starting in 2007-2008 the school

system based its staff perception survey on *The School Keys* model. Respondents were asked to choose ratings along a 4-point scale that ranged from Not Evident, Emerging, Proficient, to Exemplary.

A third research artifact that I reviewed was the yearly school improvement plan. In this document, the school leadership team established a rationale and enumerated goals, as well as listed improvement strategies that were to be enacted during the school year to bring about improved student achievement. I used these documents to represent the priorities set by the School Improvement Team each year and developed a sense of the number and degree of changes implemented over time.

Observations

I made many observations of both leaders over the course of this study. I was able to observe the school improvement process at a School Improvement Team district meeting held each year. During these sessions, I noted interactions and decision-making styles, as well as developed an impression of the work relationships between each principal and his staff. In my several visits to the SGAHS campus to participate in meetings, I observed each principal interacting with students and faculty during the course of daily operations. Additionally, I made observations of principals and their staffs during extra-curricular events held outside of school. I made notes of my observations in my research journal after each of these encounters. Notes included details of conversation topics, styles, interactions, settings, and participants.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing and systematic throughout the course of this study (Yin, 2009). My thinking simultaneously considered issues in the literature, interview

responses, school artifacts, and observations. The field notes taken during each interview helped me to keep track of ideas that occurred to me during the course of participants' answers. As Maxwell (2005) advised my data analysis began "immediately after finishing the first interview or observation" (p. 94) and continued for the duration of this research project.

I used a five-step data analysis process with each recording. I made notes in my research journal concerning different topics during each listening session. The purpose of the first listening was to clarify my impressions written in field notes during the interview.

The purpose of the second listening session was to record points emphasized by the participant based on vocal qualities that showed emotion or strong beliefs. I made notes directly on the transcript which described participant voice qualities including points of emphasis made by loud or soft volume, emphatic tones, speed of diction, or utterances such as sighs or laughs (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Vocal qualities may show another level of meaning the participant assigned to the topic of conversation.

The purpose of the third listening session was to confirm the accuracy of the adjusted transcript. This draft of the transcript included a time notation for every minute of the recording. I made corrections to ensure transcripts captured the ideas of the participant with accuracy and fidelity to the conversation. In several instances, the transcriptionist had difficulty understanding the audio, when words seemed to run together, or educational jargon and acronyms were used. When there was a question about the exact words or acronym the participant used, a time stamp was added to the transcript. During this listening session, I paid specific attention to content, determining

which questions from the interview schedule were asked, noting the order of questions, and took note of additional questions added to follow up on participant responses. This listening session helped me plan for future interview sessions and allowed me to note concepts of potential importance to the participant.

The purpose of the fourth listening session was to compare participant responses to elements of the literature surrounding leadership succession, school improvement, and school culture. With each pass I made margin notes of participant answers that seemed to align with my thoughts from previous sessions to develop a more consistent interpretation of the data. I used these margin notes to highlight passages of various lengths, whenever the participant used a unique way to capture his thoughts. The following quote is one example of a particularly unique expression:

If I had the sense of a goat, I know that if I wanted them to do one thing like I wanted it done, I needed to do at least three like they wanted it done. I let my family know that I needed them. Everybody also knew that the bottom line was that the principal was going to decide. (Dunn 2, p. 19)

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested using margin notes as a way to stay mindful of coding as a process. They indicated “as coding proceeds... ideas and reactions to the meaning of what you are seeing” (p. 67) will occur to the researcher. These responses are indicative of codes that can “suggest new interpretations, leads, connections with other parts of the data, and they usually point toward questions and issues to look into during the next wave of data collection...” (Miles & Huberman, p. 67). I remained alert to the use of language and the ways each principal expressed himself. I noted that each participant explained himself with particular metaphors that symbolized his approach to

different aspects of school leadership. These metaphors were a source of reflection as I worked to explain the case. With each subsequent reading and listening, I highlighted passages that aligned with particular themes including school improvement, leadership style, school culture, and how they evaluated the quality of transition. I assigned participant stories to particular themes based on responses to questions in the interview schedule and specific follow-up questions that I asked. During this phase of data analysis, I made notes to myself to support a generation of a survey with the intent of adding the School Improvement Team's perspective on participant comments.

Following the fifth listening session, I referred to the margin notes and generated a master list of interesting passages from interview transcripts. I organized margin notes into what Miles and Huberman (1994) called *pattern codes*. They defined pattern codes as “explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify as emergent theme, configuration, or explanation...They represent a meta-code” (p. 69). I was able to organize the master list by interview sessions and then again by codes I had assigned in margin notes. I used this master list to illustrate codes which allowed me to compare and contrast the two participants in the study. I compiled a list of quotes according to codes. I was able to dissect interviews and then reorganize them thematically. For example, quotes concerning the new bell schedule and quotes relating to additional AP classes were organized under the code change. Similarly, quotes that referred to the school *family* or as a *boat* were organized under the code metaphors. Miles and Huberman recommended researchers “work with loosely held chunks of meaning, to be ready to unfreeze and reconfigure them as the data shape up otherwise” (p. 70). I deliberately looked for alternative ways to explain participant experiences by looking at participant comments in

the context of their stories and then looking at those comments in a list organized by my assigned codes.

Following this process, I returned to the audio recordings to verify the intent of each comment by listening to it in the context of each particular interview session. I referred to the audio recordings and transcripts to verify the words and phrases each participant used, and I then arranged phrases under the heading of each theme as it emerged from the data. I was able to easily find the quote in the audio file since the transcript included a time mark each full minute.

When analyzing interview data, I compared what the participant was saying to my understanding of the school culture of SGAHS. I moved from the wide angle perspective to focus on specific details of each principal's lived experience. In order to avoid locking into a pattern prematurely, I deliberately tried to clear away previous themes to consider alternative perspectives on interview responses.

Survey data was analyzed systematically. I read through the surveys in a number of different ways with the intent of getting a more detailed understanding of the emerging perception held by the school leadership team. The first time I read the surveys, I read each one in its entirety. I made notes in my research journal about the feelings shared in the surveys. I reflected on word choice, vocabulary, and degree of positive or negative evaluative comments. I examined the survey results for unique phrases that made a point in an illustrative way. Since respondents were free to word their answers in whatever way they chose, I took note whenever they mentioned themes that had arisen in my analysis of interview transcripts. When this happened I considered the theme validated by the survey. I also noted the diversity of opinion within each survey as School Improvement Team

members gave their impressions of each principal. For example, I noted that while one School Improvement Team member seemed to hold the outgoing principal in very high regard, the respondent also noted deficiencies that he wished the incoming principal would address (Respondent1, 2011).

The second time I read through the surveys, I chose to examine responses to questions in the first section, which concerned the outgoing principal. I made notes concerning the responses to each question by all respondents in my research journal. I wanted to capture the diversity of thought among respondents for each question by going deeper than an overall positive or negative rating.

After making these notes, I read all survey responses from the second section, which concerned the incoming principal. Again, I made notes in my research journal to compare the answers of each respondent on questions within this section, as well as think about how they were similar to or different from ratings concerning the outgoing principal.

Finally, I examined the comparison section. Since the questions in the third section asked respondents to compare and evaluate principals, I was able to examine how these comparisons aligned with the responses to questions in the other sections. I made notes of my observations in my research journal; however, this time I added quotes of comments that illustrated evaluations of particular themes that seemed important to each respondent.

The third time I read through the surveys, I looked for alignment between topics and stories mentioned by the principals in their interview sessions. I wanted to triangulate the data by comparing how staff members perceived their principals in relation to what

each principal reported. I made journal notes concerning the congruence between survey data and content in the interviews.

I used documents to add detail to the context of school leadership, especially focusing on staff perceptions and school improvement. I wrote memos in my research journal about the purpose and contents of each document. Memos concerning such artifacts provided an overall description of the artifact, and placed each within a particular time. Yin (2009) wrote “the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (p. 103). Annual school improvement plans were used as research artifacts and gave examples of changes enacted. In this way, they provided “specific details to corroborate information from other sources” (p. 103). Another way I used school improvement plans was to “make inferences” (p. 103) since they are reflections of what the school values and expressions of school culture. As research artifacts, they also provided a representation of school culture because of guiding principles they exemplified.

Another source of data was observations. I observed both principals in various settings over the course of the study. I visited the campus to attend meetings, observed classrooms, the cafeteria, the bus line, and special events. Time and dates varied; observations were made during the morning, throughout the school day, and after school. Furthermore, observations occurred at different times of the year (Yin, 2009). After each observation, I captured my thoughts by writing a memo in my research journal. I made a conscious effort to take in the whole context of each encounter (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I made a special effort to describe events, participants, and locations in order to add detail and develop the context in which each principal served.

Researcher as Instrument

Concepts of validity, reliability, and subjectivity have different meanings and significance in quantitative research than in qualitative research. According to Patton (2002) “validity in quantitative research depends on careful instrument construction to ensure that the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure....In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the instrument” (p. 14). Other theorists concur, including Miles and Huberman (1994) who wrote “The researcher is the main ‘measurement device’ in the study” (p. 7). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) further echoed this sentiment “the researcher does not come as an empty slate to the job of interpreting the subject of the portrait. Individual characteristics and experiences shape the portraitists voice” (p. 66). In order to judge a qualitative study, readers must know who the researcher (as instrument) is, how his subjectivities and preconceptions might influence the collection and analysis of data, and what he will do to guard against such influences.

Yin (2009) attested to the centrality of the researcher when he wrote, “much depends on an investigator’s own style of rigorous empirical thinking, along with the sufficient presentation of evidence and careful consideration of alternative interpretations” (p. 127). Peshkin (2001) noted researchers bring “shaping if not determining values, attitudes, preferences, and experiences—all lenses of a sort—through which they apprehend the world around them” (p. 242). My observations and thinking are informed by personality and training as an educator and researcher. Peshkin described the role a researcher’s background and research interests play in the course of conducting a study, “our purposes function as criteria that facilitate making the numerous sampling

decisions about what to include and exclude and what to place at the center and periphery of what we do include” (p. 250).

In order to establish the credibility of my judgments as a researcher and to make the reader aware of my personal and professional experiences, I present in what follows, a narrative as part of this study to provide details on my career, background, and interests.

Personal Narrative

Whenever I make a new acquaintance, invariably the conversation comes around to my occupation. My first answer is that I am a teacher. They usually inquire what I teach, and I respond that I used to teach social studies, but now I serve as an assistant principal. As I reflect on the reasons for becoming a teacher, I notice that I enjoy the story telling aspect of the social sciences. I have always enjoyed learning about the interplay of various factors that made historical events unfold as they did. That is why I am predisposed to using qualitative methods of research.

From my childhood experiences as a Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) camp counselor, I have long enjoyed helping others learn new skills and being a part of a team. These aspects have continued to provide a sense of accomplishment and serve to make my work a calling, and not so much a job.

Through the years I have been fortunate to have excellent teachers that inspired me to want to learn by their enthusiasm as well as by their example. I have noticed that the teachers and leaders who were most influential in my life were those who took time to develop a supportive relationship with their students. I have benefited from the support of colleagues and mentors that have shown me the value of listening and remaining open to

the input of others. This is another reason that I am particularly inclined toward conducting qualitative research.

My professional way of thinking is guided by my beliefs that education should address the whole child. In addition to the fundamental responsibility to provide rigorous academic instruction, I believe teachers should support every student socially, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. A student's school experience should allow them to develop social skills and a network of friends. The school experience should promote emotional well-being for all students. The school should take measures to provide support for physical development by combining nutrition services, physical education, and ensure they stay healthy by providing a school nurse. Finally, the school experience should give students something to believe in by emphasizing school and community spirit. In this way, it takes all parts of a diverse school faculty to meet the needs of every student, and only through a team approach will a school be successful in fulfilling this responsibility.

Professional Narrative

I have enjoyed 18 years in education: the first 8 as a teacher, and the last 10 serving as an administrator. I have been a part of different levels of education, teaching middle and high school, as well as, both traditional public school and alternative school. I have a thorough understanding of teaching. I am experienced in planning lessons, grading papers, preparing overhead transparencies, writing quizzes, building tests, and managing student instruction and behaviors. I also have a well rounded knowledge of administrative dimensions of a school. I have evaluated teachers and counselors, planned daily schedules and yearly calendars, supported the development of a positive school

culture as part of a leadership team, planned for school improvement, led staff development activities, planned standardized testing, used computerized student information systems, and been responsible for student discipline.

I have developed a philosophical understanding of schooling from preparation programs at two different universities and a practical understanding of schooling by serving as a teacher and an administrator in traditional public and alternative school settings. I have seen how the skills of a diverse faculty have come together to meet the needs of a variety of students. I believe that in order to be an effective educator one must blend philosophical and practical knowledge to bring about specific learning outcomes and school improvement in general. Based on my background of personal and professional experiences, I am well prepared to document and analyze elements of leadership succession.

Research Implications

I recognize as an educator, I bring beliefs, biases and predispositions to my work. In the practice of qualitative research, these beliefs and biases are referred to as subjectivity. While Patton (2002) observed there is a “negative connotation” (p. 50) associated with the term subjectivity, as it is contrasted with objectivity. Objectivity is considered to be “value-free” (p. 50), while subjectivity is based on the researcher’s interpretation. Peshkin (1988) advised researchers to “systematically identify their subjectivity throughout the course of their research” (p. 17). The purpose of this self-examination is not to sterilize oneself from personal reaction to the data, but instead to, as Peshkin noted, “enable myself to manage it—to preclude it from being unwittingly burdensome—as I progress through collecting, analyzing, and writing up my data”

(p. 20). Properly identified and managed, I believe my subjectivity along with my background makes me well qualified to research leadership succession. Patton (2002) suggested that researchers “adopt a stance of neutrality with regard to the phenomenon under study” (p. 51). To that end, I engaged in self-reflection throughout the course of this study, to make myself conscious of my beliefs and predispositions and how they might influence my research.

One such bias that was monitored during this study concerns my beliefs about leadership. I believe in a democratic form of leadership: one in which many voices are heard, perspectives and input are solicited, and decisions are made collectively. At times leaders are called upon to make an on the spot decision, or exercise personal judgment, but in terms of providing leadership for a school, these situations are exceptions rather than the rule. I believe a principal is someone who must surround himself with intelligent, reflective teachers who are experts in both content and pedagogy. It is important for a leader to assemble an administrative team that reflects different professional talents, such as skill with scheduling, assessment, and discipline. Such a team would have some representatives who are detail oriented and others who are holistic thinkers. It is a corollary that leaders would accept and honor stakeholder input in the process of planning school improvement. I also believe that a school should involve students in a democratic decision making process and provide avenues for students to be involved, and in some way shape the school’s activities and leadership.

Another bias that I monitored was my feeling about decision-making. As I made observations, I brought my own perspective on teaching and leading to the scene. I observed routine processes and special occasions, as well as interactions between

teachers and their principal. I identified with the principals in this study, and recognized how I felt during similar times in my past. In some situations I believed I would have made different decisions based on my personal philosophy and learning experiences. When I made such observations, I noted in my research journal my interpretation which might be shaped by familiarity with the circumstance. The purpose of this note was to allow myself to re-examine the data and seek alternate perceptions to make certain I captured the participants' perspective. My own interpretation would re-enter during the analysis phase in discussion.

Finally, I monitored my predisposition for being conservative. I would describe myself as cautious, and in most situations I find it prudent to formulate a plan and think before I act. I would not go as far as to say I am averse to change, but I do not like to rush into changes without considering the implications. During the course of this study, I was conscious of the role of change and made notes in my research journal whenever I noticed evaluative thoughts concerning change.

Patton (2002) wrote that "qualitative inquiry depends on, uses, and enhances the researcher's direct experiences in the world and insights about those experiences" (p. 51). Ultimately, I believe my experiences and training as a teacher and leader allow me to recognize elements of school performance important to the study of leadership succession.

Being aware of myself as researcher and tracking the ways in which my subjectivities and experiences might influence my work was an important first step in dealing with validity issues. There were, however, a number of additional measures that I implemented in order to increase the validity and credibility of this research.

Validity and Credibility

Maxwell (2005) used the term validity to “refer to the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p. 106). He added that more than just identifying strategies to protect from invalidity, the author must demonstrate “how these strategies will actually be applied in the ... study” (p. 107). The following section will present how I implemented techniques to support the validity of the study.

During the course of this study I noted that themes seemed to emerge from the data. For example, I made connections between research artifacts, observed school improvement planning processes, and connected them to comments made in participant interviews. These connections became clearer as I reflected on my field notes and analyzed interview transcripts. Patton (2002) noted that while conducting field work:

Experience with the setting will usually have led to thinking about prominent themes and dimensions that organize what has been experienced and observed.

These emergent ideas, themes, concepts, and dimensions—generated inductively through fieldwork—can also be ... further examined and verified. (p. 323)

I remained aware of my reactions to and interpretations of the data by writing memos about them in my research journal, as well as making margin notes during data analysis. In one process, I used emergent themes to draw conclusions from the data. In a second analysis, I tried to generate alternative explanations by reconfiguring survey responses and realigning interview transcripts based on question type instead of chronological order. By using different analytical approaches, such as re-sequencing

survey responses and categorizing interview quotes into themes, I took specific measures to avoid locking into an interpretation of the data prematurely.

I used two techniques mentioned in the literature on qualitative research to further support the validity of the study. Participants reviewed transcripts to verify accuracy at the conclusion of each interview. I provided a review of progress to participants and asked them to comment on observations and themes I generated since the time of our interviews. This strategy is called *member checking* (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). Creswell and Plano-Clark described member checking as an “approach, in which the investigator takes summaries of the findings back to key participants in the study and asks them whether the findings are an accurate reflection of their experiences” (p. 135).

The second measure I used to protect validity was triangulation of data. I have constructed a representation of each principal, contextualized by school performance and staff perception data: resulting in a presentation of the experience of leadership succession. Yin (2009) explained “a major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence” (pp. 114-115). As I collected and analyzed the data, I noticed emergent themes were expressed in different formats. An example of this is when I reflected in my research journal that an explanation from the outgoing principal was echoed in a survey response. Through the use of multiple sources of information, researchers may notice “converging lines of inquiry” in the data, which will strengthen findings of the study (p. 115). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) added “using triangulation, the researcher employs various strategies and tools of data collection, looking for the points of convergence among them. Emergent themes arise out of this layering of data, when different lenses frame similar findings” (p. 204). Maxwell

(2005) wrote that use of “multiple sources and methods give ... conclusions far more credibility than if ... limited to one source or method” (p. 94).

Patton (2002) stated that “credibility of qualitative inquiry depends on three distinct but related inquiry elements: Rigorous methods for doing fieldwork... the credibility of the researcher, [and] philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry” (pp. 552-553). To that end, I have presented techniques such as member checking and triangulation of data that I used as rigorous methodology; I have presented a review of my background and training that established my qualifications to conduct this research; and I have outlined the aspects of qualitative research that make it appropriate for the study of leadership succession.

Ethics

I have been well received by each of the participants of this study, and therefore, I recognize my own tendency to, in the words of the Hippocratic Oath, “do no harm.” It is not the intent or purpose to support an agenda at the expense of the reputation of any participant in this study. Participants are further protected from harm with the promise to use pseudonyms for each principal and by changing the name of the school.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Valdosta State University approved this research protocol in May 2009 (Appendix F). Procedures used include: interviews with two principals, observations of various school related functions, a survey conducted with School Improvement Team members, and document analysis.

Each principal reviewed and signed an informed consent document (Appendix E). This document included a detailed description of the purpose and procedures for this study, discussion of potential risks and benefits, assurance of confidentiality, and a

statement of voluntary participation. The survey was prefaced with a disclaimer that allowed respondents to opt out by not returning the survey instrument (Appendix D). All participants scheduled and completed interview sessions voluntarily, and they experienced no physical or psychological harm as a result. Deception was not used at any time during this study. All information was kept confidential for the duration of the study. Documents, artifacts, surveys, recordings, and transcripts were kept in a locked storage cabinet or on a password protected computer throughout the entire course of the study. The transcriptionist did not keep copies of any recording or document produced for this study.

Prior to engaging in research, I completed the Human Research, Basic IRB course module offered by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) in order to develop an awareness of ethical considerations in conducting research with human subjects. I have employed strategies to ensure participants are treated according to guidelines established by the IRB of Valdosta State University. I have maintained current credentials for the duration of this study.

Chapter IV

THE CASE

Who is a legend? According to community members, one of the men in this study is a legend. Dunn was a member of the leadership team at his school for 37 years: the last 15 as principal. He taught children, their parents as children, and their grandparents as children; while serving as a school leader for 39 years. This research is focused upon the process of leadership succession, the experience of transition between this legendary principal and his successor, and the impact of existing school culture on school performance.

In 1993 a number of transitions occurred: a new campus, a brand new building, new furniture, new landscaping, and new leadership. South Georgia High School (SGAHS) welcomed the promotion of one of its serving assistants to principal. But that leadership wasn't entirely new. Chosen for promotion after 22 years of service, Dunn had been providing leadership in various roles since 1969. Since beginning as a teacher in 1969, Dunn taught, loved, nurtured, disciplined, and led many of the citizens of his hometown spanning three generations.

