Portraits of Six Successful Principals: Context and Components of Effective Leadership

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Matt Shawn Utley

Ed.S., Valdosta State University, 1999
M.Ed., Valdosta State University, 1994
B.A., Valdosta State University, 1990

This dissertation: "Portraits of Six Successful Principals: Context and Components of Effective Leadership," by Matt Shawn Utley, is approved by:

Dissertation Committee Chair

_____
Dr. Richard W. Schmertzing
Associate Professor of Educational Leadership

Committee Members

_____
Dr. Chet Ballard
Professor of Sociology

_____
Dr. Ronny Green, III
Associate Professor of Educational Leadership

_____
Dr. Lorraine Clevenger-Schmertzing
Assistant Professor of Curriculum
& Instructional Technology

Dean of the College of Education

_____
Dr. Phillip L. Gunter
Professor of Special Education and
Communication Disorders

Dean of the Graduate School

_____
Dr. Brian U. Adler
Professor of English

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined effective leadership from the perspective of five elementary school principals as it pertains to school improvement. The researcher sought to understand what effective leadership was in practice to further the understanding of the attributes and qualities of an effective leader. Purposeful sampling was used to select five principals from five school sites in five different school districts in the State of Georgia.

Five principals were interviewed and tape-recorded, and field notes were also maintained. Other data sources included a teacher survey, researcher observations of principals, relevant school documents, and a five-day journal of activities maintained by each principal. The MaxQDA qualitative data analysis computer software was used to organize data into coded sections. These data were then analyzed using the grounded theory approach as the dominant method of analysis.

Data from each case were analyzed both separately and as cross cases. Findings essential to each principal's system of school operation were reported using portraiture in which seven common themes emerged: (a) ability to build and nurture positive relationships with faculty, (b) strong instructional leadership, (c) sharing of power, (d) providing meaningful professional development, (e) use of data to guide instruction, (f) value parent involvement and foster positive home/school relations, and (g) use of curriculum guides for effective instructional delivery.

Findings of characteristics that were essential to each principal's analytical operation of his or her school, identified as "best practices," were analyzed from which ten common themes emerged. These themes were: (a) school culture and climate, (b) assessment of student progress, (c) strong instructional leadership combined with

effective instruction, (d) home/school relations, (e) effective use of resources, (f) building the capacity for leadership, (g) meaningful professional development, (h) assembling and mentoring a faculty, (i) external support and assistance, and (j) targeting at-risk students.

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PREFACE

This dissertation is the story of 6 successful principals. They fostered not just ordinary success but success in schools that have traditionally been the most intractable—those with high percentages of minority and low-income students. The six principals portrayed in this study (one of whom was me) all began with schools that were labeled as needs improvement (NI) and took them to five consecutive years of making adequate yearly progress (AYP).

My intention in this dissertation was to produce a narrative of success—of principals and their schools. I hoped to do that in a way that would be engaging and perhaps even inspiring for readers looking for ways to improve schools, looking for models of effective leadership, and looking for ways to increase student achievement—particularly for the most disenfranchised students. Thus I choose not to follow the traditional format for constructing a dissertation. In an effort to allow the reader to move through this narrative unencumbered by accounts of the more technical aspects of the study, I have moved the literature review, the discussion of methodology, and the definitions of technical terms to appendices. Readers interested in approaching this study in a more traditional manner should begin with the introduction (Chapter 1), then read the literature review (Appendix A), then the discussion of terms related to AYP (Appendix C), then the methodology section (Appendix B), and then return to the main text (Chapter 3). Those who prefer to read the account as a story may read the chapters through in order, reading the appendices as needed, at the end, or not at all.

The first account I will present is my own. I am a former elementary school principal that began my first job as a principal with seven years of teaching experience

and two years of administrative experience as an assistant principal. In a qualitative study such as this one, where the researcher is the "instrument" that gathers and interprets the data, it is important that the reader have a clear sense of the researcher's perspectives and biases—in short, where he is coming from. That need to unmask my own subjectivities and to give the reader a sense of how my experience might have shaped the way I approached and conducted this study, was the reason I began with my own story.

Chapter 1 introduces the research problem and research questions. It also establishes the context of the problem, the purpose of the study, the conceptual framework, and the significance of the study. From there, this study moves directly into Chapter 2, the personal narrative of my experiences as an elementary school principal. Like the five principals in this study, I too was the principal of a high minority, high poverty school that had not made AYP prior to my taking the job as principal of the school. In addition, like the five participants in this study, I too took over a NI school and led them to making AYP.

Chapter 3 of this study is the presentation of data of the five principals in this study as it relates to their systemic leadership characteristics. Through the use of portraiture, I attempted to present these leaders from the integrated, systemic perspective within cases. In Chapter 4, the reader will find the collective portraits, presenting the decontextualized, analytic leadership characteristics of the five principals in this study across cases. Finally, in Chapter 5, the reader will find the conclusions drawn from the data collected for this study.

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To Dr. Phillip Utley, my father and best friend, I thank you for the wisdom you have imparted on me throughout my life, for the financial support you have given me to further my education, and most of all, for the example you set for your children and grandchildren to value education.

To my mom, Dorothy Utley, I thank you for all you have done for me and my family over the years and I thank you for the example you set for me with your dedication to the profession of teaching for 30 years. I also thank you for taking care of the kids all of those long nights and weekends I spent at the office working on this study.

To Dr. Darlene Bruner, Dr. Martha Livingston, and Dr. Larry Davis, I thank you for your support and encouragement to embark upon this entire doctoral journey. You have all influenced and inspired me both personally and professionally. Thanks.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my wife, Melisa Utley and to my two wonderful children, Nick and Katelyn.

To Nick, I apologize for missing the ball games and weekends in the yard spending time with you over the past year, but I know it will pay off in the end. I'm glad you are old enough to be able to remember what I have done to achieve this milestone in my life and I hope it will inspire you to work hard at everything you do.

To Katie, I also apologize for missing the ball games and the time I could not spend with you while working on this study. I know you too will remember the time and effort I put into this study and let it be an inspiration to you.

And to Melisa, I love you. Thanks for always supporting me and being my biggest fan. Without you, I never could have done this.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The Research Project

This dissertation is a study of five State of Georgia elementary school principals. These principals present their perspectives on leadership and discuss some of the educational practices, conditions, and events they have experienced while leading their schools out of Needs Improvement (NI) into making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). (See Appendix C for AYP details). In addition to the study of these five elementary school principals, I present a personal narrative as another principal, and as researcher of this study. The personal narrative provides an in-depth examination of how I, as principal, succeeded in moving the elementary school from NI into AYP.

Problem Statement

Given the vast amount of theoretical knowledge about effective leadership, how do educators transfer the ideas of effective leadership into practice? After all, it is evident that educators know a great deal about effective leadership, so why does not school improvement occur in all schools? This research attempts to discover the qualities of effective leaders and also attempts to describe effective leaders in operational terms through a descriptive portrayal of five elementary school principals who have been able to move schools from NI into AYP. I also provide a personal narrative of my experience as an elementary school principal. I took charge of Turner County Elementary School in 1999. Over the next five years, we made five consecutive years of improvement on end-

of-the-year testing and were able to move out of NI. In 2004, Turner County Elementary School earned the AYP designation for the first time in the history of the school

Context of the Problem

School improvement efforts have taken many forms throughout the history of education. Research has shown the relationship of school effectiveness to many other interrelated components. For example, Edmonds (1979) identified correlates of effective schools, with one of those correlates being "strong instructional leadership." More recently, Marzono (2003) identifies the need for strong instructional leadership in effective school improvement efforts. Educational research has long supported the belief that the principal of the school has an impact on student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

Most people, whether well-schooled in the art of education or not, can postulate that it takes a great leader at the helm of a school to accomplish great things. But what are the things that make the leader great? The *American Heritage Dictionary* (2004) defines a leader as someone or something that shows the way, directs, escorts, leads, pilots, or shepherds. The definition goes on to read that a leader is a "boss, chief, headman, hierarch, or master." All of these terms describe a leader, but no one term by itself can define a leader. Researchers usually define leadership according to their individual perspectives and the aspect of the phenomenon most interesting to them (Yukl, 1989).

Bennis and Nanus (1985) define leadership as the "wise use of power" (p. 127) and ascertain that the purest forms of leadership empower people to overcome their trained incapacity. They find that organizations that are over-managed and under-led are very often failing organizations.

On the other hand, there is the argument that the overall effectiveness of an organization has little or nothing to do with leadership (Sheppard, 1996). The socioeconomic make-up of a school, the prevailing culture of the school, and other factors that constrain the structure and process of the school make the difference between the school's effectiveness and ineffectiveness.

Blase and Blase (1999), in their research reviewing the writing and research of others who call for the demonstration of instructional leadership by principals, find no common definition for the term. Principals often define their administrative responsibility to their teachers as that of an instructional leader, but they do not operationally define that term, leaving the final interpretation of the administrator's claim up to the teacher (Blase & Blase). Therefore, the relationship between the administrators and teachers can be confusing, allowing the possibility of individual teachers having unique perspectives on the role of the principals.

So the questions that remain unanswered are these: What do effective principals have in common? Can their actions and attributes be recognized and documented? How do effective principals initiate and sustain school improvement efforts? What is the relationship between effective school leaders and the structural, cultural, and systemic nature of the institutions they lead?

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued the report, *A Nation at Risk*. The report states, "Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purpose of schooling and of the high expectations and disciplined effort required to attain them" (p. 3). It is the job of the principal of the school to maintain the line of sight, the high expectations, and the disciplined effort to assure

that school improvement is a continuous process (Utley, 2005). Thus, there is a need for research on the principal's leadership roles to answer the question, "What is an effective leader?"

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to discover the leadership characteristics manifested by principals who lead effective schools and the relationship between those characteristics to leadership style as it affects school improvement. Through my experiences as a principal, I have formed the opinion that leadership occurs through two very distinct actions: What one actually does to improve instruction and student learning and how one's interactions with the people in the organization affect the dynamics of the organization. Therefore, this study identifies the best practices of the five participants and myself and reveals each principal's analytical method of operation in an effort to document what each principal does to improve instruction and student learning. A cross-case analysis of the five principals using the *grounded theory* method of data analysis achieves this identification. This study also identifies behaviors and interactions that are essential to each principal's system of operation, accomplished through the data analysis method known as *portraiture,* with which I examine each principal in the context of the school culture.

The purpose for using the grounded theory and portraiture to analyze data was to provide the reader with two different perspectives on how to view *leadership*. The analytical approach to leadership, more commonly known as "best practices," involves identifying the decontextualized essential components of what principals actually do to improve student achievement and instruction independently, or in conjunction with other

methods of school improvement. Best practices accomplish a singular goal, which is to improve or make better a specified characteristic of teaching or learning.

The *systemic approach* to leadership is much more difficult to define. How does a principal interact with members of an organization such that those interactions shape and are shaped by the culture of the school? What does the principal value about teaching and learning that permeates every aspect of teaching and learning? Moreover, and most importantly, what are the values within a school that without one of them, the system would cease to function effectively?

To describe the systems approach with an analogy—a $40,000 car with no gas will not perform as intended. Every single essential component of the car must be operational in order for the entire vehicle to function well. Without any one of them, the car becomes useless. This analogy clearly represents the importance of a system functioning as a whole in order to achieve its intended purpose. How does this analogy apply to educational leadership and how will such an analogy translate into my becoming a successful leader? I identify the actions that each principal values, and that are essential to each principal's system of operation. The absence of any of these actions will disrupt his or her system of operation. I intentionally use terminology that is associated with "best practices" so that the description of the principal's actions will be familiar to the reader and make it easier to associate with the terminology used.

I am particularly interested in revealing successful principals' experiences regarding leading NI schools into AYP schools. Through this study, I aim to increase the limited body of existing literature relative to Georgia elementary school principals

working in high minority, high poverty educational settings and their role in improving the quality of educational experiences.

The Research Questions

The central question answered through this research is: "How do successful principals account for their successes?" In order to find the best answer to this question, I formulated interview questions around what I already knew about effective leadership and answered the following questions: What do effective principals do differently? Do the principals operate under a clear and focused mission? What are the standards and expectations of the students within the school? What are the standards and expectations of the teachers in the school? How involved are principals in curricular issues? How important is reviewing data in the process of school improvement? What type of learning environment exists within the school? Is family and community involvement important to the school? Is teacher collaboration and teambuilding present? How does the principal improve teaching? How do principals spend their time and energy? What guides the decision-making process of principals?

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it makes known the attitudes, philosophies, and beliefs of successful school principals. Studies of leadership practices nationwide do not necessarily apply to Georgia elementary school principals in typically rural, high minority, high poverty school systems. Such information is an essential backdrop for understanding the ongoing and yet to be accomplished school improvement efforts that are taking place. This understanding is particularly significant in view of the fact that only 7% of the public schools in the State of Georgia have made AYP for three or more

consecutive years, .06% for four or more consecutive years, .04% for five or more consecutive years, and .02% for six or more consecutive years (GDOE, 2005).

Therefore, research data in this area has value in either confirming or negating or, perhaps, simply adding additional information to the existing sources of information. This type of study has value because it does not simply attempt to isolate the "best practices" of principals in high poverty and high minority areas. It attempts to draw portraits of those principals in a way that show the variety of approaches that can lead to school success and the significance of understanding successful school leaders in the cultural context of the schools and their communities.

Conceptual Framework

This study was conducted under the assumption that there are two ways of approaching leadership—*systemically* or *analytically*. The systemic approach to leadership is a holistic, cultural, and highly context-dependent perspective. The analytic approach is an abstract, characteristics-type approach. Both the systemic approach and the analytic approach to leadership are discussed in the review of literature, which can be found in Appendix A.

What is the problem when we talk about effective leadership? More specifically, what is the problem when we try to implement effective leadership? There is a plethora of literature on effective leadership, so why can't every new principal be given a list of characteristics to implement, have them implement it, and thus turn the school around from a failing school into as successful school? I would argue that you could not do it because every school, every faculty, every student population, every community, and

every principal is different. You cannot just abstract information from the literature and expect it to be applicable to all environments, all cultures, and all systems.

If we only look at the best practices of school leaders, that in itself is not enough. Yes, it is interesting to examine people who have proven to be effective leaders and see if indeed they are doing these things and to what extent and in what combination they are doing them. An examination of the utilization of best practices of each of the participants in this study has been conducted through a cross case analysis using the grounded theory approach. Grounded theory allowed me to develop a theory of effective leadership from a grounded theory analysis across cases. The findings from the grounded theory study are presented to the reader in Chapter IV, which is the cross case analysis of the five principals in this study.

The other means of analyzing the participants in this study is through a holistic, interdependent, context-dependent process of being an effective leader in a real school context. Methodologically, portraiture provides a narrative description of the participants in this study. This approach to presenting the findings of this study is related to the idea that it is not enough to merely look at the existing situation to know what characteristics an effective leader possesses. Portraiture is used to facilitate the translation of the characteristics of an effective leader as these characteristics are found in each of the principal's unique circumstances of their schools.

I began this study with a personal narrative of my experience as an elementary school principal. Like the five principals in this study, I too was the principal of a high minority, high SES school that had not made AYP prior to my taking the job as principal of the school. In addition, like the five participants in this study, I too took over a NI

school and led it to making it AYP. I began with the personal narrative in an attempt to give the reader a greater understanding of my experiences in school improvement efforts. I offer this personal narrative as a self-portrait to provide another case of success of the phenomena that I am trying to understand and to give the reader an insight into who I am and where my biases and subjectivity stems from.

Chapter II

PERSONAL NARRATIVE

In 1990, I began my career in education as a science and physical education instructor at Coffee County High School. For the next seven years, I spent my days teaching school and my afternoons coaching. During these seven years of coaching, I served as an assistant football coach, head track coach, head wrestling coach, head soccer coach, and head golf coach. I graduated from Valdosta State College (VSU) in 1990 with a degree in Health and Physical Education, and because I received such joy from my high school and college football careers, I thought my call in life was to be a teacher and a coach. After a few years of coaching and teaching, I decided to go back to school and work on a Master's degree in Educational Leadership. To be honest, my reasoning for going back to school for another degree was purely monetary. I graduated from Valdosta State University with my Master's degree and continued to enjoy coaching and the pay raise.

Nineteen-ninety-seven proved to be a career-changing year for me. For it was in that year that I enrolled in the Educational Specialist Program at VSU. I first enrolled in the Educational Specialist program for the same reason I enrolled in the Master's program—the money. However, my career goals changed very soon after I began the program. I met Dr. Darlene Bruner and Dr. Martha Livingston. They were the instructors of the first two classes that I enrolled in, and they quickly instilled their passion of educational leadership in me. I learned a lot from these two professors both in class and

outside class. They both had a great influence on my desire to become a school administrator.

Not too long after enrolling in the Educational Specialist Program at VSU, I was offered a job as an elementary school assistant principal in another school system. I wanted to get into administration, so my family and I packed up and moved to Turner County in 1997, where I began my administrative career. My first year as an assistant principal at the elementary school was much like any other administrator's first year, relegated to handling discipline and bus duty and any other jobs that could be delegated to an assistant.

After one year at the elementary level, I took an assistant principal job at the middle school in the same school system. My year at the middle school proved to be very similar to my elementary school experience. I handled discipline and made sure everyone got off and on the right bus everyday. It was also during this year at the middle school that I completed my Educational Specialist degree. I felt confident, should a principal's job open up in the system, I was more than ready for the challenge.

As luck would have it, after one year at the middle school, I had the opportunity to move again. I was at home during the summer cutting grass one day and the superintendent of my school system pulled into my driveway. I got off the lawnmower, wearing nothing but shorts and flip-flops, and walked over to talk to the superintendent. He told me that the elementary school principal had just resigned and wanted to know if I wanted the position. I often say that I am probably the only principal ever to go to a job interview not wearing a shirt and still got the job. Despite my inappropriate dress and very little time to contemplate what I would be getting myself into, I jumped at the

opportunity to take the principal's position The next morning I reported to Turner County Elementary School where I would be the third grade through fifth grade principal for the next two years.

Before I begin describing my personal experience as an elementary school principal, I think it is important that the reader know a little more about the type of school in which I began my career as a principal. Turner County Elementary School (TCES) is the only elementary school in the county. They experience a relatively steady enrollment, averaging about 800 students per year. About 75% of the student population participates in the free or reduced lunch program. The racial make-up of the school is 65% African American, 34% White, and 1% Hispanic. Currently, there are approximately 90 certified teachers housed in a modern educational facility with one principal and two assistant principals, along with additional support staff.

In 1988, TCES applied for and received federal money to become a school-wide Title I school. By participating in Title I, a voluntary federal program that provided more than $11 billion to participating states to help educate low-income children, states agree to commit themselves to the goal of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*: that all students will be proficient in language arts and mathematics, as determined by state assessments, by 2014. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is a series of performance goals set by the state for each school district and school, as well as for the state as a whole. From 1988 to 1999, TCES failed to make adequate yearly progress in meeting the performance goals set forth by the Title I program. Therefore, for eleven consecutive years, TCES was a needs improvement school and was in danger of losing Title I funding and facing reorganization by the Georgia Department of Education (GDOE). It takes three

consecutive years of improvement on end-of-the-year testing to move off the needs improvement list.

At the time that I took the job as 3-5 principal, I thought the two years I served as an assistant would have been indoctrination enough to handle the job as principal. In retrospect, I could not have been more wrong. The school that I was going to was one school building, divided into two schools, Turner County Elementary and Turner County Primary. There was a K-2 principal and a 3-5 principal on the same campus, sharing facilities, secretaries, exploratory teachers, and one assistant principal. The K-2 principal had been an elementary school principal in the system for more than ten years. She was on vacation when I reported to work for my first day during the summer. I found my office that day with no problem. However, my office was the only thing I could find. Everyone else was gone. To say the least, I was overwhelmed. I had no idea where to begin. I had never assigned students to classes. I had never made out a daily schedule that included academic subjects, exploratory classes, lunch, recess, and everything else that goes into a schedule. I had never been totally responsible for developing a student handbook or a teacher's handbook. This was just the beginning of the many challenges that I would face.

As the time drew near for school to start, teachers started showing up on campus. I thought this would be great because now I could solicit ideas and gather information on issues involving curriculum and student learning. However, that wish was short-lived. The teachers who were coming to school during the summer did not want to "talk school." They wanted desks moved, classrooms rearranged, and pencil sharpeners installed. They wanted to know when their supplies and re-covered books would show up

in their classrooms. On top of that, they told me about certain students that were in their class that I needed to move to another class for one reason or another. They told me about the teachers that needed to retire and the one's that thought they knew everything. I heard about divorces, adoptions, pregnancies, and births. They gave me all types of great advice on how to make their jobs easier and how I should do things. Additionally, when classroom rosters came out, parents started calling, wanting certain teachers and special favors. I actually had a parent call and ask for a student who she did not like to be moved out of her child's classroom. Being the new guy and not wanting to alienate anyone early in my career as a principal, I listened to every concern and piece of advice that was shared with me.

As the year was about to begin, things became more difficult for me. I was working side-by-side with a long-standing principal. She was set in her ways which made it difficult for me to initiate changes that I thought I needed to make to be successful in my new job. Both schools, the primary and the elementary schools, had been Title I Needs Improvement schools for eleven consecutive years. Therefore, I was intent on doing things differently and trying to change the way things "had always been done." Now my biggest problem was determining where to start.

I knew I was relatively inexperienced as an administrator, but I also knew that things would not change if I did not initiate the change. I knew I needed some help, so I picked up the phone and called Dr. Bruner. As I mentioned earlier, she was one of the people who had inspired me to become an administrator, so I felt she was partly responsible for the mess I was in and she needed to help me get started. Looking back, I was extremely fortunate to have a mentor to guide me through my first year. Dr. Bruner

had many years of experience as an elementary school principal and had many years of experience in training school administrators as a college professor. She held my hand through my first year as a principal. She was available either by phone or through emails on a daily basis to answer questions and offer advice. She provided me with research-based materials (journal articles, books, and her personal collection of school administrator documents) that I constantly read and re-read to make sure that actions I took and decisions I made were in the best interest of the children at my school.

Dr. Bruner's first piece of advice to me was to make sure that I did not "bite off more than I could chew" my first year. She suggested that I look at school performance data and find one major weakness to focus on and to concentrate all of my academic efforts on this one weakness. After many days of pouring over school performance data, and many meetings with a school leadership team that I was able to pull together during the summer months, Dr. Bruner, the leadership team, and I decided that I place the focus on the apparent weakness in the writing skills of TCES students. There was no organized curriculum throughout the school to address writing delivery, and my goal was to bring an organized writing program to fruition. In retrospect, the writing program needed to be very comprehensive and cover all grade levels (K-5). However, the K-2 principal was not interested in helping develop a school-wide writing program.

Undeterred, the leadership team of 3-5 teachers that I assembled began work to develop a writing program. On the first day of pre-planning, we revealed an action plan to develop a writing program for the entire 3-5 faculty. There was no discussion of whether or not we were going to do it. However, there was much discussion of how we would do it. I wanted the writing program to be the teachers' work so they would take

ownership and use what they were about to develop. I hired Dr. Bruner as a consultant, and she and I met with the TCES teachers on several occasions during the first month of school. She provided both the teachers and me with information on research-based writing skills that teachers should incorporate into an effective writing program. She also helped us make decisions as to what we wanted to incorporate in the program and what we did not need. At the end of the first month of school, after many hours of meetings and many hours of individual working time, we produced a document that we named "The Write Stuff," and made a copy for every teacher in the school.

I made frequent observations during the school year to make sure that everyone was following the writing curriculum we had designed. Writing was taking the entire school day, not just during our usual language arts segments. Students were writing about how they solved math problems, they were writing science essays, they were writing about how to kick a ball in physical education, and students were constantly displaying writing samples throughout the school, in the classrooms, and in the hallways.

After students read a story, they were writing about what they had just read. We held writing contests within the school and awarded prizes. We entered every local, regional, and state writing competition we could find. In January, the fifth grade students took the *Fifth Grade Writing Test*. The percentage of students scoring on or above grade level rose from 61% to 84%. (*Note*: Five years later, my last year as principal, 99% of fifth graders scored on or above grade level). Writing became a pervasive theme throughout the school year. At the end of the school year, on the end-of-year testing, our test scores had improved from the previous years' scores. Thus, we had completed step one in making adequate yearly progress in the elementary school.

Since the primary and elementary schools were together in the same building, the Georgia Department of Education coded the schools as one school. Despite the fact that 3-5 ITBS scores had improved significantly during my first year as principal, we did not make progress towards making AYP because the primary school did not make the required improvements on the end of year testing.

However, the elementary teachers were excited about the improvements we made on end-of-year testing and were anxious to take on additional challenges. The second year I was principal, I presented two goals during pre-planning to my teachers. First, to teach the writing program with the same intensity and in the same manner as we did the previous year and second, to develop a plan to improve reading scores. Because of the success we had the previous year with our writing program, accepting a new challenge was not difficult for my teachers to embrace. We went about improving reading scores in the same manner as we did developing a writing program. I formed a leadership team for reading improvement. I met with teachers, teachers met in grade level meetings, and everyone conducted personal research to find a reading program that would meet the needs of our students. The most amazing thing that I observed during my second year as principal was the willingness of my teachers to admit that we needed help in learning how to teach reading. Almost every teacher acknowledged a personal need for in-service training on how to become a more effective reading teacher. It was also amazing to me to see the teachers work together to develop a plan of how to address our weakness in this area of reading. They looked at many different programs and at the end of the process, realized that no one specific program would work. Rather, the teachers identified instructional weaknesses that they needed to address.

The first weakness that we identified was that we all needed to spend more one-on-one time teaching reading to our students. How could we do that without hiring more teachers? We answered that question through a couple of different approaches. First, we retained a reading specialist to come into our school and teach us how to teach our students through guided reading. Next, we found a reading program that met the needs of our students by allowing us to instruct them on their individual level and less as an entire group, thus utilizing the guided reading techniques we were learning. It was difficult at first because teachers had to give up traditional ownership of "their" students. We tested and re-tested every student at the beginning of the school year to make sure that we had leveled them properly, and then we assigned a level to each and every student in the school. We designated the first two hours of school as "school-wide reading time" and students went to different classes to receive reading instruction. Some third grade teachers taught some of the fourth grade students who were reading on a lower level and some of the fifth grade teachers taught third grade students who were reading on a much higher level. The lower level students were in small groups and the higher level students were in somewhat larger groups. This allowed teachers to devote more one-on-one time to the struggling students and accelerate their progress. Instead of the old "keep up if you can" mentality that was previously common at TCES, we developed an "I'm going to help you catch up" mentality.

Another means of addressing our reading deficiencies was through the institution of the Accelerated Reader (AR) program. Through our AR program, students were able to earn points and reap rewards for reading on their own. As a reward for earning AR points, students could earn prizes and earn the right to participate in the Principal's

Picnic. For the Principal's Picnic, I brought in a real climbing wall, an air bag obstacle course, a water slide, and a variety of carnival type activities. We cooked hamburgers and hotdogs for the students and allowed them to spend the day playing and enjoying themselves as a reward for doing well with the AR program. Students were learning to become independent readers and to read for enjoyment.

Our media center experienced a 500% increase in the number of books that were checked out during the first year of the AR program. At the end of my second year as principal, reading scores improved dramatically on end-of-the-year testing, and we made our second consecutive year of test score improvements.

Once again, the elementary teachers were happy about the success we achieved on an individual level, but were disappointed that the school did not make adequate yearly progress because our primary school did not make any improvements on the end-of-year testing. However, it was the summer after my second year as principal that my job and the school system changed dramatically. The superintendent decided he liked the progress that we were making in the elementary school so much so that he wanted the whole school under one leadership. He consolidated the schools, and I became the K-5 principal. The system offered the primary school principal an assistant principal's job at this new school, but she decided to leave instead. I replaced her with a new assistant principal. This was the beginning of a new era in Turner County. For the first time in the history of the school system, the entire K-5 student population in the county would be under one roof, under the leadership of one principal. It was a very scary thought at first, but I knew that I had a successful two-year relationship with half of the faculty and hoped that would make the transition for the K-2 teachers much easier.

My third year as principal began very much like my first. The only difference was we had six grade level chairs reviewing student data instead of three. The new leadership team, now including a kindergarten, first grade and second grade teacher, decided that we would spend this first year of being one school getting on the same page. We mapped our curriculum to assure the sequential teaching of the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC), and that an appropriate amount of teaching and re-teaching time was devoted to every objective. We also worked together to extend our reading and writing programs into the K-2 school. We had kindergarten students writing complete sentences by the end of the year and we had a very comprehensive reading program that involved every teacher, paraprofessional, and extension teacher in the school.

In addition, after a review of student data, we decided to place a special emphasis on vocabulary improvement. Vocabulary improvement began, as previous years of improvement efforts began, with a review of the research and the research-based techniques for teaching vocabulary. We began by putting word walls in every room. We brought in one of our Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) representatives to provide training on the proper use of a word wall. The RESA representative conducted lessons with groups of students so the teachers could observe actual teaching techniques. The use of graphic organizers and content maps occurred in all classrooms. We selected a word-of-the-day that we discussed for a brief period each morning during the morning announcements. Words and their definitions hung on the walls of the lunchroom, the hallways, in art class, computer lab, and in the music room. Students were encouraged to try to “stump” their teacher each day with a word that they had looked up, learned the definition, and thought their teacher may not know the meaning. If they stumped their

teacher, they earned a free ice-cream pass. We held a spelling bee for each grade level to emphasize further the importance of words. Most days, either my assistant principal or I went into classrooms and asked individual students for the word-of-the-day and its meaning. If the student got the answer right, we gave the student a piece of candy or a sticker to wear on his or her shirt. I believe that the single most important key to our emphasis on vocabulary improvement was that the faculty and administration were consistent and pervasive for the entire school term in their quest to make vocabulary improvement an important educational issue on a daily basis.

At the end of my third year as principal, my first year as K-5 principal, the Georgia Department of Education returned our test scores. I will always remember getting the call from the County Office telling me that I needed to come over and pick them up. When I got there, the superintendent, curriculum director, and the school psychologist were all in the conference room waiting on me. When I walked in, they all began shaking my hand and hugging my neck. Our students had performed exceptionally. Over 80% of all students throughout the school had either met or exceeded grade level expectations on end-of-year testing across all academic categories tested. I could not get back to the school fast enough to meet with my teachers. We still had an hour left in the school day, so I got on the intercom and summoned all teachers to open their doors and come to the top of the hallways where all six grade level wings intersected. When everyone assembled, I shared the great news. The display of emotion was amazing when these teachers heard what their students had accomplished. Teachers were crying and hugging one another. This was the first time in many of the teachers' tenure at TCES,

they had made Adequate Yearly Progress as an entire school. It was a day I will never forget. It was also a day that spawned the improvements made over the next two years.

We took on the task of improving math scores my second year as K-5 principal. As usual, we maintained the same attention to detail with previous school improvement efforts we had initiated. At the end of the year, test scores improved once again. For the first time in the history of the school, TCES got the designation: "Needs Improvement, Making Adequate Yearly Progress." We later found out that our school was one of 44 Georgia elementary schools to receive special recognition from the Governor's Office recognizing us for "Exemplary Performance" on the 2003 administration of the *Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test*. The front office on the TCES campus proudly displays this framed certificate.

My fifth year as a principal and my third year as K-5 principal began in the same way that other years began. The school-wide leadership team met during the summer, reviewed all test data and student performance data that each teacher kept on students, and we decided on our school-wide goals. We now had a writing, reading, vocabulary, and math program and academic delivery method in place throughout the entire school. What should we add to our school improvement plan this year was now the question. As a team, we decided to do something to decrease the number of disciplinary incidents in our school. We felt good about the academic progress we had made, but not about the progress we had made toward improving the learning atmosphere for all students in the school. Granted, the increased focus on effective teaching strategies had improved student behavior, but we had not specifically addressed student behavior in our school improvement plan.

Therefore, we decided to provide in-service training on classroom management to the entire faculty. We also initiated several student services programs that rewarded students for good behavior and rewarded them for acceptable academic performance. We got local businesses to donate prizes for end-of-the-month drawings we called the "Model Student Drawing." Students that were present everyday during the month received a ticket to go into the drawing. Also, students who did not have their name on the board for misbehavior received a ticket. Students who made the monthly honor roll got one ticket; the monthly high honor roll student got two tickets. Students who earned a pre-determined number of AR points received a ticket. All together, students had 15 different ways to get their names in the drawing. Teachers began donating money and prizes for the drawing. In addition to the prizes donated by local businesses and the teachers themselves, the school also purchased prizes to be included in the drawing. Each grade level met in the gym the last school day of the month and was able to participate in the Model Student Drawing. The kids looked forward to this day with great anticipation and tried very hard to have their names in the box all fifteen times.

We also focused on our character education program mandated by the state. Not only did we teach what the state required, we added to that curriculum. We started a Chip Count. Our Chip Count activity allowed students to earn a chip for being caught doing good things. Teachers carried poker chips in their pockets during the day, and when they saw a kid picking up trash in the hall or on the playground, or helping other students with their work, or doing exceptional class work, the student received a chip. The student put the chip in a jar in the homeroom teacher's class. Periodically, I called for the teachers to bring their jars to the office. I counted the chips, and the homerooms with a certain

number of chips won an ice-cream party or soft drinks during recess one day. We fostered a competitive spirit in the school in which students did everything they could to earn a chip for their homeroom's jar.

By maintaining the academic programs we had in place and by working hard to improve student and teacher morale and the overall school atmosphere through our behavior plan, we had another successful school year. After end-of-the-year testing for the year, which was my third year as K-5 principal, the GDOE designated TCES as "Making Adequate Yearly Progress." Think back as to how I described year number one in making adequate yearly progress and magnify that by ten to understand the euphoria that my teachers and I felt when we heard the news. Just like the previous two years, I called all of the teachers to the common area of the school the day that test scores reached me. Thinking back to my days as an athlete for an analogy to describe this experience, winning the Super Bowl or the World Series is the comparison that comes to mind to describe the feeling of being in a school hallway with 89 crying, hugging, laughing, and celebrating teachers. We were officially off the Needs Improvement list! It takes three years to move out of school improvement, and we did it in the shortest amount of time possible.

I learned many things during my five years as an elementary school principal. However, through all of the school improvement efforts I have been involved with over the past few years, I have found one thing that I believe to be important above all others: the people in the organization make the difference, not the programs. People who are willing to change and make informed, research-based decisions are an invaluable commodity.

After my fifth year as the Turner County Elementary School principal, I left the school to take another position. I am now an administrator with Moultrie Technical College. The move was partly financially motivated and partly motivated by a desire to move back to my hometown to be close to my parents and siblings. However, I am still very interested in the work of school principals and would not dismiss the possibility of returning to the K-12 system should an opportunity arise. Therefore, I have chosen to conduct research on what makes principals successful. My research focuses on five elementary school principals in the State of Georgia who have taken over needs improvement elementary schools and led them to making adequate yearly progress. It is my sincere desire to determine what makes them different from other principals who are not leading their schools into making adequate yearly progress.

Before I began the process of conducting my research with the five successful administrators that I selected for this study, I wanted to document my personal beliefs about effective leadership practices as having an impact on school improvement efforts. By documenting my personal beliefs, I believe I give the reader a greater understanding of what I have done and how I practice leadership and also help me to identify my biases so I can continually check them throughout the research process.

Primarily, I believe that the most effective leaders are successful because of what they do and how they act, not because of what they know. I know some of my colleagues who are a lot smarter than I am and have had much more experience as far as years of service than I have, yet most of the time they can be found in their offices or in meetings at the local, district, or state levels. In my five years as principal, I never once attended a conference during the school year. I spent 90 percent of my time during the school day in

the classrooms, lunchroom, and in the hallways. If you wanted to talk to me or meet with me in my office, our meeting took place before 8:00 a.m. or after 3:00 p.m. I made being a visible presence in my school my number one priority. I am not saying that attending legal seminars or special education mandates training is not important. What I am saying is that I sent someone else, someone from the central office or one of my assistant principals to the conference or training session and depended on them to bring me back the information that I needed to stay up-to-date with the legalities of education.

During my five years as principal, I was fortunate to work for a superintendent who allowed me to make decisions, based on what was best for my staff and my students. TCES employs about 90 full-time teachers. I experienced about a 10 percent turnover rate each year within my staff. I had the responsibility of rehiring those five or six positions every year, and over the course of five years, I was directly responsible for the initial hiring of about 30 percent of the faculty employed by the school as it is today. My number one priority in hiring was to hire the very best teachers possible. I also made it my top priority to provide ongoing training to the teachers who were already part of the faculty when I took the principal's job. I believe hiring great teachers and improving the teaching ability of the teachers on the staff is essential to school improvement efforts.

It is my personal and professional belief that great teachers can do two things very well. One, they have a command of teaching and the delivery of content material to students. No matter what kind of student gets assigned to them, whether they are gifted or special education, these teachers have the unique ability to cause learning to occur. They can deliver the required curriculum through a variety of approaches that will assure that learning takes place. The second quality that I look for in a good teacher is their ability to

manage the classroom. Teachers, who can maintain order with a minimal number of disruptions from other students in the classroom, usually accomplish this through maintaining an exciting, rewarding, educational atmosphere. When students are engaged in learning, they are not being disruptive. The bored, unmotivated student usually becomes the problem student.

Along these same lines, the best teachers are teachers who encourage and motivate their students to do what is expected. These teachers do not spend time harping on the negative. As an effective leader, the principal must lead by example by recognizing good behavior among students, and maybe most importantly, among his/her faculty. I always made it a point to acknowledge those who had exhibited excellent attendance, demonstrated excellent classroom management skills, and used superior teaching practices. By recognizing these things, I let my faculty know that I thought these things were important. The more I emphasized the importance of these attributes, the more teachers seemed to look for similar qualities among themselves and among their students. I believe consistently complimenting and praising desired behaviors is an effective leadership practice that worked for me as a principal.

In the eyes of many who make evaluations about schools, how well a school is performing boils down to one thin—test scores. I believe that our curriculum should be driven by what we were expect to know, and that is, what was being tested. The most recent test used to measure the overall effectiveness of an elementary school in the State of Georgia is the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). The design of the CRCT is to measure how well students have mastered the QCC, which is the mandatory teaching of all elementary school educators in Georgia. By allowing the CRCT to drive

the curriculum, I accomplished two goals. One, it made sure that every teacher and every student was acutely aware of what he or she were going to be evaluated on, what the format of the test would be like, time constraints placed on testing during test time, and the importance of doing well on the test. The second objective I held to was that if you were preparing your students for the test the entire school term, you have to be teaching the QCCs. Teaching the state standards forced my teachers to emphasize what our curriculum was and helped us center on the real issue of student learning.

My interaction with students and teachers during the school day, my use of committees of teachers in the process of interviewing and hiring new employees, my insistence that teachers who need help with classroom management or instructional delivery observe other teachers, my assignment of a mentor teacher to struggling teachers, and my requirement that all teachers work together as a grade level to design the curriculum around end-of-year testing are examples of a collaborative style of leadership. Since I employed these administrative practices on a daily basis, I think it is fair to say that I led my faculty by empowering them to makes decisions and by arming them with the knowledge and confidence to make the right decisions for our students. I believe that a collaborative style of leadership leads to high academic performance at the end of each school year. Furthermore, I believe that the authoritative, dictatorial leader often isolates himself from teachers, students, parents, and other interested parties and that this type of leadership leads to poor academic performance.

Chapter III

PORTRAITS

Portrait of Dr. Ruth O'Dell

> She to me personally is like a godsend…because I came from a school where when the principal walked down the hall, you held your breath. She never had anything nice to say to the staff. She was just an opposing force in the school and coming here was wonderful. Dr. O'Dell is the exact opposite. She is just wonderful…her attitude, every time I walk by her she smiles…it doesn't matter what kind of day she is having…what kind of school, or parental, or any type of problem she may be having, it does not affect the way she treats me or the other teachers in the school. She always smiles and always acknowledges you. If she has just one moment, she will stop and talk to you. She always has a smile for the kids. If they wave at her, she waves back. She is never too busy for anybody or anything. She is real easy to talk to and always supportive. It's funny how she can tell you something that is wrong with you and you think, "Oh my God, how can I fix this so she will just love it, love me." It's her people skills. You just want to do something for her because she is just such a great leader. She gives you a lot of room to make mistakes but is always there with a guiding hand. She is full of ideas to help with the children or the curriculum. If I am having a tough time with things and it doesn't seem to be going right, I can come and talk to her and she will give me one or two things to try. She's always open for me to come back and tell her what worked, what worked a little better, and is there a third thing that I can try? She is very intelligent. She reads all of the time. God I wish I could read like she does. She is always suggesting books that we can read, but it's not like, "You need to go and read this or that or you need to read this book by the end of the year." She says, "I have read this book and this is what I got out of it and it may help you solve this problem and here is my copy if you want to borrow it." She is never forceful, but always seems to get the desired results out of her teachers and out of our students. I really feel re-born as a teacher. After the three years I had at my other school, I now know what it is like to work in a real school under a true leader. She just makes me feel like I can become better and I want to become better because she believes in me.
>
> Michel, Lindsey Elementary School First Grade Teacher

Lindsey Elementary is located in Houston County, Georgia. Of the 119,765 residents living in Houston County, the average age is 35, 71% are white, the median

household income is $44,500 per year, the median value of a housing structure is $84,565, and 68% of the residents own their own home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Located within the Houston County School District, there are 21 elementary schools, 7 middle schools, 5 high schools, and 2 specialty schools. According to district information, the school system enrollment is approaching 24,000 students with an annual growth of over 500 students per year in the last several years. Lindsey Elementary School is one of only 13 elementary schools in the State of Georgia that has made Adequate Yearly Progress for five consecutive years with a student population that places them in the category of greatest poverty, as identified by the Georgia Department of Education (2005).

The principal of Lindsey Elementary is Dr. Ruth O'Dell. What Dr. O'Dell and the faculty of Lindsey Elementary have accomplished over the past six years is nothing short of remarkable. Of the 19 elementary schools in Houston County, five are Georgia Department of Education Recommended Title I Distinguished Schools. Only two of those five schools have made the AYP list for five consecutive years of improvement and only one school, Lindsey Elementary, has done so in a school that is in the greatest poverty category.

Consider this, 40% of the 24,000 Houston County students receive free and reduced meal rates. At Lindsey Elementary School, 90% of the students receive free and reduced meal rates. Seventy percent of the Houston County School District is white. At Lindsey Elementary, 90% of the students are minority (88% African American, 2% Hispanic). There are nine Houston County elementary schools within three miles of Lindsey Elementary. The nine schools combined have a student population that is 43%

minority and 50% receive free and reduced meal rates. None of those schools has made adequate yearly progress for five consecutive years.

Dr. O'Dell was the first principal I interviewed while conducting research for this study. I had never visited Lindsey Elementary School before, and as I neared the school, I thought I already had it all figured out. My route to the school took me by Warner Robins Air Force Base, and I began to assume that the preliminary data that I had gathered that showed such great test scores would be a direct result of having a large number of military children attending Lindsey Elementary. The strict military background of Lindsey's students was sure to influence their study habits, and I could only imagine the tremendous amount of parent involvement about which I would be hearing.

Lindsey Elementary School is only a short distance off the main highway that runs through the heart of Warner Robins. Although the school is less than a quarter of a mile off the highway, the neighborhood along Tabor Drive changes dramatically from the beautifully landscaped and well-manicured streets of Warner Robins to row houses and unkempt apartment complexes. Many young males who looked like they should be in high school walked the streets or rode their bikes down the road. Within the quarter of a mile stretch, I passed three Jiffy stores. There were several young people loitering at each store that I thought should be in school or working.

