Title I Principals' Leadership Experiences and Strategies Influence on School and Student Improvement

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ABSTRACT

After years of school improvement efforts to include Georgia's four hundred-million-dollar Race to the Top grant, Georgia's elementary, middle, and high schools have failed to significantly improve schoolwide student achievement. This qualitative portraiture study focused on three successful principals of previously chronically failing Title I schools in Glenn County, Georgia. Purposeful sampling methods were used to select principals based on three years of increases in College and Career Readiness and Performance Index (CCRPI) scores. Each principal was able to improve schoolwide student achievement thus having their schools removed from the chronically failing list. The purpose of this study was to understand the roles of identified school principals with regards to improving chronically failing Title I K-5 schools in Northeast Georgia. Data were collected using multiple virtual interviews with the participants, observations of the participants in their schools, and a review of school documents. The researcher collected field notes and used school documents to triangulate the data with information shared during the interviews. Data were analyzed using in vivo, values, process, and content coding methods. Themes were derived during the data analysis process to answer the research questions. The themes included participants' experience in Title I, identifying student and staff needs, shared leadership, Title I budgeting, community partnership, intervention programs, collaborative planning, and culture and climate.

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INTRODUCTION

In the United States, educational leaders, even up to 2015, were under increasing pressure to improve student achievement (Karam, 2015). Policy and research efforts over the past two decades have highlighted the altered expectation for what school leaders need to know, how to manage their time, and how to yield increase student learning outcomes (Grissom, et al., 2021). As a result, nationally, leaders have enacted educational reform policies to focus on strengthening systemic changes necessary for school improvement. In 1981, T. H. Bell created the U.S. National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). Bell and members of the committee examined the quality of education in the United States and developed the report, *A Nation at Risk*. *A Nation at Risk* assessed how teaching and learning occurred in schools throughout the United States. This document set educational reform in place for American schools to improve the quality of education available to students throughout the nation. While *A Nation at Risk* was created at the federal level, the report triggered many educational reform policies (Tomal et al., 2013).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 was developed to improve schools through the increased accountability of schools and states (Hursh, 2007). NCLB put measures into place to expose the achievement gaps of underserved students (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2017). Under this law, states administered yearly assessments for students to demonstrate content mastery. Although initially, minority students demonstrated an increase of scores on state assessments, critics complained the law forced schools to "teach to the test" (Hursh, 2007). Nolen and Duignan (2001) revealed after unsuccessful efforts, the deadline for schools to meet

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proficiency levels would be eliminated. President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law on December 10, 2015 (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2017).

ESSA rescinded several provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Similar to NCLB, ESSA was an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965, which President Lyndon Johnson signed into law to provide a full educational opportunity to all children (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2017). ESSA outlined several methods for achieving the purpose of high-quality education, to include meeting the needs of low-achieving students by holding school districts accountable using high-quality assessments (Every Student Succeeds Act: A comprehensive guide, n.d.).

Districts across the state of Georgia worked to implement the requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA provided states with more flexibility over the educational programs put in place. The creation of Georgia's State ESSA plan included feedback from educators, parents, and community representatives (Georgia Department of Education, 2017). The goal of the state plan was to align initiatives and programs to impact the classroom. At the cornerstones of the plan were improving teacher capacity and building the capacity of leaders (Georgia Department of Education, 2017).

In November 2016, an initiative outlined by the Georgia's Department of Education affecting school improvement was on the ballot and left up to voters to decide. This initiative was for the establishment of the Opportunity School District (OSD). OSD would have allowed the Governor Nathan Deal of Georgia to appoint a state superintendent who would take over chronically failing schools using the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI). CCRPI combines student performance with progress indicators and school climate ratings to a numerical score for schools, with 100 being a perfect score. Schools with a CCRPI score of 60 or

below for three years or more were considered chronically failing. In 2016, Georgia identified 130 schools as failing. Furthermore, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2016) identified nineteen school from Glenn County as failing. In November of 2016, sixty percent of Georgians voted against the creation of an OSD (Downey, 2016). While Georgia voters recognized changes needed to be made to public education, they wanted a new process for improving student achievement.

Statement of the Problem

After years of costly school improvement efforts, including Georgia's four hundred-million-dollar Georgia Race to the Top Grant (RTTT), Georgia's elementary, middle, and high schools have failed to significantly improve school-wide student achievement. In 2012, the state of Georgia began to use the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) accountability system to compute an annual grade for schools based on overall achievement, school progress, and improvements made on reducing the achievement gap (Georgia Department of Education, 2019b). Extra points were given for progress made with economically disadvantaged students, English language learners, or students with disabilities, as these students traditionally yielded the lowest overall scores on standardized tests. However, the Georgia Department of Education (2019b) continued to restructure the scoring formula which could make year-to-year comparisons difficult.