Many community members believe Dunn established a legacy. It is found in the lasting relationships with his teachers, students, leaders, and followers of almost 50 years. His legacy can be recognized in the policies and procedures that he implemented and which guided the local high school from integration to the present. His legacy is one of

great love and concern for safety, community, and education of the people of his home town. Beginning in 2006, the context of Dunn's leadership began to change. With the retirement of the superintendent, the school system welcomed the promotion of its existing assistant superintendent. Being familiar with the school district she was able to continue the district-wide improvement initiatives begun under the retiring superintendent, and had plans to implement changes of her own as well. Beginning in 2006, the new superintendent implemented a pair of improvement initiatives, a new grading policy and an academic rigor program. Chief among those was the policy that shaped how teachers assigned grades to student work. This grading policy was based upon the concept that student work would be graded on the quality of the content and students would not be penalized for non-academic issues such as handing in work late or be given zeros for work not turned in. Over the course of this study, this policy would continue to be a source of conflict as teachers struggled to get students to complete work in a timely fashion and battled parents who requested numerous chances for students to resubmit assignments for rescoring. Another policy initiative led by the superintendent was designed to instill a college preparatory atmosphere that emphasized academic rigor in each school in the system. The focus on the academic rigor program was to push the most talented students to higher levels of academic achievement. In the middle school students were scheduled based on their high test scores in advanced classes and on track to earn high school credits at the end of their eighth grade year. In high school the superintendent wanted to increase the number of students that were accepted to 4-year universities and implement a dual enrollment program for students to begin work on 2-year degrees or technical certificates.

In 2008 a new era began at SGAHS: one that followed a legend. A new principal would lead the *new high school*. Changes were on the horizon, for the physical and cultural make up of SGAHS. I was curious about many things related to the changes. What was the process of leadership succession like? How did Dunn and his successor describe the transition? What role did context and school culture play in that transition? How has the school that Dunn led changed and how has the school culture established during Dunn's tenure impacted his successor's initiatives? What is the resulting impact of this transition on school performance?

The Setting

SGAHS is home to approximately 1600 students each year from August through May. Located on the outskirts of the county seat, SGAHS serves the children of the entire county; although, some elect to attend city or private school. Its students are 63% White, 32% Black, and 5% Other. Of the students, 49% qualify for free or reduced lunches (Georgia Department of Education, 2011b).

The school's original construction was completed in 1993, but 19 years later, it is still referred to in the community as the *new high school*. SGAHS has 70 classrooms in the main building. Expansion of the current facility began in 2006 with the construction of a separate building to house all first-year ninth graders. A new media center, vocational building, and sports buildings have been added within the last 3 years.

SGAHS is located on a fairly busy highway bypass. The sprawling 100-acre campus is split by a local access road. The road, named for a local sports hero, links the highway to a residential section of town. Including parking lots fit for shopping malls, wide sidewalks that allow students to greet each other as they begin their school day, and

the large canopy over the driveway in front of the main entrance, each detail of the campus communicates immensity. As with most high schools, there are practice fields for the football team and the band, a baseball and softball stadium complex, a greenhouse and two large fields used by the high school agriculture department. The four parking lots accommodate approximately 150 faculty and staff members, as well as anywhere from 500-800 students who drive to school daily.

While I consider SGAHS a large school, all of its buildings are one story. The gymnasium is designed to keep the same single story roof line consequently its floor was set into the ground as if it were a basement. The school's front lobby welcomes visitors and allows access to either the main office or the gymnasium. There is an administrative wing and a sports wing that adjoin the academic halls via the cafeteria. Beyond the main office, is a hallway lined with several 4' x 6' photos of state championship football teams, as well as achievement plaques for honor graduates and winners of highest test score awards. This hall leads to the registrar's office, several conference rooms, and eventually to the cafeteria, which seats about 500 students at a time. Only after walking this winding corridor, does one enter the academic spaces of SGAHS. Academic halls are adorned with student lockers set into the walls—interrupted occasionally by classroom doors. Each academic hall has its own color and letter code, which are categorized: A hall, B hall, C hall, and D hall. The ninth grade academy building is located behind the main building tucked between the cafeteria and the band practice area.

The faculty is organized according to academic disciplines, which include: language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, fine arts, athletics, and vocational arts. Teachers meet regularly with members of their departments to plan instruction and

collaborate on how to teach core concepts. Another function of departments is to analyze student performance data in order to support student achievement. Teachers look at performance on unit tests, final exams, end of course test results, and college entrance exams.

Departments are organized by a chairperson who disseminates information and collects feedback for the school-wide leadership team. Department chairs assist the principal in determining the number of classes for each course to offer. Each chairperson coordinates the department's efforts to bring about school improvement and facilitates requests for curriculum resources. They research, adopt, and order textbooks and other resources to teach the content.

Over the years, classroom assignments have been changed to align with different school improvement initiatives. For example, prior to 2005, teachers were assigned to classrooms based on the grade of students they taught. In this alignment all 10th grade subjects were close to each other, thereby decreasing the amount of transition time needed between classes. In the final 3 years of Dunn's tenure, from 2005-2008, room assignments were based on department, so that all math teachers were next to each other on the same hall, the science teachers were together on a different hall, and so on. The main office area featured the reception area, principal's office, and a conference room. Also, guidance counselors were stationed in the main office near the registrar to facilitate parent meetings. Assistant principals were stationed in the central hub to allow for management of student behavior.

As principal, Dunn spent the majority of his day in the office area receiving parents and resolving student concerns regarding both academics and discipline. Dunn

routinely patrolled the bus line in the morning and afternoon, and made his presence known in each lunch period. Almost anytime students were gathered, you could find Dunn in their midst. His supervision, work ethic, and leadership style contributed deeply to the culture of SGAHS, and established the foundations of faculty and community expectations for school leadership.

Dunn: The Man

For 15 years, SGAHS had the same principal. Even before serving as principal, Dunn shaped the culture of SGAHS as a teacher and then administrator. His methods and routines were based upon his character, upbringing, and faith.

Dunn grew up on a working plantation that employed his mother and father. Picked up by bus from the end of his dirt road, Dunn attended a community school not far from his home. During the day, he was a strong math student and his gregarious personality enabled him to assist classmates that needed help with their work. After school, he would return home to work along side his mother and father. It was his responsibility to train the hunting dogs and work with the horses. Over the years, the plantation's owner became aware of Dunn's intelligence and developed a respect for his work ethic. "I worked on that plantation. If I was driving a tractor, I wanted to be the best. If I was riding a horse, I wanted to be the best. Whatever I was doing, she [the plantation's owner] noticed that" (Dunn 1, p. 16).

Dunn enjoyed his school years, and by his senior year in high school, he had earned strong enough grades to rank second in his class. Based on his family's financial means, Dunn never thought it possible that he could afford to go to college. His guidance counselor even told him as much. The plantation owner had a different plan in mind.

Dunn explained: “She thought about sending me to college when that was the furthest thing from my mind. I was going to stay around the plantation and ride horses, I loved that” (Dunn 1, p. 17). The plantation owner decided Dunn was going to college, and she was going to pay every expense. More than being a favor for an employee’s son, it was a reward for his hard work. Dunn commented: “That’s why I tell people, *if you put yourself in a position, do what’s right, the Good Lord, Somebody will notice.* That was my only way to get an education” (Dunn 1, p. 17).

Once in college, Dunn would always return home between semesters to maintain his role in the family and help around the plantation. He married his high school sweetheart while still in college and becoming a new father made it imperative to find a job. He completed his degree in teaching and returned home to find a job.

Dunn went to the local Board of Education and sat anxiously in the lobby as the principals of every school in the district came in to meet with the Superintendent. As principals determined they needed to hire a teacher, they would make their hires from the applications on hand. Coincidentally, the principal of the school in Dunn’s backyard needed a math teacher. He selected Dunn.

Until his teaching career began, Dunn fashioned himself to be a utility man, filling the job of whatever need presented itself. He applied himself conscientiously to whatever task was at hand. He applied his trademark work ethic to every challenge he accepted. Upon securing his first teaching job, Dunn desired to meet the needs of each of his students. He worked tirelessly to plan lessons and often supplemented school supplies by gathering together teaching materials from home and community. Dunn became a valued asset to his new school. He served as a bus driver, and he often ran errands to

supplement school meals when the delivery was late or short of supply. After the first quarter, his principal became ill and died. The Superintendent turned to Dunn to manage the operations of the school, as well as continue to teach a full schedule of classes.

He found his first taste of school leadership rewarding but extremely taxing. As acting principal, he not only served as colleague to his fellow teachers, but also mediator when parents complained or students misbehaved. At the conclusion of his first year, he gladly returned the reigns of the school to the superintendent. Dunn's character was evident to all as he became an asset to the school and eventually the school system. His entry into the teaching profession put him in the minority in two respects; he was male and African-American.

He taught math and science, challenging students based upon their individual needs. He described his teaching style as *differentiation* before it had that name; "I call this: smart students helping the slow ones" (Dunn 2, p. 6). For those students who struggled to learn the material, they would work at the teacher's desk for extra care and support.

After distinguishing himself as both capable and responsible, Dunn was selected as an assistant principal at the county high school. Over 22 years he gained influence based on his reputation for making sound decisions and allowing everyone to feel that their concerns were heard and addressed. He recalled an example: "The parents had to know ... that I was not trying to rush them out, and I was giving them a chance to do their beefing" (Dunn 1, p. 12). "Like I say, I was the disciplinarian. I was fair with it. I think people need to act right" (Dunn 1, p. 14). Even though he was firm, he still gave people time to be heard before explaining his decision.

Many times Dunn would find the student who needed some extra attention and make them an office aide. This allowed for some mentoring to develop the student's sense of dignity and self-worth. "I enjoyed knowing about them so that I could do something about them" (Dunn 1, p. 11). "There is a cost to be paid when you become a school principal; you lose individual contact with students" (Dunn 1, p. 3). One of the most valued aspects of serving as a teacher is the relationships a person develops by working with students. During the course of an instructional unit, teachers plan lessons, present and explain concepts, remediate those who struggle, and test their students. As time passes, an instruction unit gives way to a 9-week grading period, followed by a semester. Before you know it, students and teachers have arrived at the end of the school year. Regardless of whether students and teachers mark their time by instructional tasks, or the next school holiday, through it all, they forge a bond by sharing lessons, trials, and triumphs.

It was through this relationship with students that Dunn first came to love teaching. When he accepted the job of assistant principal, his responsibility shifted from teaching 150 students, to ensuring the well being of 500 students. Within a typical 10-hour school day, his time was now divided from 15 students an hour to 50 students an hour. This compromise was magnified even more when he was named principal, requiring him to manage the welfare of 1600 students. "I enjoyed being able to walk among students in the classroom and on the yard, but as principal, that cut that. I almost got to be nothing but a public relations officer" (Dunn 1, p. 10). In time, Dunn came to miss working with students, because the duties of principal kept him sequestered in the office responding to parent concerns.

Selection as Principal

Just 3 weeks before the start of the new school year, the SGAHS principal announced his resignation. The timing of this event factored heavily into Dunn's selection as successor. Dunn accentuated his knowledge of the faculty and the improvement initiatives already planned for the year. Dunn retells the events of his hire:

When they offered me the job, I asked them to talk to their wives, and go to their mid-week church services. I asked them if they heard any talk of me, they needed to let them know I was being recommended as principal. Because they were going to have to live with their wives and have to deal with their church members, I asked them to come back next Tuesday, and if they still wanted me, then I would ask the same support that had been given other principals, and we'll go. History was being made. I was being named the first Black principal of a predominantly White high school in Georgia. (Dunn 1, p. 6)

There had been other Black principals named to lead Black high schools, but none had been named to lead a predominantly White high school anywhere south of Macon and certainly not in a setting like this.

Dunn's selection was a natural fit. He served his entire career in the county system, including being an assistant principal for the previous 22 years. Dunn was the most experienced candidate. He knew the business of opening school, and as a member of the leadership team, had already helped plan the upcoming changes for the new school year. Since he participated in the decision making process, Dunn represented consistency. Also, his hire meant there would not be a substantial learning curve where faculty and students were concerned. He felt like he had a good working relationship with staff,

community, parents, and students. Dunn acknowledged this by saying, “the community accepted me” (Dunn 1, p. 7).

Dunn is proud that he did not change a thing his first year. He was part of the administrative team that planned for the school year. He simply implemented the plan and monitored for future changes. In his words:

There was no need for me to change anything that first year. Even though there were things that he (former principal) wanted to implement that I wouldn't have done, especially that way . . . since he was leaving, if I had tried to change in 2 weeks time what we had agreed on, then teachers would have seen me as a person, good or bad, that would make rapid speedy changes. Sometimes that's okay, but when you're talking about your entire school family, most of the time, in order for an idea to be successful, you have to spend some time thinking about it. (Dunn 2, p. 14)

He studied how the year unfolded and made weekly notes in his journal. When it came time for school improvement meetings, he referred to his observations, considered faculty suggestions, and placed the issues before the School Improvement Team. It was his approach to enlist everyone he met as a part of the solution (Marzano et. al., 2005). People made suggestions and he took note of them. People would then go about their business with the feeling of being heard.

Accomplishments were part of the whole school effort. “I wanted to make sure that everything we did was a team effort” (Dunn 3, p. 3). Dunn explained his thoughts of how to get people to buy-in (Brown, 2004; Kelly & Saunders, 2010). “If I had the sense of a goat, I know that if I wanted them to do one thing like I wanted it done, I needed to

do at least three like they wanted it done. I let my family know that I needed them. Everybody also knew that the bottom line was that the principal was going to decide” (Dunn 2, p. 19).

Personal Relationships

Dunn approached life from the perspective of maintaining healthy relationships. His primary concern with people was to truly know them as a person. “You first have to see people as human beings, and then you can see them as parents, teachers, or students” (Dunn 4, p. 9). His concern then was to inquire about one’s family members, acquaintances in common, etc. It was only after these queries were addressed that one could proceed with the business at hand. “Then you can deal with all the other issues. But make sure you see them as human beings, made in the image and after the likeness of God; then you’ll treat them right” (Dunn 4, p. 9).

Dunn wanted everyone to know that he or she was important to him as an individual. He showed concern for a person’s wellbeing regardless of what they came to talk about. “A lot of them would tell me that they wanted to talk to me because, *I know you’re going to treat me right, you’re going to be fair to me*” (Dunn 1, p. 11). He acknowledged that everyone who came to the school came for a reason, but first they had to be put at ease in order for them to have their concern resolved. The concern that one may bring to Dunn is secondary to his or her wellbeing as a person. “It was good to hear about those parental concerns or problems because then you would know why a child was acting a certain way ... because of things at home” (Dunn 1, p. 10).

Dunn developed a comfortable rapport with visitors. Most encounters begin with an enthusiastic, “Hey Papa,” and are answered with the same in return. This greeting

showed more than respect, it communicated his genuine pleasure to see and be seen. It didn't matter if a person came to talk about getting tickets for graduation or to complain about a disciplinary decision, Dunn invested time to show respect for that person. "You had to make them feel just as important as any other parent ... that was coming to see about a concern with their kid" (Dunn 1, p. 10).

He made time for people by giving them a chance to express their concern. "If you didn't spend the time necessary and respect them by giving them the time that they wanted to have ... you'd have to go through the whole story again" (Dunn 1, p. 12). It was by letting people have the time to express their concerns and tell their story fully that he was able to make people feel as if they had been heard. "The parents had to know that I was not in a hurry, that I was not trying to rush them out" (Dunn 1, p. 12). Once they finished telling their story, often they didn't have something to demand, they just wanted to be heard. "I would ask them since they've had time to think about it, and I've just heard about it how would you have handled the situation if you were in my shoes? They would say, 'Well, you're the principal,' and once they said that, I would have the chance to tell them the reason I did what I did" (Dunn 1, p. 19). The most important part of this listening style was his ability to avoid interrupting the visitor while they spoke. "[I]f you interfere while they're talking, you've got to defend something you've said. They are there to argue, but you're there to keep them from arguing, to give them respect, to say what they got to say and let them know you did what you did because you had to do it" (Dunn 1, p. 19).

Dunn made it clear that as a principal you are expected to be a member of the community. "If you're going to be an effective administrator in your community, in your

school, you have to be a part of the community” (Dunn 1, p. 13). People expect you to attend their community events, such as Mule Days and Peacock festivals. People want to know you care about them and their lives. “People have to see you in their communities” (Dunn 1, p. 13).

The relationships maintained by community visibility and close contact engender a sense of community trust. Dunn commented, “I had established something with the community. If they can trust you on Monday, they need to have the same trust in you on Friday” (Dunn 1, p. 13). Consistency was a cornerstone in the values he cited as his motto: “be fair, be firm, and be consistent” (Dunn 1, p. 13).

His care for the individuals extended to concern for peoples’ families by attending funerals. “When people lose a loved one, they want somebody from that school to acknowledge that. I bet me and Mr. H and C.W. have been to more funerals than probably most preachers around here. Because when a kid calls and tells you that their grandmamma just passed, you just got to go” (Dunn 1, p. 13). This is corroborated by the current principal who mentioned that Dunn still attends funerals of staff members, even though he is retired. “I’m sure he still considers them as belonging to him...” (Nix 3, p. 2). Taking this a step further, Dunn added,

If they call and tell you that their kid’s had an accident or something; the next day you call back. Don’t let their call be the only call that’s made. If they thought enough of you to call and tell you that the child was in an accident, or the child is sick, then you make it your business to call them back the next day. (Dunn 1, p. 13)

This family was all inclusive, regardless of color, creed, status, staff, or student; Dunn was known for being there for his family.

A trademark of his style was to see office visitors quickly. He reasoned that “the quicker you serve your parents, the quicker they’re out of your building, the sooner you can get back to what you need to do” (Dunn 1, p. 13). Dunn had an open door policy, and he made it a top priority to greet visitors and resolve concerns (Marzano et al., 2005). As such, Dunn took on the role of mediator when he met with angry parents before they took out their frustrations on teachers. Parents would come to see him even though they should have spoken to the counselor or registrar for their request. By the time of his retirement, Dunn reflected, “I taught most of their parents and some of their grandparents” (Dunn 1, p. 3). Guests said he was the only one they knew in the building and they trusted they would be taken care of well.

School Culture

As previously mentioned, over the course of 39 years, Dunn established a reputation for being consistent. He maintained a consistent message for school improvement initiatives. He commented that one should not “be one thing today and something different tomorrow. You can’t have people guessing where you’re going to stand. If you’re standing on something today, be on that tomorrow” (Dunn 1, p. 5). Consistency went beyond his school improvement messages; it also included discipline and his untiring work ethic. He arrived to work early and left work late. One could count on his being at the school every day—rain or shine.

Dunn kept a constant eye on the public perception of the school. “I wanted to make sure that parents trust the school personally. If people trust you then the greatest

part of your headaches are gone as long as people trust you, that's why it's so important to be fair, firm, and consistent” (Dunn 1, p. 24). When he accepted the principalship, Dunn said he accepted the sacred trust of families to ensure a safe environment conducive to learning. This responsibility became an ever-present consideration. “The most important thing parents want is to have a safe environment” (Dunn 3, p. 6). He emphasized that in order for a school to be a place of learning, students have to feel safe enough to relax and focus on their lessons.

Another element of his personality that was infused in the school culture was his care for his school family. Dunn said one of the most frustrating parts of serving as principal was attending off-campus meetings. “The thing I hated more than anything was meetings. I hated being away from school my time needed to be spent at school, especially while the kids were there” (Dunn 1, p. 21). The thing that kept him happiest in his work was time spent with students: “If you love people, especially students, then there's enough satisfaction for you to stick with it. I think my driving force is that I was called to teach” (Dunn 1, p. 22).

The veteran principal called the school culture a family. He indicated that by describing the school as a family it communicated an unbreakable bond among members of the school community.

But even further than the team, is the family concept... Some people call it a team; I call it a family. You can get some people on a team and it's over. It isn't like that in a family. I might be the sorriest or the black sheep of the family, but I'm still your family. You can get traded from a team or kicked off the team, but you're always part of a family. You can't divorce that. (Dunn 3, p. 8)

All families, especially extended families, have the potential for tension. Some even have a falling out of sorts. But after it is all said and done, the person is still part of the family. So it is with a school. Once one has been selected to work on a faculty, you form bonds with colleagues, teaching relationships with students, and interact with families and community members. Metaphorically, this familial strength is representative of bonds that exist in a school's culture. Every school will naturally develop cliques based on personal styles, subjects taught, and social networks that revolve around church or kids. However, these cliques can become rival factions whenever there are emotions tied to change initiatives. Fortunately, Dunn managed people, built relationships, and kept the staff focused on student achievement. He did not let cliques detract from school initiatives.

Making the connection between personal relationships and leadership style was a strength for Dunn. There was no doubt about who was the boss, yet the way Dunn related to people, the way he reflected on school initiatives, the way he built consensus, and the way he served as a leader became entrenched in the culture of SGAHS. The leadership style a principal uses is a formative model to shape school culture. Weindling (2000) quoted Schein who pointed out, "Organizational cultures are created by leaders, and one of the most decisive functions of leadership may well be the creation, [and] the management" (Weindling, p. 10).