One of the first questions I asked Dr. O'Dell was if she could attribute Lindsey's great test scores to having so many children from a military background attending her school. Dr. O'Dell stated, "My students do not come from the military base. They are all products of the neighborhood you traveled through as you were entering the campus. This is a high poverty area and one of the poorest sections of the county."

Now my wheels really began to turn. First, this school has the highest minority, highest poverty population in the county, and I find out that the students are from the dilapidated neighborhood surrounding the school campus. I immediately wanted to know why this school was successful and what Dr. O'Dell was doing differently from other principals in her district and across the state. After collecting data from interviews and observations, communicating with Dr. O'Dell by phone and through e-mails, talking to her faculty and staff, reviewing school documents, and analyzing a week long journal that she kept for me, I entered the data into MaxQDA software and analyzed the data through a system of coding. The relevant categories that emerged from my data analysis revealed five primary factors for her success as the leader of Lindsey Elementary School: her ability to build and nurture positive relationships with the faculty and staff of her school, her strong instructional leadership, her willingness to share power through team building, her commitment to meaningful professional development, and her use of data to guide instruction (especially in meeting needs of at-risk students).

Relationships, Relationships, Relationships

When I first arrived on the Lindsey Elementary School Campus, I parked out front and began making my way into the building. As I was approaching the front door, a woman stopped me and asked me what I was doing. I told her I was here to talk to Dr. O'Dell, and that I was looking for her office. She told me to follow her because she was going that way. As we were walking into the building and down the hall toward Dr. O'Dell's office, the lady began telling me how wonderful Dr. O'Dell was, how proud she was to be a part of this school, and what a great school they had here. "Is this your first time visiting Lindsey" she asked? I told her yes and that I was here to talk to Dr.

O'Dell about why this school was doing so well. She remarked, "I know this is one visit to a school you will really enjoy. Dr. O'Dell has been a saving grace for us here. We love her so much. She is one of the best people I know…and really smart." All of this bragging was unsolicited by me. I later found out that she was a parent volunteer on her way to work in a classroom. As I told Dr. O'Dell about this encounter, she told me that no one even knew that I was coming and the people in the building didn't know me from "Adam's housecat."

As I sat outside Dr. O'Dell's office waiting to interview her, I observed teachers as they were walking with their students in the halls. I noticed several of them talking to their students. I also noticed that they were having real conversations with their students. One teacher was asking a student about his mother. Another teacher was talking to a student about what he had done over the weekend. There was no berating, no re-directing and no loud talking. There was a genuine concern for what was going on in the lives of these children. According to the survey I administered to the Lindsey Elementary School teachers, the development of a loving school environment for their students has become normal everyday behavior. Lindsey Elementary has not always been that way. Dr. O'Dell described Lindsey Elementary prior to her arrival:

> Things have come a long way. It was not like this six years ago. When I first got here, it was a really depressed place. Moral was extremely low. I became principal of Lindsey Elementary after a succession of changes in leadership. Students were out of control, the school's physical plant was not clean, parents only came to school when there was a problem, teachers felt they were not listened to, the curriculum was not aligned to the characteristics of the students served by Lindsey Elementary School, and student motivation to learn was low. On top of all that, test scores prior to my arrival placed the school in the Title I category of Needs Improvement, Not Progressing. Data from the Council of School Performance indicated that Lindsey Elementary was in the bottom 20 percent of schools with similar profiles of high poverty.

Since O'Dell's arrival, the relationships she has with her teachers and students and the teachers' relationships with her and their students have changed tremendously. In fact, the newly formed relationships are what O'Dell claims to be the biggest change. After six years of hard work, things were obviously different now. One of the reasons for this transformation is the relationships that formed between everyone involved in the educational process at Lindsey Elementary. When I asked Dr. O'Dell to describe how this change occurred, she started by saying that she had the,

> God given abilities to be facilitative with my interactions with other people. I am approachable, and that is not something that I do deliberately. It is just something that I have reflected on from the feedback that I have received from my teachers and other people and that seems to be so important to other people, making them feel that you care about them.

Positive relationships exist everywhere you look at Lindsey Elementary. Relationships between Dr. O'Dell and her teachers, among teachers, between teachers and their students, and considering where this all started six years ago, the most amazing relationship that is very evident from the minute you walk in the front door is the community's relationship with the school. Dr. O'Dell observed,

> I think that relationships are the key to everything. That comes from my psychological background. I just feel like relationships drive the building, and I am a relationship person, my personality and the way I look at the world is all about human relationships. Therefore, it's natural for me to look at leading a building through my relationships and my encouraging others to have relationships with each other and with the children and with the parents. If all of that is positive, how we relate to one another, we can develop a professional learning community. When I first got here, we had parents calling everyday about different issues, most of them not so good. Now the parents don't call as much. They come to the school to see me or their child's teacher and most of all, they come to the school to participate in the education of their child. Their presence here brings that importance of education home to the student. Now they hear about school at school and again at home.

O'Dell's relationships with the adults in the school have been the key to her success. Her personal relationships with teachers are the key to everything. She is on fire about the kids in the school and passionate about them and their needs. If she were not, Lindsey would only be a country club where everyone just gets along with everyone and everything is great according to O'Dell. O'Dell believes that the adults should relate well and a sense of community should be there for them and the children. She stated,

> I think it is very simplistic when principals and leaders say that they are only going to do what is best for the kids. Of course we are all going to do what is best for the children. Sometimes you do what is best for the children by doing what is best for the adults in the building. They are the ones that ultimately affect the children. I see leaders do a lot of things that really take the air out of teachers and they use the excuse that it was what was best for the child. I don't think you can take those two things apart that easily.

Lindsey Elementary exudes a family atmosphere as one observes the faculty. Yes, people still get mad at one another and people still fuss, just as families do. There are still problems that must be addressed everyday, but the key to success is knowing how to work through those problems without disrupting student learning. O'Dell observed, "The focus of what the school should be doing should be on teachers learning everyday how to be better teachers and students learning everyday how to become better students."

James Comer, a psychiatrist from Yale, has been a major influence on O'Dell's leadership style. Comer (2005) states that of all the prominent educational reformers, only he talks about healthy child development as the keynote to academic achievement and life success. Dr. Comer used six developmental pathways to characterize the lines along which children mature—physical, cognitive, psychological, language, social, and ethical. Teachers developing relationships with their children and making decisions that will benefit all children are central to Dr. Comer's beliefs in school improvement. O'Dell

echoes these beliefs in the ways in which she deals with the people. She is a trained psychologist and possesses extensive knowledge on how to motivate people. She believes that groups of people within an organization operate the system. There are no individuals. It is all a system of interrelated dynamics. "I don't care if you are talking about a family, a church, or a school, it's a system and everything must mesh for the system to operate effectively."

Whether it is taking part in a team meeting, participating in professional development, or coming back to school at night for parents' night, buy-in is essential for the faculty to work as a system and to operate under a mission of clarity and professionalism for all involved. For example, look at how Lindsey hires new teachers. O'Dell asks the group that is going to be working with the new teacher to identify what the characteristics and qualifications should be of the person with whom they will be working. The principal and the teachers work together on a list of questions for the interview so that they can tease out information from the person they want to hire to see if he or she will fit in with that particular group. Teachers take part in the interview, they rate the interviewees, and discuss their opinions with the principal before a decision is made on who to hire. By using this method to hire new teachers, not only is buy-in to what the principal and the teachers and the school are looking for developed, but ownership of the new member is formed by those responsible for bringing him or her into the system.

Building and maintaining relationships among all stakeholders in the school is a long and complicated process. This process is one that staff must attend to every minute of every day. It is a job for the entire faculty, not just the principal of the school. As

Dr. O'Dell states, "I am not in charge of morale, we all are. Too many times principals take that responsibility on their shoulders and, in my opinion, it is too big of a burden for one person to bear. It's as much about how we treat each other as anything. It's all about relationships."

Instructional Leadership

Although there is no magic bullet or canned program that ensures success, Dr. O'Dell has used James Comer's model (1988) for school improvement for many of the things she does at Lindsey Elementary. For example, O'Dell believes that the development of a child's social skills has as big an impact on student achievement and the development of his or her analytical skills. She is a huge fan of Marzano's (2003) research on understanding by design, but believes that nothing is going to work by itself and nothing is going to work if it is *top-down*. She states,

> If you come in and say, we're doing this or that, you can forget it. There are not enough police to go around and make sure teachers are doing certain things in their classrooms. You can't do it by force of your authority. School improvement does not occur that way. I just believe from the bottom of my heart that if you do make improvements using a 'because I said so' attitude, as soon as you are gone, it's all over.

There is no doubt that O'Dell is the instructional leader of Lindsey. She demonstrates that leadership in the way she approaches professional development by training alongside the teachers when new material is presented to the faculty. Being a self described voracious reader on the topics of teaching and learning, she shares that knowledge and insight she gets from her reading with her faculty. O'Dell actually leads professional development opportunities on a regular basis. These are just a few of the trademarks of her leadership. O'Dell stays away from the bandwagons that very often derail educators. As she puts it,

> I understand, from the teachers' perspective that we very often jump on new ideas without studying them first. This causes a cynical attitude among the teachers. Being consistent and pervasive allows us to all be on the same page. What we are doing has been done since I started here. The difference is we are just doing it better every year.

Dr. O'Dell and the faculty of Lindsey used research-based literature to guide their decisions about what to teach and when to teach it. They identified the best practices of teachers and found that good teaching consisted of a few basic components that need to be used every day; the use of an essential question, the use of graphic organizers, an emphasis on vocabulary, unit planning, higher-order cognitive strategies, and hitting all three levels of learning during a lesson. They developed an effective research-based literacy program that emphasized small group instruction, differentiated instruction, and collaboration throughout the school and emphasized reading comprehension and higher-order thinking skills on a daily basis. O'Dell made the commitment to see that these strategies were used. She emphasized them in faculty meetings, developed teams to research and implement effective strategies, and as we shall see, became innovative with scheduling in order to provide the time necessary to accomplish the strategies.

Everyone in the school became committed to a two-and-a-half hour literacy block everyday. During this time, there were to be absolutely no interruptions. They developed a curriculum guide for each grade level and devised quarterly benchmark assessments. There was vertical planning among grade levels to assure the transitional process for students between grades as an effective process, with accountability shared by all, and no grouping. Finally, in addition to the daily requirement during the literacy block with all personnel working with students at all times, revamping the after-school program increased its effectiveness.

As O'Dell reflected on the changes that were made when she came on board, she stated,

> There were some who did not completely buy in. However, at the beginning of the third year I told them they had enough time, and we were going to teach using this model for literacy in this building and everyone has to do it. So if you don't know how to do it at this point, you had better learn. We had the data from previous years to show that what we had been doing was working and that made it easier for me to give that type of directive."

O'Dell speculated that because of the improvements made during the first two years, resistance to getting on board was minimal. There were a few people a little bent-out-of-shape over the ideas, but most everyone saw that this needed doing. O'Dell explained by stating,

> There is a lot of research saying that things must be consistent and pervasive in order to take hold in a school. I shared that research with them and they understood that we could not just all be doing our own thing. We don't have that luxury in a school where children have this many needs and from that point it really took off. Now people in this building probably don't remember that five years ago they thought this was all stupid.

To make sure that everyone was teaching the desired curriculum, a tremendous amount of informal monitoring went on each day. O'Dell is in classrooms everyday and holds frequent teacher conferences in her office to discuss what is going on in each classroom, with each child. Both innovative teaching strategies employed by the classroom teachers and problems that they encounter are brought to the table during these discussions. "I have delegated a lot of stuff to my assistant principal to free me up to spend time with students and teachers, out of my office. I have delegated things that I used to feel like I had to do, so I am throwing things off of me right, left, and sideways so that I can be conferencing with teachers or in their classrooms." Dr. O'Dell's journal shows that she spends 45 percent of her time during an average week conducting

professional development, informally observing teachers, reviewing student data, attending team meetings, and conducting formal observations. She only spends 8 percent of her time handling disciplinary issues, completing office paperwork, or returning phone calls.

O'Dell does a lot of instructional leadership through her team meetings. If she does not meet with teachers on an individual basis or observe in his/her rooms, she meets with a team of teachers. O'Dell also leads professional learning activities in the faculty meetings. Instruction is the main topic of the majority of these meetings. O'Dell spoke of the importance of being a strong instructional leader by saying,

> I have grown more in the last few years in the area of instructional leadership than I ever thought imaginable. Giving feedback to teachers and having those important everyday discussions about school and what is good about school is so very important to the academic health of the school. Doing these things helps the teachers grow professionally, helps them strengthen their confidence in their academic abilities, and most of all, keeps me fresh and has helped me grow as an instructional leader.

Team Building/Shared Decision-Making

"When I leave here, I have assured, from my work building teams and building knowledge in my teachers that all the ideas and all the energy is not just in me." Dr. O'Dell made this statement to me during our final interview. I have gone back and read this statement many times, and each time I think about what a wonderful legacy this would be for each principal to leave their faculty when they move on to other jobs, other opportunities. Dr. O'Dell talked to me many times about teacher moral, building relationships, and creating an atmosphere within the school that makes people enjoy being there. All of those things are essential, but any one of them by itself is useless. O'Dell states,

> If you are charismatic and energetic, you can keep people pumped up for a while. But as soon as you are gone, things will go down the tubes. I realized that could happen, so I worked hard on teacher leadership. I feel comfortable sharing my power and that will allow school improvement to continue here long after I am gone. The people that are left will know what is right and will feel obligated to do what is right because they have the knowledge about education and about teaching that will affect their consciousness.

Teacher leadership began with the formation of teams, providing the support and the structure needed to prompt teacher and staff leadership. As Dr. O'Dell began working with teachers building leadership teams, she found that this was the first opportunity many of her teachers had to be a part of the decision-making process. "I believe in empowering my teachers. The power of the school does not lie in the principal, but in the stakeholders involved in the school. Motivating teachers and students, how do students learn, it is all a system of interrelated dynamics."

O'Dell began the team building process by first establishing grade-level teams or Jet Teams, named after the school mascot. A chair from each Jet Team would meet with O'Dell, the assistant principal, and the instructional coordinator. Issues during the first year included a focus on school morale, a thorough examination of student data, and identifying professional development needs to help teachers become better instructors. Over time, the Jet Teams expanded into several other teams called Decision Teams. There was the Operations/Personnel Team that was responsible for budget and finance decisions, school beautification, teacher moral, and communication. The Instructional Chairs Team focused on instructional issues, media and technology, the Accelerated Reader program, and professional development. The third team that O'Dell formed was the Student/Parent Support Team. This team concentrates on the student support team

process, discipline, school climate, parental involvement, guidance, character education, and in-school suspension.

Jet Teams meet once a week while the Decision Teams meet once a month. Decision Teams accept suggestions from the faculty, conduct all meetings, work from an agenda, and appoint ad hoc committees at times when there is a need for more information or study. The most recently formed team at Lindsey Elementary may be its most important team to date. The Better Seeking Team will answer the questions: Where are we? Who are we? Are we there yet? Dr. O'Dell instructed members of the Better Seeking Team to begin planning with the end in mind. By the end of the second semester of each school year, the team ensures that the Lindsey faculty has a comprehensive plan for the following school term and that the organization and motivation to implement the plan is developed.

The sharing of power that O'Dell facilitates by her leadership practices is very comprehensive, yet in a way, it makes her job much easier. The school community made up of teachers, support staff, parents, and business members all have the opportunity to serve on a decision-making team. Often times a principal attempts to attend to every area of a school which can leave them spread thin. O'Dell stated,

> I think the key to my success has been my willingness and my comfort sharing power. I am willing to do that and I see the importance in doing that. I don't think I have all the ideas and the fact that I can share it and I don't have to control everything and still feel safe and allow other people to give me feed back and share ideas is what has made me successful. I empower teachers, I truly do. I believe in it completely. I don't pretend to do it and I think that probably makes me different than a lot of other administrators that I have met. I don't just go through the motions of having committees. The teams guide everything we do here at Lindsey.

Dr. O'Dell has done many presentations around the state with the Georgia Leadership for School Improvement and has spent a great deal of time talking about distributed leadership. Academic improvement through curricular decisions is not the only function of the teams within the school. One area O'Dell focuses on and discusses during her presentations is personal recognition. O'Dell states,

> I think personal recognition is important. In addition to my Operations/Personnel Team, I have a teacher who helps me with my classroom kudos' board, and we recognize teachers for doing neat things in their classrooms. I try to get as much positive feedback as I possibly can everyday, recognizing people for what I see good that they are doing.

Team building is more than naming committees and assigning people to serve on them. The members of each team must sense that their input is extremely important, and that the decisions that are made by the team will be followed. The teachers who work at Lindsey believe in the process of distributed leadership that O'Dell put in place. Through her presentations, the word is getting out to the rest of the state. She said,

> Anybody that knows my school will say that there is truly an atmosphere of shared leadership at my school. That seems to be what I do best. Team building is more powerful than you think. You sometimes don't think of it as being associated with school improvement, but in my opinion, it is critical. I can't teach these children. My teachers have to teach them. So if they like being here and feel like they are an integral part of the school, we will all profit.

Professional Development

Building a professional learning community for Lindsey Elementary is at the core of what Dr. O'Dell does everyday. An examination of Dr. O'Dell's weeklong journal finds that she spent more time conducting professional development activities for her teachers (14% of her time for the entire week) than any other act of leadership. Furthermore, in a survey that I administered to her faculty that asked the teachers to list

the three most significant things needed to be a successful school, meaningful staff development was the most common response.

> My philosophy of leadership starts with building a professional learning community. I believe in the learning of the teachers and the learning of the students being the focus of everything. Those two aspects of the community have got to be continuous learning and I am part of it too.

One only needs to walk into Dr. O'Dell's office and look at the tremendous amount of literature and volumes of books scattered throughout her office on tables and shelves to know how passionate she is about continuous learning. O'Dell conducts much of the professional development that takes place in the school herself. Currently, she and the faculty are reading a book together titled *Reading Essential* by Reggie Routman (2003). Everyone has a copy of the book, and when they meet as grade levels, teams, or as a faculty, they discuss what they have read and how it applies to what they are trying to do with their students.

> This book gives a good description of what we are about, assessing kids, seeing what their problems are, putting them in flexible groups, working with small groups of children. All of this together causes a release of responsibility in that you don't have to meet with students as often on a one-to-one basis.

Staying true to her belief in shared leadership, O'Dell also utilizes her literacy coach to conduct staff development. The literacy coach co-teaches with another teacher and, together, they have a model classroom for the school that other teachers can observe and from which they can learn. The literacy coach also teaches outside of her model classroom. O'Dell notes that, "Everyone has a chance to learn from her through modeling and from her observing in classrooms and coaching. As people see it work, they want to try it."

The most recent staff development activity that was conducted at Lindsey was a study of educational literature. O'Dell selected several books that she believes directly relate to what they are trying to accomplish at Lindsey in meeting the emotional and academic needs of their students. Teachers have teamed together to read these books, and each team is putting together a presentation to the entire faculty explaining what they have read, and how it pertains to them and the mission of the school. When this activity is complete, not only will every member of the faculty have read a book and been a part of a presentation, but they will also have been exposed to a dozen more books as presented by their peers.

Through her emphasis on professional development, one of O'Dell's proudest accomplishments is the feeling she has instilled in her teachers to enjoy learning and value knowledge.

> If you would have told me three years ago that some of these people in this building that are going for advanced degrees were going to do so, or taking the reading endorsement, or asking me to buy professional reading materials for the library, I would have told you no way ever. I have been amazed at the power of the norms of the groups changing. It is getting to be the norm of the group to want to learn. I haven't done that, it has just kind of happened. I have three people working on their doctorate, people who have gotten their dual certification in regular ed and special ed, four teachers who this past year got their reading endorsement, and the school wide book study we are doing was made mandatory by the leadership team, not by me. They are the ones who said if we don't make each other do it then everyone is not going to do it and that is coming from them, the faculty, not from me.

Dr. O'Dell is also excited about another staff development activity that she initiated. She states,

> Last summer I taught a class on Marzano's (2003) effective teaching strategies. I divided teachers into groups and allowed them to come in when they wanted for the training. They studied the material and the first three faculty meetings we had this year were them doing their presentations on what they had learned. They did a fantastic job and they really impressed themselves. We are a learning

> community and a learning community is when people are working together, learning together, and having a good time while they do it.

Student Assessment/Student Data

Upon Dr. O'Dell's arrival at Lindsey, she immediately began looking at student data to begin the process of planning for improvement. She said,

> Before you know where you want to go, you must first know where you are at. When I got here, it was pitiful, just pitiful. The first year on the CRCT, only 27% of our fourth graders could meet expectations, so that tells you right there that achievement was low. The demographics had changed dramatically over the previous five years to become almost 90 percent African American and 90 percent poverty. That huge change just overwhelmed the staff. They had the worst reputation in the county. Moral was super low, poor discipline, everything was just out of control. Anyone in the district will tell you that. But here we are almost six years later and we are at 80 percent achievement on the CRCT and we've done that with essentially the same people.

This dramatic change in student achievement has come one student at a time. O'Dell and her teachers target individual students who are struggling and develop an academic plan for each one of them. Much of this improvement has happened because of the individual attention that O'Dell gives each of her teachers. She said,

> I have conferences with my teachers and we sit down with each other and go over the target kids in their class, the ones who are struggling, and we come up with ideas to meet their needs. We are constantly developing more and more ideas to make up the deficits in the children. Most of the students do not bring any experiences with them that you can build very easily on.

Further complicating the high minority, high poverty challenges O'Dell faces with her students, Lindsey also has a highly mobile student population. In reference to issue of transient students, Dr. O'Dell stated,

> Last year our fourth grade scores were not as good as they had been and we feel like it was because 20 percent of the students who took the test for us had never been to Lindsey Elementary prior to the fourth grade. Every other grade was 80 percent in reading and they were at 65 percent. These fourth graders were the one's who had done so well since Kindergarten and made such great improvements and we couldn't understand what had happened until we looked at

> the number of students who took the test that had not been here before. When you take out that 20 percent that had not attended Lindsey prior to last year, the group that we had since Kindergarten showed that 86 percent of our fourth graders passed the test. We are determined to not let that happen again. Now we are jumping on our new students' right, left, and sideways, assessing them, finding out what they do know and what they don't know, and I mean when you walk in the door, we are not just going to put you in a room and hope you do well. We are really keying in on them.

There have been many detractors of the No Child Left Behind Act. Some say the funding is not solid, and some say the expectations of the Act are unrealistic. However, Dr. O'Dell is a big supporter. She feels that if it were not for NCLB and the A+ Education Reform Act that much of what they have accomplished would have been impossible. She says,

> I feel like we have good support for our school and what we do now that an AYP report comes out. We get listened to about things such as lowering class sizes and things like that, and that wasn't the case before. There is nothing that is being done now that shouldn't have been being done for the past 25 years, but no one really had the will to do it or the belief that it could be done. That is another thing that I think is different here now and that is that we do believe that all children can learn. I think that even the well intentioned people that have always been here at first said "look at these poor children, look at where they come from, they can't do it, let's water everything down for them so that their self esteem can be good." Well who cares if your self esteem is good if you can't read, it isn't going to stay good for long. I think that is a real good thing now, now we have higher expectations and we are pushing them. I had a little boy in here earlier and he took the SRI on the reading counts test and he sat at that computer and he just answered any old thing and his teacher got me in there and we just got all over him. I told him that we have a standard and it's right here (gesturing with her hand at eye level) and if I told you that you had to jump this high and you only jumped this high would you meet the standard? He said no ma'm and I said well you're not meeting it and it's just ridiculous. The reason you are not meeting it is that you are just answering any old thing. I said you go back and redo the test and he did, he started all over again, and he went from a zero to just a little bit below grade level. That's what we are dealing with here; values, children that don't value an education, they don't value academic success because it's not a priority at home. No one in their family values academic success. I mean they just want to get it over with so they can get on to the fun stuff. So when he brought it back to me, I told his teacher as soon as he gets it finished, you send him to me, I want to talk to him. When he came back up here a little while ago I just glowed all over him, telling him things like "now see what you can do when you try, that's all you

> had to do from the beginning, what are you going to do next time?" He told me he was going to take his time and do his best on everything. I told him, "okay take your time and remember, what are your eyes going to be doing, what is your brain going to be doing" Little things like that to reinforce what should be reinforced at all times whether they are at school or at home. So that is the kind of thing we stress now. It is unacceptable to put out something that you are not proud of and that your teacher or I would not be proud of. It must meet the standard. That's that push we have to give them each day. This school is very mobile. Students are in and out of here frequently. It is a real hardship for us. We can't keep them long enough sometimes or when you get them and you have never had them before, you have to make up so much in such a short period of time.

Dr. O'Dell and her faculty are meeting the many challenges they face head on. O'Dell believes in being proactive in fighting these challenges, having the literacy coach assess new students the day they arrive on campus. A score of 300 is the minimum passing score a student can make on the CRCT. The literacy coach and one of the third grade teachers assess every single child in the third, fourth, and fifth grades who are 310 and below on the CRCT. This insures that they are not only targeting the students who do not pass, but also the ones who are in danger of not passing. After the assessment of the students, the staff designed individualized educational plans for them. O'Dell stated,

> We assess them by taking their reading inventory and we come up with strategies for the teacher to use to work with them in the classroom and every teacher chooses three, what I call focus students, from her class, and every teacher concentrates on those three children, really getting to know them, giving them extra tutoring and conducting reading conferences with them and things of that nature. This seems to have helped a lot. It does not seem to be overwhelming to choose just three students to focus on. I know people well enough to know that if they can get used to doing it with three, and get their skills up, they will do it with every child who really needs extra attention.

The ultimate goal of Dr. O'Dell and the Lindsey faculty is to be a *90-90-90* school. A 90-90-90 school is one where 90 percent of the students are minority, 90 percent are from poverty, and 90 percent pass the CRCT. O'Dell told her teachers that each child is worth 2 percent because their grades and classes are so small. She said,

> If you can get one more kid to pass the test than did last year, our scores go up two percent. If you get three to go up, that's six percent for an entire grade level. It's just another way of looking at it so that it is not so overwhelming. Addressing the larger issue of overall school performance one student at a time. That's how we are focusing on it now that we have a good program and the system is in place to help us be successful. The next hurdle we must jump is getting up to 90 percent. We are constantly working to find new ways to reach struggling students by breaking it down to the individual child. Every child's education has to be individualized. Getting to 80 percent is quite an accomplishment for this group of students, but we want to be better and in order to be better, we have to be innovative and constantly look for ways to improve.

To prepare for end-of-year testing, O'Dell asks teachers to put test-taking strategies in their plans, expecting them to be there at least once a week. The computer lab is equipped with a computer program very much aligned with the CRCT. O'Dell describes the computer lab as a game approach to learning, but it is also teaching that is highly engaging, and there are frequent assessments through it that move the learners through the content standards of the CRCT. O'Dell also likes the fact that the program is very individualized. In our discussion about the computer lab, she told me,

> It is very individualized. Everybody goes to the computer lab once a week and then they also have it on classroom computers and most of the teachers are using it in the classroom. It's like a learning center. Then every summer I have been here I have held a curriculum planning session so that every grade level plans the year out and makes sure that they are covering all the domains. I do an analysis sheet for each teacher on their scores from the previous year, ranking the students, showing them where their weaknesses were. All I ask them to give me is the O'Dell's pilot sheet. I'm the pilot of the jet. I want focus areas. I don't want all that stuff on page so and so, I just want the meat and potatoes. They can do that for themselves. I want to know the focus areas. One shows critical analysis and meaning of the CRCT each grade level highlights what they are really focusing on this year. That's mainly how we are doing it. Taking an end of the year test is more than just practicing bubbling in all the time.

In addition to assessing all students, developing individualized educational plans, and paying constant attention to innovative instructional techniques, Dr. O'Dell places

much emphasis on end-of-year testing. The emphasis goes hand-in-hand with quality instruction. When I asked Dr. O'Dell about end-of-year testing, she replied,

> It's not practice all the time. We are definitely trying to align instruction with what is going to be on the test. I am a school psychologist, and most of my career at the beginning has been testing and assessing children, so I know the limitations of test data. One of the things we saw clear with our kids is reading comprehension and vocabulary. Yes they do need practice in reading the passages and picking the right answers but they also have to build their stamina to read and if they don't read a lot, they take the test and they are overwhelmed by the amount of reading, so it is just as important to read and to build that reading stamina, as it is to bubble in on that sheet. We don't do a lot of bubble sheet drills, but you do have to do address that also. Our school program is working real hard on that and targeting our most at risk students. They are using a program that requires them to read and think and chose the right answer. Just this week we did a mock CRCT. My assistant principal went to the CRCT online and developed a CRCT test for each grade level and we gave a test, four items per domain, and she is busy analyzing that right now, getting it scored and putting it in excel for teachers to use in directing their curriculum for the second half of the school year in preparation for the test. Then Monday I am going to work with the Better Seeking Team to analyze where we are as a school and what we need to work on between now and the test. We do that every nine weeks. We benchmark. The more I'm getting teachers to assess the students, not in formal ways, but in informal ways, the more I'm seeing them intervening with the students prior to the test. It's too late when they take the CRCT to use the CRCT as an assessment and then they are different kids in 3 months from the time they took the CRCT to when they start school the next year, so if you don't know all along the way where they are, it's useless. You can drill toward that test everyday, but if you don't know where they are in reading and what strategies they are using, you don't know what to teach them. The independent reading strategies are huge. We've got to be able to get them to read more and more and more or they will not be able to keep up on the test. So right now in these conferences we are having, that is what I am asking them to talk to me about.

Defining Success, Internally/Externally

The ability to build and nurture positive relationships with the faculty and staff of her school, being a strong instructional leader, the sharing of power through team building, meaningful professional development, and using data to guide instruction are the five leadership characteristics that I identified from the time I spent with Dr. O'Dell that best describe what makes her a successful principal. But just what is success? I can

view success from two often disparate perspectives—that of the individual who is experiencing it and those of others who are observing and attempting to define what it is that makes the individual successful. Therefore, I asked Dr. O'Dell to give me her definition of success. She replied,

> First of all, student achievement is huge. You can have a good place for everybody to work and if the children are not learning, that's broader than what they get on a test score. Especially with high poverty kids, if you can give them the skills so that they will be able to do the kind of work necessary to get a high school diploma, that is much more than a standardized test. You have to have study skills, social skills, visions of what is possible, and motivation. We can look at their parents and see what is going to happen if we are not able to do that. So it's broader than just test scores. The second thing is I want to create a school where everyone wants to commit and no one wants to leave. So my success is that the people in my school want to stay here and they don't want to leave and they don't want me to leave.

I followed her definition of success by asking her if she thought that a school can be considered successful without making Adequate Yearly Progress as defined by the Georgia Department of Education. To that she stated, "No. I don't think so. To pass the CRCT is minimal. They definitely have to do that and I would say that if that were the only thing we were using to judge success, it would not be enough."

Ironically, the day that I conducted my final interview, Dr. O'Dell and several of her faculty members were preparing to go to a Georgia Department of Education sponsored awards banquet to receive an award honoring high poverty, high achievement schools. The following description of Lindsey Elementary School was provided by Kathy Cox, Georgia School Superintendent, and the Georgia Department of Education in the program given out at the banquet

> Lindsey Elementary School has developed a vibrant professional learning community. Their goal is that all members of this community (parents, teachers, and students) will realize their potential as learners. In 2000, only 27 percent of the fourth graders met standards in reading. However, in 2004, most of the grade

levels had 80 percent of their students meeting standards. Distributed leadership has involved all staff members in the decision-making process with time allocated for job-embedded professional learning. Using a balanced literacy program, the children of Lindsey are becoming more accomplished readers and writers.

Monthly PACT (Parent and Child Time) gatherings have provided parents the opportunity to participate in classroom activities with their children. Their Even Start Program meets the needs of parents and children, birth to seven years old, with a comprehensive family literacy approach. Their collaborative culture allows them to serve most of their special education students in the regular education classroom with special education teachers working side by side with regular education teachers to implement a rigorous curriculum for all of their children.

A team of teachers implemented Second Step, a research-based social skills training program. Weekly lessons have created a common vocabulary across grade levels and encouraged empathy, impulse control, and anger management. Lindsey views themselves as a lighthouse for other schools who serve children from poverty. They hope that their efforts will result in models that other schools can replicate and the children they can help will multiply many times over for generations to come.

Portrait of Micki Wallace

It was December 16, exactly nine days before Christmas. It was a beautiful fall Friday afternoon, cold and windy, but the sun was shining brightly. The school bus rolled to a stop at the red light. For the third time since everyone boarded the bus, she stood up from her seat at the front and pulled a piece of paper out of a box, "Number 17, who has lucky number 17?" There was an excited scream from the back of the bus as the woman stuck her winning ticket up in the air and waved it back and forth yelling that she had ticket number 17. The woman sprinted to the front of the bus and collected her door prize. This scene would occur several times throughout the day as the group of women made their way to an unknown destination.

Micki Wallace is the principal of Unity Elementary School. She is also the woman at the front of the bus who was conducting the door prize raffle for her Unity

Elementary School faculty. This trip, appropriately named "Destination Unknown," is one of the many activities that Mrs. Wallace organized for her faculty to promote harmony and develop a family atmosphere among the faculty and staff of her school. When Mrs. Wallace plans one of these activities, she gives teachers simple instructions as to where they need to be and at what time, but not where they are going. In an interview with me, she stated,

> I'm lucky that I have always worked for a superintendent who recognizes that I often dance to the beat of a different drummer. For my Winter Destination Unknown, the teachers have to do three things. They have to come to school with a Santa hat on their head, a bell around their neck, and a credit card in their pocket, because we are going to take off on a school bus and they have no idea where we are going, thus the name Destination Unknown. Everyone brings a present and we get on a bus. When we stop at a red light, I pull a number and we open up a present and it goes to somebody. We have been to many different places. One year we went to Pine Mountain and ate lunch and shopped. We've been to Newnan, we've been to Peachtree City, we've been to Columbus, we've been over to Warm Springs, but this year we will be in school because we had to make up two days we missed because of the hurricane, so last Friday night we all went over to Warm Springs and ate dinner. Everyone was real disappointed that we did not get to go. Little things please teachers so much.

Unity Elementary School is located in LaGrange, Georgia. Of the 58,790 residents living in Troup County, the average age is 35, 66% are White, the median household income is $40,500 per year, the median value of a housing structure is $96,300, and 64% of the residents own their own home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). According to district information, twenty new or recently renovated schools house over 11,000 students in grades Pre-k through twelve. There are three high schools, three middle schools, twelve elementary schools, one system-wide fine arts magnet school, and one math, science and technology magnet elementary school. The system will build two new elementary schools and a new middle school in the next few years. Recent accomplishments of distinction for the district include LaGrange High School being

named by *USA Today* as the best high school in Georgia, and one of the best in the nation (based on advance placement classes). The Westat Foundation named West Side Magnet School #1 in a national five-year study of Fine Arts Schools and a 2002 Georgia School of Excellence. This past year, Unity Elementary School became an Outstanding Achievement School (one of only 30 such designations in the State of Georgia), and a Georgia Department of Education Recommended Title I Distinguished School for making adequate yearly progress for five consecutive years. Unity Elementary School is one of only 13 elementary schools in the State of Georgia that has made adequate yearly progress for five consecutive years with a student population that places them in the category of greatest poverty, as identified by the Georgia Department of Education (2005).

As I traveled to Unity Elementary School to conduct my first interview with Micki Wallace, I turned on to Park Avenue, off the main road that takes travelers and residents through downtown LaGrange. I immediately noticed the nice houses and yards that lined both sides of the narrow street. Yards were well-groomed and expensive cars were in many of the driveways. The only litter in the road was fresh cut grass and a few leaves that had fallen from the big oak trees that looked as if someone purposefully planted them in precise places many years ago. All of the houses looked as I would have imagined they looked when they were built in the late 1800s to early 1900s. There was a sidewalk on both sides of the street in every front yard. It rather reminded me of what a renovated Mayberry would look like.

As I continued down Park Avenue, I saw two young attractive women jogging down one of the sidewalks with their headphones on. They looked too old to be high

school students but looked to be too young to have children old enough to be of elementary school age. Not too much farther down the street, I could see the yellow street signs indicating I was in a school zone. There was a yellow flashing light over the road that illuminated the 25 mile per hour speed limit. I could now see a beautiful old school sitting on top of a hill on my left. I had reached the Unity Elementary School Campus.

As I turned into the Unity school campus, I noticed that the neighborhood on down the road past the school looked very different. It was if the Unity campus separated two very different communities. There were run down, trashy looking houses and apartments at the bottom of the hill. Unlike the relatively quiet and empty Park Avenue that I had just traveled through, the neighborhood at the bottom of the hill was full of people walking in the street, standing in small groups talking, and sitting on their front porches watching the action out in front of them. Using Unity Elementary as a dividing point, Park Avenue North and Park Avenue South seemed to be two very different worlds.

Unity Elementary School has a student enrollment of 484 students. Of those 484 students, 78% are eligible to participate in the free and reduced lunch program and 68% are minority. The other eleven elementary schools in Troup County have an average student population that is 40% minority and 55% of the students are eligible for free or reduced meals. The State of Georgia has recognized two of the twelve elementary schools in the district for making adequate yearly progress for three consecutive years. Only one of the schools in the district, Unity Elementary School, has made adequate yearly progress for five consecutive years. Mrs. Wallace described her student population,

> Our students are traditionally from a high-poverty, high at-risk population. We have the highest free and reduced rate in town of any of the schools. Children that

> come to us lack a lot of language, but we refuse to look or act the part of being poor, a poor school. When you walk the halls and look at our students you would never think that they come from such a challenged background. Most of our students come from the projects on down the road, not from the neighborhood to the North of us. That is mostly young couples who have bought these old houses at a great price and fixed them up.

Teaching the students from the neighborhood "down the road" has been the challenge Mrs. Wallace has faced for the past six years. She and her teachers have met the challenge head on. She said,

> The teachers here know that they just have to get in there and they do whatever it takes to get it done. Our first graders scored the highest in town with 98 percent of our kids meeting or exceeding expectations and one of my teachers said she had a friend ask her, "April, how come Unity kids always score so high? What do you do?" and she said, "It is real simple; high expectations and damn hard work." A large part of our success is the motivation of teachers. Everyone's motto is to do whatever it takes to get it done.

The Unity Elementary School pledge states, "I promise to do my best, to be kind with words and actions, to honor and respect my teachers, my classmates and myself, to strive to be an awesome Owl, and to always remember…IF IT'S TO BE, IT'S UP TO ME!" The school pledge is the first thing I saw when I entered the school to conduct my interview with Mrs. Wallace. The simplicity of the pledge struck me with how the wording set forth school goals without having a negative connotation. As I have gotten to know Mrs. Wallace over the past year, I can see very much of that pledge in her personality; kind, hard working, and always striving to do the best for her teachers and her students. Getting to know Mrs. Wallace through our conversations, interviews, emails, phone conversations, observations, and from a journal that she kept for me and recorded everything she did over a period of a week, I was able to identify five characteristics that I believe made her a successful leader. Those five characteristics are her ability to nurture positive relationships with her faculty, the use of leadership teams in

the organization of the school, being a strong instructional leader, using student data to guide instruction, and the development of positive home/school relations

Faculty Relationships

Picture this: In the principal's office down a narrow hallway behind the receptionist's desk sits a middle-aged, dark haired, nicely tanned woman. Sunflowers cover her desk. There are sunflower mugs, a sunflower clock, sunflower picture frames, and sunflowers stenciled on the walls and on the bookcases. The door to the office is open and she is looking for some information on her computer. Frustrated that she cannot find what she is looking for and ready to begin her interview with me, Mrs. Wallace must attend to one more piece of business. She yells out, "Kesha, what's the phone number for the lady that called." Mrs. Wallace cocks her ear toward the direction from which she is expecting a response. After about 10 seconds of complete silence, the reply is hollered back, "776-2081." I observed this informal relationship between Mrs. Wallace and the rest of her faculty members on many occasions. Nevertheless, at no time did I ever wonder who was in charge.

When Mrs. Wallace took over Unity Elementary School in 1999, there was a purpose behind the move. Test scores were down, teacher moral was low, and student behavior was unacceptable. Mrs. Wallace's previous school was in very much the same shape when she took over and she was able to turn things around there. Now her superintendent wanted to see the same type of turnaround at Unity and challenged her with taking the job. She described the situation,

> The school was failing. It was in horrible shape. I was sent over here to straighten it up. Everybody in town was talking about the school, talking about the faculty and how bad everything was. When I came over here, it was nothing like that,

> nothing at all. The teachers just needed to be loved. They needed to know that what they were to be doing would be validated.

As Mrs. Wallace began working with her new staff, she realized that there was a wonderful group of educators already in place. Her challenge now would be to get everyone to work together to improve student achievement. Improving student achievement began by focusing on her relationships with her faculty. Wallace discussed the importance of teachers working together:

> Once a healthy climate and culture is developed, anything can be accomplished. When everyone has a common focus, and our focus is on student achievement, a lot of the problems that you face as an administrator are non-existent. The only problem we have to deal with is that of teaching individual students, not spending the majority of our days handling things that are not directly related to instruction, such as discipline and mending fences between peers who are not getting along. Good instruction takes care of that because everyone is happier when students are learning. That is the mark of a great staff. I truly believe there are no bad teachers. Nobody wants to spend four years in college and then get paid what teachers get paid, and then not be successful. What happens is there is bad leadership, leaders that can't unite their staff. Once the group is united, they can do anything.

Getting teachers to work together and become united has been accomplished in large part by Mrs. Wallace's validation of the importance of teachers and their jobs. "I tell all the teachers the first day of school every year that I love them. I want them to know that what we are doing is more than working and collecting a paycheck. I want them to know that they are loved and that they are a part of something great. "Often times, words are not enough to show people how much you care. Actions speak volumes about how much Mrs. Wallace appreciates a teacher, and how much Mrs. Wallace wants everyone to love coming to school. "There is no other administrator in town that comes to school dressed as a season. At Christmas, I wear a Santa suit. At Easter, I wear a bunny suit. Whatever the season is, I play the part. I want everyone to know I love it here and that I enjoy doing what I do for a living."

An effective leader must have their pulse on what is going on in the school. Mrs. Wallace stays current with what is going on at Unity by constantly being where the action is. On a normal day, she is walking the halls, sitting in on a lesson a teacher is teaching, participating in a physical education activity, or mingling with students and teachers in the cafeteria. "The secretary told me the other day that she is locking me in my office so that I can get some things done for her because everybody wants to come by and talk and I always oblige them."

Mrs. Wallace pays constant attention to the development of the Unity school climate through both her personal and professional relationships with her teachers. Attending to teachers' personal needs is extremely important. She explained,

> Little things please teachers so much. Just something as simple as allowing teachers to wear blue jeans means a lot. We walked in the Christmas parade together. Everyone who walked got a little coupon that allowed them to wear blue jeans any day they wanted. I still do announcements in the mornings on the intercom to recognize teachers and give them hip-hip-hura's for all kinds of things."

Another way that Mrs. Wallace shows her appreciation for what her teachers do is by giving them time away from school after they have worked very hard on a project, stayed late to complete an activity, or came back at night for a school related activity. She shared with me one thing she does to show her teachers that she appreciates what they do

> Teachers love Early Out days. Like last week, all of the kindergarten through second grade teachers brought their kids to the auditorium one day and I watched a movie with the kids while the teachers left at 1:00 p.m. The next day, I let my third through fifth grade teachers do the same thing. Little things like that they really enjoy. It is part of that give-and-take relationship you must have with your teachers to let them know that you expect them to work really hard when the work needs to be done, but somewhere down the road they will be compensated for what they did.