The nation's goal to improve chronically failing schools will remain futile without effective principals (Wallace Foundation, 2018). Principals who build an instructional focused environment consistently work to improve student understanding to yield increased student achievement. Principals need to share their vision of student achievement and communicate to

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stakeholders how to reach targeted goals. Through continual professional learning and collaboration, school administrators cultivate shared leadership among the faculty.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand the roles of identified principals with regards to improving chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast Georgia. Many Georgia schools were failing to improve student achievement despite Race to the Top (RTTT) funding (Miller & Hanna, 2014). The purpose of this study was to understand the roles of identified school principals with regards to improving chronically failing Title I K-5 schools in Northeast Georgia. Maxwell (2013) noted Bolster made an argument for the lack of quantitative education research impacting educational practice, instead, he advised researchers use a qualitative approach with an emphasis on "…the understanding of particular settings, as having a far more potential for informing educational practitioners" (p. 31).

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the life and career experiences of identified and effective K-5 principals serving in chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast Georgia?

RQ2: What are the strategies employed by identified and effective K-5 principals serving in chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast Georgia?

RQ3: What are the barriers, in any, faced by identified and effective K-5 principals serving in chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast Georgia?

Significance

Over the past two decades states have contributed vast amounts of human, financial, and fiscal resources in response to the national school reform directives to improve school performance. However, during this time period, according to the College and Career Readiness Performance

Index (CCRPI) score, Georgia's elementary schools have not made adequate gains in school performance. The purpose of this study was to understand the roles of identified school principals with regards to improving chronically failing Title I K-5 schools in Northeast Georgia. This study may be beneficial at the local school level for determining leadership needs. At the collegiate level, administrators and professors may be able to delineate which leadership courses may help with turnaround school models for aspiring principals. Boards of education, RESAs, and even state and national leaders may find the results helpful as they determine policy, hire new leaders, and make decisions regarding improving student achievement.

Conceptual Framework

Ravitch and Riggan (2017) defined a conceptual framework as a grounded argument of why a research topic matters and intersects with other fields; it explains the methodological approach used to explore the topic and describes the appropriateness of the research design methods. Similarly, Maxwell (2013) defined the conceptual framework as the "system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support and informs your research" (p. 39). Ravitch and Riggan (2017) asserted educational research has a relatively narrow focus on set outcomes of program evaluations by identifying predictors of success or failure. Additionally, educational policies were centered on using test scores to evaluate schools (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Social scientists have begun to narrow the focus of educational research to focus on varying theories and the predictions of success in schools (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017).

I am interested in studying the effects school leaders have on student achievement in chronically failing schools. I have personal experiences related to achieving in failing schools.

Additionally, I have served as both a teacher and an administrator of chronically failing Title I schools for 14 years. As an educator, I drew the personal conclusion that great teachers and leaders mold inquisitive learners who hunger to learn and succeed. As an administrator in the Glenn County School System (GCSS), I am aware of the issues faced in chronically failing Title I schools. In 2018 Georgia's Governor's Office of Students Achievement had identified more than fifty percent of the Title I schools in GCSS as failing (2018). Having taught in chronically failing Title I schools in GCSS, I experienced the hardships affecting the low academic performance of the students. Often disgruntled teachers blamed the school leader for the lack of student academic growth and low staff morale. Additionally, working in a chronically failing Title I school had impacts on non-academic areas in education including the principal's ability to set a vision, hire and retain certified faculty members, engage parents, and manage school-wide discipline problems. While the school leaders implemented initiatives geared toward improved academic achievement, they were unable to impact significant changes to increase student performance and develop a positive school culture. School-wide change is hard because it involves systemic change. Systemic changes emphasize the interconnectedness of parts throughout the school (Fullan, 2016).

Michael Fullan addresses change theory in relation to school improvement. Fullan's (1982) change theory discusses how leaders can change the environment. He explained school improvement as an organizational issue with school principals serving as key leaders in the change process (Fullan, 2016). The role of the principal is essential for leading change toward school improvement. Fullan (2016) revealed in his research, improving schools were led by effective principals leading school improvement. The work of improving a failing school can be a daunting task for principals. The process to begin school improvement begins with educational

change. In Fullan's traditional change model, he provides broad phases concerning the outcome. Each phase of change is different and depends on the type of change that needs to be made. His four-phase change process includes initiation, implementation, continuation, and outcome (Fullan, 1982).