Likewise, the following discussions of school improvement and the pace of change during the tenure of Dunn are important aspects to the school culture of SGAHS. The faculty had very much adjusted to and been shaped by Dunn's leadership style and pace of change. This style is what the current faculty continues to use as they measure the

performance of their current principal. One important part of the legacy Dunn left behind is the faculty's memory of his leadership style and the way it shaped school culture. In fact his leadership style continues to influence the expectations of the current faculty. One survey respondent reflected "But I never pondered the decisions and what was going on with the administration like I do on a daily ... basis" (Respondent2, 2011).

When asked about anything he did that he would hang his hat on, Dunn rejected this phrase, "I don't know of anything that I've done as an individual that would make me stand out and say, 'this was put in place because of me' ... I wanted to make sure that everything we did was a team effort" (Dunn 3, p. 3). When he was asked to examine his 15 years as principal, he was most proud of the "personal relationships" that he had built (Dunn 3, p. 4).

When all things are considered, I believe the school culture that Dunn shaped may be the most significant element of his legacy. Based on the cornerstones of personal relationships, consistency, and established routines, the culture of SGAHS shaped the content, process, and results of its school improvement plan initiatives.

School Improvement Process

From the time of his selection as principal, Dunn adopted an approach to school improvement that one might call *observe and reflect*. He kept an observation notebook that he updated daily and summarized weekly. "I would go back over it on the weekends; Saturday mornings when it was kind of fresh and I'd look at the week's activities, what we had done that week" (Dunn 3, p. 2). He would observe processes, teacher performances, and events: "And those things that I thought that we could improve on, I made a note. We'll have school day pictures at a different time or whatever the case

might be” (Dunn 3, p. 2). “Then in the spring of the year after we came back from spring break, I pulled out all those notes that I had kept” (Dunn 3, p. 2). He would have his secretary type up his notes and copy them for the administrative team to review.

Dunn believed that his faculty and district support personnel had the expertise needed to address student performance concerns. That is not to say that he disapproved of staff development, rather, Dunn believed in the capacity of his staff and the district support system to plan and implement school improvement strategies. He accepted suggestions from faculty members and gave them consideration in the spring planning session (Marzano et al., 2005). “You have to let the people know that you’re going to respect their input. They’ll come up with the changes and the ideas; just let them do it” (Dunn 2, p. 19). Following the administrative team session, input was solicited from the faculty via their departmental groups. Department chairs would review resources, suggestions, and needs to bring back to the School Improvement Team. Dunn referred suggestions made during the year to the department heads and asked them to evaluate the idea. Members of a department were able to see their idea recorded and reconsidered for inclusion in the improvement plan. Dunn reported:

And believe it or not, those ideas from the teachers on the spur of the moment in the hallway, by the time spring came around and they had time to think and time to see things work out different, they would strike them. But I made sure that if this came from a certain department that it was left on there, even if the assistant principal didn’t like the idea. We wanted to give that person the opportunity from that department to strike it. We didn’t want to strike it. (Dunn 2, p. 14)

Dunn gave support to a variety of change initiatives that came from his staff. Among those ideas were planning sessions to strengthen instructional links between middle and high school instruction, as well as tutoring models that incorporated a diverse schedule that matched student schedules and faculty planning.

Dunn valued relationship building more than paperwork. That approach materialized in his approach to the school improvement process. He asked members of his School Improvement Team to make the same kinds of observations he made, and they would agree to review them as input for the school's improvement plan. "I had to ask the department heads to take notes because in the spring of the year, we were going to review We were going to look at things that we would ask them to do as department chairs with their departments. We were just going to make it a team effort to improve..." (Dunn 3, p. 2). Dunn approached school improvement as a barter system. He said that if you had something that you wanted teachers to do, you'd better support them.

Dunn used a process for review of accomplishments and relevant performance data in the school improvement process. As already reviewed, this process was designed to include the observations of his team as the basis for future improvement initiatives. The next section presents the performance data that the school improvement reviewed over the last three years of Dunn's tenure.

School Performance Data

During the period of this study, SGAHS has had measurable subgroups in the areas of all students, including: White students, Black students, disabled students, and economically disadvantaged students. The state of Georgia developed a timeline to ensure all students would meet the requirements of NCLB, which call for all students to

perform on or above grade level by 2014. Georgia uses the term Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) to indicate the expected passing rate for students at a school. Each year there is an expectation for a higher percentage of students to demonstrate proficiency on High School Graduation Tests (HSGT) and to graduate high school, and consequently, the AMO increases. Schools must surpass the AMO in each performance category to earn the distinction of having made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Having made AYP is the benchmark of distinguishing a school that is making appropriate progress toward ensuring universal proficiency by 2014.

Performance data was examined for the last 3 years of Dunn's tenure and the results are as follows. In 2005-2006 SGAHS made AYP, but failed to make AYP in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. The following section shows school-wide performance in specific areas. It is important that the reader recall that some students are counted as members of multiple subgroups in calculations of AYP. For example, the subgroup performance levels of Black students are included in the All students category. This being the case, it is noteworthy that the performance of some students is considered four times, since they are members of All students, Black students, Economically Disadvantaged students, and Students with a disability.

SGAHS met the AMO for graduation rate and English/Language Arts for each of the 3 years in this timeline (Table 1). The school was required to demonstrate 84.7% of all students in each subgroup passed the English Language Arts test on the HSGT. As shown in Table 1, SGAHS satisfied this requirement in each category except students with disabilities (SWD). In 2005-2006 and 2007-2008, SGAHS did not have enough students in the SWD category to constitute a subgroup and was not penalized for not

making the required AMO. When compared to Table 2 Mathematics, Table 1 shows English/Language Arts as a relative strength for SGAHS students.

Table 1

SGAHS English/Language Arts Performance 2006-2008

Sub-Group	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
Annual Measurable Objective	84.7	84.7	87.7
All Students	95.1	96.4	93.6
Black students	92.2	92.2	86.1
Economically Disadvantaged	92.6	93.6	88.5
Students with Disabilities	73.9	96.2	75.7

As shown in Table 2, math performance is the area that has proven most troublesome. In 2005-2006, SGAHS was able to satisfy state requirements by improving subgroup performance by 10%. In 2006-2007, however, SGAHS did not meet the AMO due to math performance, since only 60.2% of Black students passed. Since the improvement of Black students was less than 10%, SGAHS did not make the required AMO. Subsequently, in 2007-2008, SGAHS again failed to achieve the required AMO when only 62% of Black students passed and 66.9% of Economically Disadvantaged students passed. Although student performance rose in the All students categories, subgroup performance did not reflect the required performance levels. As such, SGAHS did not make AYP based on math for 2006-2007 or 2007-2008.

Table 2

SGAHS Math Performance 2006-2008

Sub-Group	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
Annual Measurable Objective	68.6	68.6	74.9
All Students	76.8	79.5	80.3
Black students	58.3	60.2	62.0
Economically Disadvantaged	63.2	67.9	66.9
Students with Disabilities	60.9	69.2	51.4

The third requirement to make AYP is to demonstrate sufficient graduation percentages for each subgroup (Table 3). From 2005-2006 to 2007-2008, AMO requirements rose from 60% to 70%. SGAHS exceeded the required graduation rate each year at a rate of 78.3% in 2005-2006, 76.2% in 2006-2007, and 78.3% in 2007-2008. While the students with disabilities subgroup failed to make required improvements, this group was not measured since it contained fewer than 40 students. Over the final 3-year period of Dunn’s tenure, graduation rate remained unchanged.

Table 3

SGAHS Graduation Rates 2006-2008

Sub Group	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
Annual Measurable Objective	60	65	70
All Students	78.3	76.2	78.3
Black students	65.8	71.7	65.3
Economically Disadvantaged	67.7	70.3	65.6
Students with Disabilities	46.9	15	24

In addition to test scores and graduation rates, the leadership team at SGAHS routinely used additional measurements to plan for school improvement initiatives. As educators have argued for many years, AYP ratings are not the sole determinate of the quality of school performance or school culture. Two more areas were suggested by principals in this study, which included college test participation and school perception survey responses. The number of college entrance exams taken in 2005-2006 was 170, rising slightly in 2006-2007 to 176. However, in 2007-2008, the number jumped to 207.

Another measure of school performance used in improvement planning was faculty perception surveys. During the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years, the survey was based on Lawrence Lezzotte's (1991) *Correlates of Effective Schools*. The purpose of the survey was to gather faculty input as a way to measure school culture. Teachers rated survey categories using a 5-point Likert scale, which included: *strongly agree, agree, average, disagree, and strongly disagree*. Teacher perception scores are listed in Table 4. While four areas showed greater than 90% approval ratings, in 2005-

2006, there were two areas that were rated below 80%. Those areas were *Clear and Focused Mission* (71) and *Instructional Leadership* (74). The 2006-2007 staff perception survey again showed four areas rated above 90%, while only Home School Relationship was rated below 80%.

Table 4

Staff Perception Survey- Correlates

Correlate Area	2005-2006	2006-2007
Safe and Orderly Environment	96	85
Instructional Leadership	74	91
High Expectations	86	89
Clear and Focused Mission	71	94
Monitoring Student Progress	91	96
Opportunity to Learn	92	97
Home School Relations	91	76

In 2007-2008 the school system based its staff perception survey on the *School Keys* model (Table 5). While the category titles changed the indicators within each category measure similar concepts when compared to the survey based on Lezotte's *Correlates of Effective Schools*. Five of the eight areas rated were above 90% approval, while two were rated below 80%: *Planning and Organization*, and *Assessment*. Although, ratings in all categories were above 70%, the two lowest areas were rated 12% lower than the next lowest area.

Table 5

Staff Perception Survey- School Keys

School Keys Area	2007-2008
Curriculum	69.7
Assessment	75.7
Instruction	73.7
Planning and Organization	76.1
Student, Family, and Community Support	44.8
Professional Learning	70.3
Leadership	64.4
School Culture	59.8

At the end of Dunn’s term of service, staff perception survey results showed a dramatic decline in all categories. While the indicators were more specific in some of the *School Keys* areas, the questions did not mirror questions in the district made surveys based on the *Correlates of Effective Schools*. Ratings in the leadership domain reflected the tension between the superintendent’s district-wide grading policy initiative and Dunn’s desire to support teacher concerns (Dunn 4). Additionally, ratings in the School Culture domain showed a remarkable decline from the 89% mark in High Expectations and the 94% rating in Clear and Focused Mission because of the impending transition and the absence of an established vision for the inbound administration. Additionally, staff comments that concerned school culture and assessment derided changes that were related to the unpopular grading policy. Staff survey results also called for improvement

of daily operations of the school, desiring fewer interruptions of their classes (Respondent1). The lowest rated area concerned student, family and community involvement.

Each year the School Improvement Team would account for school-wide performance and formulate strategies to meet challenging requirements set forth by the state and federal governments. The following section presents change initiatives implemented during the final 3 years of Dunn's tenure, from 2005-2008. It will become clear that Dunn approached school improvement methodically and as a member of a team, rather than as an individual.

Changes

Dunn felt it was important to demonstrate to his faculty that he was thoughtful and deliberate rather than someone who was quick to change. When asked about changes he made when he was first named principal, Dunn said there weren't going to be any. He had finalized the plans for the upcoming year as a member of the previous leadership team, and he didn't intend to change things simply because he was promoted. By showing this fidelity to the agreed upon school improvement plan (SIP), Dunn demonstrated that the plan was more than just the principal's decision. The SIP was the work product of the entire faculty through its' leadership team.

Dunn also emphasized the importance of knowing the context of your school (Sarason, 1982). "First I need to find out about my community. I need to find out about my faculty. I need to find out about my staff. I need to find out what's going on. They don't need me coming in here with all these bright ideas that don't fit" (Dunn 2, p. 19). School improvement ideas need to be relevant to the school context and grounded in

school performance issues (Deal, 1987). “For instance, there’s no need for me to put in a drafting class when there’s no industry around here that requires drafting” (Dunn 2, p. 19).

As Fullan (2001) advised, Dunn portrayed the role of the administrative team as success makers. “In order for an idea to be successful, you have to spend some time thinking about it. Not thinking about how you’re going to make the idea work, but what would keep it from working” (Dunn 2, p. 19). He recognized that people needed help making their ideas work, and he believed that everyone would share in the benefits of successful implementation:

If I needed them to make my idea work, why don’t I support them in making theirs work? I let the faculty know that if we come up with stuff like this to try for the first time, if it worked then it’s your idea; if it didn’t work then it was mine. Then the next one I put you in charge of, you’re going to be successful, because I’m going to make sure I put you in charge of something where you’ll succeed to get your morale back up. (Dunn 2, p. 19)

Dunn realized the role of faculty buy-in (Sarason, 1982) to any school improvement initiative and said:

Be mindful now that your changes or your idea of what changes should be might not be the same as the people who’ve got to implement them. So make sure that those people that you expect to implement your ideas will buy into it before you even put them in place, because once you’ve put them in place you’d hate to renege so to speak. So, the best thing to do is to have the team aboard before you say, “This is what we’re going to do”. (Dunn 3, p. 2)

Sarason (1982) observed, “although the principal is the gatekeeper in regard to the change effort, the ultimate outcome depends on when and how teachers become a part of the decision to initiate change” (p. 5). Dunn compared the School Improvement Team to a choir, and said, “The choir don’t sound so bad when you’re singing with them. It’s that when you sit back there critiquing it that it didn’t sing so good” (Dunn 2, p. 20). The point hinges upon the degree and nature of faculty involvement. It is easier to criticize from the outside than it is to get involved and make a change successful. From Dunn’s perspective, when the ideas come from your staff, they will spend a lot more effort to make them work. He also advised that it is the administration’s job to remove all the things that will make the idea fail, so that the only possibility is for the change to succeed.

Schein (2004) noted that the function of culture is to provide for “stability, meaning, and predictability based upon effective decisions in the group’s past” (p. 11). In the next section, I present various school performance data to show the school performance in the final 3 years of Dunn’s tenure. I conclude with a presentation of perception survey data that represents the faculty’s judgment of how closely aligned leader behaviors were to the proper direction of school improvement.

From 2005-2008, school improvement initiatives are best described as incremental. To address disparate graduation rates, SGAHS hired an additional counselor, called a graduation coach. This person’s responsibility was to support at risk students with regular conferences and ensure students received appropriate tutorial classes. To improve English/Language Arts and Math test scores, SGAHS organized interdepartmental conversations to align teaching strategies, terminology, and course

work to strengthen student performance in specific subjects. One example of this alignment is the method used to teach integers. When middle and high school teachers began to talk about their lessons, they realized they were teaching different terminology and students were not making the proper associations. One result of these alignment meetings was the use of common terminology and standard practices for math instruction.

Another significant school improvement initiative to address both graduation rates and test performance was the implementation of the Freshman Focus Academy in the ninth grade. This initiative is termed dramatic because the idea was to replicate success observed in other school districts in Georgia. In 2005 a planning committee was formed to study transition difficulties of ninth grade students. After studying instructional models across the state, the group recommended re-organizing the faculty into a freshman academy. The superintendent and school board gave their support for construction of a new building that would contain all core academic classes for first-time ninth grade students. Beginning in 2006, all first-time ninth grade students would attend class in the Freshman Focus Academy, a separate building, which contained all core academic classes. This addressed an improvement initiative to reduce transitions for students new to the expanse of the high school setting, and allow for closer monitoring of first-time ninth grade students. The only classes these ninth graders had outside of the freshman academy were two elective classes. Additionally, teachers of ninth grade academic classes were grouped together based on students they taught in common to facilitate analysis of student performance data, to plan data based interventions for students in danger of failing, and to allow time during the school day for parent conferences. The

ninth grade assistant principal and guidance counselor's offices were moved into the freshman academy as well. Grouping teachers based on students they taught was a change designed to increase the support and monitoring of first-time ninth graders. This care and supervision was an element of the school wide goal to increase graduation rate by making students more successful in their first year of high school.

Dunn provided leadership and support to faculty members throughout the change process. Dunn aligned faculty members in support teams to create the vertical alignment planning structures needed to improve test scores. Dunn included faculty and community stakeholders in the planning process for the freshman academy. He made sure training and support was provided to the ninth grade faculty. This major re-organization was successfully implemented based on the degree of communication, training, and support from the entire leadership team.

Perhaps the most dramatic change during the final 3 years of Dunn's tenure was the system wide policy on grading. The foundation for the grading policy was begun in 2005, the last year of the previous superintendent, and the school district embarked on an initiative to clarify grading practices. It was revealed through faculty and community surveys that some teachers gave zeroes for missing work or deducted points for late assignments while others did not. It was also noted that some students were awarded extra credit grades for non-academic purposes such as donating food to can drives or participating in school fund raisers. These practices were identified as root causes that obscured academic achievement of students. Beginning in 2006, under the direction of the new superintendent, the school system implemented a district-wide change initiative to standardize grading practices between teachers at individual schools and promote

consistent grading practices between schools. The most controversial element of this grading policy was the prohibition of assigning zeroes for assignments that students did not turn in (Respondent3, 2011). Teachers were expected to accept work after due dates and allow students to earn up to full credit. Teachers were prompted to use disciplinary sanctions such as parent contacts or detentions for missing work. While teachers did not blame Dunn for enforcing this policy, the policy created tensions between parents and the faculty as they implemented directives that were well meaning but ran counter to existing school culture. This policy change caused quite a lot of difficulties for the high school staff, and while many did not support the change, initially, only a few teachers were vocal in their opposition.

Although the grading policy was a change implemented district wide, the principal from each school had the task of outlining school-based procedures for implementing and monitoring it. Dunn did his best to implement the directives of his superintendent, but the objections of the faculty came on increasingly more persuasive grounds. Over time, the faculty noted the development of an attitude among students that “they (students) were entitled to endless chances to redo assignments and that deadlines for work meant nothing” (Respondent2, 2011). The unintended consequence of this grading policy seemed to be a poor work ethic among students. Each time a faculty member would bring up difficulties he or she had with getting students to hand in work, tension increased on the leadership team. The superintendent expected principals and their leadership team to develop school-based procedures to ensure all faculty members graded consistently and implemented the grading policy with fidelity. Whenever

questions arose, it was the principal's responsibility to resolve the concern in a manner that was in accord with the superintendent's directive.

When a principal reaches the 30-year milestone in his or her career, the questions begin to circulate about when he or she will retire. Dunn had long grown accustomed to such questions, and deflected them with casual style. Most times he would answer that he was grateful to be of service and would continue to come to work as long as he felt he was doing some good. Gradually, tensions from the grading policy, the many required meetings, and other daily work responsibilities began to take their toll, and Dunn began to contemplate retirement. Dunn came to his decision in the fall of 2007, and recognized that he needed to give the school district ample time to search for his successor. Dunn announced his retirement before the Christmas break and the school district began a state-wide search for a new high school principal. The news of Dunn's decision seemed to signal to district leaders that the coming search process would present a chance to hire someone eager to make some changes. Although Dunn had ideas concerning the impending transition to a new principal, he kept most of them to himself. Dunn felt his input was not desired. As such, Dunn was more of a bystander in the transition process than a guide.

SGAHS Leadership Transition

With the retirement of Dunn in May 2008, a new leader came in to tackle several pressing issues at SGAHS. First of all, the school did not make AYP for several years in mathematics. Also, the school's graduation rate met state expectations but was stagnant, and the participation rate for students taking college entrance exams was not what the district leadership expected. Faculty perception surveys indicated declining approval

ratings in leadership and school culture. One element, unpopular with the school's culture, was a grading policy, which presented a difference of opinion between Dunn and the superintendent of schools. This difference of opinion would be a persistent issue for the new administration.

Hargreaves (1995) indicated that "culture persists as a legacy, shaping values and defining reality" (p. 37). The trends in school performance measures, which the new leadership inherited, would be the foundation of achievement upon which the new principal began his legacy. Upon Dunn's retirement, the succeeding principal, Nix, was new to the school and new to the role of principal. He would not start with a *clean slate* (Weindling, 2000). Instead, Nix would be "enabled and constrained" (Barker, 2006, p. 13) by the performance and style of his predecessor, the expectations of the system, and the leadership of the Board of Education.

Changes were in the offing at SGAHS. As the new principal set about the work of planning for the next school year, he set his expectations based on an exposure to programs underway around the state and designed a plan to increase the academic rigor in accord with the superintendent's directive. One particular change Nix brought to SGAHS to support academic rigor is called Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID®, 2012 a). AVID® is a "college-readiness system" (AVID®, 2012a, para. 1) that focuses on students with average test scores and grades, many of whom may become the first member of their family to go to college. Nix also pledged to implement AP classes, consider block scheduling to allow flexibility to remediate student performance, and make AVID® available to give students support in college preparatory classes. Nix

brought with him a level of energy, readiness to implement new ideas, and an interest in school leadership that had been shaped by his background and beliefs.

Nix: The Man

While a student, Nix said he always got along with his teachers and coaches. He felt that for whatever reason his peers, teachers, and coaches looked to him to serve in leadership roles. Whether it was the way he treated people, or the fact that he was a big kid with good manners, he was encouraged to lead. Nix was elected class president and chosen captain of his high school football team. Later, he was nominated by his teachers to go to Boy's State, a leadership activity in which high school seniors go to the state capital for a week during the summer to learn first-hand about government and leadership.