The positive relationships that Mrs. Wallace and her staff have formed have kept a consistent group of teachers together for a number of years. Everyone wants to work at Unity, and no one wants to leave. She says, "I've got a long list of people who have asked to transfer to Unity when we have an opening. Problem is, we haven't had a vacancy in four years." As far as the faculty is concerned, the relationships existing over the past five years have made Unity a wonderful place to work. In the survey that I administered to the Unity staff, teachers wrote comments such as, "Unity's faculty is like a family", "We work well together", and "Just walk through our doors and you'll feel it. Everyone here is dedicated to one goal which is educating our children in a loving environment."

In every lifestyle, people forge different types of relationships with people they meet and people they know. One of the keys to Mrs. Wallace's success at building and maintaining positive relationships with her faculty is her devotion to her teachers and her admiration for what they do everyday to make Unity a better place to go to school and a better place to work. Wallace says,

> I can tell you without a shadow of a doubt, any success I have experienced as a principal here at this school is because of who I have surrounded myself with. It's nothing that I have done by myself. It's what everyone here is willing to accomplish, willing to work for. As I tell people when I am interviewing them, you will never work as hard as you will work here in this building, but at the same time, you will never have as much fun as you have right here every single day. I have been lucky to work with such wonderful people who make this possible.

The feeling of respect is a mutual feeling. The faculty is equally as gracious in their description of Mrs. Wallace. April, a fourth grade teacher at Unity described Mrs. Wallace as follows:

> She's wonderful to work for. I can't imagine working for anyone else. Before she came here, we had a principal that was just a beast. She did not believe in us, she

> did not believe in the kids, she was negative, and Micki is just the opposite of that. Ninety-nine percent of the time Micki is positive and upbeat. She is motivated and most of all, she knows how to motivate us and get us excited. She believes in us. When she got here six years ago, our test scores stunk, teacher morale stunk, it was not a good, happy place. It is now and that is because of Micki. I feel like we have done a lot of work, but I feel like she has led us through all of it and has been a great motivator. She knows the curriculum. She knows what we are supposed to be teaching. She has a vision. She can see where she wants us to be and we have a plan. Before her, we did not have a plan. Now we know where we are going.

Leadership Teams

When Mrs. Wallace took over at Unity, the school was in need of great repair. How she approached leadership at the beginning of her first year and how she leads now are two very different leadership philosophies. She explained,

> What I did then and what I do now is totally different because at that time I had to give a lot of directives. I had to make immediate decisions about certain things that needed to be changed. I was very authoritative at that time. But I also knew in my heart that I had to win their trust. Once we took off, we set a goal to be a school of excellence in five years. I eventually developed a relationship with my teachers that allowed us to intertwine our arms together and face our problems, meet our challenges. We did that, and five years later, we were named a distinguished school. We were rewarded for our efforts in the form of money. But that was not as valuable to us as the satisfaction we received from reaching our goal. Leadership wise, the school truly runs itself now. Grade level leaders form a leadership team and everything we do is through the leadership team and through grade level teams. We are strictly a team approach. Seldom do I make a decision that I don't go through them first.

Mrs. Wallace uses her leadership teams to operate the school on a daily basis and to solve problems as her faculty and she identify them. There is a tremendous amount of time spent sitting together discussing issues, planning for improvement, and deciding what problems to tackle. She told me, "We spend a lot of time collaborating as grade levels. In addition, I get subs in the spring and subs in the fall to cover for them while we plan as a school. In the fall, we make decisions about what we will be doing during the year, and in the spring we evaluate and refine what we have done all year."

Spending time collaborating as grade levels insures that each class within a grade level is covering the same curriculum. Spending time collaborating among grade levels insures that there is no time wasted teaching concepts that others have already taught or will teach in the future. Wallace told me, "The teams totally work together. If you go into one classroom and then another classroom in the same grade level, they are going to be doing essentially the same things. There may be one or two lessons difference, but they are basically on the same page."

The end of each school year has its share of parties and play days, but for the most part, the end of the school year is viewed as the beginning of the following year for the teachers of Unity Elementary. When student assessment data collected throughout the year gets compiled and test scores from end-of-year testing reach the school, the planning process for the following year cranks up. In discussing test data, Wallace said,

> Teachers look at student data and they write grade level action plans and they put them into place the following year. Student assessment data drives our instruction. We don't do anything academically that is not backed up by what the data tells us about each child, in each room. A lot of schools put the same curriculum out there for every child, regardless of what kind of learner they are. We get together on a frequent basis and discuss what it is that we are doing and how we can do it better. Making these decisions as a group helps us make good decisions and eliminate potential mistakes that we used to make, because there are multiple people looking at the data.

Instructional Leadership

When the leadership teams sit down together to begin the process of planning for school improvement, there has to be an objective or an end in mind. Mrs. Wallace is very good at providing that direction. She spends a lot of time doing collaborative planning with her teachers and they spend a lot of time mapping their curriculum. Wallace told me that she is "very much an instructional leader." By being a part of the instructional

planning for all grade levels, Mrs. Wallace knows what is going on in all of the classrooms. The combination of being in on the planning and being an excellent teacher before becoming a principal (She was the 1992 teacher of the year for both her school and for Troup County) aids Mrs. Wallace in recognizing good teaching when she makes her daily informal observations of teachers all over her school. Wallace's journal showed that she spent twelve percent of her time during an average week conducting classroom visits and informal observations. In talking with one of Mrs. Wallace's faculty members who used to teach with her when she was a classroom teacher, she told me,

> She has been in the trenches with many of us and still remembers what it was like to be a teacher. She was a very good teacher and I think that is what makes her such a good administrator. Because she was a good teacher, no one is going to fool her with the fluff. They had better know what they are doing.

Mrs. Wallace tries her best to use as many of the 180 days of school for instruction. She makes sure that end-of-year testing starts as late as possible to be able to squeeze in every day of learning possible before the students test. In talking with me about test dates, she told me, "We push the test back until May to make sure we have taught all the QCC's (Quality Core Curriculum) before we test. When the test is given in April, everyone thinks school is out and you end up loosing a month and a half of instruction." Some administrators like to test as early as possible so that they get test scores back before the end of the school year to be able to review test data, schedule, and plan for the next school year. Not Mrs. Wallace. She says, "That's what the summer is for. We can look at data, schedule classes, and send test scores in the mail over the summer and not lose any instructional time with the students."

For many administrators, instructional leadership does not extend beyond the school day or outside the walls of the school building. For Mrs. Wallace, any time is a

good time to plan for instruction. As she explained to me, planning can take place anywhere, anytime,

> I get together with the teachers over the summer as a grade level. We call it summer planning. In return, we have one less post planning day to compensate teachers for the day we worked. We get together at someone's pool or someone's lake house and we look at end-of-year test scores and begin to map out the curriculum, month by month, for the following school year.

Scheduling can affect the instructional emphasis of a school. If the student schedule that is designed by the administration only allows 60 minutes for reading each day, then in most cases, 60 minutes is all that will be devoted to that subject. The daily instructional schedule at Unity shows that there is great emphasis placed on reading and math. The reading block last three hours a day and math is a 90-minute block. Mrs. Wallace said,

> We started extending reading and math times a few years ago and it has proven to be so successful, we have continued to do it. We start everyone's day with reading and math and we break the students up into remediation and acceleration classes. The teachers break up all the kids into these classes by a careful examination of their assessment data. We basically teach everything through reading except for math.

Student Data

"Around here, they call me the data queen. I keep data on everything, on every person, on every teacher, on every classroom, on every child. Every nine weeks we review it and at the end of the year we take a long hard look at all the data and figure out what we have done and what we could do better," stated Mrs. Wallace. Student data drives the instruction at Unity Elementary. File folders and boxes containing information that she has requested from her teachers about their students litter Mrs. Wallace's office. Leadership teams review data periodically and classroom teachers either conduct or review student assessments on a daily basis according to Mrs. Wallace.

Students have certain teachers based on assessment results, and classes are scheduled based on the same type of data. When asked how she utilized assessments in the decision making process, Wallace responded,

> For reading and Language Arts, we give the Basic Literacy Test three times a year. We use results from this test to guide decisions. We use the results from end-of-year testing and from benchmarking that we do for each grade level. It is a combination of many things that determines where and how we will teach a child. It's crazy to base a placement or totally evaluate a student off of one test, the end of the year CRCT test.

Parallel block scheduling is something else that Mrs. Wallace brought to Unity. Every classroom has two distinct, very small groups to teach. Test data and benchmarking determines student placement in classes and what groups in which they are taught. Wallace says that in a class of 21, there may be a group of 14 and a group of seven. The group of 14 would be the average to above average students and the group of seven would be the slower learners who require more one-on-one attention. She considers both groups small for the type of students that are in the group. There is a reading assistant that teachers can use to help with instruction and Unity has a foster grandparent program that provides teachers with additional personnel when they are working with individual groups. Wallace says,

> We send our grandparents into the rooms to reduce the number of students to teachers and we get as much one-on-one as possible with every kid who needs that type of attention because they are below grade level. Also, we have college students who come over and put in between 700 and 900 contact hours per year. We constantly have people in working with our below grade level kids.

At the end of each nine weeks, Mrs. Wallace has teachers turn in a data sheet to her. The sheet shows their students reading, language, and math benchmarks for the nine weeks. The media specialists turn in a classroom Accelerated Reader list. Mrs. Wallace compares this data to previous data turned in and stays as involved with the progress of

each individual child as possible. She also uses the data to evaluate teachers and how they are meeting the needs of their students. It is also important information to her because she schedules kids in the classrooms. She says, "I know the teachers and I give them a certain type of kid, because I know who can handle certain types of students. It takes just as unique of a teacher to teach a gifted child as it does to teach a below grade level child. Matching teacher strengths to student weaknesses is essential."

Before end-of-year testing arrives, Unity teachers have a good idea who is going to do well and who is going to struggle on the test. That is because of the constant evaluation of their students. After Mrs. Wallace has reviewed the data sheets she receives from the faculty, data analysis begins. She explained the process,

> We sit down together and look at the data we have collected before we start back after Christmas holidays. We look at the reading benchmarks and ask ourselves what we have to do to get this child on grade level and ready for the end-of-year test. We have already identified students who struggled the previous year on testing and we are keenly aware of who they are. They get a lot of our attention. When you look at data all year long, it's hard for anyone to slip through the cracks. That holds true for those who did well on last years test. If they start dropping, we catch it right away because of our constant attention to assessing our students.

Another issue involving student data that Mrs. Wallace pays close attention to is her transient student population. She told me,

> I have a big transient student population and that just kills us. We have to get all the information we can on them as quickly as possible to begin teaching them what they need when they arrive and not waste time. I don't care how low a child is when they come in. If they will just stay with us for a whole year, we can get them where they need to be. It never fails that we get a kid and get them to where we are seeing daylight and then it is time for the rent and they are gone to another school. But the rent is always due somewhere else and we get another new student and the process starts all over. The sooner you realize that this is part of teaching and develop a plan to get to those transient kids as soon as possible, the better off you will be at meeting their needs and the process becomes easier for us to manage.

Home/School Relations

The neighborhood at the bottom of the hill is where most of Unity's students come from. However, when students leave that neighborhood and walk into their school, they have now entered Park Avenue North. Upon entering the school, bright and shiny are the two adjectives that pop into your mind. Students can see their reflections in the tile hallway floors. The walls look freshly painted. There are hand-stenciled designs at the tops of the walls and awnings hanging out into the hallways over every door and window. While traveling through the hallways, I get the feeling that I am walking down a quiet French boulevard. The main body of the school is in the shape of a square, and as I walk the halls, I can see a large courtyard in the middle of the school, landscaped very nicely with grass, flowers, and trees. When I was following Mrs. Wallace around one day observing her, I wrote in my journal that this school makes me feel like I am at home.

Mrs. Wallace is responsible for the homely feeling of Unity. She is the one who had the awnings put up and she is the one who stenciled the designs on the wall to eliminate the sterile feeling that is often associated with schools. These things she has done to make Unity as aesthetically pleasing as possible. These things seem easy compared to the hard work she has done to get the parents involved with their children's education. She explained,

> Some of the initial things that I did when I came here that were different were things like sending home the student handbook and making students bring it back signed indicating that the parents had gone over the handbook with their child. We also began having grade level orientation night the first week of school and the teachers give parents a copy of everything their child will be doing for the year. We don't try to keep our curriculum a secret. We know we need as much help from home as we can get. We hand out the benchmarks for the year, exactly what they are going to learn for the year, exactly how they are expected to behave, and what the steps are if they don't.

Unity conducts numerous activities during the school year to get parents on campus. Every nine weeks they hold a recognition assembly on the day that report cards go home. Parents already know to expect this day each nine weeks and they fill the auditorium for the event. Mrs. Wallace recognizes students for good grades, good attendance, Accelerated Reader points, and good behavior. Her belief in the need for parental support and her love of sunflowers saw the development of the Sunflower Club. In the Sunflower Club, students meet with her and take a one minute timed math test. Kindergarten and first grade students read sight words. She recognizes all students at the end of each nine weeks for their efforts in the Sunflower Club, and parents expect their children's recognition for what they have done. She said,

> I hear parents asking their children why they didn't get a Sunflower Club award. I also have to have the parent's permission to take them for a ride when they do well. I drive a convertible and if they do well, I take them for a ride in my car with the top down, even in January when it is cold. They know to wear a coat because they want to ride in the car.

Mrs. Wallace is always finding some way to reward her students for their efforts. She told me, "If I make learning important for the students it will only help. A lot of the things that I do require parental support, or at the very least, parental permission. For instance, next Monday, the kids who have met their Accelerated Reader goals are going skating during the day. This requires both parent volunteers and parental permission."

At Unity Elementary, everyone is accountable, including the parents. For this very reason, Mrs. Wallace hired a family assistant. The family assistant spends her day as a liaison between the school and the home. In discussing her family assistant, Wallace said,

> I know that ultimately I am going to be held accountable for what happens at this school, but we have truly tried to put accountability back on the parents and we have a really good process in place right now. I've got a really good group of parents who are supportive and I've got a group that because of where they live

> and how they live are not going to be real supportive. But those are the ones we need the most. That's why my family assistant stays on the road constantly. All of our papers go home on Tuesdays and if they don't come back to school the next day or they are not signed, Mrs. Dunn goes and pays the parents a visit to find out if they saw the papers or why they didn't sign them. Just yesterday we had a second grader who had been taking a girl's homework and erasing her name and putting his name on the work. The teacher could not get the momma to come to school. I sent Mrs. Dunn to the house to tell the momma I wanted her in my office in the morning. About an hour later, the momma showed up in my office. We had a heart to heart and things got straightened out. We have many good things in place that we can bring accountability back to who it needs to be on.

Addressing academics at Unity is not the sole purpose of parental involvement. Raising a child to be a productive citizen and teaching them how to behave also takes parental support. Mrs. Wallace explained how important parents were in the behavior management process at her school,

> Teachers know that when they send me a student for behavior problems, I am going to do something about it. The first step is usually the momma comes in and that student is going to go home the rest of the day because the teachers have series of steps they must follow before sending a student to the office. Everything is broken up into two things: Kid behavior or not. Kid behavior, while it is not appropriate at school, is handled by the teacher. Things like talking and playing. The not part is when they engage in disruptive behavior like fighting, or bullying, or stealing. The kids know their parents are going to get involved and more often than not, they are harder on them than I ever could be.

Mrs. Wallace expects her teachers to communicate and work with parents in all aspects of education. Unity teachers send home academic sheets and behavior sheets every week. The Unity Elementary School system of parent communication and school expectations starts at a very early age. Mrs. Wallace explained,

> The most problems we have are with kindergarten students who come to school having never had any structure in their lives. With the really bad cases, I put those students on half days. Parents get involved real quick if they can only work half a day because their child can't behave at school. I get to know my students parents very well and I want them to know me so that they know what I will accept. Sometimes they can't live with our rules and they choose to leave.

If a parent chooses not to accept the rules and regulations at Unity Elementary, their children are missing a very active, well-rounded education. Mrs. Wallace recognizes the importance of making school a place that children want to be and she accomplishes that in many different ways. She shared with me one of the ways that she attempts to provide this type of atmosphere,

> For elementary school children, learning must be fun. We try to make coming to Unity something to look forward to. Just like right now, in one grade level, we are teaching about the Civil War. We read trade books about the Civil War and teachers teach from multiple sources about the Civil War. In the fall, we will take a field trip to Charleston. We've done it before and we had the best time. But we went to learn about the Civil War. Those kids who went learned more about the Civil War than I ever thought possible. Even I came back with all kinds of knowledge. The trip cost the parents $85.00. If someone could not afford it, I paid for it. I used the money we made from another parent service program we have. We do after school child care up to 6:00 p.m. each day. For $5.00 a day we keep students for three hours and help them with their homework and play with them and make them feel like Unity is their home away from home. The money we make from that is strictly used for school and goes straight back to providing services for the students. We watch close to 100 kids a day.

Defining Success Internally/Externally

Mrs. Wallace's ability to develop positive relationships with her faculty, the use of leadership teams in the organization of the school, being a strong instructional leader, using student data to guide instruction, and the development of positive home/school relations are the five characteristics that I identified to define what makes her successful. But just what is success? Mrs. Wallace shared with me her personal definition of success:

> In this day of accountability and excellence, success has come to be looked at through test scores. To me, that does not necessarily determine the success of that school. We are very proud of what we have accomplished, not only through our test scores, but everything else that you must address with a high at-risk student population. We can go consistently, on a daily basis, without any significant behavior disruptions, and can have fun things happening for the kids in the school like field day or going on field trips. You can do these things when you have developed a student's ability to know what is acceptable behavior, what is the appropriate was to act and say. That is success…making no excuses. We don't

> allow excuses here for anything, for our behavior as teachers or for student behavior. There are no excuses. We come to school to do our very best every single day and we have proved it can be done.

With that said, I asked Mrs. Wallace if a school could be successful without having good test scores. She replied, "Personally, I think that they can be considered successful in some of the things they do without having good test scores, but I don't think those things would ever be recognized by anyone other than those in that school, working with those kids."

The day that I conducted my final interview with Mrs. Wallace, she and several of her faculty members had just returned from a Georgia Department of Education sponsored awards banquet where they received an award honoring high-poverty, high-achievement schools. The following description of Unity Elementary School was provided by Kathy Cox, Georgia School Superintendent, and the Georgia Department of Education in the program given out at the banquet:

> Located in west central Georgia, Unity Elementary School is a school devoted to increases student achievement for all students. The hallmarks of a successful school are evident: high expectations for student achievement, early intervention for struggling learners, the development of a language lab, frequent data analysis, 9-week benchmark assessments, targeted school-wide staff development, weekly parent new letters and student progress reports, grade level yearly school improvement action plans, Parent Partnership Teams, Literacy Volunteers, and an acquisition of a "no excuses" attitude. Unity Elementary glows with the freshness and the pride of an institution that cares about itself.
>
> Through the use of action research and shared decision making, they have created an academic environment that focuses on identifying student needs and providing appropriate instructional strategies that enable their students to succeed academically. They are committed to providing an atmosphere that is pleasant, conductive to learning, and fosters integrity. These school characteristics, combined with the family-style atmosphere of Unity Elementary School, foster individual student achievement and student happiness. It is the partnership with parents and local business, the enthusiasm of students, and the motivation and commitment of the faculty that are the core of Unity's success.

A story that Mrs. Wallace shared with me may contain the best definition of success. That story goes as follows:

> Six years ago when I first came over here, we were at the bottom and I mean the very bottom. As I gathered the faculty around me, I said, "Folks, the only way we can go is up. There is no way that we can go any further down because we were in the pits." I told them I want our goal to be worst to first. All of this was happening about the same time the Atlanta Braves were going from worst to first. I told them we are going to be like the Braves, we are going to go from worst to first. Well, scores came back that first year and they were better, but they were still not what we wanted. But we celebrated that little bit of growth. Then we set about that whole school year developing the things that are in place now; the grade level action plans, really looking at data, and continually looking at improving, changing, and evolving into a school that we envisioned until it all came to fruition this past Friday night when we sat there at the Schools of Excellence in Student Achievement Banquet in Atlanta. Now we can truly say that we have gone from worst to first. We are the first school in Troup County to be named a distinguished school. We are the first school in Troup County to get money for what we have done, and the first school in Troup County to be named an Outstanding Achievement School. We have arrived and will continue to work hard and do the things we have been doing to make sure we stay there.

Portrait of Hulet Kitterman

It was early August 1999. Jarvis was excited about his first bus ride, and his mother had told him that he was on his way to a place where he could play with his friends all day long, eat lunch and snacks, and have a lot of fun. Jarvis's trip to school was great. He saw parts of Jefferson County he did not even know existed. He enjoyed talking with his friends, letting the window of the bus up and down, and he was especially happy about the new clothes and cool book bag that his mother had just bought for him. The school bus rolled to a stop at the bus ramp of Louisville Academy in the small town of Louisville, Georgia, and Jarvis patiently waited to exit from where he was seated at the middle of the bus. As Jarvis got off the school bus for his first day in kindergarten, he was all smiles. Then it happened. He saw the most frightening sight he

had ever seen. He jumped from the last step of the bus and ran down the sidewalk screaming. As the school principal caught up with Jarvis, he fell to his knees on the ground, covered his face, and continued to scream.

Not only was today Jarvis's first day of school, but it was also the first day of school for Louisville Academy's new principal, Hulet Kitterman. Mrs. Kitterman was the person who caught up with Jarvis as he fell to his knees screaming. She frantically asked repeatedly, "What's wrong little boy, what's the matter, how can I help?" Mrs. Kitterman continued to console Jarvis and attempted to find out what was wrong. The more she talked the louder he screamed. After a few minutes, Mrs. Taylor, the guidance counselor, who was also on duty, recognized what was going on. She made her way through the crowd of students over to where Mrs. Kitterman was hovering over Jarvis. As she reached the principal and student, she pulled Mrs. Kitterman away and pushed her to the side and began helping Jarvis up from the ground, embracing him and wiping away his tears. Jarvis quit screaming almost immediately and returned to a normal child. It was then that Mrs. Kitterman asked Mrs. Taylor why she pushed her away. Mrs. Taylor replied, "Back up! You are scaring him! He has never seen a white person before."

After Mrs. Kitterman told me about the experience that occurred on her first day of school, I asked her what ever happened to Jarvis. She replied,

> When he first started to school at Louisville, he had very little language and social skills and was terrified by everything he observed at school. For the first few days of school, he found out that it wasn't all playing and eating. But before he left, he was a reader and a writer and talked and communicated very well. He carried his books under his jacket so his friends he lived around wouldn't make fun of him for wanting to be a good student. He is a child that I look at and say yes, we made a difference with this child. Jarvis is now in middle school and doing very well as a student.

Of the 17,266 residents of Jefferson County, the average age is 35, 42% are white, the median household income is $24,900 a year, the median value of a housing structure is $43,400 and 71% of the residents own their own home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Jarvis is only one of the students from Jefferson County, Georgia who began their educational experience at Louisville Academy. There are currently 622 students enrolled at Louisville Academy, the only public elementary school in town. Eighty percent of these students qualify for free or reduced meal rates and 78% of the students are African American. Louisville Academy is a Georgia Department of Education Recommended Title I Distinguished School. They have made Adequate Yearly Progress for five consecutive years in the category of greatest poverty. Louisville Academy is one of only 13 elementary schools in the State of Georgia that has made adequate yearly progress for five consecutive years with a student population that places them in the category of greatest poverty, as identified by the Georgia Department of Education (2005).

As I left Interstate 16 from Dublin, Georgia, heading to Louisville on Highway 319, I was amazed at the vast amount of nothingness. There were trees, creeks, and rivers around every bend in the road, and there were many bends in the roads. Occasionally, I would have to slow down to go through a one red-light town, but for the most part, it was very isolated and unexciting. It was also a very beautiful drive if you love nature and the outdoors. It was hard to tell that I had entered the city limits of Louisville because the city was not too distinguishable from the last 100 miles of my traveling. Upon entering town, I could see where the highway exited the city at the other end, indicating that it was a very small town. To say that Louisville is isolated is an understatement. As I began to wonder about what the children and teenagers in this town must do for fun, it made me

think about how important the schools must be to this community. Other than the local churches, I imagined that the schools would be the only common ground for socializing for the younger population of Louisville.

As the principal of Louisville Academy, Hulett Kitterman is keenly aware of how important her school is to the community. She stated, "Just like any other small town, we have to make our own fun. I don't see why school can't be part of the fun of growing up in a small town." Kitterman makes school fun for students by providing a supportive environment for them, by involving their families, and by insisting that quality instruction takes place on a daily basis. She said,

> Coping with the extreme needs of our poor, uneducated, mostly minority community is a reaction to the problem. Creating a supportive environment is a proactive response. At Louisville Academy, we try to create a supportive environment for living and learning by knowing our children, their families, and the circumstances of their lives. When children have issues at home or in the community, those problems spill over into the school. The school cannot fix their problems; we can only give them tools to deal with their issues. Those tools can vary from academic skills to hope for something better and everything in between. No child can fall between the cracks. A truly excellent school has to know its clients. Schools will be good enough only if they cope successfully with their unique circumstances. They will become excellent only to the degree they move beyond coping and create supportive environments for learning and living.

I made the drive to Jefferson County on several occasions and I had the opportunity to interview Mrs. Kitterman, observe her, communicate with her by phone and through emails, survey her teachers, and analyze a journal she kept for me documenting everything she did for a week. I entered the data I collected from these communications into MaxQDA software and analyzed the data through a system of coding. The relevant categories that emerged from my data analysis revealed eight primary factors for her success as the leader of Louisville Academy: Her extensive knowledge about the history and people of her community, her creation of a new school

environment, her ability to indoctrinate new teachers, her focus on developing students academically and emotionally, her willingness to share power through a philosophy of shared leadership and teacher empowerment, her development and implementation of curriculum guides, her use of data to guide instruction, and her parent and community relationships.

Home Grown Talent

Other than her first year teaching, Mrs. Kitterman has been at Louisville Academy her entire 23-year professional career; 14 years as a teacher, one year as an assistant principal, and eight years as principal. Being born and raised in the same community in which she is now an extremely recognizable figure has been a big advantage to her. Living and working in Louisville all her life, she has an intimate relationship with her students, the parents of her students, and the community from which they come. She says, "When you live in a small town like we do, you are a teacher everywhere you go. You can't go to the grocery store, you can't go to church, you can't go for a walk, you can't do anything without being recognized for whom you are and you end up having some type of conversation about school." Those conversations lend a unique perspective to the understanding of the students who attend Louisville Academy; a perspective that would be very difficult to be realized by someone from outside of the community.

If Mrs. Kitterman did not grow up with the parents of the students who now attend her school, chances are she taught them. She commented, "I have the advantage that I have taught most of the parents of my students. I've been doing this almost 30 years. I have a reputation to fall back on and a lot of prior knowledge." Kitterman also expressed the value in being able to call a child's parents by name. "When a student gets

in trouble or needs help, I can call his parents or grandparents by their first name and they know immediately that I know who they are and they make that connection with me that lets them know I am serious and I am concerned." Knowing students on a personal level adds another dimension to Kitterman's authority and increases her effectiveness as a principal. Mrs. Kitterman expresses the need to know her clients. She knows them whether they are sitting in class or sitting in church. "The third grade class we have this year is something else. Many of them were in my church choir, and I took them out of choir because they were so bad in church."

Not only was Mrs. Kitterman born and raised in Jefferson County and not only does she know the large majority of the children and adults within the community, but she also has the advantage of having worked with many of the teachers she now has on her staff. She has garnered their respect from the work she did as a teacher. When I administered the survey to the Louisville faculty and asked the teachers to list qualities that describe Mrs. Kitterman, involved, personable, knowledgeable, intelligent, and approachable were some of the most frequent responses. In addition to the many adjectives that teachers listed to describe her, teachers also wrote that they valued her experience in the classroom and her teaching experience has kept her from forgetting what it takes to get the job done. When asked about her experience as a teacher, Kitterman replied, "I was a pretty good teacher. I'm not sure I would be as effective at another school because I have such a tremendous loyalty and intimate relationship with this school. It is the staff at this school that makes this school function so well."

During one of my visits to Louisville Elementary, I had the opportunity to talk with many of the teachers at the school. Greg Johnson, a fifth grade teacher, believes that Mrs. Kitterman's community ties relate directly to her success as a principal. He told me,

> She is friends with everyone, it is a family atmosphere. She is very knowledgeable and has firm expectations for the school. She is very knowledgeable about the county and the community from which we draw our students. She knows the families; she has taught here and taught the parents of many of the kids. She is very supportive of the classroom teachers and lets us have input. She also lets us know what is expected. It is great working for her.

Creating a New Environment

One of the first self-imposed challenges that Mrs. Kitterman undertook that she felt was vital to improving her school was to create a friendly, professional environment for her faculty. To begin the process of re-creating the school environment to match her vision, she believed that she needed to promote the importance of teaching in every way possible. One way she does this is by teaching a class. Everyday, Mrs. Kitterman teaches an hour of reading to Louisville Academy students in addition to her administrative responsibilities. Kitterman feels that this strengthens her ability to identify with teachers on the instructional level. She stated,

> I think you first must participate in what goes on in the school. Supervising what goes on in the school does not build trust between the faculty and the administration. The 'us against them' mindset can still creep in to a teachers thinking if that connection is not made somehow. Now in this elementary school, I teach a class. I have no qualms about teaching a class. I think you have to be involved in those daily conversations, those informal conversations that you can't participate in from the front office, sitting behind a desk. You have to know what is happening within the classrooms and with each individual child. I can't think of a better way to begin a conversation with a teacher than from the teacher's perspective. When I can say to them, 'Guess what happened to me the other day while I was teaching,' that's powerful. It's on the same level as what they are doing everyday and it is powerful.

By working as part of the team to teach the students, Mrs. Kitterman was able to realize her next goal of getting the teachers to work together as teams. She told me, "I embrace individuality and innovativeness in the classroom, but we are part of a system, a system that must work together to accomplish school goals as opposed to individual goals." To begin the process of getting teachers working and planning together, Mrs. Kitterman held regular grade level meetings, she put together a school leadership team, she began a mentoring program, and maybe most importantly of all, she was an example to her faculty as to what she expected. They could see her in the hallways having informal conversations with her teachers and her staff. She did not stay in her office during the school day. Kitterman spent less than five percent of her time during an average week sitting behind her desk returning phone calls and responding to emails during the school day. The journal that she kept for me supported this fact by documenting everything she did for an entire week. She said, "Phone calls and emails can wait until after the teachers are gone. When there are students in the building, so am I."

Another way that teachers were encouraged to work together and transform their environment into a collaborative environment was the mapping of the curriculum for all grade levels. In order to accomplish this task, the teachers were going to have to rely on one another and work together, or the amount of work that needed doing to accomplish this task would overwhelm them. During curriculum mapping meetings, teachers shared what they were doing in their classrooms with each other. They discussed what was working and what was not. They were able to mine ideas from their peers to become better teachers in their own rooms. Kitterman stated,

> Teaching a class is easy because that's what I always did and I enjoyed it so much. The second thing I focused on was bringing everybody together and getting

> rid of the 'I'll close my door and teach' mentality. We conducted a lot of group planning, but it was mostly to get the mindset of sharing in place and to get teachers to assume responsibility for not only what happened in their classroom, but in the classroom next to them, and in the hallways, and on the school buses. It's a huge accountability issue because you can't just say "Oh I'm not worried about that teacher because my child will never be in her room' because one day he will be, or your neighbors child, or your grandchild. Therefore, trying to make people understand how that works, the dynamics of doing that, was and is very important.

Mrs. Kitterman values the importance of all of her faculty. From the janitors, to the school bus drivers, to the secretaries, she wants them all involved and wants all of them to know that they are part of the educational process. She says, "People are what make the difference in a school. You can have all the programs in the world in place, but without the right people in place, the programs are ineffective." During one of my visits to Louisville Academy, I witnessed the secretary sitting with a child at the front desk helping him read a book. On several other occasions, I observed paraprofessionals teaching classes.

Because everyone who works in the school has accepted the responsibility of ensuring student achievement, Kitterman is very protective of her staff. They have all earned her respect and trust and she will fight for them when needed. She told me:

> Just recently, time clocks were installed in the school for all support staff to use. How we treat our paraprofessionals and our custodians is very important to the overall effectiveness of the school. They have always been willing to come in early and stay late if needed, not because they were required to, but because they wanted to, because they care. I know the time clocks are in place to make sure that I don't abuse their time, but things like that upset the dynamics of a school. It offended them, but thank goodness it did not affect their performance. That's just the kind of people they are. Every one of them said, 'I'm not trying to beat you out of anything. I'm just trying to do my job and do it well and do a good job for these children because they are my neighbor's children too.' That was very offensive to them. They are part of the system and with all of the challenges we face with our student population, we can't afford to have a breakdown in our system at any level.

Creating an environment in which everyone enjoys working extends beyond the regular school day. Kitterman stated, "We are not an 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. family. We are family 24 hours a day." In order to accomplish this mindset, Kitterman fosters loyalty among her staff. She believes that teachers must be loyal to their students, to each other, and to her. Kitterman explained why she believes loyalty is such a vital part of the school environment:

> Loyalty is as an important aspect of the school environment as anything. I think that you can't kill each other in public. We have to support each other. I'll tell a teacher that I will back them in the public, but we may well have a conversation in private about what is going to happen next time. We all make mistakes. We all mess up with children. But one thing that we all have to remember is to talk positively about our children and each other while in the public. The attitude our teachers have about this organization will flow back to this organization. I'm loyal to my staff. I go a long ways to back them. The ultimate thing to remember is that if it is not working for the child, then it has got to change. If the child is not learning and the school is not functioning, you can be as loyal as you want to be, but something has to change. Making that change occur, while at the same time remaining loyal to yourself and to your peers, is the challenge.

New Teacher Indoctrination

Mrs. Kitterman talked to me several times about how difficult it is to get good teachers who want to come to a small community. She said, "If you are young and unmarried, you don't want to live and work here. Because of that, we have to develop our own teachers." Once Mrs. Kitterman hires a new teacher, she wants to make sure she can not only help him/her become a better teacher, but also make sure she can keep the teacher on her faculty for many years. In order to accomplish these goals, Mrs. Kitterman does several things to indoctrinate new teachers to Louisville Academy. Upon hiring, all new teachers have a mentor assigned to them. The mentor is not only available to the new teacher for curricular support, but is also available for moral support. Kitterman believes,

> Every new teacher needs someone they can get lunchroom forms from, someone who can explain bus dismissal procedures, and someone who can show them the ropes. Maybe most importantly, they need someone they can confide in and cry on their shoulder when needed.

In addition to having a mentor, all new teachers receive a curriculum guide when they are hired. The curriculum guide is a map of what they should be doing everyday for the entire year. All grade levels have developed the curriculum guides over the course of several years, and these serve as an invaluable resource for the beginning teacher. Kitterman says, "By giving new teachers a curriculum guide, they can concentrate on the actual teaching and not spend time hunting materials and resources to do what they need to be doing."

Once the principal and staff have removed the barrier of not knowing where to start and where the new teacher is to head, Kitterman believes in working closely with new teachers to show them how to teach. She stated,

> I think you have to go in and team teach with the teacher. You have to model it to show them what you expect. You also have to make time for the new teacher to go in other rooms and watch what other teachers are doing and how they teach. A lot of times, I say to them, 'this is what you do and, this is how the curriculum is set up, this is how it is going to work with you, this is what is going to happen, and watch me do it' or I will even get someone else to do it for them. You can't just assume kids are going to get it through osmosis. Donna is my lead teacher. She has no administrative responsibilities. She is strictly for the teachers to help them be more effective. Her sole role is to develop teachers. We have conversations, curriculum development meetings, and faculty meetings and they are all types of staff development. These meetings are not just to tell teachers when their grades are due. They are about how we work as a team to make this school better. It is everyone's responsibility to make sure that good teaching is taking place in every classroom, whether it is your classroom or your neighbor's classroom. Again, it's all a part of that system that allows everyone to work better because they not only depend on their peers, but their peers depend on them too.

Maintaining a consistent philosophy among the faculty and staff of the school is very important to Mrs. Kitterman. Modeling good teaching, providing support to new

teachers, and taking the team approach in everything that happens is essential. Indoctrinating new teachers occurs by way of other systems that are in place at Louisville Academy. One of those systems is the conversations that Kitterman frequently has with her staff members. The following statement is an example of this type of conversation made concerning homework,

> I say this over and over again and you have to really indoctrinate young teachers with it; it is never, ever acceptable for a child to say he is not going to do his work and get a zero. That is never acceptable. I tell them they may be punished for not doing their work in a timely manner and they are going to do it and they are going to turn it in and you are going to respond to it. You must remember that the goal for giving homework is for the child to learn something. The focus must be on what the child is learning, not on what you are doing as a teacher.

The constant conversation that Kitterman has with her faculty is one way that she expresses her vision to them. These conversations begin the day that she hires them and continue until the day they retire. I asked Mrs. Kitterman how she initiates these conversations and what it is that she is trying to convey to her teachers. She responded,

> The process of indoctrinating a new teacher begins when I interview them for the job. I talk to them and try to get them to talk about themselves. The initial conversation is a real open ended kind of thing. I ask them tell me about themselves, what they want for themselves, how they see themselves, and how they view themselves working with people. I'll ask them some specific things about curriculum and how they would teach a certain skill in the classroom, but I can teach them that if they don't know that part. I can teach it to them if they are willing to learn it and listen and do what I tell them to do. Most young people coming out of colleges don't know what they need to do in the classroom anyway. I want a person that children will respond to and I can teach them the rest. One of the things that our staff is good at doing is developing teachers. I'm sorry we are not a part of the professional development school with Augusta State, because we take raw material and make them into something. I won't even begin to take all the credit for that. The other teachers do it as well. The two biggest assets we have in new teacher development are our written curriculum and our ability to communicate our expectations of what it takes to work in this school.

Emotional and Academic Development of Students

Having been an assistant principal and a teacher at Louisville Academy for many years and growing up in the community, Mrs. Kitterman knew her students very well. She believed that she could make a big difference in the overall performance of the school by focusing on developing the whole child, socially, emotionally, and academically. She and her assistant principal (who had been the guidance counselor for many years) noted that their students often laughed at each other and picked at one another for doing well in school. She believed there was a mindset among the students that "school was not cool." To change this mindset to one of making academic achievement the goal of all students, she focused on changing the teacher's expectations of students. Kitterman explained,

> If you expect children to perform, then you have accomplished something already. Expectations lead to realizations. When you have teachers who say 'Oh they can't do that because of this reason' then you have defeated yourself automatically. I think that a good teacher first convinces a child that he can do it and works on that self concept, and then proceeds to show them how to do it. A good teacher puts things in place that help a child succeed, beginning with high expectations and confidence in the child that he can get the job done if the teacher does her job well. It doesn't mean that I know you've prepared them for the standardized test. It doesn't mean that every child will do well on the standardized test. That is a totally different issue. What we need to convey to the children through what we do should address their behavior, their attitude and their work ethic.

Spending time in the hallways and classrooms and conducting her daily informal observations (her journal entries support both) supports Kitterman's belief of, "I can talk about specific children. I know them all, I know their families, and I know their strengths and weaknesses." Her knowledge of her student's backgrounds has been an asset to Kitterman. She believes that knowing her students so well has enabled her to better meet their many needs. She says she knows, "Whose parents have separated, who is now living

with a grandmother and not with a parent, who is in need of school supplies, and who the potentially at-risk children are for purposes of early identification of special instruction." Kitterman also believes that her knowledge of students and their families helps her with discipline issues. She elaborated,

> Knowing where a child comes from is so important. It determines how you should set your day. It's what determines the discipline issues that arise in the classroom. If you know the families of your children, you know the issues that the families are dealing with at home. The children with problems are having issues at home. If you know what is happening at home, you know what is happening at school and you can figure out ways to head off problems. That is being proactive; trying to address potential discipline issues before they become a problem. I want my teachers to not only know their students but to also know the parents of their students. My teachers are really good about that and they have worked really hard at learning how to read children. It is just as important to know when to really get onto a child as to know when to back off.

Mrs. Kitterman describes her school as a "non-compliant school." By this, she means that she does not require everyone to do things the same way. She believes in the individuality of each teacher and each student. She says that understanding a child means understanding his/her individuality. Kitterman stated, "The one-on-one treatment that is expected for each student may not be the easiest or most convenient thing to do, but it is the right thing to do if it is what is best for the child."

Development of the whole child depends in large part on expectations for them. Expectations for students begin with each teacher's perception of what kind of students they are teaching. Kitterman reiterated,

> All of my teachers will tell you that no moma kept their good children at home. They will tell you that they have the best children those moma's have. They will tell you that some of their children are lazy and they are not real concerned or as concerned as they should be about the quality of work that they do. At the same time, they will assume the responsibility for what they have been given. The question they ask immediately then is what can I do to change the attitude of my students?

Mrs. Kitterman has a vision for Louisville Academy. The decisions that she makes take into account what is best for the children, and what she wants them to accomplish. Kitterman wants her students to "be able to communicate effectively, to be able to create and compose, and to be able to problem solve." She continued,

> That has to be what we are focused on. All of our decisions come from that, using that as our philosophy, for what we base our conversations on concerning our children with each other and with parents. It all goes back to what we expect from children. If we expect them to be creative you do things differently than if we are trying to get them to be compliant.
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> It is essential to create an environment that enables children to function in the world, in their world. There is a lot that goes along with problem solving and I don't just mean the math. It's social problem solving and figuring out things in science. We have tried to keep away from the competitive nature. Take the social studies and science fair for example. Every single child in the school participates. We do whole class projects. We set it up so that everybody is successful and the emphasis is on how you go about problem solving and how you figure out answers. I tell the staff over and over and over and over, it's not what happens on the third grade CRCT or the fifth grade CRCT, it's what happens when that child is 18. Is he graduating from high school? Did he make it on time? It's what happens when he is 25 or 35. When you read the weekly newspaper, are they in the police log? If so, that's the child we probably did not do something right with. Our goal is way beyond what happens in the test scores. If you don't keep that goal out there, then you get too narrow. I think that is one of the issues in the elementary schools that make the elementary school teachers so good and so effective at what they do. It is because they are very singular and focused, focused on that classroom, on those children and what their needs are. It is also their greatest weakness. Some of them say that I don't care if they take algebra or not. That's not what we are doing here. They have to look beyond that. I try to remind them about our high school that we feed into and what our high school graduation rate and test scores are, as well as what our employment rate is and what is happening in the community. That is our goal. What we want ultimately for these children is for them to come back to Jefferson County and be productive, not to be here because they can't go anywhere else. We want them to be here because they want to be here and because they have something to contribute. Fifty percent of the adults in Jefferson County do not have a high school diploma. What we can do to help change that is our mission.

Because of Mrs. Kitterman's vision for her students, Louisville Academy is now a place that students like to be. It is a place that they look forward to going to each day. It has become a home away from home for them. Kitterman believes,

> The biggest problem we have now comes right before a long holiday, such as Christmas or the summer break. Behavior issues begin to pick up because of the anxiety that students are experiencing about going home and not being safe. I can honestly say that Louisville students enjoy school. I know that because of the way they take care of the school and because of the way they communicate with me. They don't romp through the flower beds anymore. They come and tell me when things are wrong. They tell me when they have a problem with a teacher or if they are having problems at home, and these problems get worked out. They can count on me to work them out. They trust me and know that I will do what is best for them. By doing what is best for them, we are doing what is best for ourselves, our community, and our futures here in Jefferson County.