Nix attended college on a football scholarship and began as a business major. Along the way, he had a period of self-reflection. The business classes did not seem to capture the spirit in which he wanted to live. It seemed to Nix that the business world was all about getting ahead rather than helping others. He noticed the local high school was looking for some community coaches to help with the football program. As a college athlete, Nix would find that teaching and leading players came naturally. Coaching changed his whole outlook as he became passionate about helping kids. He decided to switch his major to education and sports administration.

After graduating, he returned home and landed his first teaching job. He taught elementary physical education and coached high school football. In his second season, he was promoted to defensive coordinator. In addition to teaching, he served as defensive coordinator for the next 3 years.

Nix changed schools to become head coach and athletic director. This career change marked the beginning of his role as a school administrator. He was responsible for all athletics, which included: selecting coaches, scheduling their classes, as well as their games, and allocating budgets for each sport. Serving as head coach required him to spend long hours preparing for games each week, analyzing film, and strategizing for the next team. Responsibilities as head coach and athletic director took a lot of time away from his family. The exhaustive time demands encouraged him to look for a new coaching job, one that allowed him more time for family.

Nix decided to accept a new job in a different town. As he put it, “I was ready to whet my appetite on proving I was a good teacher and a good coach” (Nix 1, p. 6). He served as a physical education teacher and assistant coach at a brand new high school. Nix was tapped to serve as safety coordinator and member of the accreditation team for SACS. As a member of this faculty, Nix experienced many firsts. This faculty forged new mission statements and established working relationships among departments. They chose school colors and a mascot, and they began to establish a school culture of their own.

Nix said, “I was fine and happy teaching and coaching” (Nix 1, p. 3). It was during this time that the principal of the school where Nix worked encouraged him to return to school for his leadership degree. The principal saw in Nix the ability to work well with others and provide leadership with responsibility and accountability. “I knew that was next for me down the line” (Nix 1, p. 3).

After completing his master’s degree, Nix began to look around for a job as an administrator. It was the advice of a former colleague that encouraged him to apply for an

administrative position in Georgia. He was hired as the athletic director with the leadership title of *administrative assistant*, which was the district's term for an administrator below the level of assistant principal.

As an administrative assistant, Nix was also assigned to work with the special education department. This assignment came with a measure of accountability. Nix described his principal's thinking: "He's the type that (said), *I'm going to give this to you and it's yours now—the good and the bad. If it turns around great, if not, I want to know why*" (Nix 1, p. 7). Nix attributes this way of thinking to what "made me most prepared for this job" (Nix 1, p. 7). Soon after the special education department became more effective, the principal complimented Nix by assigning him the responsibility of improving a dysfunctional math department. After working in the role for several years, the school was able to make AYP in math.

Nix credits the style of his principal, a man who created the climate of high expectations, along with his own preparation for his becoming a principal. Nix described his boss as "a very effective principal," (Nix 1, p. 7) because he placed his assistants in areas where they could grow. "If you're going to grow an assistant principal to a principal, you've got to give them experiences other than what they already know" (Nix 1, p. 7). Over time, he coordinated school-wide discipline services, supervised both the math and the special education department, and monitored maintenance of school facilities. "All of these job descriptions that you have responsibilities as an administrator; I had experience with all of them" (Nix 1, p. 7). Assignments with support, encouragement, and accountability led to results for Nix professionally and in terms of student success. Nix later adopted the same strategy of placing his assistants in areas they

were not as “comfortable with to give them those experiences that they needed to become successful” (Nix 1, p. 4).

Selection as Principal

In the district under study, the superintendent recommends applicants for the role of principal to the Board of Education in February. Dunn announced his retirement before the Christmas holidays, to allow time for a search process. The vacancy was posted on the state-wide job list, which is part of the Department of Education’s Website. Also, notices were sent to superintendents of the region and announced in the local media.

After serving for 3 years as an assistant principal in an urban school district, Nix was encouraged to apply for the principalship of SGAHS. While his only experience in Georgia had been in an urban setting, his principal noted that Nix grew up in a smaller town and liked the region of South Georgia. Looking more for interview experience than the possibility of being hired, Nix decided to submit his name for consideration.

Interviews were scheduled in mid-January. Soon after Nix returned from the interview, he was named a finalist. “Which,” as he describes the experience, “shocked me. I don’t know if I was really understanding that I was getting ready to make a move to a principalship when I was really just looking for interview experience” (Nix 1, p. 5).

A second interview was scheduled with several of the directors and members of the Board of Education. “I was open and honest with them about my experiences, my vision, and what I felt a high school principal needs to do and be about” (Nix 1, p. 5). Nix summarized what he stands for as a person, a sort of a *job description* as a principal:

If someone says to me, “What are you about as a principal?” I think there are four things that I’m really about: (1) [see] student achievement increase, (2) build

relationships, (3) develop leaders ... assistant principals to become principals, teachers to become department chairs, and students to be in student government, (4) demonstrate fiscal responsibility. (Nix 1, p. 15)

Nix noted that his background matched the context of the district, “this is a football community and at the time the head coach had resigned” (Nix 1, p. 8). The superintendent wanted “a high school person ... who understood athletics ... and who could come in here and work with the math department” (Nix 1, p. 8). It seemed to Nix that the superintendent “wanted someone who had a plan, and had some exposure to things the rest of the state had done ...” (Nix 1, p. 8). The board announced Nix as their choice to serve as the next principal of SGAHS in early February.

Over the following 5 months Nix had time to gradually learn about his new school. Dunn extended an open invitation for Nix to visit as needed for the remainder of the school year. Nix said that Dunn “was always very welcoming when I was here, which I think is key to a good transition” (Nix 1, p. 10). He highlighted interacting with Dunn on a congenial level. Nix pointed out that Dunn “... was very easy to work with. He didn’t come out and say, *I think you should do that*” (Nix1, p. 9). Although Nix and Dunn spoke every time Nix came for a visit, those conversations were more about checking in than they were about orientation to the school. Discussions did not concern improvement initiatives that should be continued. Nix said “There was no need for me to discuss plans that I’d already decided, such as having pep-rallies or implementing AP courses. Those things were going to happen” (Nix, personal communication, March 2, 2012).

Nix “made a dozen to 15 trips down here between February and May” (Nix 2,

p. 8). He met with department chairs, counselors, coaches, and the school council to begin “developing relationships with teachers and students” (Nix 1, p. 9). He began formulating his impressions by “having conversations with teachers” (Nix 1, p. 9) and by talking to directors at the county office:

I had to rely on those directors to give me some information ... so, to understand what you inherit when you become a principal, you have to go through the personnel files and just read up on each one There just wasn't any documentation, so I had to rely on the curriculum director and human resources director. (Nix 2, p. 23)

Nix indicated that not everything that was observable was written in the personnel files that Dunn kept. The review of records revealed that Dunn relied on his memory more than written notes when it came to personnel files. To overcome this gap in documentation, Nix sought input from other sources. Nix supplemented information he got from meeting with the superintendent with information from directors, conversations with teachers and staff, and his observations together to formulate his impressions. Nix went on to qualify his reliance on the directors' comments by adding, “You have to listen to that, but you definitely have got to make your own determinations on some things” (Nix 2, p. 24).

One of the new ideas he brought to the school was to include students in the leadership conversation. “That hadn't been done either—a meeting with students I asked them what they thought about the school: what were their concerns, likes, and dislikes” (Nix 2, p. 8). Student comments went along with impressions he had gathered from other sources and became change initiatives for the new principal. Changes ranged

from updating the school's appearance and moving office placements to adding new student activities and even a new bell schedule.

Personal Relationships

At six and one half feet tall, Nix stands out in a crowd—even in a high school cafeteria. Although some may be intimidated by such a big guy, he is someone who is easy to talk to. He has frequent conversations with faculty members as they are passing in the halls or while they are preparing for meetings. Nix is equally concerned for the well-being of the faculty and students. Personally outgoing and naturally energetic, he approached teaching and learning with an intense focus. Nix gathered teacher perceptions and suggestions through formal meetings and ordinary hallway interaction. Conversations invariably shifted to issues of teaching, learning, and providing needed support. “I hope teachers feel like I [support] them and [am] the instructional leader and [offer] positive change to the school” (Nix 3, p. 14).

Relationships is one of Nix's four elements he uses as his job description. He mentioned that his hire date in February allowed time for him to “travel down here and begin meeting and developing relationships with teachers and students” (Nix 1, p. 9). Establishing and nurturing good communication is an important part of professional relationships. Nix told the story of how his leadership team works together as a family.

We have a building leadership meeting. It's the administration and department chairs ... usually we're talking about budgetary items, instructional issues, test scores ... those sorts of things. Bell schedules are one we've gone over ... we've got to be able to hash that out a little bit. This has all been very good discussion. I

told them we have to have each other's backs; we're like a family. We may disagree, but when we leave here, we have to be on the same page. (Nix 1, p. 13)

The meeting is summarized so that everyone is clear about what was discussed. "So, I in turn, recapped what they're saying before we break the meeting up so we feel better about what's actually being said to teachers" (Nix 1, p. 13). After open discussions, during which opposing views are debated, it is important that the same message is redelivered to each department and feedback is gathered.

When entering the cafeteria or walking the halls, he often speaks with students. He is constantly gathering input from students regarding school culture ranging from extra curricular activities to keeping current on student learning. Nix said, "I hope that every student that I've had ... that they remember me as a principal who cared and built relationships with kids ... a discussion, or maybe just a smile or a high-five down the hall" (Nix 3, p. 14). Nix has consciously expanded leadership opportunities for students by having clubs elect officers and asking candidates not elected to serve on the student senate. "Senior officers are in my office about once a week telling me their concerns and what I can do to help them..." (Nix 2, p. 9).

The importance of developing and maintaining positive relationships spreads to all groups, teachers, administrators, students, parents, community leaders, and even school leaders, outside the district. By participating in regional leadership meetings, Nix got to know other high school administrators in neighboring school districts and considers them an informal support group. "We're not afraid to pick up the phone and call ... talking about what you're doing, what I'm doing, what's going on at the state

level, what's coming down from the Board of Education, and what we can help each other with" (Nix 3, p. 20).

School Culture

Nix has made stakeholder input a major priority. While some leadership mechanisms are the same as previous administrations, Nix has added a number of groups with the express intent to support communication. One new group is called the Principal's Advisory Council. This group is composed of dependable teachers who may not serve as department chairs, but whose opinions are valued. Meetings with this group do not have an agenda, but instead he opens the floor for teachers to talk about what is important to them. Like Dunn, Nix also uses a school leadership team to plan and implement school improvement initiatives. This group is made up of administration, department chairpersons, counselors, and other support staff. They meet regularly as a school-wide team and then disseminate information to their department the following day. Their other responsibility is to gather input for future plans and monitor the performance of school improvement action plans.

Nix observed: "The students in my opinion were wanting a little more voice at the table" (Nix 3, p. 5). So, another group Nix uses to gather input is the Student Senate. Nix expanded the scope of student government at SGAHS by creating the student senate, which gives a role for those who did not win office, but who wanted to be involved. He also included a student from each grade level on the school council. Nix asked each administrator to set up grade level student advisory groups for the sole purpose of getting feedback.

The ultimate goal of every high school is for all students to graduate, but schools also have a responsibility to be inviting places in which students create lasting memories and experiences. Nix commented on the development of school culture at SGAHS:

Students can get recognized for hard work. Yes, it's a school and unfortunately right now, in the business we're in it's all about test scores ... and making AYP, but the big picture is that these kids will have 4 years in high school. We've got to find a way to still have those fun events: football games, pep rallies, bon fires, school dances, and stuff. You've got to have things that make the kids *want* to come to school. (Nix 2, p. 6)

One area Nix expanded is school clubs, even planning periodic release time during the school day with a bell schedule that has a regular assembly period:

I feel our attendance and our school culture have improved tremendously just with the enactment of the clubs that we have. Not everybody is going to be in the band, not everybody's going to be on the football team or a cheerleader ... We created clubs to promote student interest in school, have fun, and develop relationships with teachers. The Acoustic Guitar Club, we have that club, we have 30 guitars here, and people didn't realize that Mr. P-- played guitar. He plays it without reading music, you know? So, here's this Spanish teacher from Belize who is usually a no-nonsense kind of guy; now he's in the back strumming Bob Marley with them. Mr. E started a Comic Book Club. I'll bet we have 75 members of the Comic Book Club, and again, it's that kid who's not a jock and not a joiner, but he sees the other kids like him. You've got your Video Game Club, and for the Hispanic girls we've created a Salsa Dancing Club, and they love it! (Nix 2, p. 5)

Nix devoted a lot of time with students and faculty members thinking and planning ways to support school climate. He addresses the benefits of time investment: “If you’ve got kids with a positive attitude and teachers with a positive attitude, then you’re going to get better results” (Nix 2, p. 5).

School Improvement Process

Nix placed emphasis on getting input from a variety of sources, faculty, parents, and students. “I like to get the people who are going to be affected the most at the table and listen to them. Now I know ultimately that decision rests with me, but I’d rather have buy-in” (Nix 3, p. 9). He went on to comment, “The more stakeholders’ input there is, the better” (Nix 3, p. 17).

Nix has two groups that serve together on the School Improvement Team: one is a school leadership team and the other is a principal’s advisory group. “We’ve got essentially two groups of teachers who work on developing our school improvement plan” (Nix 1, p. 13). The first group is called the Better Seekers Leadership Team, which consists of administrators, department chairs, and the graduation coach. The second is the School Improvement Team, which is “made up of other strong teachers who are *not* department chairs, but who I respect their opinion. I know they’ve thought through some things” (Nix 1, p. 13). These two groups support various leadership roles, including communication, budgeting, and scheduling events, but a responsibility they share is to plan, monitor, and bring about school improvement. Both the Better Seeker Leadership Team and the School Improvement Team will “pass it off to the other one; they’ll make improvements and pass it back. It’s a good way of collaborating on our goals, thoughts, and ideas for improvement” (Nix 3, p. 13). Each year the *school improvement plan* (SIP)

is developed during a summer retreat hosted by the Board of Education. At the end of this conference, the school improvement plan is set in motion.

The idea behind these two groups is to bring people with formal positions of responsibility together with respected colleagues who don't have formal departmental leadership roles. These teachers are those who think about improving student achievement. They are chosen "based on ... their teaching methods, their strategies, relationships with kids, and understanding of what this SIP thing is all about: constant improvement ... in all areas especially folks in on the subgroups or those kids who are falling behind" (Nix 3, p. 13).

Nix was focused on school performance data. Nix used data to contextualize the directives from the superintendent concerning the climate of academic rigor that she desired. He cited data as the driving force for school improvement ideas, "You've got to look at your data. You've got to look at how you've done in the past and how are you going to make changes to improve it" (Nix 3, p. 7). Nix approached school improvement with an openness to change. He said, "You've got to look at doing things differently ... everything from how you schedule kids, what kids go to what teachers, what courses you offer, your expectations for instruction, your expectations for parent contacts" (Nix 3, p. 7).

School Performance Data

Performance data was examined for the first 3 years of Nix's tenure, and the results are as follow. This data presents the context of student performance results of initiatives that Nix implemented to address student performance in English/Language Arts, Math, graduation rates, and faculty perceptions. SGAHS failed to make AYP for

2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2010-2011. SGAHS met the AMO for English/Language Arts for the first 2 years of this term but fell short in 2010-2011 (Table 6). Despite exceeding the AMO requirement for most subgroups, students with disabilities continued to underperform. The percent of students passing English/Language Arts declined for each of the last 3 years.

Table 6

SGAHS English/Language Arts Performance 2009-2011

Sub-Groups	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
Annual Measurable Objective	87.7	87.7	90
All Students	92.9	91	89.4
Black Students	87.7	85.4	85.7
Economically Disadvantaged	87.6	86.1	86.4
Students with Disabilities	67.6	65.9	53.1

Although student performance on the Math part of the HSGT has shown steady improvement, passing rates were continually below required levels for students in each subgroup. During the 2010-2011 school year, SGAHS benefitted from an adjusted AMO of 76% in math due to the implementation of a more rigorous state-wide math curriculum. Despite the curriculum change, SGAHS recorded the largest performance gain in math in quite some time, and met the required AMO in math for each sub group except students with disabilities.

Table 7

SGAHS Math Performance 2009-2011

Sub-Groups	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
Annual Measurable Objective	74.9	74.9	76
All Students	79	70.7	88.5
Black Students	61.4	52.8	84.7
Economically Disadvantaged	68.3	56.3	84
Students with Disabilities	47.1	42.9	43.8

SGAHS exceeded the required graduation rate in 2008-2009 and 2009-2010; however, they fell short in the final year of this study. During the 2010-2011 school year, the AMO for graduation rate increased to 85%. SGAHS did not meet this requirement in any subgroup.

Table 8

SGAHS Graduation Rates 2009-2011

Sub-Group	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
Annual Measurable Objective	75	80	85
All Students	82.3	80.8	82.3
Black Students	78	74.6	72
Economically Disadvantaged	79	78.2	82.6
Students with Disabilities	51.1	30.9	56.5

One academic program that has been a particular emphasis of Nix has been AP classes. Upon Nix's arrival, there were zero AP classes offered, but this number has

grown each year. During the 2008-2009 school year, there were five AP classes offered, and students took a total of 162 AP exams for college credit. The next year, there were 10 AP classes and 201 AP tests taken. During the 2010-2011 school year, there were 11 AP classes offered and 217 exams taken. The number of college entrance exams taken declined slightly to 193 in 2008-2009, but climbed to an all-time high of 266 in 2009-2010. Once again, during the 2010-2011 school year, 266 college entrance exams were taken.

School perception survey results for 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2010-2011 are displayed in Table 9. Perception ratings initially rose from the range of 40%-70% during Dunn's tenure to 60%-80% and then dropped below Dunn's ratings to 40%-60%. In the third year, staff perceptions rebounded to 60%-80% in the final year of this study. There is a dramatic decline in positive ratings in each category on the 2009-2010 survey. This decline prompted adjustment to the change initiatives underway for the 2010-2011 school year.

Table 9

Staff Perception Survey- School Keys 2009-2011

School Keys Area	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
Curriculum	79.1	54.1	70.1
Assessment	78.7	57.1	69
Instruction	81.2	46.3	57.2
Planning and Organization	76.4	57.1	68.2
Student, Family, and Community Support	69.2	48.3	54.6
Professional Learning	74	42.3	64.1
Leadership	78.7	59.7	70
School Culture	80.2	49.5	69.5

The key focal point of this case study is the experience of each principal in terms of transition from one administration to the next. The experiences of Nix in this area tremendously impacted the quality of this leadership succession. Many of the changes implemented by Nix were prompted by patterns in student performance and the school's AYP status. With a stagnant graduation rate and an 18% achievement gap between Black students and all students in math, Nix believed he had a mandate for change. Another dramatic statistic Nix was determined to address was the 44% rating on the student, family, and community support area of the *School Keys* perception survey.

Changes

Accepting his administrative position in February allowed Nix the time to plan and implement an ambitious list of changes during his first year as principal. Some ideas for these changes came from issues present at the school, some came as directives from the superintendent, and other ideas have been borrowed from schools around the state. An example of a local interest initiative was the bell schedule. As teachers met their new principal, some pointed out loss of instructional time for non-academic issues. “That was a big complaint from teachers, that we were losing a lot of instructional time to this or that Like Jostens coming to speak to the kids about graduation, ring orders, picture day, all those things are quite interruptive” (Nix 1, p. 10). The faculty worked together to come up with a schedule to limit these interruptions. Part of the bell schedule conversation was to set aside a time during the week that these things were going to happen. The bell schedule rotated the week between 4 days of 90-minute classes and 1 day of 50-minute classes with an assembly period. Therefore, students rotated between an A schedule and a B schedule for class attendance. The bell schedule was another attempt to dedicate time to academic support for struggling students. It was asserted that teachers would be able to use longer class periods to remediate at-risk students during class, instead of relying on students to come in before school or stay after school for any tutoring they needed.

When Nix came down to interview for the principalship, he was shocked to learn that SGAHS did not offer any AP classes. “I told them right away that I would do everything possible to have at least four AP courses by August” (Nix 2, p. 19). This initiative directly aligned with the superintendent’s desire to emphasize academic rigor at

the high school. Adding these courses required teacher training, certification alignment, securing AP status from the College Board oversight group, and recruiting students for the classes. “Some of our best teachers were just glowing, almost positioning and jockeying themselves to teach those classes” (Nix 2, p. 19). During his first year, Nix implemented five AP classes. After 3 years, these increased to 11 classes—some offering multiple sections for a particular course.

Another program Nix implemented to support academic rigor was called AVID®. AVID® is a “college-readiness system” (AVID®, 2012a, para. 1) that focuses on students with average test scores and grades, many of whom may become the first member of their family to go to college. Students selected for the AVID® program are assigned rigorous academic courses and required to take AVID® as an elective class. In this elective, students set up “long-range academic and personal plans” and participate in “structured tutorials” (AVID®, 2012b, para. 3). The AVID® system also includes instructional strategies that are interwoven into college-prep classes. An implementation team attended a summer institute to learn instructional strategies designed to promote “writing, inquiry, collaboration, and reading” (AVID®, 2012b, para. 5).