Shared Leadership

> She is the driving force behind the school. She is definitely the leader, but at the same time she asks other people to assume leadership roles along with her. She is not like a dictator. We have a very strong school improvement team at our school and that is because she feels like teachers need to have input on how the school is run. We are listened to about programs and how things are run and what is done. She has a vision and she is good about communicating that vision to all of us and keeping that vision in front of us so that we always know where we are going. Everything we do at school is geared toward that vision that she has for us and for our school and it has been great. I think we are a distinguished school because of her vision.
>
> Heidi Murphy, Louisville Academy Media Specialist

Although Louisville Academy was listed as a Needs Improvement school by the Georgia Department of Education when she began as principal, it always maintained a solid reputation and the support of the community according to Kitterman. Kitterman had enormous respect for her predecessor, who had been the principal at Louisville Academy for many years. She described him as a very controlling principal, the "prototype of his generation of principals." To illustrate this, she told me the following story

> One day, when I just started as principal, there was no toilet paper in the bathrooms and I couldn't figure out why. I asked the janitor about the lack of

> toilet paper and he said that I hadn't told him to put toilet paper in the bathrooms. That is an extreme example of the mindset I was dealing with when I took over as principal. I'm not going to tell anyone to put toilet paper in the bathrooms. That's part of their job. That's a given. They must know the minimum of what is expected of them and not look for guidance to do the minimum requirements of their job.

To get her faculty to move beyond this dependent way of thinking, Kitterman realized the needed to get them involved in the daily decision making process. She told me, "I can't say it enough how important it is to be able to make your staff members feel that they have a say so about what is taking place in the school and they are part of the daily conversations that guide the school." The first thing she did to get teachers involved in the decision making process was the development of a leadership team. Kitterman makes very few decisions without first consulting her leadership team. There are 10 people on the team represented by a teacher from each grade level, kindergarten through fifth grade. Other members of the leadership team are the librarian, the lead teacher, the assistant principal, the guidance counselor, and Kitterman. They meet regularly and talk about curriculum issues according to Kitterman. They have a lot of authority in the school because they are the ones who guide the conversations within the school concerning what they discussed at the team meetings. Kitterman says, "They are the ones who tell the beginning teacher or their grade level what it is that we are going to do. There's discussion about it and maybe even disagreement about it, but the end result is that everyone is on the same page."

Kitterman meets regularly with the school improvement team, at least twice a week. Information that the team discusses at the meetings and decisions that are made are immediately taken back to the faculty and staff of the school. Kitterman says that she has

worked hard on breaking up the cliques among faculty and staff and that there are no "in-crowds." Everyone knows about all decisions.

Sharing the responsibility of making decisions about the school is just one way that Kitterman has attempted to foster a team approach to the organization of her school. Once teachers know that they have a voice in what they will be doing, Kitterman believes that they need to know how to handle the power given to them. She firmly declared, "Whether you are a part of the School Improvement Team or participating in grade level meetings, you are expected to contribute. Each teacher's opinion or idea has to be validated by her peers and that's what I insist from my grade level leaders, to make everyone feel important." Kitterman believes in leading by example and she can insist on that type of attitude from her grade level leaders because she extends them the same courtesy when she is working with the School Improvement Team. She believes,

> In some schools, the school improvement team is viewed as another form of administration. The team is viewed as the decision making vehicle for the school. We view our School Improvement Team as a service group. The School Improvement Team is here to serve the larger groups, which are the teachers and students of the school. The teachers have to be treated as people who have information to bring to the bigger group. Everyone has something to contribute. It is important that they be heard. And everyone from the janitors on up are treated as professionals, not as hired help. I make sure that the line of communication stays open. There is no hesitancy from anyone about telling me what they think about what they are doing or what I am doing.

Mrs. Kitterman is comfortable sharing her power because her staff has earned her respect. That respect has been earned not just from the great test scores that they have posted over the past five years and not only from the way they have responded to working together as teams planning for instruction; respect has also been earned by the way the staff handles themselves on a daily basis. She told me:

> I do bus duty. If I am not out there, Mr. Johnson, a fifth grade teacher, will make sure those buses are out there and kids are on those buses. He'll just do the duty and I'm not worrying about if someone is taking care of my responsibility. Other teachers make sure students exit the building in an orderly manner, they make sure students behave on field trips and they make sure students represent us well in the public. The secretaries greet parents and visitors in a way that makes them feel welcome on our campus. This staff has been together for a long time and they know what I expect and they know what to expect from each other. They don't wait to be told what has to happen. I have everyone involved in the management part of the school so that the decision making is shared. Shared decision making is very important. One person can't do it all. I remember my first day as principal. I was out at the buses and there were 700 kids going in different directions and I had this one paraprofessional come up to me and say, 'Don't worry, I will take care of these kids and get them on their bus.' I remember thinking that maybe I can learn something from this. I wasn't sure what it was at that time, but now I know what it is. It is the importance of a team effort with everything we do and sharing the responsibility of running a school. Having an atmosphere where everybody is going to chip in and work is part of what makes Louisville Academy so successful. A test score is just a test score. We have kids learning and working like everyone else, but I can't let a test score decide what is going to happen at my school.

Curriculum Guides

On 14 of the 29 surveys administered to the faculty of Louisville Academy, teachers identified some form of effective planning as a significant component of being a successful school. Teachers used words and phrases such as, "Vision," "Goals," "Collaboration," "Planned curriculum," and "Effective use of our school improvement plan." Mrs. Kitterman uses the school improvement plan that she and her faculty developed to organize and operate her school. She speculates, "I think one of the things you would find if you walked around and asked the teachers if Hulett (Mrs. Kitterman) uses the school improvement plan, the teachers would tell you yes, and that they are tired of hearing about it". On one of my visits to the school, I had a chance to look through Mrs. Kitterman's copy of the school improvement plan. The plan is thumbed and worn and pencil and pen marks indicate many revisions. One of the goals of the school

improvement plan reads, “To develop a common curriculum for each grade level that will enhance student learning and instructional delivery.”

Kitterman believes that it is essential for a school “to maintain a focus and be consistent and pervasive with what we do.” In order to accomplish that goal, she and her teachers have developed a very extensive curriculum guide that everyone follows. Why did she insist on developing a curriculum guide? When asked this question, she responded,

> We had been an America’s Choice school and a Reading First school and these programs had all of these things that had some very good components in them and they were all based on best practices and research. The problem we found with these programs was that they were too scripted. What I mean by that is they said, ‘This is what our program is, this is what you are going to do, and this is how you are going to implement it’, but we can’t do that here. It just wouldn’t work. So what we did was we identified the best practices and we looked at the research as it pertained to our particular student population, and we figured out how we could use this information to work for us. How we make instruction work for our school and for our children is a much different way to approach instructional delivery than focusing on a program. We don’t buy programs or follow something blindly. We try to use the best of what is out there. Take our reading program for example. We use part of a program for a very focused directed lesson because that particular thing was working for our students and meeting their needs. But at the same time, we do a lot of stuff with literature and writing to compliment our reading instruction that could not be found in the program we use. We tailor our instruction to individual children in order to address their strengths and weaknesses.

The teachers are the ones who are responsible for writing the curriculum that they use. They meet two or three times a week and discuss what it is that they are doing in class, what they did yesterday, and what it is that they will be doing in the future. As previously mentioned, this has been a valuable tool for new teachers. It is also a valuable tool for experienced teachers. Kitterman described what happens,

> The teachers write the curriculum and it is a very viable document. They have an over view map, a map for the year, and a yearly plan that shows them what they should be covering and provides them with very effective lesson plans that have

> been put together over the years. During the weekly meetings, constant revision takes place. The teachers own the curriculum and that makes the weaker teachers stronger because everybody has some involvement in writing the curriculum and they have that regular discussion about what is going to happen in the classroom. There is no excuse for a teacher not to have the resources or the knowledge to teach a quality lesson every time she gets up in front of her class.

The curriculum maps identify all of the Georgia Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) objectives and when and how teachers teach every subject at every grade level. The Louisville Academy faculty is busy reorganizing their maps to reflect the new Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) that now make up the curriculum for Georgia's public school systems. Mrs. Kitterman says that depending on how students perform on the previous years testing, class activities, and the emphasis on certain weaknesses may change, but the curriculum maps do not change, being based on state standards.

The curriculum maps are very comprehensive in addressing all subjects, but they focus on three: reading, writing, and math. Evidence of the emphasis placed on writing is all over the school. When I visited Louisville Academy, I noticed that examples of student work covered every hallway, and the large majority of the student works that the walls displayed were examples of student writing. According to Kitterman,

> We spend more time reviewing and revising reading, writing, and math activities than anything else. We feel that every student needs a strong foundation in those areas to build on for future learning. Take reading for example. If you focus on good reading instruction and teach a student those diagnostic skills they need to be good readers, you don't get tied to 'do I know my schwa sound?' because that is just peripheral. Understanding the core knowledge, the concepts about what it is we want them to know is what is most important. They will learn those other things during the process of teaching. Again, we spend most of our time on reading, writing, and math. We focus on those three things. We write about everything. Our students are constantly writing. They write about math, they write about field trips they have took, they write about what they had for lunch, they write letters to me, and they write petitions on why they shouldn't have to go to music class because they are mad at the music teacher. They write about everything and everybody does it all of the time.

Analysis of Student Data

Mrs. Kitterman believes in designing curriculum based on student data. According to her, she and the teachers of Louisville Academy look at some type of student data on a daily basis. They look at results of the criterion-referenced test that they take at the end of the year as well as the norm-referenced test. As they are developing their curriculum maps and making decisions concerning the academic strengths and weaknesses of their students, end-of-year test results from the previous school year are factored into the decision making process. If an entire grade level is performing poorly on one of the tested competencies of the end-of-year tests, the teachers include strategies in their curriculum maps to address this weakness and they add resources to their teaching repertoire that specifically address the weakness. If the grade level does not show a weakness, but an individual child is having a problem with a certain competency, the teacher addresses the weakness in that particular child's individual educational plan.

In addition to analyzing end-of-year test data, the faculty of Louisville Academy administers reading benchmark tests to every student once a month. Administering benchmark tests allows the teachers to monitor the progression of each child during the year and ensures that they do not have to wait until the end of the year to find a reading problem that may show up on end-of-year testing. Teachers review each child's individual benchmark scores once a month and Mrs. Kitterman reviews each grade level's scores once a month.

Mrs. Kitterman believes that because she and her faculty spend so much time reviewing test scores, benchmarks, and daily classroom assessments, they have little need to spend time on end-of-year test preparation.

> We want to be sure that our children are familiar with the format of the end-of-year tests that are given, but beyond that, very little time is devoted to test preparation. I do not give a mock CRCT. We have some practice books that we put in the classrooms just to get used to the format. I ask teachers not to do it just before the test and kill the kids on preparing. We try to keep testing very low key and not add any more pressure to them than what they already experience with big tests like this. We believe that at least 90 percent of our kids should pass the test. Test prep is not how we teach. The CRCT is a minimal competency test.

When she identifies an academic weakness within the school or with an individual student, Mrs. Kitterman has no qualms about seeking out help from other sources to address the problem. She and her leadership team have gone to other schools with similar student populations to look at what they do to teach their children. Max Thompson, a school reform specialist has trained the Louisville faculty. Thompson's teachings emphasize the use of effective lesson plans, the use of graphic organizers, the need to map the curriculum, and the use of word walls to strengthen student achievement through vocabulary improvement. I have already discussed at length how the Louisville faculty maps the curriculum and designs lesson plans. As I toured the campus and observed Mrs. Kitterman during one of my visits, I noted that all of the classrooms had word walls and the teachers were all using graphic organizers to facilitate instruction. Mrs. Kitterman also receives instructional ideas from other places:

> We try to keep abreast of current research. We attend training seminars concerning current educational trends and I read as much as I can about best practices and improving instruction. We have used one consultant in our school very consistently who we like very much and feel very confident in what she brings to the table. We don't just do the same old thing over and over again. We fine tune, make it work, and make it work better.

Using student data to guide instruction is an issue of accountability for Mrs. Kitterman. She believes that everyone should be accountable for the children assigned to them. She informed me,

> We look at a 90 percent pass rate and pat ourselves on the back. I think my teachers do an excellent job at addressing the needs of the other 10 percent that didn't pass. More than likely, they can tell you who won't pass because they are constantly benchmarking, assessing, and examining all the data that exists on our students. Being responsible for what you do everyday is accountability. The accountability that we are forced to talk about every day now because of No Child Left Behind is junk. If you are going to be a professional person or a good person or a consistent person, then you are accountable everyday, not just when test scores arrive. That is one of the things that I can say about my teachers; they are completely accountable. They come to me and say things like, 'this third grade child is not doing what he needs to be doing so let me have him when my children are at recess.' That's accountability; assuming responsibility for what happens in your school.

Parent and Community Relationships

When Mrs. Kitterman started as principal of Louisville Academy, one of the first discussions she held with her new School Improvement Team was about the lack of parent involvement. The School Improvement Team decided to develop a survey to send out to parents to find out what their needs were and what the school could do to help them become more involved in their child's education. The survey found that parents wanted more face-to-face communication with the school and that most of the parents wanted more opportunities to interact with their child on the campus. The survey also revealed that many of the parents worked swing shifts or worked out of town and would find it difficult to come to school during the normal school hours of 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. From her life-long residency in Jefferson County and her intimate knowledge of the families of many of the students, Mrs. Kitterman also knew that many of her students lived anywhere from below to just above the poverty level, and she believed that these parents, "lacked the impetus or the energy to come to school for problems with their child or to volunteer for school functions."

After compiling all of this information and discussing it with her School Improvement Team, Kitterman posed the question to them, "What do we want from our parents?" The answer that all agreed on was that they wanted parents to be involved with their children in as many positive ways as possible. Mrs. Kitterman is extremely proud of the initiatives that Louisville Academy has put into place to get parents involved and she discussed these things at great length with me.

> Parental involvement is a real double edged sword. Parents can be involved in such a way that it hinders what a school is trying to accomplish in the way of fostering a positive relationship between the home and school. If the only time a parent is involved with the school is when they want something or when their child has done something wrong, then you are probably not going to get the type of parent involvement that you want. Therefore, we set out to create as many positive things for the parents to be involved with as possible and become true partners in education.
>
> The first thing we recognized was that positive interaction did not only need to occur at school. It also needed to occur at home. If that interaction was raking the yard with you mother or throwing the football with your father, positive parent involvement with their child was occurring. So we talked about these things with our parents, sent home newsletters giving parents information about how much being involved with their child will help them later in life. We sent home ideas of things they could do with their children that would be both fun and rewarding. We encouraged parents to know what was going on in school so that they could ask their child how this or that went today and so that they could remind them about upcoming events that they should be preparing for. How parents interact with their children at home was the first issue we addressed.
>
> Then we began setting up a series of fun events that parents could do with their kids at school. The ticket into the activities was bringing your parent. In order to participate in the activity we set up at school, the student had to have a parent or guardian with them. We had a craft night, a reading night, and a technology night. We had a bunch of different activities at school that parents could participate in with their children. Now when we have these activities, it's nothing to get 300 parents in here. These activities were done both during the day and in the evenings to make sure that everyone had a chance to participate at least once.
>
> We also targeted specific parents. We have donuts with dad once a year. Students bring their dads to school for a breakfast donut and get updates from the teacher on how their child is progressing. We do similar activities to target mothers and grandparents too.

Not everything we have tried has been a success. We tried doing some parental workshops. They tend to be a flop with our population. It wasn't fun and we had a very poor turnout for that. When we have a parent who we are having trouble getting to come to school, our counselor just flat goes out and gets the parents. She tells them that she is coming out there to get them to come and meet with their child's teacher.

I ask teachers to have face-to-face contact with all of their parents. I want personal contact, not a letter or a note home. My teachers have to document all of their parent contact and turn it in to me. I do this just to let them know that the parental contact is important to me and I want to make sure that it is occurring.

We conduct formal parent conferences. This is not on the district schedule. This is just on our school schedule. Teachers will stay until six or seven o'clock on these nights and do their best to conference with most of their parents. If the parent does not show up, we make a commitment to see all of them during that next week. We conduct these formal conferences three times a year.

We also conduct an orientation at the beginning of the school year for parents. Our school council suggested that we do this. We bring parents in by grade level and talk to them about our expectations for each grade. We explain how the curriculum differs from what they did the previous year, what their child will be doing during the year, and what to expect at the end of the year. We do that for every grade level. Probably three-fourths of our parents have been here each time we've done that. This year we changed our math somewhat. We no longer use a textbook. There were a lot of questions about that and it was extremely beneficial to get that all cleared up at the beginning and not have confusion all year long. Another thing we did for the new math program is we had several teachers conduct a lesson for the parents, using the new format for teaching math. We had parents actually problem solve and do the script work.

In the spring, we send home a curriculum map. We tell parents what they can do over the summer to help their children be prepared for the next school year and we tell them what they can expect the next school year. Also in the spring, we have parents on campus for honors day and water day (An activity where students get to go outside and play in water sprinklers and throw water balloons). There are many things we do to get parents to come to school that are non-threatening, as well as the usual parent conferences. But it is that constant talking to parents over and over that we want to create as an expectation from this school. We send papers and newsletters home. There is very little if anything that goes on here that parents don't know about before hand and have the choice to participate in.

Being in a small town, you have immediate access to parents all day long. You never leave your house without talking to a parent. That's a plus that I think cities don't have. You teach your neighbors children and you have access to parents at

> church and the grocery store. Parent involvement is not easy, but anyone who thinks that it is not necessary or they are better off without it is missing the boat.

Defining Success Internally/Externally

Mrs. Kitterman's extensive knowledge about the history and people of her community, her creation of a new school environment, her ability to indoctrinate new teachers, her focus on developing students academically and emotionally, her willingness to share power through a philosophy of shared leadership and teacher empowerment, her development and implementation of curriculum guides, her use of data to guide instruction, and her parent and community relationships are the eight characteristics that I identified to define what makes her successful. But just what is success? Mrs. Kitterman's personal definition of success is,

> A successful school is one in which everyone is focused on what they need to do for children and keeping focused on where they want the children to end up. Test scores are not necessarily what we want. We want children to do well further down the road, beyond when they are 10 years old. Our job here is to teach them how to deal with the world they live in and how to respond to it and make good decisions and good choices.

After Mrs. Kitterman defined success for me, I asked her if schools can be considered successful without good test scores. She responded,

> Yes. I think test scores are an indicator of success and that is what the public looks at because it is a number that they can identify with, but just because a school has good test scores does not mean that it is necessarily a successful school, and just because a school's test scores are not good does not mean that they are not successful. I think you have to look at a lot more than a number. All a test does is gives you a piece of information about a child on a particular day. If you run your school for the sole purpose of making test scores look good, then you have missed the point of educating children. It's fun to have good test scores, it's great to get this recognition, and it's great to have that extra money, but we can't let that be what we work for.

The day that I conducted my final interview with Mrs. Kitterman, she and several of her faculty members had just returned from a Georgia Department of Education

sponsored awards banquet where they received an award honoring high poverty, high achievement schools. The following description of Louisville Academy was provided by Kathy Cox, Georgia School Superintendent and the Georgia Department of Education in the program given out at the banquet:

> Everyone at Louisville Academy focuses on creating an environment where children read, write, create, compose, and problem solve. The school has concentrated on three areas for improvement: parental involvement, reading achievement, and math achievement. Recognizing that traditional models of parent involvement had not been successful, the staff established a series of family nights designed to facilitate meaningful communication between parent and child. The next issue the staff addressed was reading. Literacy labs, run by paraprofessionals, integrate the reading, writing, and research process with the science and social studies curriculum. The third focus for school improvement was mathematics. The school made a commitment to supplying each teacher with appropriate materials, resources, and ongoing professional learning opportunities.
>
> Visitors walking through the school will find children busily researching and gathering data, discussing solutions to real-life math problems, writing about their daily experiences, and talking about the latest books they have read.
>
> Louisville Academy is a place where children are happy and engaged in the learning process.

Portrait of Donnie Smith

> Mr. Smith has been the principal at Cherokee Elementary School for the past six years. He is a family man who is young, energetic, cares about children, has a pleasing personality and is easy to work with. He encourages the students to listen to the teacher, follow the rules, come to school everyday and do their best work.
>
> Mr. Smith believes in parent involvement and is instrumental in actively involving parent volunteers, student teachers, peer helpers and royal readers with the students on a daily basis. He communicates well with parents and makes a great effort to inform the faculty and staff about matters concerning Cherokee's family. Mr. Smith is very fair and willing to listen to all sides. He is understanding and willing to go the extra mile for Cherokee. He has a vast knowledge of education. He is a firm believer that all children can learn. He encourages the teachers to keep that idea in mind daily as we touch our future leaders.
>
> Brenda, Third Grade Teacher, Cherokee Elementary

Cherokee Elementary School is located in Sumter County. Of the 33,200 residents of Sumter County, the average age is 32, 48% are white, the median household income is $30,500 a year, the median value of a housing structure is $62,400 and 60% of the residents own their own home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Cherokee Elementary School is one of only 19 elementary schools in the state of Georgia that has made adequate yearly progress for six consecutive years with a student population that places them in the category of greatest poverty, as identified by the Georgia Department of Education (2005). Donnie Smith has been the principal of Cherokee Elementary School for the past six years and has led them to achieving that distinction.

There are eight schools in Sumter County: Four Elementary Schools, two middle schools, and two high schools. Of the four elementary schools in Sumter County, Cherokee Elementary maintains the highest minority population (90 percent African American) and the highest free and reduced meal rate (90 percent eligible). The other three elementary schools in the district have an average African American student population of 71 percent and a free and reduced meal rate of 77 percent. Cherokee Elementary School is the only school in the Sumter County School District that has made Adequate Yearly Progress for six consecutive years.

The city seat of Sumter County is Americus. Americus is a very beautiful town. I attended college there at Georgia Southwestern University over 15 years ago and since leaving, my trip to Americus to conduct my first interview with Mr. Smith was the first time I had returned to Americus and actually stopped and spent any time in town. The governing body of Americus has done a nice job of renovating the historic downtown district and blending it with the expanding new developments on the outskirts of town.

From the direction I entered town, I noticed that what used to be agricultural fields were now home to shopping centers and a new Wal-Mart Superstore.

Having lived in Americus while attending college there, I knew the town well. I have always been very interested in sports, and I spent a lot of time attending the athletic events at the two local public high schools. Someone watching the local high schools compete who was not familiar with the racial make-up of the county could very easily assume that the majority of the community was African American. However, that is not the case. The majority of the white students attended the local private school, thus the public school athletic teams were predominantly African American. Not much has changed in the last 15 years. A large number of the white students still attend Southland Academy and the vast majority of African American students still attend the local public schools. This explains why the Sumter County School district has a student population that is over 80 percent African American in a community that is 50 percent white.

Highway 280 intersects Americus in an East to West direction, allowing visitors to see most of what Americus has to offer in the way of businesses and industries. I turned off Highway 280 onto Cherokee Avenue to visit with Mr. Smith. It is about four blocks from the highway to the elementary school, and I noticed that all of the houses on both sides of the street and for several streets past the school were the same. Every house was an orange brick, approximately 1,000 square foot, single resident governmental house. As I got close enough to the school that I could see the school building, construction work on one of the streets sent me on a detour. I followed the detour all the way around the neighborhood surrounding the school. Every house was still the same. There was no variation in color, all the yards were the same size, and all of the houses

were evenly spaced apart and fairly well maintained. I did not see a house that looked unoccupied or in desperate need of repair.

As I finally navigated the detour and made my way onto the Cherokee Elementary School Campus, I noticed that the school did not look much different from the houses surrounding the school. It too had the same orange brick and the same sterile look of the houses surrounding it. Despite the external aesthetics of the school and the neighborhood, I remained very excited to get inside the school and meet Mrs. Smith in hopes of finding out what makes his school so special. After all, he is the only principal in my study who had made Adequate Yearly Progress for six consecutive years, which is one more year than the other four principals I was using for my study. After interviewing Mrs. Smith at his school several times, spending a day observing him while he worked, communicating with him by phone and through emails, administering a survey to his teachers, analyzing the journal he kept for me documenting what he did for a week, and reviewing school documents, I entered the data into MaxQDA software and analyzed the data through a system of coding. The relevant categories that emerged from my data analysis revealed four primary factors for his success as the leader of Cherokee Elementary School: his ability to provide and nurture a collaborative school environment that fosters healthy relationships among the faculty and students of the school, his ability to align policy and practices with academic goals and facilitate teacher support for reform efforts, his ability to allocate resources to support achievement, and his emphasis on maintaining an open line of communication between the home and school promoting productive parent involvement.

Relationships in a Collaborative Environment

When Mr. Smith became principal of Cherokee Elementary School, he replaced a principal who had resigned the previous April, two months prior to the end of the school year. Cherokee Elementary School had essentially gone two months of school during the previous year without any type of formal leadership. Despite this fact, and the fact that his review of test scores indicated that ITBS (Iowa Test of Basic Skills) scores were in the 30th percentile range across all academic areas, he still believed the school was in good shape with the exception of what he perceived to be low moral. He said, "I had to come in and do some mending, but as far as academically, the school was in the average to just below average range, but floundering to make improvements." The first thing Smith believed he needed to do was get to know the faculty he was inheriting and establish relationships with them that would be good for the school as a whole. He explained,

> As a former teacher, I was fortunate to work for good principals who taught me a lot about being a leader. One thing I learned from them is the importance of establishing a relationship with my staff as well as parents and students. I think that is what probably distinguishes me from somebody who may not be as successful. You can have all the ideas in the world, but if you are not a people person and know how to get along with folks and how to communicate without hurting their feelings, the whole system of what it takes to work in any environment, whether it is a school or a business, either breaks down or never gets going to begin with. Sometimes you have to reprimand those that work for you, but I am always thinking about establishing relationships so that they know you care about them, but they also know that we all have a job to do and we all have to do the right things for the kids. That is what I have tried to do over the years. I try to just build those relationships with the kids, the parents, and the staff members and let them know I care. I think they respect you for that. I have seen other administrators and bosses that just want to tell you what to do and there is really no personal contact there and they don't have anything to say except, 'hey, this is what we are going to do.' Sometimes you can probably get it done that way, but I know that it is a lot easier to draw flies with honey than it is with something bitter. I believe in being a people person who tries to work with folks and have a relationship with them.

To begin establishing the relationships with the teachers that Mr. Smith believes are so important, he expressed his philosophy of the purpose of school to his faculty. He let them know that he believed that the kids are the most important people in the building, and everything that they do and every decision that they make, should always be done with the best interest of the children in mind. He told the teachers that they, "were the second most important people in the school" and the teachers were "the key to any success that Cherokee Elementary could hope to experience." He also let them know that he viewed himself as a support person and they could expect him to give them everything they needed to be successful in their jobs. He pledged to the faculty that he would support them with, "discipline, with supplies, with instructional materials, with guidance, with allowing them a voice in what they do, and with praise" because all of their success as a school would begin in the classroom.

One of the first actions that Mr. Smith took as a principal in the organization of his school was to put together a leadership team. He wanted to get as much input as possible from his staff as to how they would function as a team. Smith's leadership team consisted of his two assistant principals, two teachers from each grade level, the media specialists, two counselors, and the literacy coach. He still maintains the same type of leadership team and they meet regularly and discuss all aspects of the school. He elaborated,

> The leadership team is responsible for a lot of things. They observe in classrooms to assist with instructional issues, they help make decisions about grants we have and grants we want to apply for, we discuss curriculum issues, and we talk about numerous things. For instance, our Title I Distinguished School money that we just received, we met last month to talk about how to spend that. The organizational flow chart of the school is from me, down through the two administrators, down to the teachers on the leadership team, then to the teachers. I

> try to let the teachers assume as much a leadership role as they possible. I value their input. My door is always open. They know they can come to me as a group, a team, or as individuals if they have ideas that they want to share. Some feel a lot more open to share than others (laughs). I have never been too much on anonymous tips or complaints. They know if they have something to say, they can come to me and I will work with them. There is a trust issue there. You just have to trust them to do the right thing Leadership wise, I do try to let my leadership team be involved as much as possible. I really rely a lot on my assistants, and value what they have to say.

The teachers of Cherokee elementary believe in the value of sharing the leadership responsibilities with Mrs. Smith as well. When I administered a survey to the faculty of Cherokee, I asked teachers why their school was successful. The most common responses indicated a collaborative work environment where everyone is involved in the decision making process. One respondent wrote, "Education is a shared responsibility for all stake holders and we give all students an opportunity for success." Furthermore, when I asked them to list the three most important things to being a successful school, the three most common attributes listed were related to leadership, collaboration, and climate. Teachers used phrases such as: "Good communication," "meaningful collaboration," "caring," "strong leadership from administration," "great teachers," "support from administration," and "dedicated teachers and staff."

In addition to sharing his leadership responsibilities with his faculty, Mr. Smith also promotes school improvement by making sure that everyone, not just those on the leadership team, have the opportunity to be involved. He maintains a very elaborate group of committees that all teachers are a part of. At the beginning of the school year, teachers sign up for the committee of their choice. The Cherokee Elementary School teacher's handbook lists and describes in detail all of the committees. Some of the committees that he developed are the

- Hospitality Committee. The Hospitality Committee is responsible for teacher appreciation, retirements, deaths, transfers, showers, spring fling, and the Christmas party.

- Positive Climate Committee. The Positive Climate Committee is responsible for holiday celebrations. He requires that they have a plan that can be used with each holiday celebration to tie activities to reading or math. The Positive Climate Committee also is responsible for participation in the Christmas parade and conducting the Spring Carnival. All certified staff are expected to attend and help with the event.

- Student Recognition Committee. The Student Recognition Committee is responsible for Cherokee Cares, a celebration every nine weeks for students who attain certain school goals, year-end events, perfect attendance recognition, and student of the month recognition.

- Fine Arts Committee. The Fine Arts Committee conducts monthly activities that are scheduled at beginning of year so teachers can tie them into their lessons, and all activities must tie to reading or math. They also have a fine arts day.

- The Media/Technology Committee. This committee is responsible for Georgia Picture Books, Dr. Seuss, Book It, Morning Show, Book Fairs, Bare Books, and Six Flags Read to Success

- Accelerated Reader Committee. The AR Committee is responsible for weekly recognition, Reading Wall, and reading excellence Celebrations.

- The Parent/Community Committee. This committee is responsible for Royal Readers, organizing volunteers, soliciting business partners, hosing the volunteer reception, and working with civic organizations.

Serving on the leadership team and/or on a committee are two of the ways that Mr. Smith keeps teachers involved in how the school operates and the type of working and learning environment developed. He also keeps them involved by being visible in the school and continually involving his teachers in educational conversations. He says,

> I try to get in every room every day. If I am not in meetings or in parent conferences, I am in the classrooms. I keep logs and document my classroom visits. My assistant principals do the same thing. Even if I don't stay but three or four minutes, I want to just let the teachers know I am there for them. The teachers do a better job if they think you are going to be coming around. It validates the importance of what they are doing. It is not to just check on them, but to let them know that I am there and I support what they are doing. I give

> them feedback too, so they know it is coming. I would say if I averaged it out, I spend the majority of my day in the rooms and with the teachers and the kids.

According to the journal that Mr. Smith kept for me, he spends 35 percent of an average school day in classrooms making informal observations of teachers, talking with students in the hallways, at breakfast, lunch, or at the bus stop. The teachers in his school also recognize Smith's visibility in the school. In the survey I administered to the Cherokee faculty, teachers listed three attributes that describe their principal. Some of the responses were that he knows his constituents, knows the parents, knows the students, easy to find, and always available.

The school environment is Mr. Smith's greatest concern. Mr. Smith said that there is a "synergy" created when teachers love their students that affects the total climate of the school. He explained,

> I tell my teachers all the time, my main thing is that you care about your children and you love your children. Wanting to teach and wanting your students to learn is all you have to do to be successful. I want you to have knowledge of how to teach reading, but we can work with you on instructional things. We have staff development throughout the year, and we will work with you on that. But the main thing I am looking for is do you love children and do you want to teach children. If you don't care about children and love teaching, it doesn't matter if you come to work on time, cooperate with everybody, and that kind of stuff, I can't use you here with what we are trying to accomplish. If they can accomplish the simple act of loving their students, they will find ways to be great teachers. You don't want to let someone down if you love them and if you really care for them. I have never bee too concerned about what everyone thinks about me. Obviously, I want to be supported by my excellent, outstanding teachers. That validates what I do, but at the same time, if a teacher is teaching with the care and compassion that I talk to them about all the time, they are going to be my buddy no matter what. The synergy that is created by teachers loving students that runs this school comes by way of not allowing anything to stand in our way to teach these kids. They care about their students so much that there is no way they are going to let them down. They are going to do whatever it takes before school, during school, and after school to get the job done. In return, I am going to support them, the district office is going to support me, and the state is going to support us for our efforts. It's a system of teaching and learning that in my opinion, begins with loving your students. Where I fall into that system is having

> high expectations of my teachers to go above and beyond. They know this is not going to be a 7:15 to 3:15 job. There are going to be times that you are going to be here late, and times you are going to have to take things home. We all have to do these things to get it done. I believe that is portrayed here and that is the mark of our success. I have some of the hardest working teachers you will every meet. I have to run some off at 5:30 everyday. That goes back to something else that I really do believe. I think that being a hard worker is an innate quality that some teachers possess and some teachers don't. You have to have high expectations for yourself and want to do a good job and nobody can really make you do that or make you feel that way. It's just a personal feeling that you have. Fortunately, I have a bunch of staff members that feel that way.

Mr. Smith does many of the things that other schools do to recognize his faculty for doing a great job and for showing his appreciation for them loving their children. The administration recognizes an employee of the month with a plant and a balloon for doing something outstanding in the school. Every month, he has hall parties for his teachers and serves refreshments. All the teachers participate in this event and it gives them the opportunity to socialize with their peers. Throughout the year, he buys them gifts, shirts, bags, and at Christmas, buys them a present. He grills steaks for the Christmas party and the end of the year party for his teachers. Smith believes that these types of activities are necessary to promote an environment of "family" and one of "support and appreciation for what they do", but he states that the most important thing to the development of a great school environment is,

> To surround myself with positive, dedicated, and energetic people. I can't run this school by myself. It takes a team approach. To be successful, you have to hire the right people. You have to work with them to become the best they can be. I think that is the only way you can be successful

Alignment of Policy and Practice with Academic Goals and Teacher Support

Mr. Smith and his faculty spend a great deal of time eliminating the inconsistencies between what they are teaching their students and the goals of the district, state, and federal agencies. The development of a very comprehensive curriculum guide

eliminates many of these inconsistencies. Every teacher handbook that given out at the beginning of the school year contains a daily calendar for the entire school year identifying the skills that taught each day. The calendar also provides the teacher information as to the priority of the skill. The priority levels are essential (teach to mastery level), important (teach), or compact (introduce concept). The curriculum guide that teachers have at their disposals identify the subject areas, the topic of the lesson, the state standards that the lesson is addressing, the essential question that each student should be able to answer at the end of the lesson, what resources to use to teach the lesson, and how to assess the students for understanding of the lesson. Information identifying technological support for learning such as computer programs or websites is also on the curriculum map.

By aligning the goals, instruction, and assessment of state standards, Mr. Smith sends a consistent message that keeps his school on track. He uses his authority to articulate and support a common academic vision. Analysis of Smith's weeklong journal found that he spent 11 percent of this time working on Georgia Performance Standards or staff development related to these standards. When I asked Smith why he thought he has been successful as a principal, he stated,

> I attribute it to the staff. I am just one person here. We have research based programs in place and of course you have to have people to implement those programs. We all know that programs are useless if they are not implemented correctly. But I think our focus on a common instructional goal by a dedicated staff to work hard and do what it takes to meet all of our self imposed objectives as well as the state's objectives is what has made us successful. That's why I am successful. I have been able to articulate to my staff what it is that we need to be doing and provide the direction that is needed to keep us on task to meet our goals. That combined with the great faculty is the key.

Things were much different when Mr. Smith arrived at Cherokee Elementary. He described the previous way of instruction at Cherokee as the "hit and miss" approach. He elaborated by saying,

> Everyone was doing their own thing. Some good things were going on, but for the most part, there was no consistency among grades and between grade levels. We got a grant when I first came and we put in the Reading Mastery Phonics reading program. It wasn't necessarily the program that made such a difference, it was the staff development that we gave the teachers and the way they implemented this program. When teachers saw how much better they were teaching reading and how much more our students were learning, the desire to learn more and receive more staff development became infectious. I had some teachers who had been here at this school for a long time and getting people to change the way they have been doing things for a long is not easy. So that becomes one of those times where a principal just has to say, "Okay, this is what we are going to do and we are all going to do it and you are going to be evaluated on how well you do it." Once that is said, then the buy in is mandatory. I did that, but at the same time, I let the teachers know how important I thought it was for our students. I showed them the results of what had been done in the past and how it was working. Once I did that, it was easy to get them to try something new since the school's test scores were very poor.

The success that Cherokee Elementary experienced with their new reading program not only increased student achievement, but it also began the transformation of the faculty from one of isolated, close my door type teachers, to a faculty that supports reform efforts and embraces new and innovative ways of teaching. Mr. Smith's description of his faculty the first year he was the principal differs greatly from the description of his current faculty. He described the faculty during his first year as, "competent, but isolated. They did not collaborate with one another and many of them thought that their feelings and needs were the most important things to be considered in the building." How he describes his current faculty follows,

> I have some of the best teachers anywhere, and they are essentially the same group that was here six years ago when I got here. I have two kids, a kindergartener and a first grader, and they had great experiences here. These teachers are dedicated, hardworking, competent, and loyal folks who try to do the

> best they can everyday. I have been fairly successful in most places I have been, and continue to be here. I attribute that to my staff. I don't attribute that to me. I believe that a school can only goes as high as the leader. Knowing what this group of teachers did before I got here and what they are accomplishing now basically proves that point. But I also realize that now that these teachers have some direction, if anybody ever gives us any accolades, it should be them. They are the ones that are doing all the work now. I just put it back on them. I just oversee what is going on and try to keep us moving in the same direction.

The faculty of Cherokee echo Mr. Smith's sentiments. On the survey that I administered to the faculty, every respondent indicated they felt that Cherokee Elementary School was a quality school. I asked the teachers why they felt that way and received responses such as: "A committed effort with planning," "developing, and implementing school improvement," "everyone has the same goal – students can learn," "teachers have extended training on programs that are being used at the present time," and "we have administrators and teachers who are constantly seeking ways to improve the quality of education that our students receive."

After Mr. Smith explained Cherokee's extensive curriculum alignment to me, and after he told me about the transformation of his faculty from one that was more individualized to one that collaborates with each other and works as teams to accomplish school goals, I began to understand how the school's test scores had improved so dramatically, and the reason behind why they have made Adequate Yearly Progress for six consecutive years. I also wanted to know how much time they spent preparing their students for end-of-year testing and did test preparation activities factor into their good test scores. He responded,

> The teachers and students hear the letters CRCT fairly regularly after Christmas. We do some practice, actually quite a bit of practice after Christmas, but we don't just spend the whole year saying to our students, "you have to take this test and you have to do well on it." I think that does more damage than good. It gets them all hyped up and nervous about the test. We just try to teach the curriculum all

> year long and be consistent in what we do in meeting the needs of all of our students. After Christmas, the teachers will set aside time at least once a week to practice CRCT. They spend about 30 minutes a day, one or two days a week, working on CRCT practice. We do quite a bit of test preparation in our after school program because we have found that those are the marginal students who need to extra help, but during the day, we try to stay focused on the curriculum.

Focusing on the curriculum is something that Mr. Smith believes his faculty does very well. As previously mentioned, Cherokee Elementary has developed a very comprehensive curriculum guide for all grade levels covering all subjects. However, Smith believes the emphasis that they place on reading has made the biggest difference in student achievement in his school. He said, "Reading is the foundation of everything we do. If a student is struggling in reading, he will struggle in all subjects." Smith said that they have three goals with their reading program. These three goals are:

- All children will be able to read at or above grade level by the end of the third grade.
- Cherokee Elementary School parents will actively engage in process of learning to read during the early childhood years to ensure that their children learn to read as soon as they are ready.
- The school will develop a research-based professional development system that will assist reading teachers in the delivery of instructional practices that maximize reading gains for all students.

To accomplish these three goals, Mr. Smith explained to me some of the things that they do. What he told me follows:

> To make sure our students are reading by third grade, we provide additional support during and after school to help them with reading. We have a research based reading program that provides evaluative tools and instruments that allow us to monitor student progress in the area of reading. Also, we have structured our classes so that we have small groups for struggling readers providing more one-

> on-one instruction for them and we provide challenging activities for the students who are reading on or above grade level. We spend three hours a day on reading instruction for all students. To get the parents involved, we provide training during the year for parents regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children at home. Finally, we provide a tremendous amount of professional development for our teachers to learn how to be better reading teachers. Our professional development focuses on skill acquisition, demonstration, and practice. I can't begin to tell you how much these teachers have evolved over the past six years and changed their way of doing things. These teachers have not only bought into what we are doing with reading, they now own it and defend it and most of all, believe in it.

Allocating Resources to Support Student Achievement

Mr. Smith believes that when his staff comes up with an idea to improve what they are doing, it is his responsibility, "to come up with the financial support to make it happened." He makes sure that their resources get directed toward instructional areas rather than general administration by targeting money to meet the needs of the students and staff. For example, Cherokee Elementary School received $50,700 from the state last year for being a Title I Distinguished School for six consecutive years. He can give the money to teachers as rewards for their efforts. If he and his leadership team had decided to do just that, each teacher would have received approximately $1,700 each. That would have been perfectly acceptable since the state allows each school to spend that money however they wish. However, personal monetary gain of each teacher was set aside to address issues that are more pressing. How did they spend their money? Mr. Smith explained,

> We spent it all on the kids last year. We used part of it to in new playground equipment. As hard as our kids have been working for us, we thought we could do something for them to make school a little more enjoyable. I also bought student agendas for all the kids and I bought some teacher planners. We are spending the rest of the money on different things for the kids such as listening centers, a kiln for the art room, and some other instructional luxuries the teachers want.

Mrs. Smith has also found other ways to provide money to meet instructional needs. The school applied for and received the Reading Excellence Act (REA) grant. The money the school received from the grant helped provide, "over 100 hours of staff development over the past three years for all certified staff." Currently, the school is receiving funding through the Reading First grant. Smith says that the combination of the REA grant and the Reading First grant has provided "supplies and materials for the teachers and students and allowed millions of dollars to come through here to update our reading program and provide staff development. You name it, we have it, and if for some reason we don't, we can get it." When IO asked the Cherokee Elementary School teachers why their school was successful, one respondent wrote, "We have a vast array of resources."

I asked Mr. Smith how the state could improve education for all elementary schools across the State of Georgia. His response centered on the need for financial support for schools. He replied,

> For schools like us and I would imagine all other schools, money is always an issue. I would really like to see state funded paraprofessionals in the elementary grades, at least through grades two and three. We have them in kindergarten and pre-k now, but we lost the funding and we don't fund them locally here. I think more funding for some release time for teachers during the school day for some staff development activities would also be beneficial. Sometimes we have to pull teachers in off contract time and that is always tough. We have to keep them late to conduct staff development activities because we don't want to waste instructional time with the students during the day conducting these types of activities. But more personnel in the form of paraprofessionals would be just so helpful. I don't think people realize what having another competent person in the room does for instruction. Working with first graders on reading at such an important time of their lives is invaluable. One teacher with 21 kids is tough.