In addition to implementing new programs that emphasized student achievement, Nix brought a new perspective to the role of department chair. “What I tried to do, . . . which was a little different than Dunn, was . . . to empower the department chairs” (Nix 2, p. 3). Nix felt like the titles had been assigned in the past, but chairs were not clear on their roles and expectations. He provided an extra planning period for them to have time to fulfill their duties. They are there to serve as informal evaluators and help out weak teachers in their department. Nix tells them, “That’s your department. The successes and

failures become yours and your teachers', which gives them ownership of that and gives them the ability to make some improvements ... instructional, scheduling, planning, or funding opportunities" (Nix 2, p. 4). Nix asks department chairs to participate in interviews when there is a job opening in their department. "Why don't you help me pre-screen them, and we'll decide which seven or eight we're going to interview" (Nix 2, p. 4). Department chairs are responsible for data discussions and ensuring that teachers are addressing performance weaknesses, as indicated by national, state, and classroom assessment results.

In another departure from the past, Nix set forth job descriptions for the entire staff. Previously, there were no specific job descriptions for teachers or administrators. Administrators were simply expected to pitch in and get the job done, and tasks were assigned as they arose. "One of the best things that we've been able to accomplish here is to describe each administrator's role and responsibilities from what they do here at school to what they're doing ... at football games ... expectations on parent contacts" (Nix 2, p. 21). Nix also implemented a new administrative team meeting schedule. This was very different from Dunn, with whom meetings would happen as needed. Anytime an issue arose they would meet and discuss it right away. Nix has two meetings each week: Monday's meeting concerns planning, supervision, and activities, while Wednesday's addresses academics and instruction. Another expectation Nix changed was the number of teacher observations administrators were required to complete. Nix set a specific number of short-term visits called *walk-throughs* for each week. Administrators were asked to formulate student advisory committees on their grade levels to solicit feedback from students and reinforce elements of the school culture.

“The biggest complaint the teachers had was that our school culture wasn’t real strong” (Nix 1, p. 9). Nix formulated a plan to make the students want to come to school. “We created clubs to promote student interest in school, have fun, and develop relationships with teachers” (Nix 2, p. 6). Club sessions allow students to see their teachers in a different light and connect with other students with similar interests. Nix firmly established that pep rallies would be added to the event calendar once he arrived. Regular club meeting times, assemblies, pep rallies, rewards, and recognitions were all centered on developing a stronger sense of school culture. Doing “some of those things has hopefully created an interest in being at school and being proud of what their school does” (Nix 2, p. 7).

Also, Nix has taken measures to improve the sense of staff culture. “The teachers’ big complaints were there wasn’t a lot for kids to do and there was no social interaction between teachers” (Nix 2, p. 15). Nix formed a teacher’s advisory group that changes every year. The sole purpose for the group is to give feedback directly to the principal and have a chance to ask questions. “I say every time we meet, ‘the purpose of this meeting is for you to talk to me about what’s going on in the hallways, good and bad’” (Nix 2, p. 10). Teachers often ask for follow up on issues, policy clarification or adjustment, and have a chance to say what is working and what needs correcting.

Nix also sought input from parents, community members, and the school council. He discovered that businesses were turned off by the constant solicitation from schools without getting anything in return. “The only time they saw kids from the high school in the community is when our hand was out wanting them to buy an advertisement or sponsor this team or that team, and I didn’t want that perception either” (Nix 2, p. 11).

Nix organized the “Shop with a [Mascot]” program. Students volunteer in teams of four to raise money and take a needy child Christmas shopping. The maximum teams can spend on a child is \$100.00. Students organize bake sales, gather donations, and even contribute money that they earn during after-school jobs. Also, community members have volunteered to sponsor a child. The community celebrates the day of the special shopping event. Teams of students board busses with their shoppers and go out to local businesses to pick out their presents. The band plays Christmas music, and small choir groups sing carols. The entire family gets a nice meal, and then, the students return to the school to wrap presents and have refreshments.

Facility development has been underway for the last 5 years while the school system benefitted from Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) revenue. Each school in the district added to or renovated their facilities. At SGAHS the newest buildings on campus were the Media Center, the PREP academy which is the 30,000 square foot vocational training center completed in 2009, and the baseball/softball complex. While the purpose of the latter speaks for itself, the PREP academy is a state of the art building that features programs in agriculture, business, broadcast video production, construction, family consumer science, healthcare science, computer labs, welding, and auto-mechanics. Extensions from this building include a pair of green houses and 85 acres of land for hands-on learning.

In previous years, SGAHS has added a building that houses academic classes for all first-time ninth grade students. Also, a program of extensive renovation began in 2009, which included replacement of the entire roof, air condition system, flooring, re-painting, and landscaping.

Beginning in 2008, the new principal emphasized a set of school improvement goals different from those Dunn emphasized, and he changed the room assignments to keep all students of the same grade together. Accordingly, the halls were organized to be subject specific; so that all 11th grade students, for example, would have their classes on a particular hall. Furthermore, assignment of counselors and assistant principals also changed according to school improvement goals. Different goals in 2008 caused a shift in office assignments. The new principal moved guidance counselors to a central hub to increase access for students and assistant principals to separate hallways that housed the assistants' assigned grade.

Transition

There are several ways to characterize the transition from Dunn to Nix. First, this was an *outsider transition*, which means that Nix was hired from outside the school district. This was a signal that the superintendent wanted to move in a new direction, one in which a hire from within the school district may not have been expected. Dunn indicated that he “wasn’t invited to have any input on any of the candidates who applied for the principalship” (Dunn 4, p. 4). Dunn summarized his thinking as follows: “... that might have been the time for the system, especially at the high school level, to go in a new direction, and if I had any input in there, I would have been trying to get that direction to be the way I started it, with no detours or about-faces” (Dunn 4, p. 4).

Soon after Nix was hired, he coordinated his visits and requested information from an assistant principal on staff. He was able to arrange meetings with small groups, as well as call for a school wide faculty meeting in the spring to discuss things under consideration and take a few questions.

Being an outsider meant Nix would have to learn everything about the town, school, staff, and students. He used a variety of sources to gather information. Nix said that he gathered information from the superintendent, county office staff, assistant principals, talking to teachers, parents, and students. He spent a number of hours with the finance director, working on the budget. He also worked with the personnel director on hiring procedures and district policies. It was important to Nix to work with the curriculum director in order to gain impressions about “what was working and what wasn’t: what needed my attention and what didn’t ... ” (Nix 2, p. 17). Nix also commented that he had to balance recommendations from directors with impressions he gathered from administrators and faculty. “I felt like as directors, they have a view ... but they’re not in the building every day” (Nix 2, p. 17).

During this time, it was a priority to establish relationships with faculty and students. He had to work on how he was perceived, and he noted that “being an outsider... coming in with all these grand ideas and grand schemes, there was some hesitation” (Nix 2, p. 21). He had to gather impressions of some teachers that were “cautious to say anything negative about Dunn” (Nix 2, p. 15) with others, who indicated that they felt like “no one cares what my input is” (Nix 1, p. 12). Faculty also had to learn about his leadership style and how Nix would accept input. His goal was to reach the point when teachers would say, “Here’s my two cents, Nix, and I know that you have to weigh it all out and make the best decision for the school” (Nix 1, p. 12).

The second significant way to describe this transition relates to timing. Dunn was promoted to principal 3 weeks before the start of the school year. The fact that he already knew the faculty, the building, and the leadership team made his transition smooth. “But

coming in, I think the community accepted me real well, the faculty and the student body. Like I say, I previously had most of the kids' parents and they knew me" (Dunn 1, p. 7). Had he been new to the school or school district, this would have given him little time to acclimate to the new school, much less consider many changes.

Since Nix had 5 months head start on the next school term, he had a relatively long timeline to use for planning and relationship development. Nix reported that this timeline, "absolutely helped me" (Nix 2, p. 22). By August, he knew his assistant principals pretty well, knew department chairs by name, and could get around the school building. "It gave me time to assess ... the school culture, the school climate, our academic issues, and our test scores. It gave me time to digest all that and start to develop plans" (Nix 2, p. 22). He also took time to gather the input of others. "I didn't want this to be Nix's decision; I'm a team guy I wanted to bounce them off the assistant principals and department chairs and get a good feeling for what they liked or disliked" (Nix 2, p. 22).

Summary

During his term of service, Nix implemented several initiatives that were successful in improving student achievement. Since Georgia requires schools to examine academic performance of subgroups against the performance of all students, efforts to close the achievement gap between Black students and All students and the gap between Economically Disadvantaged students was an important focal point in the school improvement plan at SGAHS. Under Nix, progress was made in closing the achievement gap between Black student's and All student's and also Economically Disadvantaged student's and All student's scores on the math section of the HSGT. The graduation rate

rose above 80% and remained there for three consecutive years. The number of college entrance exams taken rose to an all time high. Positive gains were recorded in several domains of teacher perception surveys, and Nix implemented several programs that motivated students to attend school regularly and increased school spirit.

In terms of school culture, Nix encountered a firmly established culture that was comfortable with the status quo and was skeptical of anything new. Although Nix implemented an advisory structure to gather feedback from previously untapped groups, such input did not fully support Nix in his efforts to get acquainted with school culture and climate. Nix brought ideas with him and misjudged the pace of change that the faculty could manage. Despite the absence of a leadership succession plan that could have assisted Nix in avoiding unnecessary difficulties as he developed an understanding of school context and culture, one may not conclude this was an unsuccessful example of leadership succession. As such, the political climate of the school district reinforced a change resistant culture that allowed the faculty to wait for changes to be reversed under a new principal.

The leadership succession from Dunn to Nix represented one that was planned to be discontinuous. With this hire, the superintendent selected a person who would have no predisposition against existing district initiatives, and chose someone who, as a first-time principal, would be reliant on her for information and direction for school improvement initiatives. Despite the contentious political climate that ultimately brought Nix's leadership at SGAHS to early end, he was quite successful in leading the school to improved levels of student achievement. Now that I have presented the details of the

case, I return to the research questions and present discussion of my findings that places them in the context of the literature.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION AT SGAHS

To say Dunn had a major influence on the school culture at SGAHS is a monumental understatement. His personality and leadership influenced the years that followed his retirement by establishing the school culture against which changes made by future leaders would be judged. While Dunn and Nix shared common aspirations to support student achievement and lead an exemplary school, their style and tactics were so radically different that this leadership change was more a revolution than a succession. This succession was also impacted by the tense political climate that surrounded the directives from the superintendent who took office in 2006. As will be discussed, the lack of a succession plan to guide and support leadership transition resulted in a dramatic adjustment period for the faculty and community stakeholders. The adjustment period and how it might have been made better by a succession plan will be addressed in two major upcoming sections. The first will be in the context of the case itself, which will be organized by the original research questions. The second will be in the context of other cases that have been reported in the literature.

Leadership Succession at SGAHS

Research Question 1

In asking, “How did the leadership of the outbound principal shape the culture at the high school?” I hoped to establish a school culture baseline to inform readers of climate and expectations that stakeholders had at the time of the succession event.

Perceptions of faculty members and site visit observations were combined with explanations of participants that detailed elements of school culture to answer research question 1. The importance of the cultural legacy established by the outbound leaders and its influence on future change initiatives was established in leadership literature and will be discussed in the context of this case study (Barker, 2006; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Garchinsky, 2008; Weindling, 2000).

Dunn shaped the culture of SGAHS in deep and enduring ways. By the time he announced his retirement, the faculty was so accustomed to business as usual that the school practically ran itself. During his tenure, Dunn made sure that people knew safety was job one. He believed, as did Lezotte (1991), that maintaining a safe and secure environment established the foundation for learning to occur and a safe environment allowed teachers to teach and students to learn. Dunn practiced Marzano et al.'s (2005) suggestion to use relationships with faculty and students to monitor daily operations and make adjustments to ensure the school would keep running smoothly. Faculty, students, and community members also came to expect consistency; —they expected things to run consistently every day (Dunn 1, p. 2). The staff had become accustomed to a certain division of labor; administration would take care of the school, and teachers would teach the classes. Teacher monitoring was an annual process that included an observation and a conference. As with any faculty, there were some factions that felt Dunn should do things differently, and there were others who liked the way school decisions were made. Faculty members, students, and community stakeholders came to expect a personal relationship with the principal. As Fullan (2005) instructed, faculty input was valued, and the department heads were used to coordinate the flow of information and ideas for the

school improvement process. Change initiatives were introduced as required by state and district initiatives. Dunn also followed Brown's (2004) advice to give support to faculty, which resulted in faculty support for Dunn and eventual success of proposed changes. In terms of school improvement, faculty members came to expect a rather slow, methodical pace of change that was closer to evolution than revolution. Staff developed and implemented improvement initiatives, such as tutorial routines and curriculum alignment to improve student achievement. In addition to school based initiatives, the faculty of SGAHS implemented mandates from the superintendent's office as part of the district-wide school improvement plan: Learning-Focused curriculum planning model (Learning-Focused, 2012), 6+1 Trait® writing model (Education Northwest, 2012), Freshman Focus Academy, and the district-wide grading policy. When each of the aforementioned aspects of school culture are taken together, the culture established during Dunn's tenure could be described as safe, systematic, and supportive. With an awareness of climate, I turn to my second research question.

Research Question 2

The question, "How did the inbound and outbound principals describe their experience of the leadership succession process?" helps to place the reader inside the lived experience of each principal. I wanted to portray the perceptions of the two principals as leadership responsibility was passed from one principal to the next.

Emotions surrounding this leadership succession shaped how each principal recalled the Spring of 2008. Retirement for Dunn was a bitter sweet decision. He would miss the relationships with faculty, students, and families; yet he felt relief from tension that resulted from the district grading policy and budget cuts that necessitated termination

of staff. Conversely, Nix was excited to open a new chapter of his career, one in which he would serve as principal for the first time. Nix eagerly anticipated the challenges of moving to a new town, establishing new working relationships, and formulating a plan for the direction of SGAHS.

For Dunn, the tone was set during the hiring process, which left him with the impression that his input was not valued. District officials did not involve Dunn in the screening of applicants, nor the planning for interviews, and so he stepped back from the whole process. Although a member of Dunn's administration was named a finalist for the job, Nix, an outsider, was ultimately chosen. After being excluded from the search process, Dunn was reticent to share advice.

The changing of the guard represented the end of an era rather than a continuation of the current policies. Nix was excited to take his first shot at leading a school of his own. He hoped to translate his enthusiasm into quick successes and bring about school improvement. Nix felt that he was granted a mandate for change with his hire, and he sought to address perceived deficiencies in school spirit, test scores, and AYP status. From their different vantage points, they saw a transition from one administration to the next was one that was discontinuous in terms of school culture and showed mixed results in terms of student achievement.

Notably there was no discussion of school improvement initiatives between the two principals as recommended by Weindling and Earley (1987). Nix gathered information from district directors, personal observations, and interactions with school faculty concerning issues of school improvement and school processes. Nix commented

that he arrived with ideas of his own, ones that he planned to implement regardless of any advice he may have gotten from Dunn (Nix, personal communication, March 2, 2012).

According to Hargreaves (2005) a series of frequent leadership turnovers that prevented the development of effective working relationships between outbound and inbound principals evidenced a disconnection between improvement initiatives.

Hargreaves noted that whenever the inbound principal abandoned the reform agenda begun by the outbound principal, the achievements were quickly lost. In this case, the agenda was not shared between the two principals, nor did the district have a plan for transition that encouraged discussion. As a follow up to the experiences of the two principals during the succession process, I asked research question 3, “How did the quality of the relationship between the two principals impact the inbound principal’s experience during his first year of leadership?”

Research Question 3

It was important to establish how the working relationships effected Nix in order to place this case in the context of related literature. Authors Fink and Brayman (2006), Hargreaves (2005), and Weindling and Earley (1987) implied a need to establish working relationships between inbound and outbound principals in order to maintain school improvement initiatives that were working. Their idea was to keep the positives in the status quo while at the same time allowing space for the inbound principal to introduce new initiatives. Previous research on leadership succession advised coordination between the outbound and inbound leaders that would result in the continuation of positive gains achieved under previous leaders, and support achievement of long-term improvement goals (Fink & Brayman; Hargreaves; Weindling & Earley).

The quality of the relationship between Dunn and Nix can best be described as cordial but distanced. While both principals remained on speaking terms, there was not a sense of working together to maintain continuity. This disconnect was present from the very beginning. Dunn observed: “I wasn’t invited really to have any input on any of the candidates who applied for the principalship” (Dunn 4, p. 4). Since he wasn’t involved in the hiring process, he felt the district leaders wanted to move in a direction other than the one in which he had been taking the school. The experience of the final 2 years working with a new superintendent as she implemented district improvement initiatives also created the impression that she was ready for a different direction. In fact, the district grading policy caused significant tension as Dunn seemed to be caught between his superintendent’s policy and teachers who noted negative student work habits. Respondents in the study indicated Dunn represented the past, one in which the superintendent was intent on changing, which respondents recognized as part of the significant disconnect between the tenures of Dunn and Nix.

During the spring of 2008 before Nix assumed the role of principal, he traveled to the school to visit, make observations, and meet with different school groups. Each time Nix came, he stopped in for small talk, and Dunn would encourage him to go see whoever he needed to see. That was the extent of their cooperation. There was only minimal orientation to the school, and little discussion between the two men about school culture, or the legacy of improvements that needed to continue. Although the leadership literature (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Hargreaves, 2005; Weindling & Earley, 1987) encouraged interaction, in this case there were no significant meetings between the two men to articulate which policies and programs were strong and which were in need of

change. This lack of coordination introduced unnecessary tension and raised the level of difficulty for Nix to plan his own school improvement initiatives and begin the following school year smoothly. Nix was left on his own to gather information and to get to know his staff.

Further, the disconnect that resulted from the hiring process created difficulty for Nix as he began to form relationships with the assistant principals. One of the assistant principals on staff had been a finalist for the principalship. It was difficult for Nix and this assistant to establish an effective working relationship given that they had been rivals for the principalship. After Nix was named principal, some faculty members continued to believe the existing assistant should have been promoted. This group greeted new policies and procedures with distrust and suspicion (Respondent2). This tension persisted in part due to the absence of alignment and cooperation between Dunn and Nix (Respondent2). Overall, faculty and community members perceived the relationship between the outbound and inbound principal as superficial, and their great respect for Dunn led to their continued questioning of the validity of implemented changes. As a result of this perceived disconnect, Nix had trouble obtaining faculty support for change and consequently Nix's first year was more difficult than it might have been had he had that faculty support. However, each principal, during his tenure, did establish with stakeholders that school improvement was important to them and would be an ongoing agenda item—a priority the literature suggested as crucial for successful principals (Garchinsky, 2008; Marzano et al., 2005).

Research Question 4

Elements of leadership style and tactics each principal used to implement change during this study were used to answer the question, “How did each principal approach school improvement?” It is interesting to note that the literature identifies a leader’s perceptions of his school, faculty, and style as foundational choices related to choices he or she makes regarding school improvement (Senge, 1990). Consequently, to discuss how each principal approached school improvement, I will present their use of metaphors as mental models for the school and its faculty.

The different approaches to leadership each principal used is exemplified in the way they used metaphors to describe school culture. The only metaphor they both used was *family*, but the way each principal used it had different implications for leadership style and tactics. Additionally, Nix introduced the metaphor of the school as a *boat* and applied it to his leadership approach. Senge (1990) noted that mental models impact school culture especially when tensions develop between faculty and administration concerning the number and speed of changes—an issue that was prominent during Nix’s tenure.

Family

Family is a metaphor used by both principals. Dunn used family to describe school culture. The point of emphasis for Dunn was the unity and permanence of family membership. He explained how he considered culture and family similar terms:

Culture is a good word and it’s probably a term that could bring in three or four different families; a family of Cubans, a family of Mexicans, a family of Blacks, a family of Whites, a family of whomever. If you put all these *cultures* together,

and you see that we have all of these different cultures, which make up just this one. See but I'm saying we've got all these different *families* that make up just this one. We've got the family at the elementary school, the primary school, the middle school and the high school. All of these families make up the *system* family. I think we're just playing on *words*, really. (Dunn 2, p. 15)

He used family to incorporate a *team* concept. "I think it's important, and here I touch on the family again, that people see us as a *united body* working towards the same goals. It's a *team* effort where we all bring our individual contributions to the table" (Dunn 2, p. 15).

Dunn used the family metaphor to refer to a sense of *permanent relationship*. He commented:

That's one thing that you want to always to bring to the table, that team concept. But even *further* than the team is the *family* concept. See you have a lot of people who play on our team that really are not members *of* the team ... It isn't like that in a family, I'd be grown, I might be the sorriest thing, I'd probably be the black sheep but I'm still your family ... You can't divorce that. You can be traded in front of the team, kicked off the team, but your family's safe. (Dunn 3, p. 8)

Members of the faculty were there to stay. Whatever the work required, the faculty would pull together to accomplish the goals. Even with instances of an underperforming teacher, Dunn would emphasize training and support rather than considering termination.