Mr. Smith does not let the loss of funding for paraprofessionals keep him from providing the individual instruction he feels is so important for his students. Instead, he

changes the way he schedules students in classes by using an augmented model of classroom design. The augmented model places students in classes according to their academic performance and combines a small number of below grade level students with a larger number of students who are on or above grade level. Using the augmented model provides more funding from the state to reduce class size and provides the much needed one-on-one time that he wants for his students. He said,

> The augmented model gives the teachers more time to allocate individual instruction to our struggling students. I also utilize some parent volunteers that come in and work with some of those classes. I have also some teachers who manipulate their schedules to try to come in and work with students who need extra help and I have done some team teaching with special education teachers to give more support to the students who really need it. I think small class size is very important. The research proves that. I think small class sizes really help our test scores and I think it helps those kids that struggle.

Parent Involvement

Over the past six years, Mr. Smith has come up with some very innovative things to get the parents of his students involved with the education of their children. During the school year, they have at least five family nights where parents are fed supper and they are able to watch their children in some type of performance. He also has parent involvement activities throughout the entire school year that are both fun and educational for the parents. The student handbook given to students at the beginning of the school year lists these activities. The parent involvement activities on this year's calendar are

- Space heaters - a home safety program
- No Child Left Behind program
- Holiday Safety program
- Our public library program
- Research Based Reading Strategies program
- Computer Basics program
- Drug Awareness program
- Preparing for Testing program

Smith also conducts a student of the month luncheon each month of the school year to get parents to school and witness the wanted behaviors of his students as they are recognized. He conducts school-wide birthday parties each month. Every student who has a birthday during the month goes to the cafeteria to have a party with their peers and their parents. He does all of these things because he believes,

> Parent involvement may be the single most important thing to the success of a school. It's a part of the system of learning that, if missing, everything breaks down. During the day we have quite a few tutors come in. I think our parents are fairly involved and I do think it is very important to get them here during the school day. These kids I have need to see that their parents think school is important to them so that it will be important to the kids. If my students see their parents up here, it reinforces to them how important school is.

My analysis of Mr. Smith's journal found that he spent 16 percent of his time during a normal week of school involved in with parents in activities such as parent conferences, home visits, Student Support Team (SST) meetings, and with the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO). Smith believes in parent involvement so much, he has devoted three-fourths of his letter to the parents of his school found in the student handbook to the importance of parent involvement. He writes:

> The intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development of each child is of utmost importance. We encourage you to be continually involved in your child's education. A team effort is necessary in order to provide the best possible educational opportunities for our students. Please be involved in your child's education by volunteering at school, working with your child at home, reading to and with your child daily and communicating and visiting with your child's teacher on a regular basis. Parents or guardians are strongly encouraged to schedule a conference with the teacher after each progress report and each nine weeks grading period and at any other time questions or concerns arise about your child's performance at school.

Parent involvement is a partnership between the school and home. To be an active member of that partnership, Smith believes that the school must also, "do things to make the job of parenting easier." One of the services that Smith provides parents of his

students is after-school care. This program is for students whose parents do not get off work until after normal school hours thus allowing the students supervision by adults instead of going to an empty home. The program runs until 6:00 p.m. everyday. Certified staff members monitor ten to twelve students. A small fee for parents compensates teachers for their time. Smith states, "We have some scholarships for those that can't afford to send their kids." Students in the program participate in physical activity, work on homework, and are fed and after school snack. Parents that cannot come and pick up their child from the program do not have to worry. Smith sends them home on a bus with the other after school program students.

Mr. Smith also values the need for parents to be involved with the behavior of their child during the school day. He very often calls on parents for behavior support. For the severe cases of misbehavior, students experience suspension from school. However, Smith says student suspension is very rarely for more than "a day or two." He does not believe in long-term suspensions because he feels that is only a temporary solution to the problem. He says, "Eventually, the student will return and the issue is still there. I would rather get the parent involved with me and the school and make solving the problem a team effort." When I asked Smith what he thought he did differently than other principals that may attribute to his success, he stated,

> I think something I do differently or unique would probably be how I relate to the parents of my students. For example, if I suspend Johnny off the bus for 10 days and his parent can't come get him, I will take him home if that is what is needed to get him to school. My willingness to work with parents and make school a team effort where we work together to make sure each child gets a good education, the best education possible, is probably what I do best. I will work with parents and do what it takes to help. I believe all of the parents of my students know that. There have been many times I have gone by and picked up students in the mornings and dropped them off at home late in the afternoon just to get them to school. There have also been many times that parents have thanked me for what I

have done for their child while they were a student here. Parent involvement with the school is essential to being a successful school.

Defining Success, Internally/Externally

The ability to provide and nurture a collaborative school environment that fosters healthy relationships among the faculty and students of the school, aligning policy and practices with academic goals and facilitating teacher support for reform efforts, the ability to allocate resources to support achievement, and the emphasis on maintaining an open line of communication between the home and school promoting productive parent involvement are the four leadership characteristics that I identified form the time I have spent with Donnie Smith. These four characteristics attribute to the success that Mr. Smith has experienced as the principal of Cherokee Elementary School. But just what is success? I asked Mr. Smith to define success for me. He replied,

> To me success is having a school where students learn and students feel good about themselves because they are learning. Success is when a majority, if not all of your students, are meeting academic goals. When a student gets an education that makes them good citizens and allows them to be successful when they leave your care, whether it is going out into the world of work or if it is going to the third grade, that is what I consider success. Adequately preparing them for the next step of their life, that is success.

I followed his definition of success by asking him if he thought that a school can be considered successful without making Adequate Yearly Progress as defined by the Georgia Department of Education. To that, he responded,

> I think a school can be successful without making AYP. I think it is really tough on the moral of the staff and the principal and the parents because there are so many pitfalls to AYP. You have so many different gaps that must be closed. Trying to close those gaps sets schools up for failure. Take attendance for example. If you have a parent who doesn't care about school and won't bring their child to school, that counts against you and at the elementary level, that kid can't get up and get himself ready for school and drive himself to school. In fact, we have a couple of schools here in our system that did not make AYP, but met all of their academic goals. They had problems with attendance or a sub-group.

> Maybe the difference is I have gone to their houses and got them to make them come to school. However, when you look at the big picture, schools can be successful without making AYP

When I conducted my final interview with Mr. Smith, he and several members of his faculty had just returned from a Georgia Department of Education sponsored awards banquet to receive an award honoring high poverty, high achievement schools. The following description of Cherokee Elementary School was provided by Kathy Cox, Georgia School Superintendent, and the Georgia Department of Education in the program given out at the banquet:

> The ongoing process in reading, language arts, and mathematics scores is a significant effort exhibited by teachers and students. Scientifically research-based reading strategies have been delivered through professional development, Reading Excellence, and Reading First grants.
>
> Cherokee Elementary has implemented programs such as Reading Mastery Plus, Silver Burdett Mathematics, Language for Learning, Second Step, and specific instructional methods. Instructional methods are differentiated instruction, phonemic awareness, word study, fluency and comprehension strategies, vocabulary, and word walls. Teachers have adopted brain compatible instruction and environmental strategies that enhance the learning process of students at their academic level. Flexible grouping is used when students required more challenging objectives and need to strengthen their skills in a particular content area.
>
> Cherokee Elementary School, part of a culturally diverse community, chooses to prepare students for a challenging social structure. Fine Arts, Kid's Vote, Character Education, Relay-For-Life, Jump Rope for Heart, St. Jude Math-a-thon, and Holiday Food drives allow students to practice lifelong skills for exploring human needs and developing cooperative relationships. Their goal is to have all students reading on grade level by the end of second grade.

Before I left Cherokee Elementary School, the last comment Mr. Smith made to me was,

> I feel good about what I do when I look at a student from where he started as a new learner and where he is now. If you take a bright child in kindergarten and they are still just considered bright when they reach the fifth grade and not exceptional, then you have failed. On the same hand, when you take a kid who

> enters kindergarten with a lot of baggage, no learning skills from home, no parental support, poor behavior, and can't function in a group because of inadequate social skills, and he turns out to make good grades and pass all of his end-of-year tests in the fifth grade and can speak in front of a crowd and get along well with his peers, then you have been successful with that student. I can site many cases where this type of turnaround has occurred and luckily, very few where we don't take the bright child from bright to exceptional.

Portrait of Tammie Smith

Northside Elementary School is located in the Tift County School District. There are eight elementary schools, one middle school, one ninth-grade academy, one high school, and one pre-kindergarten school in the district. According to district information, the school system enrollment is approximately 6,900 students. Northside Elementary School is part of the Tift County School District and is one of only ten elementary schools in the state of Georgia that has made adequate yearly progress for five consecutive years with a student population that places them in the category of lower poverty, as identified by the Georgia Department of Education 2005).

The principal of Northside Elementary is Mrs. Tammie Smith. Of the eight elementary schools in Tift County, only Northside elementary is a Georgia Department of Education Recommended Title I Distinguished Schools. None of the other seven schools have made Adequate Yearly Progress for three years; the minimum number of years to receive this recognition.

Of the eight elementary schools in Tift County, an average of 52 percent of the students qualifies for free or reduced meal rates and 34 percent of the students are African American. Of the 654 students enrolled at Northside Elementary, 67 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced meal rates and 59 percent of the students are

white, 40% of the students are African American, and less than one percent is either Asian or Hispanic.

Of the 40,000 residents of Tift County, the average age is 33, 66 percent are white, the median household income is $40,900 a year, the median value of a housing structure is $33,000 and 66 percent of the residents own their own home (U.S Census Bureau, 2000). The Tift County School system spent an average of $4,690 per student for public education each year between 1996 and 2000. This average expenditure was less than the statewide average of $5,285 (Georgia Snapshot, 2004).

Tift County has taken many monikers over the years. Some of the names that have been given to Tift County are, “The Friendly City,” “The Softball Capital of the World,” "Plant Capital of the World," and most recently, “The Reading Capital of the World.” The Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education has designated Tift County as a Certified Literate Community (CLC) program participant. A CLC community is one in which 50 percent of the community, plus one, have been served through adult literacy.

Tifton is the city seat of Tift County. Interstate I-75 and Highway 82, two of the heaviest traveled roads in the State of Georgia, dissect Tift County. Tift County is a rapidly growing and rapidly changing community. The combination of being a hub for agriculture, the growing business and industry, and the hospitality industry, has stemmed much of the growth and change that the town is experiencing.

As I exited I-75 to conduct my interview with Mrs. Smith, I noticed a brand new civic/conference center on one side of the interstate and a very large medical center on the other side. Making my way to Northside Elementary School, I passed a hospital that

covered several city blocks, several new restaurants and hamburger joints, and mile after mile of middle to upper class income sub-divisions. The neighborhood surrounding the Northside campus did not change much from what I had been witnessing since leaving the interstate. Being the parent of two elementary school aged children, I immediately thought to myself that I would feel completely comfortable allowing my children to ride their bikes to school or walk to school if I lived in the surrounding neighborhood. The well-maintained streets with sidewalks, the nice houses, and the nicely maintained grounds of the school all combined to give me a safe feeling. Northside Elementary certainly appeared to be a neighborhood school.

I parked my truck in a visitor's parking spot in front of the school and made my way into the building. Two secretaries staffing the front desk greeted me quite warmly, aware that I was meeting with Mrs. Smith. As I sat on the couch in the front office waiting to talk to her, I struck up a conversation with two students who seated in the front office. Both students were waiting for their parents to pick them up to take them to dental appointments. Ironically, one student was getting braces put on, and the other student was getting her braces off. The student who was getting new braces was going to a local dentist a few blocks away from the campus. He told me that his mom was taking him to eat before the appointment because he heard you "couldn't eat for a month" after you got braces on. The other student began telling him that he should go to her dentist in Albany because her braces did not hurt her at all. As she was telling him about her dentist, Mrs. Smith entered the front office and invited me back to her office.

Mrs. Smith's office was very regal looking. She had a nice desk with wooden bookshelves in front of her desk covering a wall. There were two paintings of flowers in

vases hanging on the wall behind her desk There was a window with curtains on one side of her desk that gave her a view of the hallway outside her office. The wall on the other side of her desk contained a wooden library table with two new filing cabinets on either end. All of the papers on her desk were neatly piled or in folders. Between her desk and the bookshelves were two nice leather chairs with high backs and armrests. I sat down in one of the leather chairs and began to get to know Mrs. Smith as our first interview began

Mrs. Smith is a life-long resident of Tift County. She attended Tift County public schools as a child and graduated from Tift County High School in 1979. She is married to a coach in the school system and has two daughters who both currently attend Tift County public schools. After Mrs. Smith graduated from the University of Georgia with a degree in Early Childhood Education, she began her teaching career as an elementary school teacher in Tifton. During her seven years as a teacher, she attended Valdosta State University at night and on the weekends and earned her Master's Degree and Specialist's Degree in Educational Leadership. Near the end of her seventh year as a classroom teacher, she had the opportunity to take an assistant principals' job at the elementary school in which she was teaching. She ended up serving eight years in that position, working for two different principals during that time. After eight years as an assistant, she became the principal at Northside Elementary School.

The move from her assistant principal's job to a principal job was a big move for her. After all, she had spent her entire 15 years in education at the same school working with the same core group of people. Now she was expected to move all the way across town to work with a totally different group of students and teachers. However, she felt prepared to take on the new responsibilities because she had been working for a "very

strong principal" who she credits for "showing me, by example, how to run a school and be good at what I do. He allowed me to learn from my mistakes and I was there long enough to learn from his mistakes too."

The job that Mrs. Smith undertook by assuming the principals' job of Northside Elementary is somewhat different from the other four principals I studied in that the majority of the student population was white and with a majority of the students not eligible for free or reduced meal rates. The differences ended there. What she had in common with the other four schools is that, upon her arrival, the school was a Needs Improvement school according to the Georgia Department of Education upon her arrival. As I have had the opportunity to interview Mrs. Smith on three different occasions, observe her at her school four times, survey her faculty, examine school documents, and analyze the daily journal she kept for me documenting everything she did for an entire week, I have collected many data about her school and her leadership style. I entered the data I collected into MaxQDA software and analyzed the data through a system of coding. The relevant categories that emerged from my data analysis revealed six primary factors for her success as a leader: her ability to develop a vision that united school projects, the development of a common curriculum, obtaining support from the community, redefining the role of principal, providing focused professional development to her faculty, and her development of relationships with her faculty and with her students.

Developing a Vision to Unite Projects

Having worked in the school system for many years, Mrs. Smith was very familiar with the faculty and the facilities of Northside Elementary. The year prior to

taking the job as principal, the school district started a new initiative called Reading Recovery (RR). The new RR initiative was a literacy collaborative training that taught a balanced literacy framework. She knew from her conversations at district meetings and from her conversations with other educators in the community that the Northside Elementary School faculty was resistant to changing to the new program. Mrs. Smith explained:

> The word was out that Northside was resistant to the Reading Recovery program and they wouldn't buy in. When I went there, I had comments from people like our district Reading Recovery trainer and our district literacy collaborative trainer such as, "good luck. You are going to have a hard time with some of those teachers and changing their minds." The overall perception that I had was that people in that school were set in their ways and would resist change, no matter if it was good or bad. So I knew that my work was cut out for me. I decided the best way to approach the situation was go in form day one and let them know that we were going to have Reading Recovery teachers and we were going to train for literacy collaborative and we were going to implement. That was the way it was going to be and I was going to stick to my guns and see that everyone knew we were going to do it. So the teachers knew that from the beginning. Some didn't like this new person coming in and telling them what to do and they chose to leave and go with the other administrator to her school. Also, I had some teachers from the school I was leaving, about eight of them, who wanted to transfer to Northside. And they did and I took them with me mainly because they already had the buy-in to the program.

Mrs. Smith firmly believed in making sure that everyone was "rowing in the same direction." She said that the principal she had worked with for the past eight years had a "very comprehensive team decision making process" that she really liked and believed that was the way to run a school. However, with so much resistance to the Reading Recovery program, she knew she was going to have to be "authoritative concerning the issue of implementing the program." Smith said, "even though teachers were told program implementation would be tied to their evaluations, which only ensured all would

be doing it when I walked by their rooms, but did not mean that they believed in the program." The results of uniting the faculty happened slowly. She explained,

> There were some in just about every grade level who didn't like balanced literacy framework and wanted to work out of a basal and didn't want to change. They did just enough to satisfy themselves that they could pass an implementation evaluation. But still, I didn't go in and push. I just took those who were willing to do it and used them to help convert the others. They started training and they started implementing in their classrooms. Those classes were the one's I bragged on because they were the ones I could see real change taking place in student learning. Eventually, word got out and that's where parents wanted their kids. They would hear teachers talking and people in the community talking, saying things like "I hear she does this and she does that and she is the best teacher" and that would make them want to put their kids in those teachers rooms. I think those had been resistant all along started seeing that. I don't know how authentic their implementation was, but they made an effort to do it.

As Mrs. Smith grew more comfortable in her leadership role, she began to identify which teachers she could count on to help her unite a common vision among the faculty. She selected lead teachers to direct grade level meetings and serve on her leadership team. By doing this, she was able to move away from an authoritative type of leadership and evolve into a shared leadership for the school. She stated, "When the team makes a decision, we can all say it was our decision to do this and not just my decision. It helps with the buy-in for anything we try to do." Mrs. Smith said,

> At the end of five years, I can honestly say that the Northside faculty would do anything that dealt with change. We were willing to be the school that would experiment and be willing to look at new ways of doing things. But it took five years. It was at the end of five years before I felt that way. During that process, some chose to leave and not be a part of it, and that was okay. But I knew that developing a vision for the school starts with the teachers. If you weren't a teacher who was willing to be a part of a vision of improvement and change, then you weren't the right fit for this school. Some people think the leader of the school possesses the vision. That's not true. The vision is developed and owned by everyone in the school.

Mrs. Smith's insistence on making everyone a part of the "system of operating the school." facilitated changing the mindset of the faculty. She said, "Having an opinion did

not make you a part of the system. Having an idea that could be backed up by research or best practices did make you a part of the system." Mrs. Smith made the commitment to share with her faculty every piece of school performance data that she could find. Teachers knew what the schools strengths and weaknesses were and could begin to talk intelligently about strengths and weaknesses to their peers and to the stakeholders of the school. Smith believes the "power of sharing information is immeasurable. When any conscientious person is confronted with their weaknesses, they will address them." Now the group of Northside teachers are describe by Smith as:

> A group of hard-working, conscientious professionals who embrace change and not run from it. It all started with groups being formed by people who are willing to get on board and accept change. Those that were willing to do that were looked on by others as doing something that I wanted them to do and they wanted to buy in and get on board or be left behind. All I had to do was make them realize that I thought it was important to me, for them, and for the students. Once they knew that, they took over and turned this school around.

Developing a Common Curriculum

One of the first things that Mrs. Smith realized about the teaching practices that were taking place in her new school was that there was no continuity within grade levels. During one of her first classroom observations, she observed a third grade teacher teaching a wonderful lesson on Indians. She made a mental note to herself that this particular teacher had done a wonderful job teaching her lesson. She believed this would be a great time to give some positive feedback to a faculty member and decided to write up what she had observed as a formal observation and provide the teacher with a great evaluation full of accolades. As she sat in her office and began writing up the observation, she realized that Native American culture was a second grade state standard

and the third grade teacher had just taught a wonderful lesson on a standard that was not applicable to her grade level. She told me,

> There are certain things that teachers like to teach and they have a hard time giving that up. That teacher really enjoyed teaching her unit on Indians. However, kids at that grade level don't need that because this is not something they have to learn. So even though you enjoy teaching about Indians, you need to stick to the curriculum that is relevant to your grade level. Therefore, we set out as a faculty to align our teaching with what the state says is mandatory for each grade level to teach. The state is aligning the test to their standards so we needed to focus on the standards. If a teacher could teach such a wonderful lesson on Indians, she should have no trouble teaching as equally a wonderful lesson on dinosaurs if that is what she should be teaching.

To begin the process of planning a common curriculum for each grade level, Mrs. Smith asked all of the teachers to list the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) objectives in their lesson plan books that coincided with each lesson they were teaching. Her plan was for all teachers to be able to use their yearly lesson plan books as the beginning of their curriculum guide that they would develop before the beginning of the next school year.

At the end of the first year, before teachers went home for the summer, Mrs. Smith met with them by grade levels and explained to them the task she wanted them to accomplish. She asked each grade level to review what they had taught that year, how they had taught it, and develop a common curriculum guide that they would all follow the next year. They were to check off each QCC objective that they taught and make sure that they had a very comprehensive guide. They shared with their peers the lessons that they felt were very effective at achieving the desired student outcome. Smith provided each teacher with copies of test scores of their students from end-of-year testing so that they could identify each teacher's individual strengths and weaknesses and use that as part of the planning process. Teachers who had students that did not perform well in

certain areas were able to draw on the strengths of their peers, and how they taught certain QCC objectives to their students.

Each year Mrs. Smith holds the same type of meetings with her teachers. They constantly review and revise their curriculum guides to incorporate the best of what each teacher does in all of their lessons. She says, "sixty percent of what some teachers do now comes directly from lesson plans that other teaches used to instruct their kids and have shared with the group."

The QCC objectives have change this past year to the new Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). Mrs. Smith stated, "We all know the research on the QCC's. Supposedly, it would take 22 years to teach all of the objectives that were listed in kindergarten through twelfth grade." The faculty of Northside Elementary is busy converting what they have done with the QCC objectives to the GPS objectives. Mrs. Smith believes this process be a "fairly easy process since the teachers have been doing this for five years." She states,

> I hope we are headed in a better direction with the Georgia Performance Standards. I hope we are defining what it is that teachers need to teach more clearly. I think we ask so much of teachers that it becomes a hit and miss kind of thing. Knowing what they really need to spend time on is important. I hope GPS will answer this question. I hope this will be more concise and tell them what they need to focus on more than the process we have in place now. Teachers will now know what it is they need to teach at their grade level and developing a common curriculum among grade levels and between grade levels should be much easier.

Community Support

Another concern that Mrs. Smith had about her new school was the lack of parent involvement. She believes that student achievement goes "hand-in-hand with the parental support for education that is evident in the school." Smith commented on the need for parent involvement:

> It makes a difference in the academic progress that their children makes if parents are concerned and know what is going on in school. That's why I ask my own children everyday, "What kind of day did you have? Did you turn in your project today? What did you make on that test you took?" I want parents at home asking these same questions to their children. That's the only way that children make a lot of progress is if someone at home shows they care and make school important for the student.

Smith began the process of promoting parent involvement by using her parent liaison to assist her in addressing this need. She explained,

> I think parent involvement is very important. We were like many places in that we got the parents involved that are easy to get involved. The tough to get involved, those that are hard to reach, are still a challenge. I had a good parent liaison that helped me start a comprehensive parent involvement program. We would hold parent meetings during the course of the day, and she had money to buy them lunch. She would buy big Subway sandwiches and bring them in so she could feed them lunch. She would use people like our literacy coach to do presentations to the parents. She would pick out people like that who could teach parents tips on how to read with your child and how to help your child in certain areas. Typically they did some hands on things and parents left those meetings with some good positive comments. She offered to provide transportation. We provided her with a van so she could go pick them up. Somehow, food is a good motivator to in those that were hard to get.

Mrs. Smith wants her school to be a "happy environment, a welcoming place and most of all, parent friendly." During kindergarten registration, her parent liaison puts together parent packets that have all sorts of information and activities parents can do over the summer to help their child be prepared for kindergarten. The liaison dresses up like a clown during registration and gives away pencils. She said, "It is just a thing we do to make the children feel good about where they will be going to school, to give them a great first impression of school, and to make them and the parents feel welcomed."

The group of parents that Mrs. Smith has been working with over the past five years is now very involved with all aspect of the school. The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) has over 100 parents who attend the monthly meetings, help plan

special school events, and organize their fund raising activities. She has many parents who come in each day and help with reading instruction by reading to students and assisting with small group instruction. She believes the parent readers are important in that they are a model for the kids to show them they believe reading is important. The parents that help with small group instruction, conduct activities with students, and help monitor them while the classroom teacher is teaching reading to other students.

Mrs. Smith provides multiple opportunities for parents to come to school to witness positive things that are happening. Each grade level has end of the year programs where the students put on a play or sing songs. There are also several other activities similar to this conducted during the school year. Smith has a school-wide birthday party for students each month. By doing this, she says she accomplishes two goals, "Every student gets a birthday party at school and their parents get to come and we don't have to stop instruction 22 times a year to have individual parties in each room." One of Smith's proudest accomplishments is the number of parents that are now involved in "Terrific Tuesdays." She explains,

> Through a culmination of all of our promoting parent involvement, we now have a core group of parents we can count on to be here for everything. For Terrific Tuesdays, we always have a great turnout. A lot of the parents that show up are ones that you would have never guessed five years ago would be a part of any type of parent involvement. Terrific Tuesdays is a way that parents can give back to the school by helping their child's teacher. On Tuesdays, teachers put a box outside their door that is labeled Terrific Tuesday and the parent volunteers go by and pick up that box of stuff that needs to be done. As a group, they take the boxes to the stage in the cafeteria and work on these things, such as grading papers, running copies, or organizing materials for a future lesson, and they deliver it back to the teachers. I have found that activities such as these accomplish a couple of things. First of all, the teachers work a little harder at instruction because they know there is another set of eyes on what they are doing. And secondly, the knowledge that parents gain from participating in these activities provides them with the ability to speak to their child and to other parents about what is going on in schools. It's like electing the President. People are

> constantly talking about who the President is and who will be the next one. You can't turn on the TV or listen to the radio without hearing about our President. The constant conversation about the President adds to the importance of the position. The constant conversations that people have about schools make school more important.

Redefining the Role of Principal

In our discussion about leadership styles, Mrs. Smith told me she believed in leading by example. She believes in "working side-by-side with my faculty in everything we do." There were several responses on the teacher survey that I administered to her faculty asking them to list three qualities that describe their principal that verified her statement to me, such as; "Participates with the faculty in all that we do," "Can always be counted on to be there when you need her," and "Extremely supportive." Evidence in her belief of working closely with her faculty is in her weeklong journal. During an average school week, Smith's journal indicates that she spends 23 percent of her time communicating with teachers in her office, conducting classroom visits, during teacher conferences, and in faculty meetings.

Mrs. Smith believes the way she leads is much different from her predecessor and believes that is one of the keys to why the school has been successful. She states, "The principal before me viewed sharing power as a loss of power. I believe sharing power multiplies power." She continued,

> I believe sharing the power of the school means arming teachers with the knowledge to be able to make good decisions by giving them access to student data, allowing them a voice in the decision making process, and by giving them the power to chose programs and have a voice in how money is spent in our school. I don't want to ask anyone to do anything that I am not willing to do. I try to lead by example. If I ask teachers to do a duty, I need to be willing to get out there and do it also. If I ask them to learn about new curriculum or be a part of staff development, I better be willing to sit in on it, be a part of it, and learn about it as too. I sit in on the training because it is new to me and I am excited to learn about it. I feel like part of the problem the school was having was the

> administrator not being present and sitting there learning and showing the importance for what was going on. I feel I need to be sitting there whether I am already trained or not, I feel like they need to see it. There again, lead by example.

Smith's philosophy of sharing power is evident in the way she manages the discipline with students in her school. She has set up a unique method of student discipline that requires teachers to document student behaviors and meet with their grade level chair to handle discipline issues before reaching her office. The method of handling discipline seems to be effective as her journal reflects that she spends less than three percent of her time during an average week attending to disciplinary issues. Teachers are required to make parent contact before sending a child to the office for discipline matters. If the teacher and the grade level chair cannot resolve the discipline issue, she says, "My door is always open, as is my assistant principal's door, to help them maintain order in their classrooms so that effective instruction can take place."

The system of decision making that Smith has in place starts with her leadership team made up of her, her assistant principals, and her grade level leaders. The ideas developed during leadership team meetings go back to grade levels for discussion. Any issue that arises in grade level meetings that is contrary to what the leadership team decided is re-addressed in the leadership team meetings. If a final decision needs making, the leadership team makes it. Smith says,

> I want people that I work with, whatever they are responsible for, to feel like they have a voice. I want them to be able to make decisions and say, "I think I am going to do this or that" and I want them to feel like they can take ownership of whatever needs to be done and bring closure to it and not feel like they have to run to me with every little petty decision. I want them to feel like I am going to support them. Sometimes it may not be the way I would have done it, and that's okay, I'm not the one doing it. I feel like if I have to make all the decisions I might as well take it back over. That's not what I want. I want them to feel like they can take something and run with it and they will have my support.

Another attribute that Mrs. Smith believes accounts for her success is her ability to be straightforward with her teachers. The teacher survey confirmed this belief in that responses to the question I asked her faculty in regards to describing their principal included such things as: "Honest," "Integrity," and "Identifies boundaries and allows us to work within those boundaries." Smith commented,

> I think teachers would tell you I will just go straight to you and deal with any issues that need to be dealt with. Once I deal with it, I am through with it. I don't get hung up on whatever it was that I needed to address. For example, I had an EBD (Emotional Behavior Disorder) teacher who brought a kid to me to be disciplined recently. She was not happy with the way that I disciplined the child. I told her she was mad when she was dealing with this student. I said to her that my job is not to get mad with the student, my job is to remain calm and make a rational decision on how to deal with the problem at hand. I told her I knew she would like for me to string the child and get the whip out, but my job is not to get angry. I am to be the calming factor. I didn't let her leave my office mad that I didn't support her the way she wanted. I talked to her and let her know how I felt and how I believed I should handle the problem. She realized that I was right and thanked me for the way I handled the situation. Whether the situation was handled right was important, but the most important thing was that there was an understanding between me and the teacher and she did not leave here confused about anything and spreading that confusion among her peers.

Focused Professional Development

Twelve of the nineteen respondents to the teacher survey that I administered listed some form of focused professional development as a key to the success of Northside Elementary School. Examples of phrases that teachers used to describe professional development were "Continuous learning," "Multiple professional development opportunities throughout the school year," "Maintaining the focus on teacher improvement," and "Meaningful staff development." Mrs. Smith's journal showed that during an average week she spends 18 percent of her time involved in some form of professional development, whether it was working with her local Regional Educational Support specialist, participating in Reading Recovery training, reviewing an online

professional development survey she administered to her faculty, or registering she and her teachers for upcoming workshops.

Mrs. Smith conducts a needs assessment at the beginning and end of each school year to determine what types of staff development should take place. She states "most of the staff development takes place in house, during the school year." Smith's staff development gives teachers release time, half day training sessions where the students go home at noon, and during in-service days. She also encourages teachers to go to conferences or trainings that relate to their particular grade level. Smith says that about "50 percent of our staff development is related to our reading program." The literacy coaches for her school have received extensive training in how to teach the reading program. When they receive new training, Smith immediately conducts staff development for her teachers by having the literacy coach redeliver what it is they just learned. Smith gave me an example of this type staff development

> We do a lot of training to implement the components of a balanced literacy framework. For example, teachers have staff development on how to conduct a shared real aloud. The literacy collaborative teachers are in house people and they go to training and come back and redeliver that training. They go to Boston to train and they come back and help implement what they have learned. They set up model classroom in the school for the teachers. We train our own trainers. Also, those that have taught our trainers conduct a site visit to see if we are implementing the program correctly.

Mrs. Smith also conducts continuous staff development by way of utilizing her literacy collaborative teachers to help with classroom instruction. The literacy collaborative teachers not only model teaching, but they also go into classrooms, observe, and provide teachers with suggestions on how to improve their teaching methods. Smith is careful to point out that the "literacy collaborative teachers do not serve as evaluators. This makes their presence in the rooms wanted and un-threatening."

Mrs. Smith explained to me why she likes the balanced literacy approach to teaching so much,

> Balanced literacy is not a program. It is a model for delivering instruction. We don't purchase any materials. All we do is buy books. It trains teachers to be better teachers. They do a lot of reading. They have read Marzano's work and they do a lot of book studies. Training to teach reading has a lot to do with why you do what you do in the classroom. In English/LA, we don't have programs; we only have resource books for teachers to use to help them be better teachers. What we are doing teaches the teachers how to teach. It gives them the tools that they need to be able to listen to a child read, diagnose how they have read, and know how to teach that child to be a better reader. If the child doesn't know beginning sounds or medial sounds, the teacher knows to take out a little chalk board and work a mini lesson with that student to help them understand their reading difficulty. They have to come up with this off the top of their head. They have to know how to teach. It's not in a manual. It teaches them to better at diagnosing and prescribing.

Relationships with Teachers and Students

When I asked Mrs. Smith during one of my interviews with her what she felt was the biggest reason for her success as a principal, she told me she believed it was the relationships that she has been able to forge with her teachers and with her students that "foster a feeling that I care about school, I care about learning, and most of all, I care about them as a person, not just as a faculty member or a student." She continued, "I know I am going to come across touchy feely, but effective principals build those relationships with the people they work with and with their students. If that doesn't happen and you don't build those relationships, I don't know that much else happens. Relationships are the key to everything."

Smith believes the relationships she has built with her teachers began with "treating teachers like professionals and giving them ownership of some decision making so that they feel like they have a voice in what happens in the school as far as what

decisions are made." She makes speaking to her teachers and greeting them with a smile part of her personality. She says,

> There are mornings where I don't really want to greet anyone nor do I want anyone to greet me. But I still make myself get out there and get in those halls because I think that is so important. Even if I am not happy with a person or I have something that I need to discuss with them that may not be a fun conversation, I smile and greet them when I see them. Maybe that makes it easier to say the things that I may need to say later to some of my teachers. It helps when I have to tell them I think they made a poor decision concerning an issue. I don't like confrontation, but at the same time, I would rather deal with it and get it over with as soon as it becomes necessary and not stew over something for a long time. That creates an unhealthy tension among the faculty that disrupts student learning.

Some of the other things that Smith does that she feels are important to building needed relationships with her faculty involve connecting with teachers on a personal level. If a teacher has a baby, she goes to the hospital and visits with them. If they are sick, she checks on them both at school, and when their sickness keeps them away from school. She believes "a phone call to check on a sick teachers is just as important to their happiness at school as having a good group students." Smith makes it a point to go by teaches rooms after school and have casual conversations with them about things that "may or may not be related to school." She takes pride in knowing what is going on in their personal lives and being able to know why they may be having a bad day at school. She even makes the personal connection between her and the teacher while conducting school related business. She explains,

> This is silly, but after I go into a classroom and observe, I write up the comments. Before I give it back to the teacher, I stick a smiley face on it. I stick smiley faces on a lot of feedback that I send to teachers. If they don't get a smiley face because I'm in a hurry and don't put it on there, they come to me and say "I didn't get a smiley face. What did I do wrong? Why didn't I get a smiley face?" That may seem silly, but I do it, and they expect to see it. Somehow it shows my approval. Teachers need that approval and at the same time, I need to know that what I do is appreciated too.

As important as connecting with a teacher through her personal actions is to Mrs. Smith, she also makes sure that teachers know she appreciates them on the school level too. Smith works with her PTO to provide luncheons for her teachers at different times during the school year, she provides release time for them to go to lunch off of the school campus, she occasionally buys them gifts to show them they are appreciated, but most of all, Smith says she "try (tries) to make this a place that I want to come to work everyday. I know that if I enjoy coming here, so will others." She believes creating an atmosphere where people enjoy coming to work is her responsibility. She explained,

> Wanting to come to work has to do with the atmosphere that I create. I know administrators who are very unhappy at their schools. I also know that if they are unhappy, so are their teachers. That does not make for a good learning environment and eventually, something has to change. That's why I greet people with a smile, say good morning to them every morning. I know these are little things, but I feel like if you make those face to face communications everyday and let them see you and they know that you are out and about in the building and they know that you are part of the team, and there to support what they are doing, that is the best way I can show the teachers how much I appreciate them.

In return for what she does for her teachers, Smith wants teachers to "make sure that the boys and girls assigned to them make progress. In order for that to happen, she has to build relationships with those students while she has them." Mrs. Smith believes that teachers who do not build relationships with their students are the ones who have problems with classroom management and they "never really connect with them." Her hope is that by treating the teachers with respect and dignity, the same type of relationships with trickle down to the teachers and how they treat their students. She said, "As important as those relationships are between teacher and student, I haven't figured out how you train teachers to build relationships with them. It's an innate quality good teachers possess. You can't teach it."

To Mrs. Smith, her relationship between her and her students is just as important as the one between her and her teachers. She believes that the best way to get a teacher to treat their students as she wants them treated is through her example. She explains,

> As a classroom teacher, I didn't have any discipline problems. I believe it is because I knew my students so well. I believe in preventative medicine. I try to look and see where the potential problems lie and I can go ahead and do something to prevent it. You can't identify those potential problems if you don't know your students. Teachers must manage students in the classroom just like I have to manage them on breakfast duty every morning. I know who is going to cause the problems at breakfast. I make it a point to greet those kids, to ask them how they are doing. I walk them down to class or to the nurse to take their medicine. I stay in close proximity to them and keep an eye on them. If the teachers are not here yet to help watch them, I have them come and sit with me a few minutes. I am not approaching it like they are in trouble. I approach it like I really have an interest in that child and getting to know that child. I try to be proactive with them and that does not happen in every classroom. I was just talking to a teacher about this very thing this morning. She just reacts to problems as they occur. Those are the kids that I get up here in the office; the ones that come to me because of a lack of planning on by the teacher, poor supervision, and not being aware of where potential problems lie. Those are the teachers that don't see the importance in getting to know their students.

Mrs. Smith has strong feelings about the type of school that she wants for her students. She "expects them to come to school ready to learn, to behave while at school, to give their best effort while they are here, and to enjoy being in school." She says,

> I want this to be a place they like to come. My own children have always loved going to school and that is how I want other children to feel. I want them to view school as a positive thing. I want them to know that even if they wake up not feeling the best in the mornings, they will be okay once they get to school. Even as adults we sometimes feel like that. But that is the environment I want here at my school, the feeling that once I get here, I am okay.

Defining Success, Internally/Externally

Mrs. Smith's ability to develop a vision that unites school projects, to develop a common curriculum, obtain support from the community, redefine the role of the principal, provide focused professional development to her faculty, and develop

relationships with her faculty and with her students are the six characteristics that I identified to define what makes her successful. But what is success? Mrs. Smith shared with me her personal definition of success

> Success to me is measured by student achievement. An accurate measure of student achievement cannot be determined by just one measure (i.e. a standardized test). The success of a school can be more accurately measured by examining individual student growth. Portfolios of student work, teachers' anecdotal notes, and records of student progress toward specific goals are a more accurate measure of success. I remember sitting in on parent/teacher conferences a few years ago and hearing teachers simply say, "They're doing fine." How do we define "fine?" What is it that we expect the children to know and what skills they have in place toward meeting the stated goals is a much better way to communicate progress/success. Today our teachers have a much clearer picture of what children need to know and when they should know it.

After Mrs. Smith defined success for me, I asked her if a school is successful without having good test scores. She replied, "Not by our public...but they can by me."

Unfortunately, there currently is no Georgia Department of Education sponsored banquet to honor schools identified as Georgia Department of Education Recommended Title I Distinguished Schools in the category of lower poverty to provide a Georgia Department of Education description of Northside Elementary. However, Mrs. Hammond, one of Mrs. Smith's teachers, provided a description of Mrs. Smith to me that certainly qualifies as an external definition of success. She states,

> There is a quote that I often read which inspires me: "We must be the change we want to see in the world" (Mohandas Gandhi). I believe this quote applies to those special people who are brave and courageous enough to make a positive difference in the lives of others. Tammie Smith is most definitely one who lives her life day to day stamping her particular "brand of leadership" on everyone she meets.
>
> I could spend hours explaining what Tammie's friendship means to me personally. Our friendship goes back over 30 years. I have had the privilege to witness the special transformation of a young, skinny 13 year old into a polished professional administrator and a well-respected leader in Tift County. Our school system is so fortunate to have her as a devoted employee for sure. I have heard

numerous people say, “If only we could clone Tammie Smith, then every school would benefit from her leadership.

Tammie Smith happens to live her life making positive changes inside and outside of school. She exemplifies the qualities we all wish we could acquire. She is a dedicated wife, mother, administrator, colleague, and friend. She is a true professional at work and never seems to complain when there are added burdens to shoulder. Instead, she carries herself with pride, dignity, and grace and never fails to work diligently toward solving problems and meeting goals. She knows how to unite a faculty and how to develop an atmosphere and vision for school improvement. She has a wonderful gift of knowing how to uplift and encourage a struggling new teacher, calm an overly anxious parent, or discipline an unruly child. She gives credit where credit is due and is all about “teamwork.” I feel so lucky to have worked with her for the past five years. I’ve learned so much and I am very grateful.

Tammie Smith is definitely changing the world for the better everyday with her smile, boundless energy, work ethic, and leadership skills. I also have the privilege of calling her my friend and reaping the many beautiful blessings that come with this special friendship.

Chapter IV

COLLECTIVE PORTRAIT: ACROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of elementary school principals on how they transfer the ideas of effective leadership into practice. More specifically, this study sought to examine from the elementary principals' perspective the leadership characteristics of an effective leader.

The overall research questions that guided this study include:

1. How do successful principals account for their success?
2. What do effective principals do differently?
3. Do the principals operate under a clear and focused mission?
4. What are the standards and expectations of the students within the school?
5. What are the standards and expectations of the teachers in the school?
6. How involved are principals in curricular issues?
7. How important is the use of student data in the process of school improvement?
8. What type of learning environment exists within the school?
9. Is family and community involvement important to the school?
10. Is teacher collaboration and teambuilding present?
11. How does the principal improve teaching?
12. How do principals spend their time and energy?
13. What guides the decision-making process of principals?

Five case studies were developed from the data collected over a 12-month period with five principals who served in different school systems. The five principals, all of Title I Distinguished Schools, had taken over Needs Improvement schools and led them to making Adequate Yearly Progress. Their experience as teachers ranged from seven to fifteen years, and their experience as principals ranged from six to eight years.

This chapter provides a cross-case analysis of the analytical (best practices) leadership characteristic of the five principals. Included in the first cross-case analysis are the themes emergent from the data presented. Second in the cross-case analyses are: (a) definitions of success, (b) the analysis of the teacher surveys, and (c) the analysis of the journal each principal maintained over a 5-day period.

Cross-Case Analysis 1

I entered transcripts from principal interviews into MaxQDA software and identified broad categories so as to organize the data and to provide direction for further analysis. From these broad categories, the data were refined until individual perspectives clarified and delineated themselves further presenting as themes. The emergent themes are school culture and climate, assessment of student progress, strong instructional leadership combined with effective instruction, parent and community involvement, effective use of resources, building the capacity for leadership, meaningful professional development, assembling and mentoring a faculty, external support and assistance, and targeting at-risk students. Each theme has a discussion.

School Culture and Climate

The interactions each participant had with members of the school faculty or staff, with students, with parents of students, or with community members offered each

principal an opportunity to reinforce the core value of the school. Participants expressed the need for a variety of relationships in cultivating the culture and climate of their school. In identifying the need for relationships between the principal and all stakeholders of the school, Dr. O'Dell stated, "Relationships are the key to everything. I feel like relationships drive the building." She continued,

> I am a relationship person. My personality and the way I look at the world are all about human relationships. It's natural for me then to look at leading a building through my relationships and my encouraging others to have relationships with each other and with the children and with the parents. If all of that is positive and we relate well to one another, we can develop a professional learning community

Mr. Smith also identifies the need to maintain and develop relationships among the stakeholders of the school. He stated:

> I try to establish a relationship with my staff as well as parents and students. I think this is probably what distinguishes me from somebody who may not be as successful. You can have all the ideas in the world, but if you are not a people person and know how to get along with folks and how to communicate without hurting their feelings, then you already have two strikes against you before you ever get up to bat.

The third principal to identify the need for numerous relationships as the key to being successful was Mrs. Smith. Mrs. Smith said, "Effective principals build those relationships with the people they work with and with their students and their parents. If that doesn't happen and you don't build those relationships, I don't know if much else happens."

Participants also identified the specific need for relationships between the principal and the teacher. Mrs. Wallace said, "I expect my teachers to work hard. We must all work together to be successful. Once we are able to function as a group, we can do anything. We must work hard to build and maintain the relationships that allow us to

work together effectively." In addressing her need to build relationships with her faculty, Dr. O'Dell stated:

> I could share wonderful stories all day about kids because I love them, but I don't think that is the secret to my success here. I think it is the adult relationships in the building. You can go back to Roland Barth or use any of Marzono or Covey's leadership characteristics. It's that emotional bank account described by Covey and the collegial relationships and professionalism that Marzono talks about. I believe in the adult relationships in the building.

Mr. Smith said he tries "to build those relationships with staff members and let them know, I care and I think they respect me for that." Mrs. Smith also believed that relationships between her and her faculty members were vital to the success of her school. She said,

> I believe in building those relationships. If a teacher has a baby, I go to the hospital and see her. If they are sick, I go by and check on them. If they have a sick family member, I ask about them. It's that entire thing that I have talked about—building relationships. I go down to their rooms after school and have casual conversations about things that may not be school related and ask what is going on in their personal life. Relationships are the key to everything.

Participants also identified the need to build relationships between teachers and students. The importance of relationships between teachers and students took many forms. Mrs. Wallace identified the need of "making sure children are happy." Mr. Smith stated, "Relationships that are developed between the teacher and student solve a lot of academic and behavior problems." Mrs. Kitterman said, "If children trust you, they will do anything for you." Dr. O'Dell emphasized the need for teachers to "know a child personally," and Mrs. Smith summed up the beliefs of all five participants by saying,

> Teachers should always be aware of how they are interacting with and relating to children. Their success is directly tied to their relationships with their students. I know what the hidden agenda is. I don't fuss when Mrs. Johnson takes five extra minutes of recess with her class every now and then. That is one way she is building a relationship with them, letting them know their needs are important, and rewarding them for a job well done. By doing things like this, she is laying

> the groundwork of a positive relationship with her students that will ultimately affect achievement.

All five participants in this study identified the need for positive relationships between the principal and the students of the school. Participants viewed themselves as a "confidant to the students," "someone that students could talk to if they had nowhere else to go," and as being, "attentive to certain needs that the student may have that is not directly related to academics, but will eventually affect academics if no one else pays attention."

I identified relationships crucial to the effectiveness of a school that addressed how each stakeholder of the school relates to one another. Mrs. Smith offered,

> It's about knowing your parents, your kids, and your teachers. I've said the same thing over and over again. It's those relationships that I've been trying to describe that make the difference in a good school and a bad school. You can list all of the qualities that should be qualities of an effective teacher or administrator, but what makes them effective is what kind of people they are. Can a principal influence those qualities? Sure they can. Can they totally change everyone? Not everyone, but they can impact how people think and how they influence one another and their students and the parents of their students. When their actions positively influence those around them, the atmosphere becomes contagious.

Another important aspect of developing a climate and culture for a school that the participants identified was the development of a vision for the school. Developing a vision and expressing that vision to the stakeholders of the school happened in several different ways. Dr. O'Dell said, "The focus of the school should be on teachers learning everyday how to be better teachers and students learning everyday how to become better students." O'Dell also said that she "has a vision for helping public education by spreading the word to other school leaders about what is working in her school that is making a difference."

Mrs. Kitterman's vision for her school was "maintaining a focus on school improvement goals by making sure that everything we do is focused on what we have identified as important to our success." Mr. Smith's vision was along the same lines as he said, "We have to maintain the vision of constantly improving what we are doing and how we are doing it. These things our spelled out in our school improvement plan that everyone follows."

Mrs. Wallace's vision for her school was one of, "We can accomplish anything if we are willing to work hard enough. Time and effort combined with the knowledge of what it takes to meet the needs of our students is how we get it done." Mrs. Smith's vision for her school followed the same line of thought in that she says, "We will teach our students what they are required to know and assess them, and assess our efforts to make sure they are all successful."

Participants emphasized the importance of the faculty of their school. At some point during each of the five interviews conducted, all five participants made a statement to the effect that the success of their school directly related to the "people" in their school, not the "programs." Of the five faculties that were surveyed for this study, only 5% attributed the success of their school to programs. The other 95% attributed success to a joint effort between the principal, teachers, and other stakeholders of the school.

Another contributing factor identified as a commonality among the five participants was the schools maintaining high expectations for their students. Mrs. Smith "expects the students of Northside Elementary to come to school ready to learn, behave while at school, give their best effort, have a great attitude, and most of all, enjoy coming to school." Similarly, Mrs. Wallace said, "I and my teachers expect students to not

disrupt the learning environment of others, to do their best every day, and to work hard at everything we ask them to do."

The expectation of students for Dr. O'Dell addressed academics. She said, "I expect students to reach achievement goals on or above their grade level expectations." Mr. Smith also expressed academic expectations of his students by saying, "The teachers and I want students to be able to be proficient in the minimum competencies that correlate to their grade level."

Mrs. Kitterman and her faculty also maintained high expectations of their students her teachers reported. Mrs. Kitterman stated,

> If you expect children to perform, then we'll come a long, long ways. When you have teachers who say, "Oh they can't do that," then you have defeated yourself automatically. I think that a good teacher first convinces a child that he can do it and works on that self-concept, and then proceeds to show them how to do it. A good teacher puts those things in place that helps that child to succeed. We want students to be able to communicate effectively, we want them to be able to create and compose, and to be able to problem solve. That has to be what you are focused on.

High expectations for teachers were important also as influencing the culture and climate of each school. Each participant expressed their expectations of their teachers. Mr. Smith said,

> I expect teachers to go above and beyond. They need to know this is not going to be a 7:15 to 3:15 job. There are going to be times that you are going to be here late and times you are going to have to take things home. You have to get it done. Some are going to look at you funny, even the veterans, but high expectations to me are doing whatever it takes to get the job done. That includes outside of class time, outside of school time, and working as hard as you can everyday.

Mrs. Wallace concurred with Mr. Smith's expectations of his teachers. She said she expects teachers to "work hard and long and make sure the job gets done. Part of our success is the motivation of teachers to succeed." In addition, Mrs. Kitterman emphasized

the need for an unrelenting work ethic of her faculty. She has tried to develop an atmosphere where, "Everybody is going to chip in and work, no matter what time of the day it is. That is what has made Louisville Academy so successful."

Mrs. Smith and Dr. O'Dell both expect professionalism and continuous learning from their teachers. Mrs. Smith said, "Teachers should come to school ready to teach and ready to learn how to become better teachers." Dr. O'Dell spoke of professionalism and continuous learning when she stated, "I expect my teachers to be a part of this professional learning community. They expect me to treat them like professionals and I expect them to conduct themselves in a professional manner."

To promote further the unofficial happenings and the atmosphere that pervaded each educational setting studied, the principals' treatment of their teachers had an impact on the culture and climate of each school. What principals said, and what principals did for their faculty expressed their treatment of teachers. Mrs. Wallace said,

> I tell all the teachers on the very first day of school every year that I love them. I tell them if they are not happy, they need to find a school in which they will be happy, because they are going to spend a majority of their time at school. They need to be loved and know that what they are doing will be validated.

Mrs. Wallace showed her appreciation for her teachers in many different ways. She let them wear blue jeans on Fridays, walked in the Christmas parade with them, gave them coupons to dress down on days other than Fridays, gave hip-hip-hoorays on the morning announcements to recognize teachers, had early out days where teachers got to go home early, and conducted, "Destination Unknown to give teachers time away from the school with their peers and with me to build moral and camaraderie."

Dr. O'Dell organized an operations/personnel team that developed activities for teacher moral. She said,

> I think personal recognition is important. I have a teacher who helps me with my classroom kudos' board and I put their names on it according to when I see really neat things going on in the school. I try to get as much positive feedback as I can everyday by recognizing people for what doing good things.

Mrs. Smith also talked about how she treated her teachers in an effort to promote a positive school climate. She said,

> I treat my teachers as professionals and give them ownership of some decision making so they feel like they have a voice in what happens in the school as far as what decisions are made. I want to be able to treat them with respect. I want to be treated that way by the people that work for me, and in return, I owe them the same amount of respect. I think we should be friendly and helpful to each other and support each other. I make decisions that are in the best interest of the kids but at the same time, I need to make decisions that show I support my teachers.

To show her appreciation to teachers for what they do, Mrs. Smith allows release time for them to go to lunch, buys gifts for them on special occasions, and hosts a luncheon at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year. In addition to material gifts and other types of benefits, Mrs. Smith said,

> I try to make this a place that I want to come to work to everyday. That has to do with the atmosphere that you create. I greet people with a smile and say good morning to them every morning. I know these are little things, but I feel like if you make those face-to-face communications everyday and let them see you and they know that you are out and about in the building and they know that you are part of the team and will support what they are doing, that is the best way I can show the teachers how much I appreciate them.

Mrs. Kitterman believed that teachers have to be treated as people who have information to bring to the bigger group. "They all have something to contribute. It is important that they be heard and that they are treated as professionals, not hired help." Mr. Smith's treatment of his teachers closely followed what Kitterman said. Mr. Smith believed that a "professional atmosphere combined with a voice in the decision-making process empowers teachers to want to do what is right." Mr. Smith fostered this feeling of

respect by being "consistent in the way I treat everyone. I try to remember to treat them the way I want to be treated."

The development of social skills of students affects the school climate and culture. Mrs. Wallace said, "How a child interacts socially within the school impacts achievement as much as anything." Mrs. Smith stated, "School must function as a social outlet for students to maintain their interest in coming to school." The focus of the Lindsey Elementary School faculty and Dr. O'Dell for the 2004-2005 school year was on "social skills training because we have done about all we can do with discipline." Mrs. Kitterman emphasized the need for social skills development when she said, "School serves as a society for our students for eight hours a day. How they function within this society either promotes or hinders achievement." Finally, Mr. Smith believed that, "It is important to provide social skills training for our students that prepare them to be better students and better citizens."

Each of the five participants offered many student services to create an atmosphere that is warm and inviting. All five participants offered several common student services such as 4-H, after-school programs, guidance and counseling sessions, and holiday and birthday parties. There were also student services offered that were unique to each school. Mrs. Wallace had a recognition assembly every nine weeks for students. She also awarded good readers with a skating party and took them for a ride in her convertible car. Dr. O'Dell recognized exceptional student work by putting student pictures on the bulletin board with a brief description of the recognition. Mrs. Smith organized a variety of field days to reward students for reaching different achievement milestones. Mrs. Kitterman worked with her family connections' coordinator to provide

activities beyond the school day that promoted a positive school image for her students, and Mr. Smith and his faculty organized and hosted a school carnival every fall and spring to "provide opportunities for the kids to come back to the school and see school as something other than just academics."

The final two common attributes that were identified that promote a positive school climate and culture were the principals ability to communicate effectively with his or her faculty and the principals insistence on being a visible presence within their school. Communication with the faculty happened in several ways for each of the participants. Mrs. Kitterman communicated with her faculty on a daily basis using email. She said she also,

> Communicates through grade level meetings and through my leadership team at least twice a week. That is the way that major information gets shared. Information is also shared through conversations in the halls and casual conversations that take place throughout the school.

Mr. Smith kept his faculty informed about issues within the school through a variety of methods. He said,

> We use a lot of email. I give them a calendar up front at the beginning of the year that has all of the predominant stuff up front and we update it throughout the year. I send out an email every Monday morning saying, 'Good morning. I hope everybody had a good weekend. Here's the following FYI's for the week." I let them know if somebody is sick and I update them periodically on those issues. We have staff meetings as well to discuss what is happening in the school. They are usually held at least once a month.

Dr. O'Dell took pride in her very in-depth methods of communication. She said,

> I go to great lengths to make sure everyone is informed about what is going on in my school. We have monthly decision team meetings. We wrote a professional covenant of how we behave and how we treat each other, how we treat students, and how we treat parents. I periodically recite the covenant to the faculty during several faculty meetings during the year to remind them. I put out the Jet Express every morning. This is a newsletter to the faculty to keep them all informed. There is no in group. Everyone knows what is going on. I get here at 6:15 a.m.

> every morning to let them know who the subs are, what are the cares and concerns, and all of this information is shared with the entire faculty in the newsletter.

Mrs. Wallace communicated with her faculty using email everyday. She also participated in grade level and school-wide leadership team meetings. Mrs. Smith valued sharing information with her faculty. She said,

> We do a lot of emails, faculty meetings, memos, and announcements in the morning and afternoon. I conduct meetings with grade level chairs; especially if I need for a lot of information to be delivered back to the grade levels. I also have a lot of face-to-face conversations.

All five participants expressed the need to discourage "cliques," "groups," "in-crowds," and Dr. O'Dell stated that principals need to "make sure that they do not isolate a percentage of their faculty members by informing some and not others. This practice can cause your system of operation to fail."

The visibility of the principal within the school is the final common attribute noted among all five participants that affected the climate and culture of each school. Each participant emphasized the importance of being a visible presence for both teachers and students. Mrs. Kitterman said, "I make it a point to go into every room, everyday. I want the teachers and students to see my face to let them know I care about what is going on in this school." Mrs. Wallace stated, "I am in and out of classrooms, the lunchroom, and the gym, all the time. Not a day goes by where I don't at least try to get into every classroom." Similarly, Dr. O'Dell stated, "I am in every classroom every day."

Mr. Smith believed so strongly in the need to be a visible presence in the school, he documented his time visiting with teachers in their rooms and also had his assistant principal's document the time they spend in classrooms, hallways, and common areas of the school. He said "If I am not in a meeting or in a parent conference, I am in the

classrooms or hallways." Mrs. Smith did an excellent job of relating the importance of the visibility of the principal within the school to the climate and culture of the student stating,

> I make myself get out there in the halls because I think that is so important to my effectiveness as a principal. I don't like to think of my visibility as being 'big brother looking over your shoulder.' I like to think of my visibility as a supporter and a cheerleader for what is going on in my school. Students get to see me, parents get to see me, and the faculty gets to see me, and that makes them realize that I value them and the role they serve in our system of educating children. I can't think of very many examples of great things that have ever been accomplished by someone who sits behind a desk and waits for things to come to them. I want to be proactive in dealing with all aspects of my school and the best way to do that is to be out there and have my finger on the pulse of this school.

Assessment of Student Progress

Participants established a comprehensive school reform program that included measurable goals for student academic achievement and established benchmarks for meeting those goals. All five principals used regular assessment and benchmarking of students to monitor student progress throughout the school year. Dr. O'Dell stated, "We benchmark new students to find out where they are for accurate placement and we benchmark enrolled students to assess their progress." Mrs. Wallace said, "Teachers benchmark students in reading and math every nine weeks and turn those scores in to me and we all look at them together to make decisions for each individual child." Mrs. Kitterman also employed benchmarking as a common practice within her school. She stated, "Every teacher benchmarks their students periodically to find out where they are in reading, language, arts, and math. We use this information to modify instruction continuously." The Cherokee Elementary school teachers were also familiar with student assessment. Mr. Smith said, "We assess every student at the end of each competency we teach to find out if they know the material or if we need to re-teach a competency." Mrs.

Smith believed that student assessment is critical to instruction. She stated, "We assess our students in math and benchmark them in reading on a regular basis. We don't want to wait until the end of the year to find out if they know something."

Each of the participants in this study linked student achievement goals to the State's definition of AYP. The State's definition of AYP states, "All students will be proficient in language arts and mathematics, as determined by state assessments, by 2014." Four of the five participants designated time for special instruction to prepare for the state student assessment test (Criterion Referenced Competency Test or CRCT) which is the major determining factor in making AYP. Dr. O'Dell had teachers put test taking strategies in their lesson plans at least once a week, used a computer program with her students that simulates the CRCT test, prepared an analysis sheet for teachers of student CRCT scores for teachers to use to prepare for instruction, and this past school year, conducted a mock CRCT in December with all of her students to assess where they were and what their weaknesses were so the teachers could provide instruction to address these weaknesses prior to taking the CRCT.

Mrs. Wallace also emphasized end-of-year test preparation. She and her faculty began preparing for the CRCT "at the beginning of the year. We have to. We know we are going to give it, and it is here to stay, so we do special things to prepare for it all year long." Some of the special things Wallace did were providing time for students to practice "bubbling in answer sheets and practice reading for extended periods of time."

Mrs. Kitterman took a different approach to test preparation. She said,

> What we say is be sure your children are familiar with the format of the test and how the questions are asked because you don't want to be figuring out what the questions mean when you already understand it.

Mrs. Kitterman said she does not give a mock CRCT to her students, but she does purchase practice test booklets for her teachers to use for test preparation.

Mr. Smith and the Cherokee staff did "quite a bit of CRCT practice after Christmas." Two days a week, for about 30 minutes each day, his teachers conducted CRCT test preparation activities with their students. Mr. Smith also used his after school program as an opportunity to prepare his "at-risk students with additional time to prepare for the CRCT test."

Mrs. Smith paid no special attention to end-of-year testing. She stated, "If you work on the required skills all year long, you shouldn't have to put extra pressure on students to prepare for a test. There should be no pressure to cram with practice tests and such."

Strong Instructional Leadership Combined with Effective Instruction

Being a strong instructional leader was an important characteristic of the five participants in this study. Each of the five principals incorporated strategies that improved academic achievement into their leadership style. Some of the common practices of these administrators identified were leading by example, effective scheduling, planning for teaching content as well as how to teach, mapping the curriculum, and requiring students to practice skills.

Participants led their faculties by conducting professional learning with their staff and by participating in professional learning presented to their staff. Each participant expressed the need for being actively involved with learning opportunities presented to their staff. Dr. O'Dell stated, "I do a lot of instructional leadership through my team meetings and I meet with teams of teachers constantly. I teach a lot to the faculty by

leading professional learning activities." Mr. Smith also leads professional learning activities with his teachers. He stated, "I can teach teachers most of what we are doing with our curriculum because I have been involved with it from the beginning."

Mrs. Wallace, Mrs. Kitterman, and Mrs. Smith believed in participating in required professional learning with their staff. Mrs. Wallace stated, "If they take staff development, I take staff development. That way I know what goes on and I can talk the instruction talk." Mrs. Kitterman believed that, "I must first participate in what goes on in this school, not just supervise it, before I can be a part of it." Mrs. Smith said, "If I ask teachers to learn new curriculum, I am sitting next to them. I sit in on training because it is new to me, because I want to be the most knowledgeable person in the building about curriculum issues, and because I am excited about learning new things."

Another aspect of being a strong instructional leader in this study was each principal's ability to schedule effectively students in classes to facilitate their intended instruction. Participants cited small class sizes and a combination of heterogeneous grouping and homogeneous grouping as essential for effective instruction to take place. Dr. O'Dell referred to "small reading groups" during our interview. Mrs. Wallace and Mr. Smith both said that small class sizes were "very important." Mrs. Kitterman utilizes all of her teachers on staff, paraprofessionals, and parent volunteers to reduce class sizes during reading and math instruction that she considers "the two most critical subjects we teach."

Dr. O'Dell conducted a "school-wide literacy block." During this literacy block, teachers conducted three hours of uninterrupted reading instruction. O'Dell used physical

education teachers, the art teacher, and janitors and secretaries to help with reading instruction during this time. O'Dell stated,

> After we assess kids to determine their strengths and weaknesses, I put them in flexible groups. By being able to work with small groups of children, the children get better and better which causes a release of responsibility in that you don't have to meet with them as often on a one-to-one basis. Students become more independent learners. If certain students need more time with you, then others work in small groups independently while you work in small groups with those who need your help.

The model that participants used to schedule their students in classes differed by name, but accomplished the same goal, which was small class size for more individual instruction. Mrs. Wallace used parallel block scheduling to reduce class sizes in her school. Dr. O'Dell, Mr. Smith, Mrs. Kitterman, and Mrs. Smith all used an augmented model for student assignment. Through parallel block scheduling, Mrs. Wallace was able to maintain classes that had "two very distinct groups. One-fourth of each class is made up of low students and three-fourths of each class is comprised of average to above average students," she stated. The augmented model also allows for small group instruction. With the augmented model, 20 percent or less of the class is the lower students. Both models for scheduling maintain a heterogeneous classroom assignment of students while at the same time creating small ability groups for instructional delivery.

Another characteristic of the participants' leadership style revealed through data analysis was that of fostering an environment rich in planning for instruction and mapping the curriculum. All schools participated in some form of collaborative planning. Dr. O'Dell's faculty participated in "regular grade level planning sessions as well as planning sessions between grade levels." Mrs. Wallace's teachers conducted planning sessions between individual grade level teachers and held planning sessions as a school

several times during the school year. On the subject of school-wide planning, Mrs. Wallace commented, "All the teachers start analyzing data in the spring to be prepared for our summer planning day as an entire faculty. We also get together in the fall to discuss school-wide goals that take the combined effort of the entire faculty to reach." When speaking of how Louisville Academy teachers plan, Kitterman offered,

> Teachers meet two or three times a week and go through the stuff that they will do for the next month. They look at what they did at this time last year, what worked in the classroom last week, revise it, and revamp it, so they own the curriculum. That makes your weaker teachers stronger because everybody has some involvement in writing the curriculum and they have that discussion regularly about what is going to happen in the classroom. If there is a teacher who is not performing, that is pretty inexcusable.

Mrs. Smith scheduled collaborative planning times for her teachers to ensure that they meet and "share ideas with one another so that everyone can use the best of the best lessons to instruct their students." Mr. Smith stated that he "meets regularly with his teachers to review student data and plan for instruction." By staying focused on academic achievement, building a comprehensive program that supports achievement, and emphasizing the things that work in the classroom, each of the participants was able to facilitate a successful and comprehensive design for planning for instruction.

Participants also identified the need for teachers in their schools to not only know what to teach based on their planning efforts, but they also expected their teachers to know how to teach. Mrs. Smith stated, "Literacy is not taught with a canned program in our school. To teach literacy, our teachers must participate in continuous training that instructs them on how to diagnose and prescribe when teaching." Dr. O'Dell went into detail explaining the concept of teachers knowing how to teach. She elaborated,

> With the way we began teaching reading, it was different in that you couldn't teach reading without first learning how to teach. In other words, you couldn't

> teach the program unless you knew how to teach reading to a student, no matter what level he was on. There were some who did not completely buy in, but at the beginning of the third year I said, 'okay, you've had enough time, we are going to teach this model for literacy in this building. Everyone has to do it so if you don't know how to do it at this point, you better learn.' Everyone can't be doing their own thing. We don't have that luxury in a school like this.

By mapping the curriculum, participants were able to establish a very focused, goal-oriented instructional program for their teachers and students. Mrs. Kitterman stated, "The teachers write the curriculum and it is a very viable document. They design an overview map of what will be taught during the school year." Similarly, Mrs. Wallace said, "the teachers map out the curriculum month-by-month to develop a curriculum map. They include the skills to be taught, the number of lessons to be taught, and the goals that they expect students to achieve in their curriculum map."

Included in every teacher's handbook at the beginning of each school year was a curriculum map developed by the faculty of Cherokee Elementary School. Mr. Smith and his teachers have developed a curriculum map that identifies skills to be taught, the subject areas, the topic of the lesson, the state standards that the lesson is addressing, the essential question that each student should be able to answer at the end of the lesson, what resources to use to teach the lesson, and how to assess the students for understanding of the lesson. Information identifying technological support for learning such as computer programs or websites is also on the curriculum map.

The final essential characteristic of these strong instructional leaders was their requirement that students practice reading. Dr. O'Dell stated, "It is essential that our kids practice reading passages to improve their ability to comprehend." Mrs. Wallace commented, "All of the teachers know how the ability to read impacts every other subject. The only way to get better is to practice the skill of reading." Mr. Smith said

about practicing reading, “The only way for a student to become a better reader is to make it a part of their daily practice. We encourage students to read at home through some of the things we do to accent what we do with reading during the school day.” Mrs. Smith also placed a big emphasis on teachers requiring students to practice reading. She stated, “Reading is at the core of everything we do. The only way students will become better readers is by practicing the skill of reading.” Mrs. Kitterman elaborated on the need to practice reading, “Reading is like playing the piano. It takes practice. If you don’t practice the piano, you won’t be able to play it. The same is true for reading. If you don’t practice reading, you will not be a good reader. That is a part of what we do in our reading program. We conduct sessions of sustained reading for practice.”

Home/School Relations

The participants’ school provided for the meaningful involvement of parents and the local community in planning, implementing, and evaluating school improvement activities. Each school paid special attention to building parents' capacity for involvement and designed ways in which parents could be brought into the instructional program and contribute to the academic achievement of their children. The data collected for this study revealed that school improvement, and the academic achievement of students was positively effected by home/school relations when the participants made parent involvement part of their system of operation, supported parental responsibilities through their actions, put personnel in place to promote parent involvement, used parent involvement as part of their discipline plan, kept parents informed on all school happenings, and when participants involved parents during the school day and after school hours.

Each of the five participants identified the need for parent involvement as crucial to their system of operating their school. For example, Dr. O'Dell stated,

> I know from all of my training about how to motivate human beings and how children learn, that any group in an organization are like a system. They are not individuals. It's all a system of interrelated dynamics. I don't care if you were talking about a family, a church, or a school, it's a system and everything must mesh for the system to operate effectively. A big part of that system that I think principals miss out on is the component of parent involvement.

Mrs. Wallace also addressed how parent involvement affects the overall system of operation for the school. She said, "We feel it is essential to get parents involved in everything we do to insure the added support from home." Mrs. Kitterman stated, "A school without parent involvement is like a car without gas. It just doesn't run right." In addressing the need for parent involvement, Mrs. Smith commented, "If we expect our students to perform to the best of their ability, we must account for all of the resources available to them to meet their needs. Support from home is a major resource." Finally, Mr. Smith spoke of the importance of parent involvement to his system of operation. He stated,

> The thing I do differently from other principals is my relationship with my parents. My willingness to work with parents and make school a team effort probably distinguishes me from other principals. I believe in the importance of parents being an integral part of the educational process of my students.

To establish a relationship of trust between the school and parents was a common characteristic of the five participants in this study. This relationship grew in different ways with each of the participants. Dr. O'Dell and Mrs. Smith maintained funds to buy glasses, shoes, clothing, schools supplies, and to provide for other needs of their students. Mrs. Wallace, Mrs. Kitterman, and Mr. Smith provided after-school childcare for the parents of their students. All three stated that if they have a parent who cannot afford to pay for the after-school childcare that they have set up scholarship programs to allow the

most needy students attend without being charged. Partnering with the parents to make the job of parenting a team effort built the trust between the school and home that set the stage for future parental involvement.

Another means of initiating parental involvement that was common among all five participants was retaining school personnel specifically designated to promote home/school relations. Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Wallace had a school social worker on their staff. Mrs. Kitterman, Dr. O'Dell, and Mr. Smith all three required their guidance counselors to assist the administration and teachers in making parental contact when needed.

Insisting on parental involvement when dealing with discipline issues was also a common characteristic of all five participants. When a student got sent to the office for discipline matters, Mr. Smith made contacting the parent his first priority. He stated, "Most of our parents are very supportive and they will really try to take care of problems if you call them." Likewise, Mrs. Kitterman said, "When a student is sent to me, the next step is for a parent to come to the school." "When a student is sent to the office, we immediately get the parent involved" was how Mrs. Smith described a part of her management of discipline at Northside. Dr. O'Dell and Mrs. Kitterman also used parent contact when dealing with discipline issues and they both mentioned being "proactive" in their approach to managing discipline. Mrs. Kitterman explained,

> In managing discipline, you have to be visible in the classroom and in the halls. You must talk to parents and to the children. That way, when kids screw up, you have credibility with the parents and with the children. If you know the families of your children, you know the issues that the families are having at home. The children with problems are having issues at home. If you know what is happening at home you know what is going to happen at school and you can figure out ways to head it off. That is what I mean by being proactive; trying to address potential

> discipline issues before they become a problem. I want my teachers to not only know their students but to also know the parents of the students.

Keeping the parents informed of all school happenings was another way that the participants promoted positive home/school relations. The participants handled informing parents of what was happening at school in many different ways, sharing with parents through weekly progress reports detailing academics and behavior, the use of a school website, weekly newsletters describing school events, weekly and monthly calendars sent home with students, articles in the newspaper emphasizing positive events that took place at school, and promoting upcoming activities, orientation sessions for parents at the beginning of the school year, update sessions held for parents at the midpoint of the school year, and informative meetings held for parents at the end of the school year to help parents prepare their children for the following school year by giving them an overview of what to expect for the next school year and allowing parents to work with their children over the summer. Participants conducted some type of orientation session for their parents. Mrs. Kitterman describes one such example

> We conduct an orientation session at the beginning of the school year for parents. We have a series of conversations with parents for their child's grade level only. For example, if you have a first grader, you attend first grade orientation. We have first grade teachers talk to first grade parents and define our expectations for first grade. They describe how the curriculum differs from kindergarten, what their child will be doing during first grade, the first grade curriculum, and expectations of students at the end of the year. We do that for every grade level. We probably have three-fourths of our parents come to these orientations sessions.

Promoting home/school relations happened for each of the five participants by providing opportunities for parents to interact with their child both during the regular school day and after school hours. Dr. O'Dell conducted parent/child activity time every month where parents came to the school, sat with their child, and learned what they were

learning during the school day. Mr. Smith had parent volunteers work in his school on a daily basis and assist with instructional activities. The opportunity to be a parent volunteer was open to all Mr. Smith's parents. Mrs. Wallace had a foster grandparent program that she used to reduce class sizes by utilizing grandparents of her students to assist with different instructional activities. Mrs. Kitterman got her parents on campus during the school day by providing social opportunities for parents to interact with their children. Donuts with Dad was one such activity that provided a social opportunity for Kitterman's dads to interact with their children during breakfast on school grounds. Mrs. Smith had a unique program to promote parent involvement during the school day. At Northside, parents participated in Terrific Tuesdays. Each Tuesday, parents came to the school and helped teachers' grade papers, put up bulletin boards, help with classroom instruction, and provide any other special assistance that the teachers needed.

Getting parents back on campus after school hours was to be very important to promoting home/school relations for the five participants. All five participants provided opportunities for parents of their students to come to school after the regular school hours either for parent workshops, for some form of social time between parent and child, or for the opportunity for the parent to conference with their child's teachers about their academic and behavioral progress without having to worry about time constraints that are in place during the regular school day.

Effective Use of Resources

Participants in this study efficiently managed and allocated Federal, State, and local resources made available to them to coordinate services that support and sustain their school improvement efforts. Mrs. Smith set a budget for each grade level and each

department in her school at the beginning of the school year. Each group met periodically to determine how the money would be spent to meet their needs. She stated,

> This forced them to prioritize to get what was needed and not necessarily what is wanted. This is done to make sure that we get the most out of every dollar spent and more groups get money instead of more money going to the most visible or influential group.

Mrs. Wallace saved money by not purchasing science or social studies books. She said, "We know what the objectives are that we have to teach and we all have internet access. The internet is the most current and comprehensive resource we have at our disposal and there is no need to ever purchase a textbook again."

Much like Mrs. Smith, Dr. O'Dell had an operation and personnel decision team in her school. The operations and personnel team "makes all the funding and finance decisions. They make the decisions on how we are going to spend our money as it relates to supporting instruction."

Mr. Smith has applied for and received, "millions of dollars through different grants." He stated that,

> Some people think grants cause you to have to do things you wouldn't normally do or do things that get in the way of instruction by having to jump through hoops to meet grant requirements. I don't think that way. We make grants work for us. Grants have provided staff development for teachers and resource materials for our students that we would be without if we were not willing to jump through a few hoops and meet grant requirements. I believe it is worth the extra effort to provide the best for our students.

Each of the participants in this study received Title I award money for making AYP. The schools led by Dr. O'Dell, Mrs. Wallace, Mrs. Kitterman, and Mr. Smith all received an award of $50,700 for their school improvement efforts in the category of highest poverty. Mrs. Smith's school received $12, 492 for their accomplishment of making AYP in the category of lower poverty. In discussing the effective use of

resources, it is of interest to note how each school spent their award money. Dr. O'Dell used the money to buy "a whole new lab of computers because ours was totally outdated. That was a total of 22 computers, some printers, monitors, and audiovisual equipment to complete the lab." Mr. Smith spent his money, "all on the kids. We put in new playground equipment and bought some student agendas for the kids." Mrs. Kitterman spent her money by funding a five-day workshop presented by Marilyn Burns Math Solutions program. The program "is designed to assist teachers in improving the way they teach mathematics in grades K-8" Kitterman said. The money paid for the presenter of the program and provided each teacher with a $700 supplement for attending. Mrs. Smith used her money to pay for "student agendas, teacher planners, and some much needed teacher supplies that are hard to get from our regular allotted budget." Finally, Mrs. Wallace spent her award money by providing monetary awards to her teachers, paraprofessionals, secretaries, and janitorial staff.

Building the Capacity for Leadership

Building the capacity for leadership by sharing power and team building were common characteristics identified among the five participants**.** These school leaders developed the skills and talents of those around them by leading change and helping others through the change process. They engaged in shared decision making with the school community, including staff, students, and parents. Through their efforts, the participants ensured that all groups were engaged in a common goal and moving in the same direction. By recognizing that leadership skills can develop, participants established and nurtured strategic activities to make certain that other individuals in their school developed as leaders, sharing leadership responsibilities throughout all levels of their

organization. Through their process of sharing power, empowering their faculty and staff, and team building, they nurtured and supported a learning community that promoted the continuous growth and development of individuals who acknowledged and shared responsibilities for high academic achievement of all students.

Dr. O'Dell spoke of the importance of sharing power. She stated,

> I think the key to my success has been my willingness and my comfort sharing power. I am willing to do that and I see the importance in doing that. I don't think I have all the ideas and the fact that I can share power and I don't have to control everything and I can still feel safe and allow other people to give me feed back and share ideas is what has made me successful. The school should be a professional learning community centered around sharing information about teaching and learning. I believe in everyone in the community having a part in making the decisions in the building and that the power of the school does not lie in the principal and the answers to all of the questions about school improvement doesn't lie in the power of the principal. It lies in the power of the people that are stakeholders in the system. I don't think that very many principals really share power to the extent that I do. I believe the teachers would tell you that. I've been doing a lot of presentations around the state with Georgia Leadership for School Improvement and what they wanted me to talk about is distributed leadership or shared leadership. That seems to be what I do best. It is more powerful than you think. You sometimes don't think of it as being associated with school improvement, but in my opinion, it is critical.

The other participants all spoke of the importance of sharing power with their faculty as well. Mrs. Kitterman stated, "my goal is to get the staff to have more ownership of what happens and be more involved in a participatory management of the school and to share the leadership and to share the authority." She accomplished this goal by meeting regularly with her faculty to discuss curriculum issues and she gave the faculty the authority to make curricular decisions. She also maintained an expectation of her faculty to mentor new teachers and new members of the faculty. Kitterman said, "This creates an atmosphere at Louisville Academy where everyone is expected to be at

their best every day and be knowledgeable enough to teach others the right way to do things."

Mr. Smith let his teachers know that he expects them to be leaders in the school. He described his relationship with his faculty as "collaboration in leadership." He continued by saying, "For things that effect the teachers and effect the kids, I try to get as much input as possible from the teachers because they are the ones who must implement the curriculum."

Mrs. Smith also believed in the importance of sharing power. She said,

> I want people that I work with, whatever they are responsible for, to feel like they can make a decision run it. I want them to feel like they can take ownership of whatever needs to be done and bring closure to it and not feel like they have to run to me with every little petty decision. I want them to feel like I am going to support them. Sometimes it may not be the way I would have done it, but that's okay because I'm not the one doing it. I feel like if I have to make all the decisions I might as well take it back over, and that's not what I want.

The common characteristic of sharing power that each of the participants possessed was their process of team building. Each participant had very involved leadership teams. Participants identified different types of leadership teams such as school improvement team, grade level team, Jet team, and the building leadership team. Mrs. Wallace spoke of her leadership team by saying, "The school truly runs itself. Everything we do is through the leadership team and through grade level teams. We are strictly a team approach and I seldom make decisions without going through them first." Mrs. Kitterman had a leadership team consisting of ten people. Kitterman said the teachers, administrators and the guidance counselor who were a part of that team were very involved with everything that happened in the school because "They meet with me

constantly and they meet with members of their grade levels or their departments a minimum of once a week to constantly work toward achieving the vision of our school."

Mr. Smith had a leadership team that "sets policy and determines the direction in which we want to head as a school." Mr. Smith also required that all of his teachers be involved in the operation of the school by serving on at least one committee. The committees he had in place at Cherokee Elementary were Hospitality, Positive Climate, Student Recognition, Fine Arts, Media/Technology, Accelerated Reader, and Parent/Community Committee.

Mrs. Smith's leadership team consisted of teachers and all three administrators and they met once a month. Each of the members of the leadership team was also a member of a grade level team or a departmental team. The meetings discussed issues addressed during grade level meetings and departmental meetings. The monthly meeting was a means to communicate what was happening throughout the school and to keep everyone informed. The leadership team brought information from their team meetings to the leadership team meeting and took information back to their grade level or departmental meetings that was discussed during the leadership team meetings.

Dr. O'Dell had a very involved process of team development. She was to be a presenter at the Georgia Leadership for School Improvement conference and at the Blue Ribbon Conference to explain further her process of team building. She explained,

> I am trying to build capacity of teacher leadership because I don't see me being here for a lot longer and I don't want to see things going down the tubes. I'm really delegating responsibilities to more people than ever. I'm getting more and more people up to speed on what good leadership consists of, and I feel it is important for teachers to buy in and completely understand what it is that we have done and be willing to speak up and take responsibility. I'm hoping it will keep on going. So many times, when the leader leaves, it doesn't stay, so I'm trying to do everything I can to make sure it keeps going. That's teacher morale and I think

> teacher leadership has a lot to do with teacher moral. When I leave here, I have assured, from my work building leadership teams and building knowledge in my teachers, that all the ideas and all the energy is not just in me. If you are charismatic and energetic, you can keep people pumped up for a while. But if you are not there, everything will go down the tubes. I realize that could happen so I work hard on teacher leadership. I feel comfortable sharing my power and that will allow school improvement to continue here long after I am gone. The people that are left will know what is right and will feel obligated to do what is right because they have the knowledge about education and about teaching that will affect their conscious.

Meaningful Professional Development

Each participant created an atmosphere of continuous teacher and staff professional development and training. The professional development involved proven, innovative strategies that were easily accessible and ensured that teachers were able to improve instructional practice and student academic achievement. The well-designed professional development activities increased teachers' knowledge of both the academic subjects they taught and effective instructional strategies scientifically based in research. Professional development activities took place, led by the participants, led by current staff, or by outsourcing to bring professional development specialists into the schools. Professional development was to integrate school and district educational improvement plans.

Dr. O'Dell concentrated much of her efforts aimed at professional development on the need for teachers to be continuous learners. She said she "firmly believes in the learning of the teachers and the learning of the students being the focus of everything." To help teachers to be continuous learners, O'Dell led professional development activities such as a book study that had teachers read educational literature and conduct a power point presentation with the faculty to show what they had learned. She also led a

weekly workshop for several months on Marzano's best practices in teaching. Evidence of continuous learning is all throughout a statement O'Dell made,

> If you had told me three years ago that some of these people in this building that are going for advanced degrees were going to do so, or taking the reading endorsement, or asking me to buy professional reading material for the library, I would have told you no way, ever. I have been amazed at the power of the norms of the groups changing. It's getting to be the norm to want to learn. I have three people working on their doctorate, people who have gone and gotten dual certification in regular ed and special ed, and I have four other teachers this past year who have done their reading endorsement. We are a learning community and a learning community is when people are working together, learning together, and having a good time while they do it.

O'Dell also utilized modeling as a form of professional development. Her literacy coach set up a model classroom that teachers were scheduled to visit and watch her teach a model reading lesson. The literacy coach also helped with observations of teachers and the coaching of teachings on how to teach an effective reading lesson.

Unity Elementary School also emphasized continuous learning. Mrs. Wallace stated she and her faculty spent a lot of time "sitting at the table having educational discussions and debates about what is best for our students." To promote continuous learning, she conducted staff development days in the fall, winter, and spring. Wallace hired subs for the teachers during these staff development days so that teachers could learn together "either through a consultant we bring in or by a professional development activity that I develop." Wallace stated, "If teachers quit learning new and innovative ways to do things, they become stagnant in their method of teaching. We have to constantly evaluate how we teach, what we teach, and know our audience if we are going to be successful."

Modeling was a hallmark of Mrs. Kitterman's process of professional development. How her teachers taught was a group effort in that their peers heavily

influenced so much of what every teacher did at Louisville Academy. Kitterman explained,

> For good instruction to take place, I think you have to go in and almost team-teach with the teacher. You model it and take the teacher in to other classrooms to watch what others do. Donna, my lead teacher, has no administrative responsibilities at all. She is strictly there for the teachers to help them be more effective teachers.

With the Adequate Yearly Progress money that Kitterman received, she hired Marilyn Burns to conduct a math seminar with her teachers. The whole staff participated in the training and received a supplement for attending. Louisville Academy also participated in a statewide model for school improvement called Learning Focused School Training. Furthermore, Kitterman said,

> I look at the conversations we have and the curriculum development that we do as staff development. Every faculty meeting should be staff development. It's not just to tell you when your grades are due. It needs to be how you build that team that you have in the school to make it all work. We train everyone when we do something. Our paraprofessionals can go into a teacher's class when she is out and pick up on the reading program where the teacher would have been. It doesn't mean she has the same competency level as the teacher, but she could fill in those gaps. We probably do more staff development that most people do because of the very broad definition we have of what is staff development.

Professional development was a common occurrence for the faculty of Cherokee Elementary School. Mr. Smith estimated that "We have probably done over 100 hours of staff development during the last three years with all certified staff." Staff development opportunities took place in large part due to the Reading Excellence Act grant and the Reading First grant that Mr. Smith applied for and received during his tenure as principal. Smith believed that the programs that accompanied the grants they received were not what led to the high achievement of his students. He said,

> It wasn't the grant programs that made a difference. It was the staff development the teachers received as part of the grant and the way they were able to effectively implement what they learned that has made huge impact on the way we teach.

Most of the staff development that took place at Northside Elementary school was in-house, conducted by members of Mrs. Smith's faculty. Mrs. Smith conducted a needs assessment, and based on the identified needs, set up staff development opportunities for teachers to participate in that focused on those specific needs. Teachers participated in staff development during the school day, after school hours, during district wide in-service days, and there were days when students went home at noon, and the teachers participated in staff development for the remainder of the workday. Mrs. Smith provided an example of in-house staff development,

> We gear everything toward what we are doing in the classrooms. For example, to implement the components of a balanced literacy framework, teachers needed to know how to conduct a shared real aloud. Most of our literacy collaborative people are in house people and they go to training and come back and redeliver that training. They go to and from Boston to train and they come back and help implement what they have learned. There is a model classroom in the school for our teachers. Next year they will train all of the third grade teachers to do what they learned in Boston. That is our model for staff development. We train our own trainers, practice it in a model room, and use the trainers to observe in the classroom to monitor implementation.