Dunn used family to demonstrate an *unbreakable bond*, an alliance of faculty members united in the pursuit of a common goal. Faculty well-being combined with a care for student well-being to bring about student learning. Dunn pointed to the lasting

relationship between family members to emphasize that the faculty would continue to teach school and do what's best for kids, no matter what educational fads came along to change requirements.

Nix used the term *family* to refer to a common group of people working toward a common goal. "It's a feeling I had when I was head football coach. We talked about our football *family* because we're in this together" (Nix 2, p. 2). Nix defined himself as the head of the *school household*, in charge of setting direction as well as taking corrective action whenever needed:

Granted there are some teachers [who] need improvement and that's my job as head of the *household*, head of the *family*, the head of the school here to make those adjustments. You've got a son, I've got two boys and I love them with everything I've got, but there are times when I've got to take some corrective action with my sons. It's the same way here, so it is a family. (Nix 2, p. 2)

Nix used the *family* concept as a team concept, in which the team has a head coach that directs its efforts during practice as well as in the game. He speaks in terms of position coaches working with different parts of the team. He delegated responsibility for the department like he did coaching football:

I told them 'I'm not coaching over your shoulder, they're *your* linebackers' or 'they're *your* offensive linemen.' And I said, 'The success will be yours and the losses will be yours, depending on who we assess is the weakest link in the chain,' which gave them, then, ownership in the family. (Nix 2, p. 2)

Nix believed this ownership and responsibility engendered buy-in and motivation for people to work hard and succeed. "I told them, 'That's *your* department. The successes

and the failures become yours and your teachers,' which gives him ownership of that and gives him the ability to make some improvements ... ” (Nix 2, p. 3). Each time Nix referred to the *family* metaphor, he used it to symbolize working together to make changes. Teachers and leaders were portrayed as working to make improvements and to do things differently. He used *team* as his central metaphor and gave it more nuance than family. Nix used the term to refer to the faculty as a team working for school improvement goals. Nix commented that in cases that a staff member isn't getting the job done, a change might be needed:

Sometimes the leader of that department might be weak and I may have to go in and make some changes there. I've had to do that in some instances. Someone who's not getting done what I need to get done. (Nix 2, p. 4)

Nix viewed the school in discrete parts like the parts of a *team*, rather than a *family* which is a whole unit. Nix applied the term *family* to symbolize the dedication to common goals, but used the *team* metaphor in reference to delegation of tasks to promote group ownership and buy-in. For Nix, there was a limited relationship when it came to the *family* concept. Nix remained task oriented, and he indicated that at the end of the day if a faculty member was not getting the job done, they would have to move on.

Although both Dunn and Nix used the metaphor of *family*, they bestowed different significance on the term. Dunn spoke in terms of unconditional acceptance of his faculty and referred to the “safe” relationship (Dunn 3, p. 8) of family members. Nix, used family to highlight the custodial relationship of a principal to his staff, and in some circumstances, the principal had to take “corrective action” (Nix 2, p. 2) to address performance issues.

Boat

Another metaphor Nix used was the school as a *boat*. He compared the departmental structure of the school to oars on a boat. He saw the organization of the high school faculty as compartmental and separated into the following departments: Math, Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, Special Education, Fine Arts, and Vocational. He further stated the efforts of teachers in each department worked similar to the way an oar would effect the movement of a row boat. “If all of our departments are rowing in the same direction, then we’re going to be successful at the school” (Nix 2, p. 4). Continuing the metaphor, he described the department head as the oarsman rowing with the oar. This created the image of the responsibility for organizing and directing the efforts of members of the department in a way that leads to the accomplishment of goals in the school improvement plan. Nix used similar terms when evaluating school-wide performance. “If Special Ed is bringing us down, then is it the person paddling, or is it the entire oar? Sometimes, the leader of that department might be weak, and I may have to go in and make some changes there” (Nix 2, p. 4). He mentioned that he had made some changes in departmental leaders as well as changes in faculty membership. Nix defined himself as the captain of the school’s ship, saying, “He’s [the outbound principal] turned the keys over, and now, it’s mine to drive” (Nix 3, p. 3).

In using this, *captain* metaphor, Nix crafted the idea that the school is a *boat*, and the department heads, under his leadership, are completing tasks that should result in school improvement. A small group of school leaders, the oarsmen, are used to guide efforts, introduce changes, and accomplish the school improvement plan. Although Nix did not detail the *boat* metaphor, there are several connections that could be made based

on his description of his views. The *boat* metaphor communicated the concept of movement, that a school is either improving or not, the boat is either moving or not. Nix previously commented that he had to work together with other administrators “to shoot holes in my [Nix’s] plans. We would tear it apart and put it back together again” (Nix 2, p. 13). I related the process of tearing apart plans with the difficulty of learning to steer a row boat. Further, there is a learning curve associated with rowing a boat. If the boater favors one arm or rows with one oar at a time, the boat will veer off course. Alternatively, if the boater tires and rowing slows down, the momentum fades, and eventually the boat glides to a stop. After some time, a successful boater is able to establish a rhythm rowing the oars simultaneously, the boat gains momentum, and its course will follow a straight path. Nix experienced this when the improvement gains were realized when working with the Math department, whereas the English/Language Arts department declined due to a shift in focus. Applying this metaphor to leadership succession in general, the inbound principal is tasked with assessing the context and culture of the school—becoming familiar with the *boat* (Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Weindling, 2000), managing the legacy of past successes (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006), setting goals that chart a course toward a destination (Garchinsky, 2008), monitoring initiatives and solving problems, which are the ways in which the captain learns to steer the boat to make mid-course corrections (Kelly & Saunders), to reach the distant shore of improved student achievement.

Notably, Dunn did not describe the school using the *boat* metaphor. The *boat* metaphor as explained by Nix did not match Dunn’s approach to leading a school. Dunn’s processes for school improvement did not revolve around the role of a *captain* who would chart a course for implementing change. Instead Dunn encouraged his faculty

to collaborate, to work together like a *family*, and to develop local solutions for underperformance. The product of this collaboration was a shared pursuit of a commonly held vision of school improvement.

Both Dunn and Nix used metaphors to refer to elements of their leadership style as it concerned SGAHS. In terms of school improvement, one influence Nix discussed was differences in departmental performance. He explained that some departments that work well seem to have everyone working together, under the direction of the department chair. Other times, Nix noted, departments may not have the same unified approach and the results are not as effective. In times like these you have to examine things more closely to see if it is the department or the one leading the department that needs a change (Nix 2, p. 4). Dunn spoke in terms of providing needed support for teachers, mentioning strategies for helping weaker teachers. Based on Dunn's *family* approach to school initiatives, and his preference for using mentoring to improve teacher performance, if he had discussed school performance in terms of a boat, I believe Dunn would have preferred repairing the oar rather than changing it out as Nix would endorse.

As Senge (1990) observed, mental models have the purpose of focusing our perceptions and guiding our actions. Based upon the aforementioned metaphors of the relationship between the faculty and the school—*family* or *team*—and the administration to the departments—*boat*—that Nix based his decisions of leadership style and tactics. After having established a basis for Nix's ideas concerning school leadership it was important for me to ask research question 5. Recognizing the importance placed on the succession stage that Gabarro (1987) called *induction* it seemed logical to explore

Research Question 5, in which I asked, “How the inbound principal assessed the school upon arrival.”

Research Question 5

Literature on succession places a great deal of importance on the inbound leader understanding school context (Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Stein, 1998; Weindling, 2000; Weindling & Earley, 1987). The succession stage during which the inbound leader makes assessments of school performance, gets acquainted with staff, and familiarizes himself with school culture is called *induction* (Gabarro, 1987). This next section presents how Nix made sense of the school context and moved from *entry*, through *taking-hold* and began to implement school changes (Kelly & Saunders; Stine; Weindling; Weindling & Earley).

Despite suggestions in succession literature (Weindling & Earley, 1987), the school district had no official process of induction for an out of district hire. As a result Nix relied on his instincts to acclimate himself to the school. He mentioned that he met with selected staff, made observations of school processes, and reviewed personnel records. Nix noted that school leaders have similar job responsibilities from school to school, such as maintaining facilities, scheduling students’ classes, hiring and evaluating teachers. School districts have different policies and procedures for each task, but basically the tasks are the same. Although the literature on succession does not highlight one particular method of assessing school culture and school performance upon arrival, studies by Stine (1998) and Kelly and Saunders (2010) highlighted the importance of the inbound principal investing time to orient himself to the school. Kelly and Saunders noted that each principal took time to familiarize himself/herself with the school context

and to understand the school culture thoroughly. Nix did not specify any program or assessment strategy that he used to gather input, formulate perceptions, or accumulate procedural knowledge.

Dunn mentioned his suspicion that Nix had been told to develop his own impressions: “I don’t know if the new incoming principal was told not to talk to me” (Dunn 4, p. 5). Also, Nix observed their communication was limited: “When I’d come to visit we’d chitchat for a minute and he’d say go talk to who you need to talk to. He didn’t want to be a meddling principal” (Nix 1, p. 9). The fact that *talk* was kept at a superficial level represents a lost opportunity to ensure sustained improvement (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). The inbound principal did not obtain insights from the outbound principal as repeatedly suggested in the literature (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Hargreaves, 2005; Hargreaves & Goodson; Weindling, 2000). While there was ample time to plan for transition, Nix spent his time trying to learn it all himself, rather than working collaboratively with the outbound principal. Also, he did not discuss any initiatives that Dunn started even if they seemed to be working for the good of the school and the students. This approach to leadership succession is a direct departure from the way the literature recommended handling legacy of improvements of the outbound principal and his staff.

The absence of a procedure that promoted articulation between the outbound and inbound principals resulted in school changes that were a departure from the improvements that were underway when the inbound principal arrived. Another example of Hargreaves’ (2005) findings where the school districts was so “preoccupied with inbound knowledge” (p. 169) that they failed to encourage continuation of past successes.

Nix did not tap into the outbound knowledge of Dunn to determine what initiatives were underway, nor did he align himself with any of Dunn's legacy of school improvements.

With this lack of connection, Nix relied on his interpretation of student achievement data to make the case for implementing changes. It was found, however, by Garchinsky (2008) that principals were more successful leading change initiatives when they relied on a commonly held vision of school improvement as opposed to data alone. Routinely assessing and continually updating initiatives in relation to the accomplishment of school vision was perceived by Garchinsky to be a key element toward desired school improvement. Nix did not utilize a process to review the school vision in setting the agenda for change. Instead he based his initiatives on what he was able to observe and the AYP report for student achievement. I asked about school performance indicators to establish a basis for discussing changes that Nix implemented.

Research Question 6

In asking, "What were the relevant school performance indicators that the inbound principal intended to change?" I wanted to establish the link between the inbound principal's observations of how school routines established during Dunn's tenure impacted student performance and improvement initiatives that he implemented. Further I wanted to examine "what were the consequences of those changes?" in order to establish how the succession events impacted school culture and student achievement. As the literature suggested (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Marzano et al., 2005; Normore, 2007), Nix examined student performance measures reflected on the school's AYP report that included test scores and graduation rates; he made observations of faculty; he gathered input from the superintendent and district directors; and he looked at overall routines that

were in place at the school in order to determine which school performance indicators were deficient. Nix used that input to formulate a plan to implement school improvement initiatives that would address those performance indicators. He found school performance needed to change in the areas of Math, graduation rates, and college readiness exams; and consequently he implemented a new bell schedule, made AVID® available to give students support in college preparatory classes, and created AP courses to address what he considered needed changes.

Student Performance Measures

At the time of Dunn's retirement SGAHS had not made AYP for the previous two years. Student achievement on the English portion of the HSGT was the strongest of all academic areas, exceeding 93% passing for All students (Table 1), but the reason SGAHS had not made AYP was math performance on the HSGT. SGAHS had an 18% gap between the number of Black students who passed the math portion of the HSGT and the number of All students (Table 2). Although, SGAHS increased graduation rate by 4% during the final 3 years of Dunn's tenure (Table 3), there was a remarkable 13% disparity between the graduation rate for Economically Disadvantaged students from All students.

Pace of Changes

A striking personality difference comes to light when the two principals are compared on the issue of the pace of change. Dunn commented, "It is important to just observe that first year. Now, you have to put in some things, but don't do a major overhaul, because everything that's going on at school is not bad, until you can see for yourself what works and what doesn't work with your review team" (Dunn 3, p. 1). Dunn established himself as a conservative leader, who studied things, gathered input, and let

time marinate his thoughts before he set a plan into motion. He commented that upon assuming the principalship, he would not have changed a thing because such changes would have said to the faculty that he was a man who would make quick decisions. It was his preference to make notes throughout the school year and bring up ideas for consideration during the spring planning phase. Dunn said that he liked to “make sure that those people that you expect to implement your ideas will buy into it before you even put them in place” (Dunn 3, p. 2). He asked his administrators and department chairs to make notes and gave the leadership team “plenty of time to review” (Dunn 3, p. 2). Before writing out the plan for the next year, one must make sure he or she has “everybody aboard” (Dunn 3, p. 2).

On the other hand, Nix established himself as a man of action. Nix came in with the intention to make changes and did. In so doing, Nix seemed to have combined the entry, transition, and re-shaping stages of headship (Weindling, 2000) into one stage, and consequently he was not well grounded in the context of the school and misjudged the pace of change the faculty could effectively implement. Nix believed: “Everybody [faculty, staff, students, and community members] loved Dunn, and they were very cautious about saying anything to be negative about him. But, they also recognized that there were some things that needed to change” (Nix 2, p. 15). The superintendent gave Nix the impression that SGAHS was a stagnating school with immediate potential for improved student performance. “I wanted to do some things to put a positive spin on the school media. There wasn’t much that I wouldn’t entertain or at least investigate to see if we could pull it off” (Nix 2, p. 16). Nix set out to address the following performance indicators: (1) the achievement gap in math test scores between Black students and All

students, (2) the gap in math test scores between Economically Disadvantaged students and All students, (3) the graduation rate for All students that was below 80%, (4) the academic climate of SGAHS in which students enroll in challenging academic courses, and (5) indicators of the teacher perception survey that showed a lack of school spirit among students.

One critical event in the transition was the consideration and implementation of a new bell schedule. The bell schedule was aligned to improvement goals to provide extra time for academic support, to allow staff development time for the faculty, and to consolidate extra-curricular student assemblies into a regularly scheduled period. The basis for implementing the new bell schedule was to allow flexible scheduling to conduct in-class remediation as needed, reduce the frequency of disruptions in the school day, and to provide an avenue for regular staff development through the provision of an early release day each week. Nix indicated that when he talked about the idea with the faculty, there was a lot of excitement. He said:

I tried to slow down our faculty, but I feel like they were so excited about something new and different that they were charging ahead ... I didn't want to squash their excitement, I wanted to throw some fuel on the excitement and really get a good energy going around here. (Nix 1, p.12)

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) referred to change of this magnitude as second order change, and as such, they recommended the principal devote particular attention to knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment; intellectual stimulation; monitoring; flexibility; and clarification of school-wide ideals (Marzano et al., 2005). Although change of this magnitude is addressed in the literature, Nix did not address

specific leadership responsibilities as Marzano et al. suggested. In his third year, Nix reflected on the initial decision to change the bell schedule:

We did it for 2 years and we're going to adjust it this year again ... I think if we would have slowed down and thought through it a little more we would have gotten to where we're going to be now, just 2 years later ... I think it is part of the growing process. (Nix 1, p. 12)

With the benefit of hindsight, Nix observed that there was need for significant support to make a successful transition to a new bell schedule, including: training teachers for longer class periods, making the public aware of scheduling, addressing the logistics of a regularly planned early release day, and implementing processes that would support students success in classes that no longer met every day of the week. Although the new bell schedule included regular professional development time, those efforts did not result in the faculty developing plans to appropriately use the additional class time to the fullest advantage. Teachers continued using the same instructional methods they had once used in 55 minute classes for the longer 70 minute classes. As a result the bell schedule was not accepted as part of the culture of SGAHS. Nix overestimated the faculty's tolerance for change, and the school paid the price in the court of public opinion.

The superintendent set a district goal of improving the academic climate of each school. One indicator Nix used to reflect such a climate was the number of AP classes the school offered. He was amazed to learn that there were no AP courses offered at SGAHS, and immediately pledged to offer five in his first year (Nix 1, p. 8). Nix indicated that he saw the caliber of teachers and students present at SGAHS and saw no reason why AP classes couldn't be implemented. Another initiative related to the academic climate was

the enhancement of dual enrollment agreements with local colleges. Nix expanded these to include certification programs offered through the technical college and secured the possibility for students to complete their Associate of Arts degree through the local university. Nix's first year as principal featured quite a number of new initiatives to improve academic rigor and provide support to at risk students. From AP classes and AVID®, to remedial *intensive care* sessions, the staff implemented more changes in a single school year than they had in the preceding 3 years with Dunn. The beginning of Nix's tenure could be aptly described as a shock to the system.

The pace of change led to some resistance, controversy, and public outcry. Families voiced their concerns at Board of Education meetings, privately to board members, and even wrote comments in local newspaper features. One complaint stated that Nix gathered ideas from far and wide to import into "our" schools. A common concern voiced was that changes did not match the context of the school and community: "His ideas are not based on his own experience, but catchy things he hears at a conference or from some buddy in another system" (Respondent2, 2011, p. 3). Surveys indicated changes introduced were not accompanied with sufficient staff development to achieve faculty buy-in. The number of changes he has championed has left some faculty and parents with the impression that he has come to "our" town to teach "us" his grand ideas from the big city: "Nix came in and made too many changes instead of learning about our school and community. Most changes he made have been reversed since" (Respondent3, 2011, p. 3).

Change was one element that divided the faculty into two factions; one side tended to see administrative actions in a positive light, while the other generally adopted

a skeptical view of Nix and his administration. The faculty noted that there were fewer changes under Dunn's administration than the first several months of Nix's first year (Respondent1, 2011). One faction supported the implementation of new initiative it perceived as an invigoration of school improvement efforts. The other faction generally resisted changes Nix implemented based on the degree to which the changes were a departure of accepted practices of the school culture.

Nix received the superintendent's endorsement for significant changes, but soon realized that he inherited a school culture that had very strong ideas about how the school should run. Undertaking a change agenda of the magnitude Nix planned called for what Fullan (2005) deemed significant work to re-culture the school. In order to adhere to Fullan's recommendations, Nix stated that he would need to employ specific strategies in order to assist the faculty in accepting the need for change, strategies that would give them a voice in designing the changes that they would have to implement (Fullan).

As Nix entered his third year, he seemed to move into Weindling's (2000) fourth stage of headship, called *refinement*. He began to slow the pace of change by decreasing the number of initiatives underway during the coming school year. As goals from the 2009 plan were met, they were not replaced with new goals, but the faculty was prompted to focus on meeting existing targets for achievement. Nix seemed to sense the reaction of the faculty, which seemed to get burned out the rapid changes of his first 2 years. Nix and the faculty experienced what Barker (2006) called innovation overload. The faculty was simply worn out by trying to accomplish a large number of initiatives in the course of a school year. Indeed there was a small measured decline in student performance from the first to the second year of Nix's term.

Faculty noticed that the pace of change had slowed. One survey respondent wrote “The school improvement plan is a living document under Nix, and changes were significant after Dunn left. Changes are still being made but not to the level of the first year in transition” (Respondent1, 2011, p. 4). Nix reflected on the speed and number of changes: “Looking back, we probably did more than the faculty could handle the first year. I probably wouldn’t change as much as fast if I had it to do all over again” (Nix 2, p. 18).

During his brief tenure, Nix implemented many change initiatives to address school performance issues including under performance in math, graduation rate below 80%, and a disengaged student body. Nix implemented a program of AP classes, AVID®, a new bell schedule, student clubs, pep rallies, and expanded student government. In addition to multiple district-wide initiatives implemented: Learning-Focused curriculum planning model (Learning-Focused, 2012), 6+1 Trait® writing model (Education Northwest, 2012), Freshman Focus Academy, and the district-wide grading policy.

The basis for many succession plans advocated in the literature is the pursuit of sustainable long-term school improvement (Barker, 2006; Fullan, 2005; Gray, 2003; Hargreaves, 2005; Hargreaves et al., 2003). Fink and Brayman (2006) and Garchinsky (2008) asserted that a major barrier to long term school improvement is frequent principal turnover. They joined other authors to recommend school districts explore ways to keep principals in the same school longer than 5 years so that they might secure a legacy of lasting school improvement (Fink & Brayman; Fullan; Garchinsky; Hargreaves;

Hargreaves et al.). In light of the fact that Nix's service as principal was ended after 3 years, history would lead one to predict that initiatives he began will not remain in place.

Research Question 7

I used student performance data from the indicators that Nix used when making his decisions about initiatives to implement as well as teacher perception survey results to address the question, "How did this leadership succession impact school performance?" In this section I present the student performance results of Nix's term of service and hoped to explore the impact this succession had on student achievement and school culture.