Assembling and Mentoring a Faculty

During the data analysis of the interview transcripts of the five participants, similar phrases to describe the success of each school such as "can be attributed to a great faculty" and "the hard work and dedication of the faculty are the key to success" were used. The hiring practices of the participants ranged from potential teachers applying through the district office and going through a county wide screening process before becoming a candidate for employment, applying with the individual school leader, to the principal personally contacting potential candidates and asking them to come talk to them

about teaching at their school. Though the hiring practices may have varied greatly, retaining teachers was a consistent theme that emerged among all five participants. All participants used the Georgia Teacher Observations Instrument to evaluate formally all teachers, used informal observations to document the daily teaching practices of teachers, and participants expressed the need to be in "every classroom every day" to get to know their teachers and be able to make employment decisions based on their effectiveness in the delivery of the specified curriculum.

The qualities that the participants were looking for when hiring a new teacher were also of interest to the researcher. Dr. O'Dell expressed the need to hire intelligent teachers with good grades on their college transcripts and that have professional goals. Mrs. Wallace wanted her teachers to have a great personality. Mrs. Kitterman said, "I want a person that children will respond to and I can teach them the rest." Mr. Smith looks for a teacher who he believes cares about children and loves to teach. Mrs. Smith stated, "I want to meet them and talk to them and get a feel for their willingness to get on board with the goals we have for our school and what we are doing to accomplish those goals and help us move forward to meet our goals with students."

Participants in the study provided mentoring for both existing faculty members and new faculty members. Participants and fellow teachers provided mentoring. By providing mentoring opportunities, new teachers received guidance to improve their teaching and existing teachers improved their own professional competency. The act of mentoring forced existing teachers to reflect on their own beliefs about teaching, students, and learning. Dr. O'Dell stated, "I believe I have greatly impacted the teaching careers of the young teachers who have come to my school by showing them the right

way to do things, being there for them at all times, supporting their efforts, an encouraging them to be continuous learners."

Mrs. Wallace believed that the act of mentoring began during the interview process. She employed a panel of teachers to conduct interviews with her. By using teachers to conduct the interviews and be involved in the selection process, she believed teachers feel obligated to help the teachers they are responsible for bringing into the system. If the new teacher fails, then they fail because they made the wrong selection. Teachers will go to great lengths to help a new teacher if they are the ones who hired them.

Both new teachers and existing teachers benefited from the mentoring process in place at Louisville Academy. Mrs. Kitterman stated,

> I have a mentoring program set up that benefits everyone. New teachers benefit from the knowledge and experience of veteran teachers they are paired with and veteran teachers get the personal satisfaction of seeing another teacher grow and become good at what they do. I believe mentoring enhances the mentor's self esteem and gives them a greater sense of worth in their career because they know they are shaping the life of a future educator. I also believe that the new teacher who is being mentored works harder and smarter because of the help they are receiving and because they know that they are being watched to see if they have the same amount of caring and enthusiasm for their students as the veteran teacher has.

Mr. Smith conducted much of the mentoring that took place at Cherokee Elementary. Mr. Smith conducted classroom visits on a daily basis. His classroom visits were both social and professional. He stated, "I want to talk with teachers about things other than school so that they are comfortable having me in their rooms, but at the same time, I provide constant feedback to them about what I see going on instructionally in their rooms." Mr. Smith also used peer teachers and the literacy coach to provide modeling for teachers to help them improve their instructional practices. The modeling

exercises that Smith created for his faculty "provide opportunities for good teachers to validate the experience they have gained over the years and provide opportunities for beginning teachers to learn good teaching practices."

Mrs. Smith's move behind the principal's desk did not remove her from the classroom. When asked what needed doing to improve education throughout all elementary schools in the State of Georgia, Smith responded,

> I think we bring our first year teachers in at a big disadvantage. I don't think they are properly trained and they need intensive support from the school. That is why I get in the classroom and work with them. I have to trust that my experienced teachers will continue to do the great job that they do and will allow me to spend more time with the new teachers. I learn the same things they learn from professionals that come to our school and bring us information and I participate in the same activities they participate in so that I can go into their rooms and support their instructional efforts.

External Support and Assistance

Participants relied on external support for the successful operation of their school, utilizing high-quality external support and assistance from entities having experience and expertise in school-wide reform and improvement with programs and instructional delivery supported by available literature concerning school improvement and by providers that had a successful record of accomplishment. Furthermore, Mr. Smith provided professional development for school personnel and on-site support during the full implementation period of the reform during their school improvement efforts.

Dr. O'Dell used James Comer's model for school improvement as a resource for her school improvement efforts. O'Dell knew that she had a student population that was 90 percent minority and 90 percent from poverty, so she sought to incorporate the teachings of James Comer School in her school that she believed would "improve the educational experience of my poor minority youth." She described the improvement

process as one that would “build supportive bonds among children, parents, and school staff to promote a positive school climate.” The Comer process creates a school environment where children feel comfortable, valued, and secure. In this environment, children will form positive emotional bonds with school staff and parents and a positive attitude toward the school program, which promotes the children's overall development and, in turn, facilitates academic learning. O’Dell initiated the basic tenants of the Comer process in her school. She stated,

> The basic tenets require our school to review problems in open discussion in a no-fault atmosphere and to develop a collaborative working relationship among all stakeholders. It also requires that all decisions must be reached by consensus rather than by decree.

Additional outside sources that O’Dell sought for advice in her school improvement efforts came from educational literature. O’Dell used the teachings of Reggie Routman to address the reading deficiencies of her students. She used Marzano’s teaching strategies for improving instructional delivery and constantly read to stay abreast of current writings and research associated with school improvement. She stated,

> I am a voracious reader. I read constantly. I read all the time. As you can see from my office, I have books, books, books and I read all the time. I read research, I read journals, I read books, and I am big into leadership. I love leadership books. I just try to mine ideas everywhere I can and grow myself. I really believe in growing and stretching myself.

Mrs. Wallace consulted with leaders in the central office to assist her with school improvement efforts. She felt “thankful to have such knowledgeable resources that are just a phone call away.” Wallace also relied on her faculty to “conduct research on goals we are trying to achieve and bring solutions to the table when we are establishing our school improvement strategies.”

Mrs. Kitterman had "no qualms about going to other schools and witnessing first hand what they are doing that is working for them." She continued by saying, "The school improvement team is very involved with reading research concerning current instructional issues. That is one of their big tasks—trying to keep abreast of what is going on in research and in other schools." Kitterman also used consultants that brought current best practices to her faculty that related to what they were doing instructionally. She stated,

> We have used one consultant very consistently who has really helped us make the changes in this school. Our Regional Educational Services Agency (RESA) has always been really strong and they have been able to bring in a lot about what is going on in research. We don't just do the same old thing over and over again. You have to fine tune, make it work, and then make it work better. Additional support sources I use comes mostly from reading the data, reading the research, and using those outside consultants to keep us up with current trends in education.

Mr. Smith used "a lot of reading resources" to find solutions to problems and improve instruction at Cherokee Elementary School. Mr. Smith also relied on his experiences as a teacher and an administrator when confronted with a problem or when making decisions about policy or practice. He and his leadership team have visited other schools using similar programs as Cherokee. However, much of the support for instruction that Mr. Smith received was born out of the grants that he applied for and received as principal.

Like Mrs. Kitterman, Mrs. Smith employed her RESA to use consultants who could provide instructional support for her faculty. She also relied on her faculty members to stay current with educational trends and use "best practices" when delivering the curriculum to the students. She and her faculty had all participated in Learning Focused School Training conducted by Max Thompson. Much of what Thompson

teaches about school improvement consists of a school-wide focus on priorities, strong research-based and exemplary practice-based literacy curriculum, high accountability for the central office, principals, teachers, students, a significant extra help acceleration component, a focus on smallness (vertical teams, grade level teams), and sustained, school-based staff development with accountability. In addition to using RESA consultants and the Learning Focused School training, Smith stated, "I feel fortunate to have worked under a very successful principal as an assistant and much of what I do an how I run this school, I learned from him."

Targeting At-Risk Students

Participants paid special attention to the academic progress of at-risk students enrolled in their schools. At-risk students may include those who are disciplinary problems, who have particularly stressful home situations, or who have shown a propensity for weak academic performance. Participants expressed the need for teachers who work with at-risk students to become more aware of how their own thoughts and feelings about those students may either prevent them from meeting the students' needs or help ameliorate their difficulties. In expressing this need, participants used phrases such as "all children can learn," "high expectations for all learners," "we treat all children like they are our own children," and "we must give our very best to every student, every day."

Meeting the needs of at-risk students, not just philosophically, but in reality through the early identification of at-risk students and through monitoring their progress is important to all participants. Dr. O'Dell identified every student within her school who made 310 or lower on the CRCT. With 300 being the minimum passing score, she and

her teachers were able to focus on the individual strengths and weaknesses of students in danger of failing the CRCT and provide them with additional test preparation.

Through regular benchmarking, all five participants were able to continuously monitor students within their schools and identify those that were at risk of not meeting grade level expectations. Dr. O'Dell and Mrs. Smith benchmarked students every six weeks. Mrs. Wallace benchmarked students every nine weeks. Mrs. Kitterman benchmarked students weekly and Mr. Smith benchmarked students at the end of each competency taught.

Transient students were another at-risk student population identified by the participants. Every participant had a plan to address students enrolling in their school at a time other than the beginning of the school year. Dr. O'Dell stated,

> We jump on students we don't know right, left, and sideways. When they walk in the door, we are not just going to stick them in a class and hope they do well. We are going to assess them, see what they know, and teach them what they need to know to be successful.

Cross Case Analysis 2

Definitions of Success

To determine each participant's perspective of the definition of success, I asked each of them to define success. Table 1 lists each participant's definition of success.

Table 1

Participant's Definitions of Success

Participant	Definition of Success
Dr. Ruth O'Dell	Student achievement is huge. Having a good place for everybody to work and the children not learning, that's broader than what they get on a test score, especially with high poverty kids. If you can give them the skills so that they will be able to do the kind of work necessary to get a high school diploma means more for them than a standardized test. You have to have study skills, social skills, visions of what is possible, motivation. We can look at their parents and see what is going to happen if we are not able to provide that. Therefore, it's broader than just test scores. The second thing I want to have is I want to create a school where everyone wants to commit and no one wants to leave. So my success is that the people in my school want to stay here and they don't want to leave and they don't want me to leave either.
Mrs. Micki Wallace	In this day of accountability and excellence, success has come to be looked at through test scores. That does not necessarily determine the success of that school. We are very proud of what we have accomplished, not only through our test scores, but everything else that you must address in a high at-risk student population. We can go consistently, on a daily basis, without any significant behavior disruptions, and can have fun things happening for the kids in the school like field day or going on field trips. You can do these things when you have developed a student's ability to know what is acceptable behavior, what is the appropriate way to act and say. That is success. Making no excuses. We don't allow excuses here for anything; for our behavior as teachers or for student behavior. There are no excuses. We come to school to do our very best every single day. We proved it can be done.
Mrs. Hulett Kitterman	A successful school is one in which everyone is focused on what we need to do for children and keeping focused on where we want the children to end up. Test scores are not necessarily what we want. We want children to do well further down the road, beyond when they are 10 years old. Our job here is to teach them how to deal with the world they live in and how to respond to it and make good decisions and good choices.
Mr. Donnie Smith	To me success is having a school where students learn and students feel good about themselves because they are learning and a majority, if not all of your students, are meeting academic goals. When a student gets an education that makes them good citizens and allows them to be successful when they leave your care, whether it is going out into the world of work or if it is going to the third grade, that is success. Adequately preparing them for the next step of their life, that is success.
Mrs. Tammie Smith	Success is measured by student achievement. An accurate measure of student achievement cannot be determined by just one measure (i.e. a standardized test). The success of a school can be more accurately measured by examining individual student growth. Portfolios of student work, teachers' anecdotal notes, and records of student progress toward specific goals are a more accurate measure of success.

In defining success, the participant's spoke of student outcomes, such as "success is measured by student achievement," "student achievement is huge," "test scores of students," "where we want children to end up," and "students learn." Underlying each participant's perspectives of the meaning of success was a commonality revolving around the concept of actively and consciously engaging in student outcomes.

One of the five participants defined success in terms of student achievement. Her definition implied that success relates directly to test scores. Four of the five participants defined success in terms of preparing a student for his/her future. Their definition implied that success directly relates to the physical, social, and emotional development of the student and academic achievement was a secondary concern.

The one participant who defined success in terms of student achievement was the principal of the only school in this study who did not have a majority minority, majority free, and reduced meal student population.

When posed the question "Can schools be considered successful without having good test scores?" Three of the five participants answered "yes." One participant answered "no," and one participant answered "not by the public but they can by me."

Analysis of Teacher Survey

A focus group consisting of five teachers, one administrator, and one researcher met on two different occasions to develop a survey (Appendix D) to determine the teachers' perspectives of why they believed their school was a quality school, why they believed their principal was an effective leader, and what needed to occur within a school for the school to be successful. The survey asked the following questions:

Question No. 1: Do you consider this school a quality school? Table 2 provides the number of teachers surveyed in each of the five schools under study.

Table 2

Teacher Response by School

Participant	Response	
	Yes	No
Lindsey Elementary, Dr. Ruth O'Dell		
Unity Elementary, Mrs. Micki Wallace	23	0
Louisville Academy, Mrs. Hulett Kitterman	23	0
Cherokee Elementary, Mr. Donnie Smith	28	0
Northside Elementary, Mrs. Tammie Smith	21	0
	19	0

All teachers surveyed from all five schools under study believed their school was a quality school.

To determine the teachers' reasons for identifying why they believed their schools were quality schools, teachers answered this question "Why do you consider your school a quality school?" Table 3 lists each participant and the number of respondents who believed that the quality of the school relates to the principal, the teacher, programs used, or a joint effort between parents, students, teachers, and the administrator

Table 3

Teacher Responses to "Who" and "What" is Responsible for Quality of School

School	No. of Teachers Surveyed	Who is Responsible			
		Principal	Teachers	Programs	Joint Effort
Lindsey Elementary	23	6	4	1	12
Unity Elementary	23	0	4	0	19
Louisville Academy	29	2	2	1	24
Cherokee Elementary	21	2	5	0	14
Northside Elementary	19	5	0	4	10

Sixty-nine percent of the teachers surveyed under study believed that the quality of their school was directly attributed to a joint effort of the principal, the teachers, and the programs that were used. Thirteen percent attributed the quality of the school solely to the principal, 13% to the teachers, and 5% to the programs.

Table 4 lists each participant and adjectives or phrases used to identify why they believed the *teachers* were responsible for the success of the school.

Table 4

Teacher Responses to "Teachers" Being Responsible for Quality of School?

School	Comments Regarding Teachers Responsible
Lindsey Elementary Dr. Ruth O'Dell	This school has a lot of educators that are willing to do what it takes to make educated and well rounded students. The staff works well together. The quality of teacher leadership.
Unity Elementary Mrs. Micki Wallace	Excellent, dedicated, dependable teachers. Wonderful staff! Teachers go above and beyond to reach all children. Hard working staff that puts children first.
Louisville Academy Mrs. Hulett Kitterman	Teachers are highly qualified. Teachers care about the students because they will always be a part of this small community.
Cherokee Elementary Mr. Donnie Smith	Teachers strive to push students. Teachers serve student needs.

Table 5 details teachers' responses to *principal* being responsible for quality of schools.

Table 5

Teacher Responses to "Principal" Being Responsible to Quality of School

School	Comments of Teachers
Lindsey Elementary Dr. Ruth O'Dell	The principal is educated, not just in leadership, but in psychology, special education, and life. We have a quality school because we have a highly qualified leader with a massive vision.
Louisville Academy Mrs. Hulett Kitterman	We are a quality school because of the leadership of our principal. The principal is hands on and knows what is going on in every room
Cherokee Elementary Mr. Donnie Smith	Our principal is constantly providing ways for us to be successful. Great leadership by principal.
Northside Elementary Mrs. Tammie Smith	Mrs. Smith is a true leader with vision The ability of our principal to pull us together.

Table 6 details teachers' responses to *programs* being responsible for quality of schools.

Table 6

Teacher Responses to "Programs" Being Responsible to Quality of School

School	Teacher Responses
Lindsey Elementary Dr. Ruth O'Dell	Up to date curriculum and quality reading program.
Louisville Academy Mrs. Hulett Kitterman	We have a quality academic program. Our research based reading program.
Northside Elementary Mrs. Tammie Smith	We have the best programs money can buy. The quality of our reading instruction.

Table 7 describes teachers' responses to *joint effort* (i.e., parents, students, teachers, and school administrator) for quality of school.

Table 7

Teacher Responses to "Joint Effort" Being Responsible to Quality of School

School	Teacher Responses
Lindsey Elementary Dr. Ruth O'Dell	The caliber and overall singleness of purpose of the staff, parents, and student support programs We have an excellent leadership, both in administration and with the teaching ranks. We have shared decision making that is authentic and ongoing. There is a high level of dedication from most if not all who are here. There is a good professional communication within the grade level and throughout the different grade levels.
Unity Elementary Mrs. Micki Wallace	Unity has wonderful leadership, a positive school climate, lots of support form parents, and is the #6 school in Georgia. Excellent leadership, teachers, environment. Our test scores have risen steadily as teachers, administrators, and parents have worked together. Every staff member and stakeholder in this school works to make sure every student is working and learning to the best of their ability.
Louisville Academy Mrs. Hulett Kitterman	We care about our students and each other. "Everyone matters and everyone's opinion counts. Everyone from the janitors on up is involved in providing a quality education for our students. We have wonderful collaboration between teacher, grade levels, and administrators. We have great parents who support what we are doing with their children.
Cherokee Elementary Mr. Donnie Smith	Everyone works together. The principal involves us in the decision making of the school and we take that responsibility seriously. Our students love coming to school here because they know we care and the parents know we care.
Northside Elementary Mrs. Tammie Smith	Mrs. Smith fosters a feeling among the faculty that makes us work together. We have grown close over the last five years and know that our effort to improve is a team effort. Collaboration among teachers, parents, and the administration make a quality school.

Table 8 lists the most common adjectives or phrases used by teacher participants to identify what needs to occur within a school for it to be successful.

Table 8

Teacher Responses to Significant Things Needed for a Successful School

School	Teacher Response
Lindsey Elementary Dr. Ruth O'Dell	Quality leadership, cooperation among staff, willingness to learn, putting kids first, collaboration, parent involvement, shared leadership, money to support programs.
Unity Elementary Mrs. Micki Wallace	Quality leadership, good discipline, good teamwork, high standards, good teachers, good discipline, nurturing environment.
Louisville Academy Mrs. Hulett Kitterman	Good teachers and hard work, great leadership, supportive principal, proper funding, love for kids, effective discipline plan.
Cherokee Elementary Mr. Donnie Smith	Communication, flexibility, funding for programs, parent involvement, continuous learning, positive climate, good administrator.
Northside Elementary Mrs. Tammie Smith	Vision, organized curriculum, strong leadership from principal, relationships between home and school, collaborative work environment, love of kids and school.

All five faculties surveyed identified the need for effective leadership in order to be a successful school. Addressing the climate of the school was identified by all five faculties in the form of loving the students and developing a nurturing school environment. Providing continuous learning opportunities for the faculty was the next most common response in that three of the five faculties identified this attribute as a need for being a successful school.

Table 9 lists the frequency of teacher responses identifying things needed for a successful school to research question No. 3.

Table 9

Question No. 3: Frequency of Responses for Things Needed to be a Successful School

Qualifying Ingredient	School					Total
	Lindsey	Unity	Louisville	Cherokee	Northside	
Quality Principal	8	15	16	9	7	54
School Environment	5	20	13	5	4	47
Quality Teachers	3	14	14	11	4	46
Parent Involvement	4	8	6	13	6	37
Ongoing Professional Development	7	0	2	4	12	25
Research Based Instruction	3	4	3	5	7	22
Shared Decision Making	3	1	3	9	3	19
Development of School Vision	2	2	5	0	9	18
Funding	1	0	7	5	0	15
Collaborative Planning	2	0	5	4	2	13
Curriculum Mapping	0	0	5	6	2	13
High Expectations of Students	0	7	2	2	0	11
Use Date to Guide Instruction	2	4	0	1	1	8
Work Ethic of Faculty	2	1	2	1	0	6
Effective Student Discipline	2	2	2	0	0	6
Small Class Sizes	0	0	1	0	0	1

In identifying things needed to be a successful school, 55% of the combined responses of all teachers surveyed for this study identified 4 systemic characteristics as needed for a successful school. These 4 characteristics were: (a) quality principal, (b) school environment, (c) quality teachers, and (d) parent involvement.

To determine the teachers' perspectives on the most difficult challenges educators face in improving schools, teachers listed "the three most difficult challenges educators

face in improving schools." Table 10 lists the frequency of responses identifying the most difficult challenges educators face in improving schools.

Table 10

Question No. 4: Frequency of Responses Identifying the Most Difficult Challenges Educators Face

Teacher Perspective	School					Total
	Lindsey	Unity	Louisville	Cherokee	Northside	
Lack of Parent Involvement	5	18	16	5	3	47
Student Backgrounds	5	14	13	6	1	39
Lack of Time	5	2	10	7	5	29
Lack of Funding	5	3	8	4	8	28
Managing Discipline	1	4	4	6	2	17
Unchanging Practices of Teachers	5	2	2	6	2	17
Politics	3	1	1	4	7	16
Change in State Requirements	1	1	1	2	4	9
Large class sizes	0	1	3	0	5	9
Too much emphasis placed on testing	0	3	5	0	1	9
Too much to teach	0	1	1	2	4	8
Transient Students	2	1	0	0	1	4
Lack of Needed Personnel	0	0	0	4	0	4
Turnover Rate of Staff	1	0	1	0	1	3
Lack of Support from Public	1	1	1	0	0	3
Change Programs Too Often	0	1	1	0	0	2
Poor Vision for School	1	0	0	0	0	1
School Safety	0	0	1	0	0	1
Lack of Specialized Training for Teachers	0	0	1	0	0	1

To determine the teachers' perspectives of their principals, teachers listed "three qualities that best describe their principal." Table 11 lists the five most common adjectives or phrases used by participants to describe the principal, and the number of frequencies of responses that coincide with each description.

Table 11

Question No. 5: List Three Qualities that Best Describe Your Principal

Principal	Qualifier				
	Intelligence	Trustworthiness	Intrinsic	Extrinsic	Leadership
Dr. O'Dell	Smart Knowledgeable Researcher	Faithful Dependable Honest	Supportive Good listener	Motivator Happy Cheerful	Empowering" Shares decisions Great leader
Total	21	9	11	7	23
Mrs. Wallace	Knowledgeable Intelligent	Dependable Dedicated	Supportive Good listener Caring	Energetic Tenacious Friendly	Good leader Great communicator Professional
Total	11	6	25	23	4
Mrs. Kitterman	Knowledgeable Intelligent Knows her stuff	Dependable Dedicated	Supportive Great listener Approach-able	Motivating Fair Friendly	Excellent leader Empowering Involves Parents
Total	29	19	14	12	32
Mr. D. Smith	Smart Knowledgeable	Consistent Dedicated	Supportive Caring	Inspiring Committed to teachers	Great leader Curriculum expert Strong Leader
Total	7	19	11	21	7
Mrs. T. Smith	Knowledgeable Witty Bright	Reliable Credible True to her vision	Supportive Friendly Backs us	Comrade Warm heart Friendly	Great principal Shares in decision making Great with curriculum
Total	10	14	19	13	9

To determine the teachers' perspective of the quality of their school, they were asked: Would you feel completely satisfied with allowing your own child to attend this school?" Table 12 lists the frequency of teacher responses for each school.

Table 12

Question No. 6: Would You Feel Completely Satisfied with Allowing Your Own Child Attend This School

School	Frequency of Responses	
	Yes	No
Lindsey Elementary, Dr. Ruth O'Dell	23	0
Unity Elementary, Mrs. Micki Wallace	23	0
Louisville Academy, Mrs. Hulett Kitterman	27	2
Cherokee Elementary, Mr. Donnie Smith2	19	2
Northside Elementary, Mrs. Tammie Smith	19	0

To determine the teacher's perspective of the quality of their school, teachers were asked to rank their school by comparison to other Georgia elementary schools as to whether they were in the top 5 percent, top 25 percent, average, or below average. Table 13 lists each participant and the frequency of responses.

Table 13

Question No. 7: Frequency of Teacher Responses in School Ranking

	Frequency of Ranking			
School	Top 5%	Top 25%	Average	Below Average
Lindsey Elementary Dr. Ruth O'Dell	20	3	0	0
Unity Elementary Mrs. Micki Wallace	13	8	2	0
Louisville Academy Mrs. Hulett Kitterman	10	11	8	0
Cherokee Elementary Mr. Donnie Smith	5	14	2	0
Northside Elementary Tammie Smith	17	2	0	0

In analyzing the teacher surveys from all five faculties, I found that all five schools were considered to be quality schools by 100% of the teachers of the principals under study. Furthermore, 57% believed their school was in the top 5% of all elementary schools in the State of Georgia, and 97% felt completely satisfied with allowing their own child attend their school.

As to why the faculties of the participants believed their school was a quality school, I found that 69% attributed this to a joint effort among all stakeholders of the school, 13% attributed success to their principal, 13% to the teachers, and 5% to the programs taught.

The quality of leadership provided by the principal of the school was the most popular adjective or phrase used to describe why each school was successful. Additionally, the leadership of the principal was the number one response of teachers in

identifying things needed for their school to be successful. The climate of the school was the second most frequent response and the quality of teachers was third.

The lack of parent involvement was the number one response to identifying the most difficult challenges each school must face. Student backgrounds was the second most challenging occurrence noted and the lack of time to adequately prepare for and complete instructional activities was third on the list of challenges educators face.

There was no consensus among all five schools studied as to the quality that best describes their principals. Intelligence was the number one quality identified by the faculty of Mrs. Kitterman. The ability to be an effective leader was the number one quality identified by the faculty of Dr. O'Dell. Mrs. Wallace's and Mrs. Smith's attention to the intrinsic needs (good listener, supportive, caring) of their teachers were the faculties number one response to what makes them successful. Mr. Smith's faculty used adjectives to describe his success as a principal that addressed the extrinsic needs (inspiring, commitment) of teachers as their number one response.

Despite the lack of consensus among the five faculties as to the description of their principal, there was one common factor noted; all five faculties' descriptions of their principal could be placed into five categories. The five categories (or attributes) of the principals under study as identified by their faculties were: (a) possessed a high level of intelligence, (b) they were trustworthy, (c) paid attention to the intrinsic needs of teachers, (d) provided extrinsic motivation for teachers to be successful, and (e) they portrayed exceptional leadership qualities.

Journal Analysis

Each participant in the study kept a journal documenting everything done over a five-day period during a regular school day or other school-related activities that took place outside of normal school hours. All participants maintained their journals during the third full week of school after returning from their Christmas holiday break.

In identifying how each principal spent their time during the same week of school among all five principals, the journals showed that a combined majority of their time was spent observing and evaluating teachers (28%). Following observation and evaluation of teachers was working with students (15%), team meetings (13%), professional development (11%), office work (9%), parent involvement (7%), duty (6%), reviewing student data (4%), communication with teachers (3%), work at home (2%), and discipline (2%).

Table 14 lists each participant, the activities that occupied the majority of time during a normal school week, and the percentage of time they spent attending to these activities.

Table 14

Principal	Activity	Percent of Time
Dr. Ruth O'Dell	Professional development for staff	14%
	Informal observations on visitation with teachers	11%
	Reviewing student data	8%
	Team meetings	8%
	Work at home	7%
	Office work (emails, phone calls, paperwork)	7%
	Communicating with teachers (newsletter, developing schedules, agendas)	6%
Mrs. Micki Wallace	Teacher observations	15%
	Walking halls, casual conversations with teachers	12%
	Answering/reading emails	8%
	Duty (morning and afternoon)	8%
	Team meetings	8%
	Office work (paperwork, reviewing student data	7%
	Discipline	6%
Mrs. Hulett Kitterman	Teacher observations, conferences, conversations	32%
	Direct instruction with students, working with students individually, teaching class	21%
	Parent contact; conferences, recruiting help	12%
	Team meetings with teachers	12%
Mr. Donnie Smith	Classroom observations; informal/formal	23%
	Administrative meetings at school and at district office	20%
	Bus duty, breakfast duty, and lunchroom duty	12%
	Work in office	11%
	Staff development	10%
Mrs. Tammy Smith	Direct involvement with students; conferences, attendance and academic hearings	33%
	Classroom visits, teacher conferences	23%
	Professional development with teachers	18%
	Parent and community involvement	9%
	Reviewing student data	8%

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Chapter V

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this dissertation, educational leadership is presented in two very distinct, interrelated threads—an abstract, analytical view and a holistic, systemic view. Each thread is unique in that an analytical approach to leadership accomplishes a very different result than a systemic approach to leadership. In analytical leadership, the goal is to achieve a predetermined, designed, desired outcome. Through systemic leadership, the entire organization is affected, spurring growth to its full potential.

Green (1999) states that analytical thinking can help explain how a system works. Knowing how a system works allows the leader to repair the system. Repairing the system allows the system to operate within its original design limits. In other words, the system's design to a great degree defines the system's performance limits. This is not to say that analytical thinking is ineffective, because as this study indicates, the application of analysis can have a positive impact on school performance.

In analytical thinking the primary role of the leader is to manage the parts of the system. In systems thinking the primary role of the leader is to facilitate an increased number of meaningful interactions among the parts of the system. Analytical thinking can be viewed as operating in isolation from systems thinking. In systems thinking improved performance deems analytical thinking to be necessary but not sufficient to significantly increase performance. Thinking systematically is the application of analytical thinking and synthetic thinking.

The systems approach to leadership has no cap or ceiling on performance. A systemic approach to leadership affects the system's capacity to facilitate energy flow and perform works residing not in its parts, but is a product of the interaction of its parts. When those parts interact efficiently, they create synergy and the group works as a whole, not as individuals. The systems approach to leadership energizes each relationship within the school that influences school effectiveness, and each begins interacting on an equal footing with the primary parts of the system. Through the systems approach, schools become living synergistic social systems that have the ability to facilitate additional energy flow and accomplish more work (Green, 1999).

This study examines five successful principals in the cultural setting in which they work and takes an in-depth look into why they are successful. The central characteristic or overwhelming theme revealed as an integral component of all five participants' leadership style and which contributed greatly to their overall effectiveness as principals was their ability to build relationships with the stakeholders of the school. The natural association between these principals and their constituents was found to be the major reason for their success. As the need arose, being able to draw upon each personal relationship that they developed with people they interacted with on a daily basis, was easy to see when I talked with the participants or observed them in their workplace. However, it was much more difficult to describe this process for the benefit of the reader. I attempted to provide this description in Chapter III, using portraiture.

Developing positive relationships with the stakeholders of each school is an endless resource for the principals to draw upon. When a parent comes to the school to meet with a principal about a problem they are having with their child's teacher, what

better way is there to begin the process of reconciliation than with the trust of the parent? When a student misbehaves or earns a failing grade, what better way is there to get that student back on track than to have a relationship with that student in which the student just does not want to disappoint the principal? When a teacher is having problems with his or her instructional delivery or classroom management, what better way is there for a principal to address the problem than through a continuous collaborative atmosphere with the faculty?

What makes identifying the specific characteristics of developing relationships so difficult is the fact that no two people achieve this goal in the same manner. Take, for example, the five principals in this study. All five identified the need to foster positive relationships with their stakeholders. The adjectives that I would use to describe each principal's relationship with his or her faculty would be different for each principal, yet the relationships that were formed worked for each of them. I would describe O'Dell as grounded in continuous learning and academic, Wallace as friendly and fun- loving, Kitterman as family oriented, Donnie Smith as professional, and Tammie Smith as a caring and concerned person. Despite the differences in the descriptive adjectives, each principal accomplished the same goal of being considered trustworthy. They earned the trust and respect of their students, the parents of their students, their peers, and their faculty members.

As important as developing relationships with the stakeholders was in facilitating each principal's successful systemic operation of their schools, there were other common characteristics that were essential to the overall effectiveness. O'Dell and Wallace are identified as being strong instructional leaders. Kitterman, Donnie Smith, and Tammy

Smith possess the characteristic of emphasizing a common curriculum for their faculties and students. Therefore, each principal values the need for being the instructional leader of the school, but in different ways. At some point during my interviews with each of the principals, all made statements concerning the importance of the principal of the school being viewed as the instructional leader, and of keeping everyone focused on a singular goal of academic excellence.

Another common systemic characteristic shared by the participants is the ability to share power. Sharing power was accomplished in different ways, but as was the case with relationships, the principals achieved a common result. This common result was the creation of a collaborative atmosphere that allowed the leaders to assume ownership of their organizations. O'Dell shares power by allowing faculty and staff to have a say in the total operation of the school. Wallace has staff members as part of a leadership team, as do Kitterman and Tammy Smith. Donnie Smith's leadership team is made up of a group of lead teachers and other administrators within his school. The makeup of each leadership team did not matter; what made the leadership teams systemic in nature is that each principal allowed multiple voices in the total operation of their school.

I would like to reiterate this point as the central and maybe the most significant finding in this study. Dr. O'Dell promoted the sharing of power through her team building efforts. She stated, "When I leave here, I have assured, from my work building teams and building knowledge in my teachers that all the ideas and all the energy is not just in me." Mrs. Wallace also shared the power of her position as principal with her staff through team building efforts. Where Wallace's team building efforts differ from O'Dell's is in the job performed by each team. O'Dell's teams operate the entire school.

Wallace's teams unite a core belief centered on what teachers need to be teaching, how they teach, and what students should be learning. In other words, O'Dell's teams focus on the overall functioning of the school on a daily basis while Wallace's teams focus on curriculum. Again, it is not the composition of the team or the function of each team that has the biggest impact on each principal's leadership effectiveness. It is the ability to share power with the stakeholders of the school, and the fact that, through sharing power, stakeholders have ownership of the school that makes each of these principals effective.

I believe this study reveals two very valuable understandings which are the components necessary to produce effective and successful schools, and the idea that these components can be combined in many different ways. It is not possible to prescribe a simple combination of essential components that will produce a leader who will in turn create the "one best system" (Tyack, 1974) for leading a school. In reality, there are many paths that reflect the unique approaches of the leaders and the way in which they interact with others in the school and contribute to the effectiveness of their particular school culture.

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Appendix A: Literature Review

The most important goal of any educational institution, according to many researchers, is student learning. As the leader of an institution, a principal whose behaviors and leadership practices significantly affect the performance of the school is an important component of a successful school. Within the body of research over the past three decades, there has been a comprehensive, although at times disparate, set of conclusions about the elements, behaviors, and characteristics of instructional leadership (Sheppard, 1996). Furthermore, there has been growing support for the view that the importance of the principal to school quality and improvement is significant (Goodlad, 1984, Wasserstein-Warnet, 2000). Although conceptual frameworks do exist to guide and support leadership of schools, there is still a need to explore the leadership acts, placing a particular emphasis on existing leadership theory, extracted from the practice of principals of high performing schools.

Before conducting a review of the research on *effective leadership*, it is important to discuss the differences between two common approaches to leadership utilized by school principals. The two approaches to leading are the *analytical approach* and the *systems approach*.

The analytical approach to leadership focuses on the parts of the organization. Green (1999) states that analytical thinking has only the potential to explain how the system can be repaired and returned to the performance level defined in its design. If an organization's goal is only to address its weaknesses by focusing on individual problems within the school, the analytical approach to leadership will be the most appropriate method to reach that goal. Green goes on to say that most of a system's capacity to facilitate energy flow and perform work resides not in its parts, but is a product of the

interaction of its parts. When those parts interact efficiently, they create synergy and the group works as a whole, not as individuals. This ability of individual parts to work together as one synergistic unit is the systems approach.

The systems approach to leadership energizes each relationship within the school that influences school effectiveness and each begins interacting on an equal footing with the primary parts of the system (Green, 1999). Through the systems approach, schools become living synergistic social systems that have the ability to facilitate additional energy flow and accomplish more work (Green). Conley and Goldman (1994) also define the systems approach to leadership as the behaviors that enhance the collective ability of a school to adapt, solve problems, and improve performance.

Ackoff (2005) states that,

> The characteristic way of management that we have taught in the Western world is [to] take a complex system, divide it into parts and then try to manage each part as well as possible. Moreover, if that's done, the system as a whole will behave well. That's absolutely false, because it's possible to improve the performance of each part taken separately and destroy the system at the same time. (p. 2).

Ackoff goes on to describe the differences between conventional thinking and systems thinking by stating, "An understanding of the difference between analysis and synthesis is crucial for an introduction to the theory of a system" (p. 2). Dr. Ackoff explains that analysis has been the dominant mode of thought in the Western world for 400 years. Analysis explains how the pieces of a system work. Synthesis is vital to understanding the why of a system and the interactions between its parts. Understanding the implications of seeing the organization as a system leads to the conclusion that cooperation is more effective than internal competition in leading any organization to work more effectively.

The works of Stephen Covey and Robert Marzono (1989 & 2005) provide a comparison between proponents of systems thinking and those of analytical thinking. Covey (1989) identifies the seven habits of highly effective people. These people are: (a) are pro-active (solutions oriented), (b) begin with the end in mind (mission statement), (c) put first things first (annual goals), (d) think win/win, (e) seek to understand, then to be understood, (f) develop synergy within the organization and engage in creative cooperation, and (g) believe that self-renewal is essential to their effectiveness. All of the characteristics exhibited by highly effective people as defined by Covey are a systems thinking approach to leadership.

In contrast to Covey's system's thinking approach to leadership, Robert J. Marzano (2005) describes an analytic approach to leadership in his interactive web program "Balanced Leadership." In this program, Marzano identifies characteristics of effective leadership as: (a) developing classroom instruction that works, (b) understanding the dimensions of learning, (c) thinking tactics, (d) describing essential knowledge, and (e) developing standards-based instruction. Marzano states that this type of leadership allows leaders to move beyond abstraction to concrete practices, knowledge, and tools for effective leadership.

Whether the actions and behaviors of a principal are analytical or systemic, what they do and how they lead impacts school performance and common themes categorize them. In my review of literature, eight common themes emerge that are most helpful in framing existing leadership theory. These themes are: (a) climate and culture, (b) student expectations, (c) effective school leadership, (d) monitoring of learning and teaching, (e)

learning environment, (f) schools as communities, (g) collaboration and communication skills, and (h) professional development

Climate and Culture

Bennis (2003) states that good leaders make people feel that they are at the heart of things, not at the periphery. Everyone feels that he or she makes a difference to the success of the organization. Bennis goes on to say that people feel centered, and this fact gives their work meaning. Shannon and Bylsma (2003) review research and determine that in high-performing schools, the focus is on achieving a shared vision, and everyone understanding his role in achieving the vision. Furthermore, they state that common beliefs and values develop the focus and vision, creating a consistent direction.

Why do certain things occur in some schools that improve school effectiveness, but not in other schools? The answer lies in the value system that is in place in each school (Whitaker, 2003). Values are the principles, philosophies, beliefs, and ideals that stakeholders of the school consider important (Short & Greer, 1997). Although a system of values is already in place when new principals begin their tenure at a specific school, values can change for better or worse. Whitaker states that values are important because what is valued shapes what is taught, what is valued is rewarded, what is valued is practiced and embraced, and most importantly, what is valued defines what takes place in the school. Furthermore, Whitaker states that values determine behavior, teaching practices, and personal and professional relationships.

McBrien and Brandt (1997) state:

> The sum of the values, cultures, safety practices, and organizational structures within a school cause it to function and react in particular ways. Some schools are said to have a nurturing environment that recognizes children and treats them as

> individuals; others may have the feel of authoritarian structures where rules are strictly enforced and hierarchical control is strong. Teaching practices, diversity, and the relationships among administrators, teachers, parents, and students contribute to school climate. Although the two terms are somewhat interchangeable, school climate refers mostly to the school's effects on students, while school culture refers more to the way teachers and other staff members work together. (p. 89)

"Climate refers to a general social condition that characterizes a group, organization, or community, such as the general opinion in the community, as it affects what happens in schools and classrooms and as it contributes to effective schools" (Brookover, Erickson, & McEvoy, 1996, p. 26). Peterson and Deal (1998) contend that the powerful characteristic of schools called "culture" "is actually one of the most significant features of any educational enterprise" (p. 28). Put less formally, "climate and culture are the unofficial happenings and the atmosphere that pervade each educational setting—warm and accepting, strict and intolerant, large and impersonal" (Ballantive, 2001, p. 228).

As an instructional leader, the principal must understand the complexities of the school's culture as it "reflects what organizational members care about, what they are willing to spend time doing, what and how they celebrate, and what they talk about" (Robbins & Alvy, 1995, p. 23). Creating a positive atmosphere is the principal's responsibility. The leader of the school must take a positive approach and understand the power of praise. Praise must be authentic (Whitaker, Whitaker, & Lumpa, 2000). When authentic praise and recognition permeates the school culture, it reduces the possibility of the tone of the naysayer being the predominant cultural force within the school (Lumpa, p. 121).

The feeling people get when they work in a school impacts the overall culture of the school. However, there is much more to cultivating a productive culture. The principal must assure that effective instructional programs are in place, an appropriate balance of student services are offered, teachers are allowed to participate in useful professional development, a plan is in place to welcome new teachers, and expectations are expressed to guide interactions with one another within the school (Stolp & Smith, 1995).

According to Stolp and Smith (1995), "The culture tells people in the school what is truly important and how they are to act" (p. 14). Culture is so much of an influence on the school that it can literally define what occurs, when it occurs, and how and why it occurs (Hall & Hord, 2001).

School culture and climate are "often intertwined and are both related to organizational behavior and productivity" (Fiore, 2001, p. 8). The school climate influences how people interact with one another. How safe teachers and students feel while at school, expectations placed on students and on teachers, parent involvement, and administrative support or the perceived lack of support affect the climate (Hall & Hord, 2001). There are both academic and social climates established in all schools.

The academic climate is affected by leadership skills, teaching skills, collaboration among school personnel, and by the use of reward and praise bestowed upon students and teachers alike (Sackney, 1988). The social climate is composed of many interrelated components such as the relationship between administration, staff and students, peer norms, student participation opportunities and the appearance and comfort

of the school (Sackney). The work of the principal creates the reality of the effectiveness of the social and academic climates.

Student Expectations

It is found that schools that establish high expectations for all students and provide the support that is necessary to achieve these expectations see high rates of academic success (Edmonds, 1979). The staff of a high-performing school believes that all students can learn and meet high standards (Shannon & Bylsma, 2003). Bernard and Goodyear (1992) cite research stating that schools that exhibit characteristics of high expectations for all students have a lower rate of delinquency, behavioral disturbance, failure to attend school, and below grade level academic performance. Bernard and Goodyear go on to say that one of the most significant findings is that the longer students attend these successful schools, the more their problem behaviors decrease.

Cultivating a culture that is positive and steeped in high expectations occurs in many ways. One of the most powerful ways is through personal relationships in which teachers and other school staff communicate with students. The literature on student resiliency repeatedly confirms the protective power of firm guidance, challenge, and stimulus—plus loving support (Bernard, 1995)

Another area in which high expectations influence student motivation is instilling within each student a responsibility for learning (Kelly & Finnigan, 2003). High expectations must occur by addressing the intrinsic needs of the student as opposed to extrinsic motivational ploys. While it would be misleading and inaccurate to state that teacher expectations determine a student's success, the research clearly establishes that

teacher expectations and the motivation of students to learn do play a significant role in the determination of how well and how much students learn (Bamburg, 1994).

Whitaker (2003) states that may people believe that great teachers have high expectations for students. However, even the worst teachers have high expectations of students. Whitaker goes on to say,

> Great teachers have high expectations for students but even higher expectations for themselves. Poor teachers have high expectations for students but much lower expectations for themselves. Not only that: They have unrealistically high expectations for everyone else as well. They expect the principal to be perfect, every parent to be flawless, and every one of their peers to hold them in incredibly high regard. (p. 17)

Finally, Whitaker states that expectations must be real and authentic and that expectations of students must align with the academic, social, emotional, and behavior goals of the school.