Student Performance Measures

SGAHS experienced 3 years of increasing progress in terms of graduation rates, but rising state-wide expectations caught up with the school in 2010-2011. SGAHS increased graduation rate by 4% during Nix's tenure, boasting a 17% increased graduation rate among economically disadvantaged students. Student achievement rose in the area of Math making required passing rates for the first time in many years. Despite these positive strides, scores in English/Language Arts declined, resulting in failure to meet state expectations. It is interesting to note that English/Language Arts scores increased under Dunn who had an initiative to target those scores but not math scores. With Nix's target initiative on math, scores increased in the area of math, but went down in English/Language Arts. Greater emphasis was placed on college admission with the implementation of AP classes, SGAHS recorded 217 AP exams taken during 2010-2011 school year. Additionally, the number of students who took college entrance exams increased by 22% to 266.

Teacher Perception Survey Results

The final year of Dunn's tenure marks the base line for staff perception surveys aligned with the School Keys (Table 10). Although, survey results in Nix's first year were initially higher than those of Dunn in all eight categories, survey ratings from 2009-2011 have declined in each category. Survey comments indicated that initial excitement and good relationships were developed between Nix and his faculty. Following Nix's first year as principal, there was a growing level of discontent (Respondent2, 2011). Some of the discontent is attributable to unpopular school district policies concerning grading. Other comments were pointedly directed at Nix, in relation to his leadership style and the number of changes during his tenure (Respondent2). The unprecedented rate of changes implemented over this 3-year period resulted in declining staff perception results.

Table 10

Staff Perception Survey- Multi-Year Comparison

Leader Name	Dunn	Nix	Nix
School Keys Areas	2007-2008	2008-2009	2010-2011
Curriculum	69.7	79.1	70.1
Assessment	75.7	81.2	69
Instruction	73.7	78.7	57.2
Planning and Organization	76.1	76.4	68.2
Student, Family, and Community Support	44.8	69.2	54.6
Professional Learning	70.3	74	64.1
Leadership	64.4	78.7	70
School Culture	59.8	80.2	69.5

After receiving high ratings in his first year, by the end of 2011 Nix’s perception survey ratings declined in all eight categories, five areas showed double digit drops. In fact, in the 2010-2011 school year four of eight category ratings fell below ratings for 2007-2008, which was the final year Dunn served as principal. When compared to Dunn’s final year, Nix showed improvement in three areas: student, family, and community support; leadership; and school culture. Dunn and Nix scored the same rating in Curriculum. Nix showed decline from Dunn’s ratings in these areas: instruction, assessment, planning and organization, and professional learning.

Nix and Dunn got different results in terms of student achievement. Under Nix, attention was devoted to making improvements in academic rigor by implementing AVID® and AP courses, and to increase student involvement by implementing pep rallies, clubs, and community service programs. There seems to have been a trade off in terms of academic performance, math scores rose and English scores declined. Similarly, perception survey results showed initial enthusiasm for a principal who aggressively implemented new initiatives, but after 3 years time, the faculty approval ratings showed mixed results with some areas stronger than Dunn and others areas weaker than Dunn.

Summary of Leadership Succession at SGAHS

Nix did not have the opportunity to progress beyond Weindling's (2000) *taking-hold* stage of headship. His administration ended after 3 years by an unexpected promotion to the district office. When the school board hired a new superintendent, Nix was promoted to a district director's role. With the abrupt transition merely weeks before the beginning of school, little time was left for transition routines and rituals. The end of Nix's tenure as high school principal was more of a transfer of keys than an example of a smooth leadership succession.

The leadership succession from Dunn to Nix turned out to be a poignant instance in what has become a pattern of school leadership turnover (Barker, 2006; Fink & Brayman, 2006). Initially, Nix was selected because he represented a departure from the status quo—perhaps too much of a departure. His tenure as principal came to an abrupt end as the Board of Education sought to change the direction of the school district and replaced the superintendent. The new superintendent reorganized the district office and

tapped Nix to serve in the central office. A new principal was hired from within the system and began to lead in his own style.

Certainly, Nix was successful in shaking up the system, an event Barker (2006) considered to be a positive force for school improvement in some cases. He implemented programs that were student focused and targeted academic achievement for struggling students as well as college bound students. Nix did not link changes to the legacy of his predecessor as Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) recommended, which is according to Fink and Brayman (2006) a likely reason he ran into significant resistance from faculty and community members. As Tyack and Cuban (1995) asserted, changes instituted during Nix's tenure are likely to change again, and as the school reverts to traditional practices that have become engrained in its culture, the next principal will have to grapple with an increasingly change resistant faculty as he seeks to implement initiatives (Barker; Hargreaves & Goodson).

Leadership Succession in the Larger Context

The purpose of this section is to place my research into the context of other studies of leadership succession. By examining the experiences of the two principals in this study through the lenses of recommendations in the literature, I hope to present similarities and differences to make recommendations for supporting leadership succession in the future.

Discussion of Barker's Study

Barker (2006) conducted an historical case study of the leadership succession of three principals at the same school from 1986 until 2003. He noted that with each change in principal, there followed an implementation of new innovations for school

improvement. Barker's study revealed inbound principals experienced difficulty because they perceived the school's performance profile differently than did the faculty. Barker noted that, although the new leader was ready to implement change, "key individuals were not prepared to return to the early stages of change and culture building" (p. 290). Like Barker, I found the same disconnect between existing school culture and the desire to implement new initiatives.

Barker (2006) discussed the way each principal's style influenced the way they approached change. He found "leadership characteristics, styles, and habits were formative influences on organizational climate and culture" (p. 288). He described principals as moving through life cycles in which they were initially energetic and implemented many changes, but by the end of their tenure were exhausted by the requirements of the job. Barker found that the cumulative effect of successive leaders in his study had been to achieve school improvement in a way that exhausted the faculty. Like Barker, I found there was an interaction between the existing school culture and the inbound principal. Nix experienced resistance on some initiatives and negative faculty perceptions. The number of changes implemented by Nix also left the faculty with innovation fatigue. The brevity of Nix's tenure limited the influence over the school culture at SGAHS.

Finally, Barker (2006) found leadership was contingent on internal and external forces related to the school context. Barker described how declining student enrollment and aging buildings shaped leadership initiatives. He indicated that the change of a principal is in itself a major innovation for the school that should be carefully planned, managed, and supported. Barker found that the change of a principal presents risks that

make it disruptive to school improvement and “undermine hopes of large-scale, sustainable reform and improvement” (p. 290). Barker advised those interested in leadership succession “conduct self-evaluation measures that include mapping climate, culture, and enduring features of the school” (p. 290). I found no evidence of a self-evaluative process of school culture or improvement initiatives to determine what should be continued. Like Barker, I found that the change of leadership at SGAHS was a major event in the culture of the school. Some of the difficult components of the succession may have been avoided if it had been supported with a succession plan that aligned improvements with long-term initiatives of the previous administration.

Discussion of Kelly and Saunders

Kelly and Saunders (2010) conducted a case study of three newly appointed principals from different school districts in England and noted the emergence of two themes during their study; organizational socialization and the need to lead school improvement. They found that, during the period of orientation, the principals seemed to make sense of performance elements of the school and developed an understanding of the existing culture of the schools. Kelly and Saunders indicated the principals worked to establish personal credibility prior to making important decisions and in advance of selling their personal visions for the schools. They indicated that these three principals spent significant time in their first year at the schools building internal support systems, emphasizing distributed leadership, and working to achieve buy-in for change initiatives. Unlike Kelly and Saunders, I did not observe an organizational assessment before implementation of changes. Instead, I noted that Nix did not confer with the outbound

principal and brought several pre-conceived initiatives to SGAHS. Nix seemed to bypass organizational socialization and proceed directly to implementation of change initiatives.

Kelly and Saunders (2010) emphasized that principals progressed through three stages of transition to the principalship; preparation, socialization, and control. Preparation included pre-service training to become a principal. Like Kelly and Saunders, I found that both principals in my study spoke of a period of pre-service training that prepared them for the role of principal. Kelly and Saunders spoke of a socialization period that followed being named principal. They indicated that this featured a period of acclimation to the school context and came to understand the culture of the inherited school. Unlike Kelly and Saunders, I did not find a process by which Nix explored school culture and engaged the faculty in collaborative processes to change the school culture. Instead, Nix gathered concerns that “school culture wasn’t strong” and began to implement changes that included expanding the role of student government, insisting on pep rallies, and building student led clubs. Kelly and Saunders indicated that stage 3 or control was marked by school reshaping and implementation of school change initiatives. Although Kelly and Saunders observed that to follow the socialization period, I found that Nix skipped right to this phase. Nix began discussion of changing the bell schedule before he even had an office at SGAHS. Implementation of change was the first priority.

Based on my case study, I recommend implementation of a succession planning process that would guide transitioning principals through a process of school assessment and formal orientation that aligns the legacy of school achievements with long-term goals for sustained improvement.

Discussion of Fink and Brayman

Fink and Brayman (2006) studied leadership succession in the 30-year study titled *Change Over Time*. They found an accelerating rate of principal turnover presented a barrier for long-term school improvements. They asserted that frequent turnover led to staff cynicism and a staff culture of waiting for unpopular change initiatives to be replaced when the principal is changed. Fink and Brayman indicated that principals are serving in the same school for fewer than 5 years. The byproduct of this frequent turnover is limited ability to leave a legacy of improvement. Principals don't have time to imbed changes into the culture of the school before they are moved or decide to retire. Much like Fink and Brayman, I discovered that Nix served as principal for only 3 years, and many of the changes he implemented have changed once again.

Fink and Brayman (2006) advised that planning for succession events would allow for a structured entry process to provide the inbound leader with insight into the culture and micro-politics of the school. While I noted a 4-month period between hire and the end of the school year, there was very little articulation between the outbound leader and the inbound leader. Additionally, Fink and Brayman endorsed a support system to mentor new principals that can pass on essential leadership knowledge. I did not find such a system of support in place in my study.

Perhaps most influentially, Fink and Brayman (2006) recommended implementation of succession planning as a component of annual school improvement processes. They asserted that when the responsibility for planning, assessing, and continuing school improvement initiatives is shared across a group of school leaders, the legacy of school improvement will be incorporated into the school culture. I found no

evidence of succession planning that joined distributed leadership practices with the legacy of school improvement. As a result, Nix transitioned independently of in-school leadership and did not align his initiatives with the legacy of prior school improvements.

Discussion of Hargreaves

Hargreaves (2005) advocated for leadership succession planning as a process to support sustainable school improvement. He asserted that “principals stand on the shoulders of those who went before them” (p. 163) to indicate that inbound principals must come to terms with the existing school culture when they arrive. He indicated that there is a long-term aspect to leadership, one that created a legacy of changes for their successor. Like Hargreaves asserted, I found that Nix had to come to terms with a school culture that expected a more consultative method of leadership than he had and a much slower pace of reform than he took. Hargreaves distinguished between successions that were planned to be continuous or discontinuous with the trend of the previous leadership. He indicated that discontinuous successions can result in rapid results, and indeed effectively shake up a school. In the case of SGAHS, it is clear that the superintendent desired a discontinuous succession to further support the district initiatives of the grading policy and academic rigor. Hargreaves noted, however, that when compounded by tenures less than 5 years, discontinuous successions rarely make lasting changes. The results of my study did note improved performance in math test scores, an increase in the number of college exams taken, and an increase in the graduation rate. Only time will tell if those gains are secured beyond Nix’s tenure.

Hargreaves (2005) also pointed out that leadership succession is often undermined by poor planning. Hargreaves noted that sustained improvements were derailed when the

inbound principal took the school in a direction that differed from that of the previous leader. Likewise, I found that the end of Dunn's tenure signaled the beginning of different initiatives. There was no plan articulated to ensure the legacy of prior improvements would continue. One result was a 4% decline in student performance in English. Another result of this discontinuity was increased resistance to Nix's change initiatives. As public discontent with Nix's initiatives combined with resentment of the leadership of the superintendent who was appointed in 2006, some teachers, rather than embrace the initiatives, sought to wait for his changes to be reversed when Nix was replaced.

Hargreaves (2005) made the following recommendations to support leadership successions: (1) develop leadership capacities and provide a pool of leaders from which future successors may be chosen, (2) leaders should plan for the legacy of improvement by incorporating succession into training programs, and (3) districts should find ways to keep principals in place for longer than 5 years. I did not find any element of a plan to incorporate succession planning in school-based school improvement plans or training efforts at the district level. It was asserted that the small size of this school district worked against the development and implementation of a leadership succession plan (Nix 2, p. 15). The abrupt end of Nix's term as principal came well before 5 years, and as such it is predictable that the legacy of his initiatives will soon be reversed.

Leadership Lessons

Although leadership succession planning and support are topics of current interest for school districts around the United States (Cary & Foran, 2006; Garchinsky, 2008; Levitz, 2008; Normore, 2007; Riddick, 2009), there was no formal policy in this school

district to support this leadership succession. As a result, Nix had to figure out what he needed to know, who possessed the procedural or factual information he needed, and set up appointments with them. An important element of a succession plan is a comprehensive needs assessment (Cary & Foran; Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Stine, 1998). Without a needs assessment strategy the inbound principal may become mired in test scores and as a result become data rich but information poor (Carroll & Carroll, 2002). The pattern of short-lived changes under Nix's administration makes this researcher believe that greater support and planning of a formal district-wide succession plan could have made this succession better in terms of managing school culture and sustaining long-term school improvement.

I propose the following definition of leadership succession planning: a holistic approach taken by a school district to meet leadership needs. As Normore (2007) suggested, it should involve the identification, development, and placement of leaders. Succession plans should support transitions between outbound and inbound leaders that solidify current achievements and enable future improvements (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). The final element to supporting leadership succession is to implement supports to increase the length of time successful leaders remain in place (Garchinsky, 2008; Hargreaves, 2005).

Although Nix cited the small size of this school district as an excuse for not having a formal succession planning procedure, the results of this case study establish the need for such a procedure to be instituted. There is a need in this particular district to develop and implement a comprehensive leadership succession plan. Such a plan should account for current staff characteristics and establish procedures to identify and develop

future leaders. The resulting plan may be able to satisfy future leadership needs from existing staff, but the plan should also specify when it is appropriate to consider hiring leaders from outside the district. The succession plan should identify concrete ways to support leaders and the school community during transition between leaders. Hopefully, this study will encourage others to implement structures to support leadership succession in more school districts. Specific recommendations include: establish a procedure for review of school culture, design a detailed orientation to the school, identify of change initiatives that should serve as a legacy for continuation, and implement specific retention policies designed to increase the length of service of principals.

Transition between leaders should be viewed as a methodical process that includes: a comprehensive review of policy, procedures, staff, programs, building, and system characteristics; and specific articulation between inbound and outbound leaders concerning alignment of school culture and school improvement planning. Time should be invested to blend the insider knowledge of the outbound principal with the inbound knowledge of the new leader (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). It is vital that the inbound principal become familiar with the legacy of the outbound leader. Kelly and Saunders (2010) noted inbound principals had to “make sense of context” and “understand the culture of the inherited organization” (p. 140). The inbound principal must demonstrate an understanding of the school’s strengths and develop a rationale for instituting changes. I believe an inbound principal’s success hinges upon accurately assessing school culture, identifying and continuing positive elements of the predecessor’s legacy, communicating regularly and effectively, and supporting changes in a manner that enhances improvement. Although Nix did not specify a process of assessing school culture, the

methods and quality of information he gathered to develop an understanding of school culture and context may have proven to be the most crucial element of this succession. It is likely that a leadership succession plan would have helped Nix in some ways. Given the political pressures of the school context, one can not say Nix was not successful in this leadership succession. If Nix had been supplied with a succession plan that prompted assessment of school culture and featured the support of key stakeholders, he may have learned that the existing school culture would not allow as much change he attempted as fast as he tried to make it. If he had followed the example that others addressed in the literature (Kelly & Saunders; Weindling & Earley, 1987), he would have made informed choices related to needed changes upon arrival and more appropriately established the proper pace for implementing other initiatives.

Certainly there are circumstances that call for changes that are sometimes drastic. In other instances, relatively minor and limited changes are needed. Regardless of the magnitude of change, the principal will be charged with bringing about positive gains in student achievement within the context of a unique school culture (Kelly & Saunders, 2010). It is vital that the principal gather input, build consensus, and work within existing cultural norms to make needed changes (Garchinsky, 2008).

A solid leadership succession plan must also specify ways to increase the length of successful service of existing leaders (Garchinsky, 2008). The average length that principals lead their schools is less than 5 years (Hargreaves, 2005). Principals leave for promotions, retirements, or dismissals. A leadership succession plan should outline ways to pick the right leader, give needed support, and retain them with an attractive compensation plan. Incentive plans, career counseling, and mentoring programs for

leaders in new roles are all elements recommended to increase longer terms of service (Riddick, 2009).

Suggestions for Further Research

Regular leadership turnover is no longer the exception; it has become the rule. Further research is needed to strengthen the case for school districts to establish leadership succession plans, to explore ways in which leadership succession works, instances in which it does not work, and to establish why leadership succession plans are needed. In particular future research is needed to determine routines that improve planning, transition, and legacy management. Additional research is needed to recommend ways principals assess and act strategically in order to build a positive school culture.

Case study research allows interested parties to make observations and compare cases with their unique settings. Case studies allow policy makers and prospective principals alike to develop new insights and improve the results of future succession events. Further research is needed to document examples of leadership succession in various contexts, including urban and suburban school districts, and at schools of different levels such as elementary, middle, and high schools. Additional historical case studies are needed to map the sequence of leadership succession in context and to study the long-term effects of leadership successions on sustained school improvement.

As the United States embarks upon a new direction of student assessment under the mantle of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (NGA Center, 2012), it will be interesting to study the impacts curricular changes have on the frequency and quality of

leadership successions. Finally, I also hope that future research will continue to focus on the role that school culture plays in leadership succession.

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APPENDIX A:
21 Responsibilities

Appendix A

21 Responsibilities

The 21 Responsibilities identified by Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005)

1. Affirmation: Recognizes and celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges failures.
2. Change Agent: Is willing to challenge and actively challenges the status quo.
3. Contingent Rewards: Recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments.
4. Communication: Established strong lines of communication with and among teachers and students.
5. Culture: Fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation.
6. Discipline: Protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus.
7. Flexibility: Adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent.
8. Focus: Establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention.
9. Ideals/Beliefs: Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling.
10. Input: Involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies.
11. Intellectual Stimulation: Ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these practices a regular aspect of the school's culture.

12. Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment: Is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
13. Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment: Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices.
14. Monitoring/Evaluating: Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning.
15. Optimizer: Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations.
16. Order: Establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines.
17. Outreach: Is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders.
18. Relationships: Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff.
19. Resources: Provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs.
20. Situational Awareness: Is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems.
21. Visibility: Has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students.

Appendix B:
Transcript Excerpt

Introduction

In this section I will present two versions of the same audio recording. The first is a verbatim transcription, and the second is an adjusted transcript. I want to make clear the adjustments did not significantly impact the content of the data represented in the transcript. The following guidelines were used in generating transcripts: (1) List the speaker using initials. (2) Add a header on each page of the transcript that list the interview date and title based on participant initials and session number and page number. (3) Note interview time parenthetically as each minute passes. (4) Make specific notes of questions with minute and second time stamps in the text of the transcript. (5) Remove vocal crutches such as ah and um. (6) Delete sentence fragments, and type the restatement as the only version of the answer.

Verbatim Transcript

BD- Start off with, with your background. Tell me what, um, how you got into teaching.

Nix- (2:27) Okay, um , I guess I just always had ah, a good relationship with, ah, my teachers and coaches um from elementary school forward, and (cough) excuse me bob I'm fighting a little bit of a sinus cold this morning. Had a real good relationship with one of my football coaches, who um, at the time was influencing me in a way that I didn't know. Um, he, ah, I guess put me in leadership positions. ah, I didn't seek them out, (3:00) I didn't ask for them. Maybe he recognized something in me, ah, whether you're born with it or whatever. Um Captain, that sort of thing.

Adjusted Transcript

BD - Start off with your back ground. Tell me how you got into teaching.

Nix - Um, I guess I just always had a good relationship with my teachers and coaches from elementary school forward. * I had a real good relationship with one of my football coaches who, at the time, was influencing me in a way that I didn't know. He, I guess, put me in leadership positions. (3) I didn't seek them out, I didn't ask for them. Maybe he recognized something in me, whether you're born with it or whatever, Captain, that sort of thing.

Here is another example from an interview with a different participant.

Verbatim Transcript

BD- (1:26) So you didn't change anything that first year.

Dunn- Nope.

BD- Because you were part of the decision making process

Dunn- Yep.

BD- ...Prior to beginning of the year.

Dunn- And if I had come from Colorado, wouldn't change a thing. I'd have set there and observed before I even made a recommendation on something to change, because everything that was going on wasn't bad. And what worked for me in Colorado wont work for me in SGA County. I need to find out about my community, I need to find out about my faculty, I need to find out about my staff, I need to find out what's going on. There's no need for me putting in drafting when we have no industry around here that requires drafting. So there's no need for me to come here with all these bright ideas, doesn't fit (1:27) in with the community because the people don't deserve it. Come in and observe. Let people know you gonna respect their input, and they will say 'papa I'm sure gonna work hard to see if I cant make this work', because if it doesn't work we'll change it next year. Let them do it. They'll come up with the changes. They'll come up with the ideas, and what they come up with, they will make it work. And I don't have to sell them on my idea. Because if they... these are all professional people. (1:27:30)

Adjusted Transcript

BD – So you didn't change anything that first year.