A good school is a successful organization that strives to realize the higher values involved in preparing productive citizens for democracy (Glickman, 1993). Glickman outlines the process for preparing students to be productive citizens as: (a) having a consistent curriculum, (b) conducting focused professional development for the faculty of the school, (c) collaborating with fellow staff members, (d) purchasing a relevant instructional program, (e) aligning testing and assessment practices with the school covenant, and (f) valid fiscal management of resources.

Effective School Leadership

High-performing schools have effective leaders who are proactive and seek help when needed (Fullan, 1997). Fullan also states that open-mindedness and a positive attitude are essential attributes of good leadership. Effective leaders nurture an

instructional program and school culture conducive to learning and professional growth (Starratt, 1996). Teachers and other staff share leadership responsibilities (Shannon & Bylsma, 2003).

Larry Lashway (2003) in his article, *The Mandate to Help Low-Performing Schools*, states that external assistance can facilitate school renewal, but effective leadership at the school site is essential. Lashway also states that even though empirical research has not uncovered a single "best strategy" for low-performing schools, researchers and analysts have identified some promising approaches. The promising approaches he identifies in his article were the Washington School Research Center's (2002) interview of teachers and administrators at elementary schools that found the percentage of students meeting state standards was significantly above the state average. They found four "primary factors": (a) a caring and collaborative environment, (b) strong leadership, (c) focused, intentional instruction, and (d) the use of assessment data to guide instruction. In addition, the high degree of teacher support for reform efforts impressed the researcher despite the shift in teaching practice that was required. Significantly, these patterns were the same for high-poverty and low-poverty schools.

The other promising approach that Lashway (2003) identified was that of research in Texas (Just for the Kids, Inc. 2000). This research identified half a dozen promising practices used by high-performing schools with low-income students:

- High-energy, hands on principal leadership that articulates the vision and keeps the school focused on instruction.
- Broad-based planning that sets clear instructional priorities and meaningful benchmarks for improvement
- Focused, research-based professional development that is driven by identified instructional needs
- Continual monitoring and assessment

- Flexible grouping for instruction based on identified student needs
- Immediate intervention for struggling students. (p. 5)

Lashway calls these studies of successful schools suggestive and contends that they do not identify a detailed plan for principals taking the reins of low-performing schools. Lashway cites Murphy and Datnow's (2003) statement that even in comprehensive school reform, which provides concrete models and resources, implementation varies considerably from school to school. Lashway concludes by stating that even at this early stage of research, it seems evident that turning around a school requires leaders who nurture an educational vision, keep a laser-like focus on instruction, and work to build a professional learning community.

Samuel Casey Carter (1999) interviewed more than 100 principals of high-performing, high-poverty schools in Illinois and New York. Many of these schools were near failing public schools that draw from the same local populations. Carter's interviews identified seven common traits among these principals. These seven traits are

1. Principals must be free to hire whom they want and determine what teachers teach on the school level. People usually leave principals who develop a reputation for academic achievement alone.
2. Principals use measurable goals to foster achievement and set specific benchmarks the whole school must reach.
3. Good principals improve the quality of instruction by employing quality teachers. Teacher quality is emphasized, not seniority.
4. High-performing schools test rigorously and regularly, administering mock tests three or four times a year to prepare for end of year testing.
5. Achievement is the key to discipline. Success inspires confidence, order, and discipline in students.
6. Good principals demand that their students work hard. Long days, after-school programs, weekend programs, and summer school are all features of outstanding schools.
7. Outstanding principals know that all students can excel academically regardless of race or family background. (p. 2)

Monitoring of Learning and Teaching

Legislation has challenged the U.S. States schools with mandates that they leave no child behind. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires that teachers and administrators see to it that all children in our public schools succeed academically. While there are many components addressed in the NCLB plan for improvement that involve multiple stakeholders, it is ultimately the responsibility of the school principal to assure that this challenge becomes a reality. Addressing this challenge begins in the form of planning. According to Mintrop and MacLellan (2002), planning is "a key ingredient to the school improvement process of effective schools" (p. 276). When beginning the process of planning, one must learn from an examination of school needs, thus planning causes learning to take place.

Effective planning promotes change. Deal and Peterson (1994) state that change begins with proper planning and implementation. Planning for school improvement involves having an intimate knowledge of the school. The only way to develop that knowledge is to know the stakeholders and know the data. Edmonds and Lezotte's (1979) effective school correlates identify having a clear and focused mission shared by all based on the needs of the students and the frequent monitoring of student progress through the use of data.

There is an abundance of research available to suggest that planning should begin with a review of school data. Sagor (1996) states that goals necessary for school success are outcome-based education, effective teaching strategies, and effective use of data. Schmoker (1999) states that data helps guide and perform better teaching practices.

Furthermore, he concludes that the use of data can convey the magnitude of the problem, speak of hard facts, and can reveal slow and steady growth.

Once data has been collected, organized, and analyzed, the use of data results should become a community process to develop the vision, beliefs, missions, and goals of the organization (Marzano, 2003; Schmoker, 1999). Marzano and Schmoker also support the use of planning to reflect expectations of student achievement, analyze student needs, analyze teacher needs, and include ongoing evaluation of efforts and modifications to sustain continuous improvement.

Data should be the foundation for the formation of the school improvement plan. Fitzpatrick (1997) explains by stating, "Collection and careful analysis of pertinent information is critical in determining the effectiveness of the existing programs and services in your school. Moreover, the types of data collected for the profile can assist schools in planning and sustaining their school improvement initiatives on behalf of student learning" (p. 13). The principal of the school should take the lead in providing relevant and useful data to the school improvement team so that it makes research-based decisions.

In a high-performing school, there are steady cycles of instructional assessments used to identify students who need help. These assessments are the basis for adjustments. Students who need more time and instruction receive it. Teachers adjust upon the basis of frequent monitoring of student progress and needs (Shannon & Bylsma, 2003).

Learning Environment

Shannon and Bylsma (2003) state that high-performing schools have a safe, civil, healthy, and intellectually stimulating learning environment. Students feel respected and

connected with staff. Instruction is personalized and small learning environments increase student contact with teachers. According to Ronald D. Stephens (2003) of the U.S. National School Safety Center: "A safe school is a place where students can learn and teachers can teach in a warm and welcoming environment, free of intimidation and fear of violence."

Edmonds and Lezotte (1996) identify in their effective school correlates the necessity for a safe and orderly environment. Edmonds and Lezotte identify components that make for a safe and orderly environment as:

- Climate of respect
- Violence prevention policies and procedures
- Curriculum and school-based programs
- Training and professional development
- Support for students and staff
- Safe physical environment
- Community involvement
- Effective communication. (p. 3)

Schools as Communities

Sergiovanni (1994) wrote that it is more desirable to operate schools as social rather than as formal organizations. He stressed the importance of community. “People are bonded to each other as a result of their mutual bindings to shared values, traditions, ideas, and ideals” (p. 61). He stated that one of the basic reform principles of the NCLB Act of 2001 has expanded options for parents. The NCLB Act holds educators accountable by giving parents more control over their children's education. When schools fail, the law gives parents a number of important options, including school choice. High-performing schools have a sense that the responsibility to educate students reaches

beyond the teachers and school staff. Families, community agencies, and higher education institutions play a vital role in this effort (Shannon & Bylsma, 2003).

Research often cites increased involvement of parents and families often as one of the most important ways to improve public schools. Varieties of studies confirm that parent involvement makes an enormous impact on students' attitude, attendance, and academic achievement (Henderson & Berla, 2002).

Research suggests that a strong sense of community can facilitate staff members' instructional efforts and enhance their personal well-being (Royal, 1997). Additionally, Schlechty (1997) identifies the need to develop a pattern of leadership and decision-making that centers around the principal and the faculty working as a community to provide quality instruction.

Miller's (1981) study on communally organized schools found that these schools have fewer problems with student misbehavior than other schools and that students in these schools show more interest in academics and greater achievement gains plus a lower dropout rate.

Collaboration and Communication Skills

Researchers have argued that traditional theories of leadership are no longer valid in the current reality and complexity of schooling (Fullan, 1997, Sergiovanni, 1994). Theorists are calling for a new perspective on leadership, one that involves a decentralized, developed, and shared approach to leadership within the school (Lambert, 2003). Putting the decision-making power as close to the point of delivery as possible makes implementation of those decisions not only possible, but successful (Short & Greer, 1997). Principals who relinquish control and promote team-building put the

decision-making power in the hands of the teachers. When principals create a capacity of leadership among many teachers, those teachers in turn affect the leadership abilities of more teachers.

Schmoker (1996) believes that collaboration and teamwork are essential qualities in school improvement. He states that schools perform better if teachers work in focused, supportive teams and that isolation promotes professional insecurity and is especially detrimental to new teachers. The job of being a teacher is both socially and emotionally demanding. Teamwork demands collaboration. Through collaboration, teachers experience productive and rewarding meetings that defuse the feeling of being isolated from colleagues.

Blase and Blase (1999) also promote the concept of teambuilding through what they call "shared governance." Shared governance is the impetus for teacher empowerment and the principal's role is critical in implementing the shared decision-making process. Teams of teachers, working toward goals identified by the principal through the school improvement plan, lend multiple perspectives to problem-solving and reaching goals, and thus, develop professional communities.

Zepeda (2004) identified characteristics of effective teams:

- Clear goals
- Diffused power
- Balanced membership
- Positive behavior of members
- Positive conflict
- Positive work patterns
- Positive support
- Open risk taking. (p. 68)

The team must clearly define its purpose. A research-based examination of the problem or a research-based identification of a problem must be the first step in the need to organize a team.

Short and Greer (1997) identify the need for team building through self-managing teams. Hackman (1986) states that in self-managing teams, employees take personal responsibility for the outcome of their work, manage and monitor their own performance, seek needed resources, and take the initiative to help others improve. Hackman developed five conditions that support team building.

1. A clear definition of the goals and the work of the group.
2. Meaningful tasks definitions to assign personal responsibility within the group.
3. A non-divisive reward structure must be in place.
4. Expert coaching and consultation must be available to team members.
5. Teams must have adequate material resources. (p. 85)

Hackman's conditions for team development closely align with Katzenbach and Smith's (1993) designation that teams must have a purpose. There has to be a reason for forming a team and the reason for team formation must have a purpose.

Professional Development

Teacher certainty about their own professional abilities and skills is highly correlated to student achievement (Rosenholtz, 1985). Given the shear enormity of the task of leading an effective school, principals cannot assume the sole responsibility for improvement efforts. "Teachers are among the many variables that will greatly influence school improvement" (Zepeda, 2004, p. 49). Research can argue that the most important work of a school principal is to improve the people in the school. Teachers in the more effective principals' schools report that their leaders encouraged and supported individual staff development (Whitaker, 1997). Staff development takes many forms. Staff

development can address the necessary skills needed to teach new programs, to provide innovative and up-to-date teaching techniques, and to address certain strengths and weaknesses identified in the school improvement plan. Staff development can also teach teachers how to become leaders within their school. Promoting and developing authentic teacher leadership relates to building capacity for both the individual and the organization (Zepeda). Principals must remember that leadership is a shared endeavor (Lambert, 2003). Furthering this point, Lambert believes that the development of a professional community occurs when teachers participate in decision-making, and everyone accepts joint responsibility for the outcomes of work.

Student learning is at the core of all successful schools. Teachers cause learning (Edmonds, 1979). Teacher leaders bring about positive learning experiences for students, and it is the responsibility of the principal to provide opportunities for teachers to be involved in leadership within the school. According to Short and Greer (1997), principals who promote leadership:

- build trust throughout the organization
- empower teachers by developing and maintaining effective communication
- promote risk taking
- problem solving
- build a commitment and support for change. (p. 183)

The challenge for the principal now becomes how to accomplish this and lead the process of teacher empowerment.

Appendix B: Methodology

The review of literature for this dissertation proposal identifies the leadership practices that can have a positive influence on school improvement, but does not provide real life, practical applications of these practices. Turning around a school is a complex process in which clear cause-effect relationships are difficult to isolate. In an effort to better identify the elements of effective leadership, their relationships to each other and to the context in which they occur, and because of the complexity of analysis, I used qualitative research methods for this study. Patton (2002) noted that good description takes the reader into the setting being described. He also states that presented data that is rich in detail helps the reader understand the phenomenon studied and to draw his own interpretations about meanings and significance.

In this study I knew I wanted to compare the commonalities and differences of leadership characteristics of the five participants. I also knew that I wanted to accomplish this comparison in two different ways. One way was to examine the analytical leadership characteristics of each principal and the second way to examine the systemic leadership characteristics of each principal.

With this in mind, I began the process of determining the methods I would use to collect and analyze data for the research. In my efforts to distinguish among the many different types of qualitative research, I read Merriam's (2002) description of eight approaches to conducting qualitative research and determined that *grounded theory* would be best suited for analyzing the analytical leadership characteristics of each principal and then conducting a *cross case analysis*.

Grounded theory involves looking at data and generating theory (from the ground up) rather than to test existing theory. Merriam (2002) states that grounded theory

research emphasizes discovery with description and verification as secondary concerns. Additionally, Creswell (1998) writes about the research strategy of grounded theory as a means of identifying how people act and react to a certain phenomenon. Both Merriam and Creswell describe the basic tenets of grounded theory as the researcher collecting primarily interview data, making multiple visits to the field, developing and interrelating categories of information, and writing theoretical propositions or hypotheses based on the data collected or presenting a visual picture of the theory. In the data collection section of this chapter, I describe in detail how I use these data collection methods in this study.

With the grounded theory in place for collecting the analytical characteristics of each principal, my next step was finding the method to interpret and present the systemic leadership characteristics of each principal. I determined that Lightfoot and Davis's (1997) *portraiture* method would enable me to present a narrative description of each of the five principals studied. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) states that the only way to interpret people's actions, perspectives, and talk is to see them in context. I made the point earlier in this study that just understanding the abstracted components of good leadership is not enough to allow one to create a model for successful leadership which can be universally applied. Rather, it is the way in which a particular leader combines those components in a particular setting that allows us to see how successful leaders improve, in this case, schools.

The use of portraiture allowed me to present six examples of successful leaders as unique individuals in particular contexts. The collective portrait, which I discuss in more detail later, helped me to extract the essential components that all the successful school leaders use as well as those additional components that are used by one (or some) but not

all successful leaders. It was hoped that this approach would help present successful leaders from both the integrated, systemic perspective (through the individual portraits or within-case analysis) and the abstracted, analytic perspective through the collective portrait (cross-case analysis). Furthermore, portraying these dual perspectives affords the reader insight into both the essential components of successful leaders and a glimpse of some of the variety in the ways in which those components can be constructed and reconstructed by particular people in particular settings.

In addition to the cross-case analysis and the within-case analysis, a personal narrative of my experiences associated with leading a school out of Needs Improvement into making Adequate Yearly Progress is also presented to the reader. This personal narrative is written in the first person to account and investigate my own perspectives and subjectivities so that the reader is kept informed of the process used in the study.

In this study, I have tried to be authentic and accurate in my interpretation of how successful principals account for their success. Patton (2002) writes that portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experience of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and visions, their authority, knowledge, and their wisdom.

In the next two sections, I describe in detail the research strategies of grounded theory and portraiture as they pertain to my study.

Grounded Theory

Charmaz (2000) characterizes grounded theory as the study of experience from the standpoint of those who live it. This characterization best relates grounded theory with the theory of portraiture. In both portraiture and grounded theories, the investigator is the primary source of data collection and analysis. Strauss and Corbin (1990) state that

a grounded researcher does not begin with a theory, and then prove it. They believe that a researcher should begin with an area of study, investigate that area, and what emerges from the investigation is what is relevant and reported.

Punch (1998) states, "Grounded theory is both a strategy for conducting research and a procedure for analyzing data" (p. 163). In this methodology, theory generated from initial data is elaborated and modified as incoming data meticulously plays against them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

The basic analysis procedure in grounded theory is the *constant comparative method* of data analysis (Merriam, 2002). The constant comparative method is based on the work of Glasser and Strauss (1967). Glaser and Strauss describe it as,

> Four stages in the constant comparative method: (1) comparing incidents applicable to each category, (2) integrating categories and their properties, (3) delimiting the theory, and (4) writing the theory. (p. 105)

Gay and Airasian (2000) state that in order to use the constant comparative method, the researcher must constantly compare identified topics and concepts "to determine their distinctive characteristics so they can be placed in appropriate categories…Categories can be compared to develop more general patterns of data" (p. 243).

By following the constant comparative method of data analysis, I was able to enter all transcribed interviews, observation notes, journal entries, results of the teacher questionnaires, and artifacts specific to the context into the MaxQDA software to facilitate the development of themes. Once data was entered into the software, I read through the collected data and assigned codes to each line of text for the purpose of thematic and content coding. After reading through all data numerous times, I assigned

over 100 different codes to categorize each line of text. For example, some of the initial categories that evolved were:

- Principal expectations of teachers
- Principal expectations of students
- Principal expectations of parents
- Building trust
- Integrity
- Team building
- Collaboration
- Shared decision making
- Relinquishing power
- Professional development
- Teacher mentoring
- Principal mentoring
- Schools as communities
- Parent involvement
- Teacher morale
- School culture
- Communication skills
- Inducting school leaders
- Ethical leadership
- Mistakes made
- Instructional leadership
- Facilitative leadership
- Shared leadership
- Autocratic
- Democracy
- Burnout
- Evaluation of teachers
- Visionary leadership
- Transformational leadership
- Student data
- End of year testing
- Test prep

As I analyzed the initial themes within the data to eventually "ground theory" I developed categories, examined the attributes of these categories, and then constructed meaning such as themes (Silverman, 1993; Merriam, 2002). After much reading, re-

reading and making notes about what I read, I eventually condensed the 100 categories into common themes that were directly related to analytical leadership or best practices. Merriam (2002) described categories as one element of the emerging theory and further states, "Categories are derived by constantly comparing one incident of unit of information with another (p. 142). As I analyzed these themes across the data collected for each participant, these common themes emerged across all cases:

- School culture and climate
- Assessment of student progress
- Strong instructional leadership combined with effective instruction
- Home/School relations
- Effective use of resources
- Building the capacity for leadership
- Meaningful professional development
- Assembling and mentoring a faculty
- External support and assistance
- Targeting at-risk students

Portraiture

In describing *portraiture*, Davis (1997) states,

> Portraiture is a method of inquiry that shares some of the features of other qualitative research methods such as ethnography, case study, and narrative. However, portraiture is distinctive in its blending of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experiences and organizational life. (p. 294)

I selected portraiture to reveal the systemic leadership characteristics of the participants in an attempt to describe these characteristics to the reader through the voices of study participants and through my interpretations as I experienced them.

If individuals or groups are the primary unit of analysis, case studies of people or groups may be the focus for case studies (Patton, 2002). Patton states with *Respect*, Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) illustrates different forms of respect through case studies of people who manifest those different forms in the way they live their lives. Lawrence-Lightfoot illustrates these forms of respect through portraiture. Furthermore, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) state that, "If we understand that writing up qualitative findings is an interpretive craft and that the text can take a variety of forms, researchers can be liberated from some of the conventions that inhibited their creative expressions" (p. 205).

Therefore, in an attempt to portray examples of effective leadership learned from the principals interviewed, I used a qualitative design based on the method developed by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot as exemplified in her 1983 book, *The Good High School: Portraits of Character and Culture*. Although she is a sociologist by training, Lawrence-Lightfoot's approach is essentially that of a portraitist, a methodology that combines art and science, literary narrative, and empirical description. Lawrence-Lightfoot once testified before Congress on the topic of education and describing that testimony, she said, "I told stories about high schools because I believed I could capture the attention of my listeners by conveying what was good about those schools" (p. 6). This dissertation attempts to capture what accounts for the success of successful leaders, using stories.

Shelton (2005) states that the technique of portraiture developed by Lawrence-Lightfoot seeks to capture generic character, personality, culture, and the associated

meanings and values individuals hold. In an attempt to minimize my subjectivity by offering readers a descriptive portrait of each of the five principals, I use portraiture to tell the individual stories of success, as related to me.

To bring interpretive insight, analytic scrutiny, and aesthetic order (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997) of the leadership characteristics of the participants in this study, I developed emergent themes from the transcribed interviews, journals, teacher questionnaires, and from collected school documents relevant to this study. Lawrence-Lightfoot describes the process of presenting data to the reader as an "iterative and generative process" (p. 185). During this process of analyzing data, themes emerge from the data that give the data direction, shape, and form. A thematic framework is created from this data and presented in a narrative description.

After I collected all of the data for this study, I organized the data for each participant in the following categories:

1. Participant initial interview
2. Follow-up interview
3. Final interview
4. Participant observation
5. Observation analysis
6. Participant journal
7. Journal analysis
8. Teacher questionnaire
9. Questionnaire analysis
10. Leadership characteristics drawn from school documents

After the data was organized into these categories, I began scrutinizing the data by reading and re-reading the data multiple times, assigning themes to strands of data, and making notes about questions that I had concerning the data collected. Any questions were clarified in three ways. The first way was by email, or a transcribed copy of interview, along with any highlighted questions. Text was well spaced, so interviewee had ample space for written comments. The third method was face-to-face during final interview.

Data collected was analyzed for convergent threads, illuminating metaphors, and constructing a coherence out of themes that participants experienced (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). From the analysis, I developed 127 terms for the themes. These 127 terms were entered into the MaxQDA software to help me organize the data and to make the data more accessible. As I found convergent threads among the 127 terms, I condensed them into the 10 common themes found in the five portraits. For example, I originally entered teamwork, team building, collaboration, administrative led teams, teacher led teams, teams that affect culture, teams that affect curriculum, parent voice in school organization, teacher voice in school organization, and student voice in school organization. Ten metaphors that were used to describe something I found in the text of the data collected were eventually condensed into one common theme, which was *sharing power.*

The seven common themes found to be systemic characteristics among all five participants were:

- The ability to build and nurture positive relationships with his/her faculty
- Strong instructional leadership

- Sharing of power
- Providing meaningful professional development
- Use of data to guide instruction
- Value parent involvement and foster positive home/school relations
- Use of curriculum guides for effective instructional delivery.

Once this process of analyzing data was completed, I began the process of presenting the portraits to the reader. I wanted to put down every line of text to get to the essence of what I was trying to convey to the reader in a meaningful and logical manner. Therefore, I developed a template that I followed for each portrait to remain consistent in my presentation, and at the same time, revealing the differences in each of the participants. The template I followed was to begin by introducing the principal through the physical environment of the school, identifying the systemic leadership characteristics, and providing an external and an internal definition of why each of them was successful.

I believe it is important to note what Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) states concerning the researcher's influence on the final portrait:

> The portraitist comes to the field with an intellectual framework and set of guiding questions. The framework is usually the result of a review of the relevant literature, prior experience in similar settings, and a general knowledge of the field of inquiry. It also resonates with echoes of the researcher's autobiographical journey—those aspects of his own familial, cultural, developmental, and educational background that can be related (whether consciously or unconsciously) to the intellectual themes of the work. (p. 185)

for final review and allowed them to accept or reject any of the findings in the portrait presentation. A copy of a participant correspondence can be found in Appendix F.

Data Collection

In selecting the five participants for this study, I began by identifying the elementary schools in the State of Georgia that had received the Distinguished Schools Award. In FY 05, there were 1,827 elementary schools in the State of Georgia. Two hundred-fifty earned the Distinguished Schools Award.

FY 05 Distinguished Schools Award Summary

Distinguished Schools	# of Schools	Award Amount
Three consecutive years making AYP	150	Certificates
Four consecutive years making AYP	42	$973,752
Five consecutive years making AYP	23	$815,250
Six consecutive years making AYP	37	$1,275,600
Grand Totals	250	$3,064,602

The situation that I was in at Turner County Elementary was one of taking over a NI school in school system that was in the "greatest poverty" classification. The greatest poverty classification is used to describe schools that have a free and reduced meal rate of 71% or higher. Turner County Elementary also had a minority population of 65%. As principal of TCES, we made AYP for five consecutive years. Therefore, in selecting principals that were in a similar situation such as mine when I began my tenure as principal, I began looking for principals:

1. Who took over a NI school and led them to making AYP
2. Which had a free and reduced meal rate of greater than 71%
3. Which had a majority minority population
4. Which made AYP for five or more consecutive years

As I began looking at AYP data from the GDOE website, I first identified schools that met the criteria. I then began contacting principals via telephone and internet and found six principals who met the criteria. These six principals were:

- Ruth O'Dell, Lindsey
- Micki Wallace, Unity
- Hulett Kitterman, Louisville
- Donnie Smith, Cherokee
- A principal from a South Georgia elementary school who did not wish to participate in the study.
- A principal who was no longer principal of the identified school (Moved to a central office position).

I wanted a minimum of five participants for this study in order to have a broad base of data collection, but could only find four who met the established criteria who were willing to participate. Therefore, I decided to select a fifth principal from a lower poverty, lower minority school who had taken over a NI school and led them to making AYP to see if their leadership characteristics differed from the higher poverty, higher minority school leaders. The five participants for this study, including myself in the personal narrative are:

Participant	School	Free/Reduced %	Minority %	Yrs AYP
Utley	Turner Elementary	72%	65%	5
O'Dell	Lindsey Elementary	95%	90%	5
Wallace	Unity Elementary	76%	68%	5
Kitterman	Louisville Elementary	86%	78%	5
D. Smith	Cherokee Elementary	83%	90%	6
T. Smith	Northside Elementary	67%	40%	5

After identifying the participants and securing their permission to participate in the study, I set up an initial interview with each participant.

- O'Dell, October 7, 2004 (342 minutes)
- Wallace, October 8, 2004 (302 minutes)
- Kitterman, October 14, 2004 (367 minutes)
- Donnie Smith, October 15, 2004 (298 minutes)
- Tammie Smith, October 22, 2004 (275 minutes)

I arrived at each principal's school at the time I scheduled the interview with each participant. I carried a series of prompting questions with me so that I could make sure to find out each principals perspective on each of the preconceived topics of interest, but for the most part, the face-to-face interviews conducted in each principals office were unstructured in that once each principal was prompted with a question, I asked follow-up questions to their responses to make sure I was understanding what they were telling me. Their responses to the prompts dictated the course of the interview.

Each interview lasted varying lengths of time. I was under no time constraints, nor were the participants and the length of the interviews lasted until the last prompt was fully answered.

I audiotaped each interview and I also made written notes about what was said and each participant's demeanor when answering questions (laughed, smiled, emphatically responded, etc…). At the end of each interview, I gave each principal a Mead Composition notebook divided into hourly intervals to document their actions for a five day period. Each principal agreed to complete the journal of activities for the five day period of the second week of the second semester of school after returning from their

Christmas break. This was done to simulate some type of consistency among time frames for what elementary school principals would be doing during a certain time of year. For example, if one principal kept the journal the week before Christmas and another principal kept a journal the week before end of year testing, there may be a tremendous difference in their personal accounts for what they were doing each day.

Additionally, before leaving the initial interview, I asked for and received copies of student handbooks, teacher handbooks, curriculum guides, and any other school documentation that may be relevant to this study.

After the completion of each interview, I transcribed the audiotapes and sent a copy of the transcribed interview to each participant via email to make sure they agreed with the transcription and I also asked each participant to ad to or delete anything that was said to insure the accuracy of their response. After receiving confirmation from each participant that they had received and reviewed the transcribed initial interview, I scheduled an observation day with each participant. The observation days were:

- O'Dell, January 14, 2005 (9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.)
- Wallace, January 20, 2005 (7:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.)
- Kitterman, February 2, 2005 (7:45 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.)
- Donnie Smith, February 3, 2005 (8:20 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.)
- Tammie Smith, February 10, 2005 (8:00 a.m. – 3:45 p.m.)

Before embarking on my day of observation with each participant, I read and studied Patton's (2002) writings on fieldwork strategies and observation methods. The central theme I derived from my readings was that I must be prepared for each day of observation and not plan on just showing up and documenting what I see. To prepare for

my observations, I studied each participant's transcribed interview and made notes to look for certain things to validate what each participant had told me. I also studied the relevant school documents I had collected during my initial interview and spent time reviewing each schools website and their mission statement. The format I used for each observation was:

- Describe the setting
- Describe activities that took place in the setting
- Make notes of the physical aspects of the environment around the school and within the school.
- Upon returning home, review notes and describe the meanings of what was observed.

Through my observations, I was able to witness teachers interacting with students, the participants interacting with students, parents, and teachers, and I was able to make my own conceptualizations about each school setting. I was also able to learn things that were not revealed in the initial interview. I was able to have several conversations with students from different schools who revealed to me their perceptions of their school that would not be revealed in an interview with the principal. I was also able to have conversations with teachers who told me their thoughts and feelings about their principal that would not be revealed during a principal interview. But maybe most importantly, I was able to take with me from each observation a snapshot of the culture of the each school.

After my day of observation with each principal, I began working on a questionnaire to administer to each of the participants' teachers. With the help of an

assistant principal from my county of residence who is in my doctoral cohort, I put together a focus group consisting of myself, six elementary school teachers and one assistant principal. The purpose of this focus group was to develop a teach questionnaire to determine the participants' teachers' perceptions of the successfulness of their principal and of their school. The focus group developed the initial questionnaire that was later reviewed by my dissertation committee. Committee members made suggestions and the initial questionnaire along with suggested changes were taken back to the focus group. The focus group reviewed the suggested changes and developed the questionnaire for this study. Before administering the questionnaire to the participants' faculties, the questionnaire was administered to 10 teachers from a local elementary school in an effort to avoid any ambiguities that may arise once the interview was administered to the selected group. No problems were noted from the sample group.

The final stage of data collection for this study was scheduling a final interview during which time I planned to clear up any questions I had to this point, allow the participants to respond to the data I had collected and written up for each of them, and to administer the teacher questionnaire. Final interview dates were:

- O'Dell, April 29, 2005
- Wallace, May 4, 2005
- Kitterman, May 6, 2005
- D. Smith, May 10, 2005
- T. Smith, May 12, 2005

Prior to my arrival for the final interview, I emailed a copy of the teacher questionnaire to each participant and received their approval to administer the

questionnaire. Upon arrival at each school for my final interview, I walked the halls with each principal as they handed out the questionnaires to their teachers and asked them to return the questionnaire to me before the end of the day. This procedure for administering the questionnaire was consistent among all five participants.

- O'Dell – 23 of 25 teachers surveyed
- Wallace – 23 of 23 teachers surveyed
- Kitterman – 28 of 29 teachers surveyed
- D. Smith – 21 of 24 teachers surveyed
- T. Smith – 19 of 19 teachers surveyed

As teachers were completing the questionnaires, I was able to conduct a final interview with each participant. I had four preconceived questions I asked each participant. The questions were:

1. Define Success.
2. Can a school be considered successful without good test scores?
3. Why are you successful?
4. Can you share a story of success with me?

During the final interview, I also asked each participants permission to walk around their school and have brief conversations with teachers. I asked teachers from each participant's school to give me their thoughts, feelings, perceptions of their principal and what leadership characteristics their principal possessed that they felt were important to them.

Through the use of a wide variety of data collection methods, I was able to document multiple perspectives on certain topics which allowed triangulation as a form

of verification of the findings. For example, I identified school climate and culture as a systemic leadership characteristic of O'Dell and this was documented and verified with the following data collected:

- Interview: O'Dell: "Things have come a long way. It was not like this six years ago. When I first got here, it was a really depressed place. Moral was extremely low."
- Conversation with Parent Volunteer: "We have a wonderful school thanks to Dr. O'Dell. We love her so much."
- Teacher questionnaire: Revealed a focused effort to develop a loving school environment.
- Observation: Teachers interacting with students, "real conversations" "no berating."
- Journal: O'Dell spent 39% of her time interacting with teachers (leading professional development, visiting classrooms, team meetings, and communicating with teachers).

The principals in this study gave their permission and approval in writing to participate in this study. Each participant signed an informed consent form (Appendix E) that contained both the purpose of the study and confidentiality statements. I asked each participant to sign two copies of the informed consent forms (Appendix E). The participants kept one copy and I retained the other. Furthermore, each participant was given a copy of the dissertation for final review before I went to my dissertation defense. Participants were asked to verify that all accounts pertaining to their specific school and leadership styles was an accurate representation of the data that I collected and presented.

The major data-gathering technique was face-to-face, in-depth, and unstructured interviews of the five principals. Additionally, analysis of field notes, teacher questionnaires, principal journals, observation of participants, and artifacts added a deeper understanding of each participant's professional context. Data collection began in September of 2004 and ended in May of 2005.

Principal Interviews

I conducted two separate interviews of each participant, beginning with an in-depth initial interview at the beginning of the data gathering process, and a follow-up interview at the end of the data gathering process. The initial principal interviews began with an open-ended question such as “How do you lead this school?” or “What are some things that need to be done to improve our schools?” Participants were prompted for clarification and to provide more detail about their answers. I asked for examples to ground any abstractions. Subsequent questions were conversational in an attempt to get the interviewee to discuss further something mentioned in an answer. There were some preconceived prompts used during the interview such as “talk to me about accountability,” or discipline, or the climate and culture in this school, etc..

A tape recorder and field notes stored the data collected. After transcribing all interviews, I returned to each school to observe the principal for a day. Questions arose from the initial interviews, and from the observations. I needed answers in order to confirm my interview and observation interpretations and to understand how the school functions. I asked these questions related to this in a follow-up interview.

The initial interview of each principal took place in the principal’s office and each interview lasted from 3.5 to 5.0 hours. I audiotaped and later transcribed the interviews. I began each interview by explaining my research on “effective leadership,” and that the interviewee had, in my opinion, met the requirements for the study. For each interview, there were analytic memos and contact summary sheets discussing setting, principal demeanor, and content that I had written.

I conducted a final interview with each principal at the end of the data gathering process. Prior to the final interview, I transcribed all initial interviews, read, and re-read each interview multiple times. I had also spent a day at each school observing each principal. I reviewed school documents collected during the first interview and documents collected when I spent the day at each school observing, reviewed all email communications with each principal over the data collection period, and extensively researched and reviewed each school's website and all information pertaining to each school that was available on the Georgia Department of Education website (http://www.doe.k12.ga.us). The final interview was conducted for the purpose of finding answers to questions I had about the data I had collected and to allow each participant the opportunity to provide any further information they felt was relevant to my research.

I gained entry into the schools through my prior experience as an elementary school principal, contacting principals via email or by telephone to arrange a time to conduct the interview. I purposefully selected principals of elementary schools that had made adequate yearly progress for five or more consecutive years in order to compare their individual leadership styles.

Principal Journals

At the conclusion of each interview, I gave the principals a journal to document what they did during the course of a school day. All principals agreed to record what they did on an hourly basis for a period of five days, logging entries at the beginning of the school day until they left campus each day. All principals agreed to conduct their journal entries during the second full week of school after their Christmas break. I gave each

principal a postage paid envelope to return the journal to me when having completed the five days of journal entries.

Principal Observations

Principals agreed to allow me to shadow them for a full school day after I received their completed journal. I maintained field notes describing the physical surroundings of each principal and documenting the observed interactions between the participants and staff and students.

Teacher Questionnaire

A focus group consisting of six elementary school teachers and one assistant principal developed a teacher questionnaire (Appendix D) to determine the participants' teachers' perceptions of the successfulness of their principals and of their schools. The focus group developed an initial questionnaire later reviewed by my dissertation committee. Committee members made suggestions, and the initial questionnaire along with suggested changes went back to the focus group. The focus group reviewed the suggested changes and developed the questionnaire used in this study.

Appendix C: AYP: Its Terms and Its Consequences

AYP: Its Terms and Its Consequences

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). By participating in Title I, a voluntary federal program that provides more than $11 billion to participating states to help educate low-income children, states agree to commit themselves to the goal of the federal *No Child Left Behind* Act. The *No Child Left Behind Act* mandates that all students will be proficient in language arts and mathematics, as determined by state assessments, by 2014. AYP is a series of performance goals set by the state for each school district and school, as well as for the state as a whole (Georgia Department of Education (GDOE, 2005).

In defining AYP, each state sets the minimum levels of improvement based on performance on state standardized tests that school districts and schools must achieve within time periods specified in law in order to meet the 100% proficiency goals. AYP requires schools to meet standards in three areas: Test Participation (for Mathematics and Reading / English Language Arts), Academic Performance (for Mathematics and Reading / English Language Arts), and a Second Indicator. A more detailed description of Second Indicators follows under the heading Additional Indicator.

For a school to make AYP in Georgia, it must meet the following criteria as outlined by the Georgia Department of Education:

- 95% of all students, as a whole and as subgroups, must have a participation rate of 95% or above on state assessments
- Students as a whole and as subgroups must meet the state's annual measurable objective regarding the percentage of students scoring proficient on state assessments
- Each school, school district, and the state as a whole must show progress on an additional indicator.

Needs Improvement (NI). Schools that do not meet AYP in the same subject for two or more consecutive years earn a Needs Improvement status with escalating consequences for each successive year.

Same subject. The definition of Same Subject is that the school has two years of not making Reading/English Language Arts (participation or academic performance), or two years of not making mathematics (participation or academic performance), or two years of not making second indicator (GDOE, 2005). A NI school is simply a school that needs to improve in specific areas. Needs Improvement schools are not failing schools. Schools that do not make AYP for two or more consecutive years in the same subject are in need of improvement or are simply under-performing (GDOE).

Subgroup. Subgroups are groups of 40 or more students in the following categories: (1) African-American, (2) American Indian/Native Alaskan, (3) Asian/Pacific Islander, (4) Hispanic, (5) White, (6) Multiracial, (7) Students with disabilities, (8) Limited English Proficiency, and (9) Socioeconomic status.

Additional indicator. The additional indicators for Georgia elementary schools are (1) attendance rate, (2) retention rate, (3) percent proficient on criterion reference competency test (CRCT) science, (4) percent proficient on CRCT social studies, and (5) percent moving from meets standards to exceeds standards on CRCT assessments.

Consequences. The consequences established by the Georgia Department of Education for schools not making AYP are

- First year not meeting AYP: No consequences
- Second year not meeting AYP: Parents will have the option to transfer their child to a higher performing public school in a local educational agency (neighboring school system). The school must notify parents of this option and notify them that the school system not meeting AYP is responsible for

covering transportation costs. In addition, the school not making AYP must develop a school improvement plan to raise student achievement.

- Third year not meeting AYP: Parents of students in Title I schools have the option of requesting tutoring and other supplemental educational services from either their school or from a state approved outside group. The Title I school must pay for supplemental educational services.
- Fourth year not meeting AYP: Technical assistance, public school choice, and supplemental services continue. Furthermore, the DOE must identify the school for corrective action and must change its staffing or make another fundamental change (including instituting a new curriculum, appointing an outside expert to advise the school, extending the school year or school day for the school).
- Fifth year not meeting AYP: The school must develop an alternate governance plan that includes converting it to a charter school, replacing all or most of the staff, turning it over to a private management company, or having the state take it over.
- Sixth year not meeting AYP: School must implement the alternate governance plan developed the previous year.
-

Types of Georgia Department of Education Recommended Title I Distinguished Schools, FY 2005. Georgia has 180 school systems of which 159 are county systems and 21 are city systems. There are over 1,800 schools and special entities in these 180 systems (GDOE, 2005). The numerical breakdown of Title I Distinguished Schools is:

- Schools making AYP for three consecutive years – 150 of 1,800
- Schools making AYP for four consecutive years and greatest poverty – 16 of 1,800
- Schools making AYP for four consecutive years and lower poverty – 26 of 1,800
- Schools making AYP for five consecutive years and greatest poverty – 13 of 1,800
- Schools making AYP for five consecutive years and lower poverty – 10 of 1,800
- Schools making AYP for six consecutive years and greatest poverty – 19 of 1,800
- Schools making AYP for six consecutive years and lower poverty –20 of 1,800

Appendix D: Teacher Survey

My name is Shawn Utley, a doctoral candidate for the Ed. D. degree in Educational Leadership at Valdosta State University. The research that I am conducting for my dissertation is a study of effective leadership in successful schools. I would greatly appreciate your help in adding to the body of data that I have collected by answering the following questions:

I. Do you consider this school a quality school? YES NO

a. Why or Why Not?:_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

II. List the three most significant things needed to be a successful school

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

III. List the three most difficult challenges educators face in improving schools

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

IV. List three qualities that best describe your principal

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

V. There are 150 schools designated as Georgia Title I Distinguished Schools and your school is one of those schools. To what do you attribute that designation?

_____
_____
_____
_____

VI. Would you feel completely satisfied with allowing your own child attend this school?

YES NO

VII. By comparison, I would rank this school…

- Top 5% of Georgia elementary schools _____
- Top 25% of Georgia elementary schools _____
- Average as compared to other Georgia elementary schools _____
- Below average as compared to other Georgia elementary schools _____

If you have any additional comments, please write them below or email me at sutley@moultrietech.edu. _____
_____

_____

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form

Participant's Informed Consent Form
Dissertation Research

Effective Leadership: A Cross-Case Analysis of Five Elementary School Principals.

My name is Shawn Utley, a candidate for the Ed. D. degree in Educational Leadership at Valdosta State University. My telephone number is (229)567-7968.

This study will document your accounts and experiences as a Georgia elementary school principal. I will use the information collected from you to compile elaborated notes and develop portraitures for completing the dissertation, which is a study that serves as partial fulfillment of requirements for the Doctorate of Education Degree in Educational Leadership.

Unless you provide express written authorization, I will not use your name at any time in the study. The identity of all participants is confidential. I will use pseudonyms to report data collected from all participants. Only information that you agree to will be included in the report. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you are not compelled to participate. You have the right to and may withdraw from participation in this research at any time without any consequences or penalty.

This is only a consent form. Your signature on this form indicates that you have agreed to participate in the Effective Leadership Study under the conditions state above and does not obligate you to any unspecified actions, conditions, or commitments.

The Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board has reviewed this research for the Protection of Human Research Subjects. Should you have any questions regarding the conduct of this research, please contact Dr. M. H. Watson, IRB Administrator, at Valdosta State University, (229) 333-7837.

_____
Signature of School Principal (Participant)

_____ Date:_____

Signature of Researcher
Shawn Utley, Doctoral Candidate
Department of Educational Leadership
Valdosta State University
Valdosta, Georgia 31698

Appendix F: Participant Email Correspondence

Shawn,
Your dissertation is FABULOUS! What a great job and I know how proud you must be!! Congratulations! It's all over now but the shouting!!!!!!!!!!!

Micki

>>> "Shawn Utley" <SUtley@moultrietech.edu> 08/22/05 1:54 PM >>>
Dear Colleagues,

I want to thank each of you for your time and effort in helping me complete my dissertation. I have attached a final edited copy for your reviews. If you find anything that is incorrect, anything that you would like for me to change, or anything that you just simply don't like, please let me know. I am scheduled to defend on September 19. However, if it takes longer to finish so that I will have a project that you and I are both proud of, I will make the changes you request.

I want each of you to know that I learned more from all of you than you could possibly imagine. I was certainly fortunate to have selected such outstanding and willing participants in this study. After I defend, I will send each of you a bound copy for your personal library.

Again, I can't thank you enough and I sincerely hope you enjoy reading about yourself and reading about others in this study.

If there is anything that I can ever do for any of you, please do not hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,

Shawn Utley
Vice President of Operations
Moultrie Technical College
52 Tech Drive
Tifton, Georgia 31794
Phone: 229-391-2600
Fax: 229-391-2626