Dunn – Nope.

BD – Because you were a part of the decision making process prior to the beginning of the year.

Dunn – If I had come from Colorado, I wouldn't have changed a thing. *I would have sat there and observed before I even made a recommendation.* What would work for me in Colorado, wouldn't work in SGA County. First I need to find out about my *community*. I need to find out about my *faculty*. I need to find out about my *staff*. I need to find out what's *going on*. *For instance, there's no need for me to put in a drafting class when there's no industry around here that requires drafting. They don't need me coming in here with all these bright ideas that don't fit. **(1:27)** You have to let the people know that you're going to respect their input. *They'll come up with the changes and the ideas; just let them do it. And I didn't have to sell them on my ideas. These are all professional people. *

Appendix C:
Interview guides

Introduction

The following list represents the questions planned in advance with follow up questions added. The questions are different for the two principals to account for differences in their particular role as outgoing or incoming principal.

Outgoing Principal questions:

Interview one questions: Background & transition

There are plenty of leadership books that have been written, but very few tell the story of transition, of becoming principal. You are a person from whom a great deal can be learned about that process. I would like to record and tell your story in such a way that others can learn from your experiences. Below are some of the things that I would like us to discuss. If you have any suggestions for additional topics I would love to hear them.

I would appreciate it if you would share some stories that tell the history of your principalship.

1. The purpose of today's activity is to begin the search for understanding, of leadership transition, leadership succession. Since you've held the head principal's position you've experienced many transitions and I'm certainly interested to learn whatever you will share with me.
2. (follow up) I certainly want you to feel like you're directing our conversation at all times, I want you to talk a little bit more about how did it feel when you transitioned from assistant principal to the principal, you began to talk about that a minute ago.
3. (follow up) You said earlier that it took you out of a personal relationship with the students moving from an assistant principal to principal, talk to me about that.
4. (follow up) What are some of the things that took you away from the students, the time with the students? You mentioned parents?
5. (follow up) A while back, you said your success was built on the support you had from a great community, a great faculty. And you also mentioned that you asked the board for the same support they had given previous principals. Talk to me about the kind of support you mean.
6. (follow up) You tell me if I can't ask this, but I'm going to ask you because you mentioned that would take care of the white community but the black community might not have come forth if they had a beef?
7. Tell me how you would spend a typical day.
8. You don't have a 39 year career by accident. What was it, if you had to tell me anything or some things that kept you going, that kept you so involved, tell me what your driving forces were.
9. When you became principal, what did you hope to accomplish?

Interview 2

10. I remember giving you a copy of the transcript to look over. My hope was that you would look at it and decide if there was anything that I misunderstood or that needed to be clarified. I'm ready to hear your comments on that.
11. Thank you for those comments. You know that I want to portray your tenure, coming up as a teacher then as a leader and then transitioning to your tenure as principal. Help me divide that up into timeframes so we can talk about what it's like and what kind of changes took place in different times.
12. What was the year of integration? Other than student make up, how did schooling change? Did you change buildings, did you switch people around? You talked about buses...
13. (follow up) When was consolidation?
14. So you're dividing up times, you've got integration, consolidation, that leaves you right around the eighties? What's next?
15. How was it different when you were selected as principal? How did you approach that year?
16. (follow up) So you didn't change anything that first year? Is that because you were a part of the decision-making process prior to the beginning of the year?
17. So, observations made each week plus faculty suggestions made over time, that's how you came up with ideas about what to change?
18. You addressed my question about referring to school culture as a family. That is something that you've talked on a couple of times today.
19. (follow up) In the material I've read, they call that the legacy. Your spirit or your strategies or ways of doing things, your policies whatever you started that continues on after your tenure, after you're gone, they refer to that as your legacy. What is something that you would like to see continued as part of your legacy?

Interview 3

20. The focus of this third interview is to make sure that I can describe the school, the climate, and your leadership. Perhaps sometimes during our discussion today you'll be able to tell me what a "day in the life" is like at your school.
21. As you came in, what were some of your most important projects?
22. So once you conducted the review team, and you asked for input, and you saw everybody's notes, in the spring you began putting together a plan. Starting with the year 1993, thinking all the way to 2007, what stands out as something you want to hang your hat on as "yep, we put this in place"?
23. What were some of the school's accomplishments in that time?
24. So let me make sure I hear you. (Restated high points for confirmation...) Tell me what is it about your school tenure that you want to see continued.
25. How would you describe your leadership style?
26. We talked about how you approached school improvement. We talked about how you approach decision making, how it's an inclusive process, approachable, that people participate. (example provided as response)

Interview 4

27. Last time we wrapped up the historical part of our conference and you remember I'm trying to do a case study that's inclusive of your time, and then the transition to a new tenure, a new administrative team.
28. What was it like when you decided to retire?
29. As you approached the end of the school year, this was different from the "end of the year" that had been in place for 30 years because for those times, you had been involved in the next year's planning, the next year's meetings. How did your role as leader change?
30. Did you have any formal meetings with the new person?
31. (follow up) You told me earlier that you would have liked to have been able to help him avoid some of the things that came up. What kind of comments do you feel like the outgoing administrator should share?
32. (follow up) How do you think this new person has managed the transition?
...understanding that yours is an outside view because of the lack of interaction...
33. (adjusted question from interview guide) Via your administrative team, were there any seeds that you might have planted on things you wished to see continued?
34. Since it wasn't coming directly from you, tell me what kind of ways that you know about, that the new person gathered information.
35. Can you tell me some examples of things that you felt uncomfortable about the change in direction?

Incoming Principal Questions:

Interview one question: Background & transition

The purpose of our first of three interviews is to set the stage with your background relating to leadership succession. There are plenty of leadership books that have been written, but very few tell the story of transition, of becoming principal. You are a person from whom a great deal can be learned about that process. I would like to record and tell your story in such a way that others can learn from your experiences. Below are some of the things that I would like us to discuss. If you have any suggestions for additional topics I would love to hear them.

I would appreciate it if you would share some experiences that tell the story of your principalship.

1. Let's begin with some background. Can you tell me about yourself and why you got interested in teaching.
2. (follow Up) Were those Jobs in the same area you grew up?
3. (follow Up) What was the motivation for moving from one job to another?
4. Tell me about your first leadership role. Could you tell me about why you decided to pursue leadership?

5. What things in your background do you think prepared you for your first leadership role? How well do you feel were prepared for that? In what ways were you unprepared for your first leadership role?
6. As we know that there are specific requirements that must be fulfilled for being hired in a leadership position. What are some of the events that have prepared you to transition from assistant principal to principal?
7. Tell me about the experience of assuming leadership of your school.
8. Tell me about your relationship with Mr. D in the first couple of weeks and months after you were named principal.
9. When you were learning about your school, did you see some things you thought you'd like to change?
10. (follow up) Give me some examples of things that used to interrupt class.
11. Did you see some things that you wanted to continue?
12. Do you think that being new to the system made a difference in your experience here? How do you think your transition went?
13. In retrospect, are there things you would do differently if you were to do it again?
14. (follow up) How did you gain that perception? How did you get that kind of information?
15. (follow up) Do they have a time where they do that redelivery?
16. (specific follow up) That got to a process answer. I was interested, with my question, a little bit of a different scope. When you said ... it generated a lot of excitement when you got some new ideas flowing and the faculty went from having 'no say' to 'having a say' and from 'nobody cares what you think' ... Where did you get those kinds of impressions? How did that come to you?
17. What advice would you give a new principal about their transition?
18. (follow up) Anything you can think of that might be of interest?

Interview 2:

- Follow up from interview 1
19. Both you and Dunn used the word family to describe your school. Is that a term you use to describe school culture?
 20. (specific follow up) How are they involved in hiring decisions?
 21. (specific follow up) I paraphrased something; you talked about accountability and ownership. You felt like ownership led to this cohort/colleagues camaraderie. Is that an accurate way to say that?
 22. Part of this project on blending your experiences with the literature. I was wondering there are a couple of terms... in that field: school culture, school climate. How do you feel like those relate to each other?
 23. So from your comments it seems like climate is more nuts-and-bolts categories whereas culture is an overall sense or feel of how we gel. Is that the way you use the term family?
 24. With all of this conversation about school climate and school culture, tell me how did you go about assessing school culture?
 25. (specific follow up) How did you know the kids hadn't been met with?
 26. (specific follow up) And that's specifically for feedback?

27. (specific follow up) That bled into the next question about some of the decisions you've made with the intent of changing school culture. You mentioned and we focused a lot on involving students. Tell me about teachers and counselors...
28. (specific follow up) You mentioned paying it forward. You talked about bringing in other schools, other districts, other high schools. Tell me how that's gone and I'm not really sure how to formulate this question. It's a fine line between partnership and rivalry. Tell me about that.
29. (specific follow up) So how do you get that money?
30. Tell me about a comment from the first interview. You said the biggest complaint that teachers had was that our school's culture wasn't real strong. What did you mean by that...?
31. When you got these reports, what was the kind of person who would say that report? I'm wondering, as you come into the building, you're the new guy. Can you characterize the kind of person or how would that comment be shared?
32. Would you say those comments came from a lot of people? Were they disgruntled? ... Were they average? Were they strong? Were they leaders?
33. What did you do to validate teacher reports concerning school culture or their requests and recommendations?
34. What are your most important projects? Talk about some that you haven't mentioned.
35. Were there any barriers that you encountered to your initiatives?
36. (follow up) There wasn't a go to person for discipline?
37. The first interview and you've already talked a little bit about this too. The first interview talked about the time lag between your hire and moving in. What was the significance there? Was it positive, negative?
38. (follow up) Did you have a plan or a schedule, or some kind of a way that you approached getting information?
39. (follow up) Now you mentioned about relying on the directors. Especially because they knew the people, they knew the players; they could probably share some inside story that wasn't written in the folders. How did you digest that?
40. (follow up) Did you uncover with those stories, relationships and alliances that made it either positive or negative?
41. (follow up) Tell me about, you mentioned earlier and this ties right back into it, the reliance on the directors because you were out of district. *What kind of support ... was there any kind of a program?
42. (follow up) Was there any vacancies or did you make a lot of faculty adjustments?
43. (follow up) You talked about the time lag. And you mentioned that you always want more time. But the time lag served your benefit. But tell me about some of the things that you wish you had more time for.
44. What's the difference in preparing for the school year from being an AP to being principal?
45. (follow up) Regarding collaboration with school people, the process of negotiating the final product, that gives you ownership and them ownership.

Interview 3:

46. Describe Dunn's legacy here.
47. Can you pick out elements of your school culture that remain from his era?
48. If you had to choose one word to describe the transition from Dunn's tenure to yours, what would it be?
49. How do you approach school improvement as principal?
50. Share with me about some of your experiences with the school improvement process since your arrival.
51. How do you approach decision-making?
52. How would you describe your leadership style?
53. Tell me about the School Improvement Team. How were they selected? Terms of membership?
54. With regard to School Improvement, what support have you received?
55. How do you want to be described?
56. Describe what you think makes a good school?
57. What is keeping your school from exemplary student achievement?
58. Sarason described used the term context to refer to the set of expectations and rules within which a school functions. He included community members, parents, school board office, teachers within the system, and students. Do you find this term applicable to your experience here? Has the school's context had on your tenure.
59. How do stake holder perceptions impact school initiatives and daily operations?
60. How do you measure the quality of your school's culture?
61. (From previous interview) What did you do to validate teacher reports concerning school culture or their requests and recommendations?
62. What are some decisions you've made with the intent of changing school culture?

Appendix D:

Survey

Introduction

This is an adjusted copy of the survey sent to the school leadership team members as submitted by the inbound principal. I have removed specific references contained in the original survey. Each question was followed by 2 inches of space to allow survey respondents to print the survey and write on it or to type on the electronic copy before printing it. This extra space has been deleted to shorten this appendix.

You are being asked to participate in a survey research project entitled “Leadership Succession in a Rural Georgia High School, a Historical Case Study,” which is being conducted by *Robert Dechman*, a student at Valdosta State University. The purpose of this research is to investigate school performance under the tenure of two school leaders and examine the impact leadership succession has had on your school.

This survey is anonymous. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to take the survey, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your completion of the survey serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 or older.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Robert Dechman at 229-226-4968 or rmdechman@valdosta.edu. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-259-5045 or irb@valdosta.edu.

The following questions refer to school improvement during Dunn’s tenure.

1. Describe the leadership style of Dunn.
2. Describe the process of writing the school improvement plan.
3. How did teachers provide input on the school improvement plan?

4. Describe the amount of changes from year to year that were reflected in the school improvement plan.
5. How would you describe school culture during Dunn's years?
6. Evaluate the quality of your school in 2008.

The following questions refer to school improvement during Nix's tenure.

7. Describe the leadership style of Nix.
8. Describe the process of writing the school improvement plan.
9. How do teachers provide input on the school improvement plan?
10. Describe the amount of changes from year to year that are reflected in the school improvement plan.
11. How would you describe school culture now?
12. Evaluate the quality of your school in 2011.

The following questions will reference ask for you to compare Dunn and Nix.

13. Describe how Dunn and Nix are similar.
14. Describe how Dunn and Nix differ.
15. Briefly describe the transition from Dunn to Nix?
16. Is there anything else about this transition you would like to tell me?

17. Do you have any other comments?

Appendix E:
Informed Consent

Appendix E

VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY
Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled “**Leadership Succession in a Rural Georgia High School, A Historical Case Study.**” This research project is being conducted by **Robert Dechman**, a student in the Department of Curriculum, Leadership and Technology at Valdosta State University. The researcher has explained to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask the researcher any questions you have to help you understand this project and your possible participation in it. A basic explanation of the research is given below. Please read this carefully and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have. The University asks that you give your signed agreement if you wish to participate in this research project.

Purpose of the Research: This study involves research. The purpose of this project is to report the experiences and meaning derived by each participant as it related to school leadership. The researcher hopes to discover how school leaders have responded to their experiences in the formulation of their agenda for leadership and accomplishment of their duties.

This historical case study will present the experience of leadership transition by using imbedded portraits of two school principals at a rural Georgia high school. The researcher will create a portrait of the school by placing it in the context of the community and the leaders who have guided school performance.

Procedures:

As the past or current principal of a rural Georgia High School, you are being asked to participate in a series of interviews for a historical case study of leadership succession. The interviews will consist of open-ended questions with follow-up questions to your responses and clarification questions. The questions will be about your opinions and experiences in school improvement and your recent transition from/to the principal position. Before the first interview, I will conduct a site visit and will include discussion of noted artifacts and processes in the interviews. You will be asked to conduct a brief orientation and tour, and then allow me to observe school activities such as the mail-room, a school improvement team meeting, lunch, library time, class transitions, etc. You will be asked to follow up the observation with a debriefing interview. You will be asked to share school communications such as faculty communications, weekly calendars, newsletters, and other artifacts including, school-related archives such as yearbooks, student publications and media, news articles and displays at the school or in the district as they relate to the rural Georgia High School.

The number of interviews in which you are being asked to participate are not known; however, each interview will likely last from 60 to 90 minutes, and you are being asked to commit a total of ten hours over the course of the next three months for completion of interviews, which will be scheduled at your convenience. All interviews will be audio taped and transcribed for analysis and follow-up. You will be given the opportunity to review a transcript of each interview to give feedback and clarify comments. You will also be given the

opportunity to review and give feedback on the dissertation manuscript prior to the researcher submitting it for defense.

The second part of the study involves surveying members of the school improvement team. Themes identified from the principals' interviews will be used to construct an anonymous survey about experiences with leadership succession and school improvement activities that will be distributed to these individuals. Finally, members of the school improvement team will be interviewed to develop the context of details from interviews and surveys.

Possible Risks or Discomfort:

It is possible that you may be uncomfortable with the introspection caused by being asked for the rationale for certain decisions or actions. It is possible you may be uncomfortable with the way your leadership style is characterized by survey participants. It is anticipated that these risks would be minimal and would probably not involve any degree of harm to you. By agreeing to participate in this research project, you are not waiving any rights that you may have against Valdosta State University for injury resulting from negligence of the University or its researchers.

Potential Benefits:

Although you may not benefit directly from this research, your participation will help the researcher gain additional understanding of the process of leadership succession. Knowledge gained may contribute to addressing needed support systems and continuous school improvement.

Costs and Compensation:

There are no costs to you and there is no compensation (no money, gifts, or services) for your participation in this research project.

Assurance of Confidentiality:

Valdosta State University and the researcher will keep your information confidential to the extent allowed by law. Members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a university committee charged with reviewing research to ensure the rights and welfare of research participants, may be given access to your confidential information.

Interviews will be recorded with a digital recorder. Recordings will be transcribed and coded for analysis. Interview recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer for the duration of the research project. The researcher will assign pseudonyms at the time of transcription of interviews. A list of pseudonyms will be maintained in an envelope stored in a locked file cabinet for the duration of the research project. Results of interviews will be reported referenced by pseudonym to ensure that quotes will not be directly linked to the participants.

Surveys will be given anonymously, and resulting data will be cited without attributing quotes to specific participants. Survey documents will be stored in a locked file cabinet until the completion of research.

At the conclusion of the research, recorded data will be erased from the computer with a commercially available software package that deletes and overwrites files from the hard drive of the storage computer as well as the recording device. At the conclusion of research, transcripts of interviews, surveys and pseudonym lists will be stored in a locked file cabinet for an additional 3 years, and then will be destroyed by shredding and burning.

Data from this study will be reported as part of the fulfillment of the doctoral dissertation. As such all or part of the resulting work may be published.

Appendix F:
Institutional Review Board Approval



**Institutional Review Board (IRB)
for the Protection of Human Research Participants**

NEW PROTOCOL REVIEW REPORT

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-02396-2009

INVESTIGATOR: Robert Dechman

PROJECT TITLE: Leadership Succession in a Rural Georgia High School, a Historical Case Study

APPROVAL DATE: May 18, 2009

EXPIRATION DATE: May 17, 2010

LEVEL OF RISK:

- Minimal
- More than Minimal

TYPE OF REVIEW:

- Expedited (Categories 5, 6 and 7))
- Convened (Full Board)

DETERMINATION:

- This research protocol is approved. If you are using an informed consent form, you will receive a copy of the form, which bears an IRB approval stamp, in the mail in the next few days. Please use this stamped consent form as the master when making copies for use with participants. Once you receive the stamped consent form, you may begin your research project. Please also see Attachment 1 for additional important information for researchers.
- The approval of this protocol is pending. You may **not** begin your research until you have addressed the following concerns/questions and the IRB has formally notified you of approval. You may send your responses to irb@valdosta.edu.

This approval is valid only for conducting interviews with the two principals. When you have developed the survey questions (and possible interview topics) for the School Improvement Team members, please submit these with a protocol modification request for approval by the IRB before implementing those activities.

Rich Vodde

Rich Vodde, IRB Chair

9/14/10

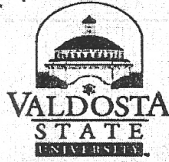
Date

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.

Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-259-5045.

cc: Dr. Don Leech (Dept. Head)
Dr. Richard Schmertzing (Advisor)

Form Revised: 10.26.2007



**Institutional Review Board
for the Protection of Human Research Participants
PROTOCOL CONTINUATION REVIEW REPORT**

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-02396-2009

INVESTIGATOR: Robert Dechman

PROJECT TITLE: Leadership succession in a rural Georgia high school, a historical case study

CONTINUATION APPROVAL DATE: April 14, 2010

NEW EXPIRATION DATE: May 17, 2011

- TYPE OF REVIEW:**
- Expedited review of previously expedited protocol
 - Expedited Review Category 8 - Review of a protocol previously approved through convened review where:
 - The research involves no greater than minimal risk and no additional risks have been identified; or
 - The research is permanently closed to enrollment of new participants, all participants have completed all research-related interventions, and the research remains active only for long-term follow-up of participants; or
 - No participants have been enrolled and no additional risks have been identified; or
 - The remaining research activities are limited to data analysis
 - Convened review

DETERMINATION:

- Protocol continuation is approved for an additional 12 months through the New Expiration Date noted above. If you are using an informed consent form, you will receive a copy of the form, which bears an updated IRB approval stamp, in the mail in the next few days. If you are still enrolling participants in your study, please use this updated consent form as the copy master as soon as you receive it. Please also remember the following:
 1. You must receive IRB approval for any protocol modifications prior to implementing them.
 2. You must report to the IRB, through the Office of Grants & Contracts, any unanticipated problems or adverse events which become apparent during the course or as a result of the research and the actions you have taken.
 3. You may not conduct research activities involving participants or data about them (including interaction, intervention, data collection, and data analysis) beyond the expiration date noted above.
- Protocol continuation approval is pending. You may not implement the proposed changes until you have addressed the following concerns/questions and the IRB has formally notified you of approval. You may send your responses to irb@valdosta.edu.

Rich Vodde _____ Date: April 14, 2010
Rich Vodde, IRB Chair

*Thank you for submitting a continuation request.
Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-259-5045.*

cc: Dr. Don Lech (Dept. Head)
Dr. Richard Schmertzling (Advisor)