Figure 1

A Simplified Overview of the Change Process (Fullan, 2016)
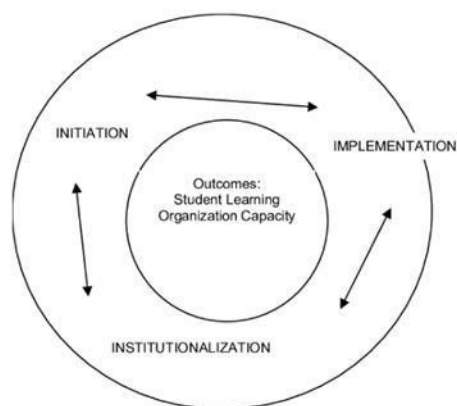
During Phase I, Initiation, principals review the school's current state. For Phase II, Implementation, principals carry out action plans and monitor progress toward improvement. In Phase III, Continuation, principals labor to embed the changed practices into a routine for all stakeholders. Fullan (2016) revealed the timeline for continuation is lengthy, taking between two to four years to achieve. These phases lead to outcomes. There are several results of outcomes, which are generally school improvement objectives, such as student learning, teacher satisfaction, improved stakeholder attitudes (Fullan, 2016). Figure 2 depicts the relationship between educational change and effective Title I principals. The concept map shows a linear relationship between each phase of change leading to outcomes.

Figure 2

Concept Map for Educational Change and Effective Title I Principals
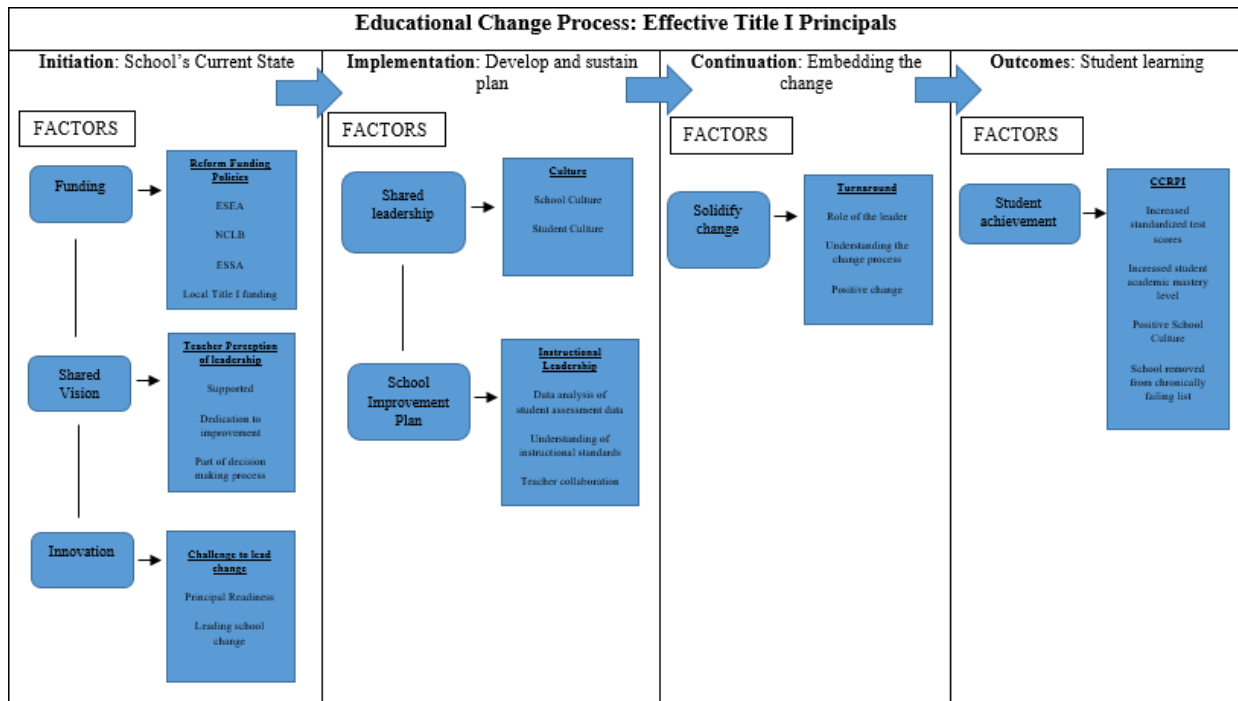
One characteristic of change is the need for the principal to determine a school's current state during the initiation process. Principals are tasked with examining the operational status of schools. They then evaluate and monitor the status quo of a school before planning for change (Hussain et al., 2018). In the initiation process, principals review funding, create a shared vision, and serve as innovators. Principals leading chronically failing Title I schools possess a knowledge of school reforms and funding policies.

Leaders must establish and use a wide range of methods to meet the demands of internal and external change. School leaders must establish and communicate a clear shared vision to ensure that change efforts are successful (Washington et al., 2011). Kafele (2015) confirmed this notion stating that a school without vision has no direction. Bolman and Deal (2017) noted today's organizations require guidance and the vision provided by leaders. Washington et al.

(2011) outlined components for identifying the vision of the organization as determining the set of values and communicating the vision to the organization's stakeholders to ensure successful change. Effective principals begin the process of school improvement by creating a shared vision for teachers and students. These principals work to establish a common goal among stakeholders to get initial support in the change process. Bolman and Deal (2017) explained there is a need for versatile leaders who can reframe issues and discover possibilities. Principals leading chronically failing schools must be innovators. As innovators, principals bring new concepts and ideas to the school they learned through their principal preparation. School leaders must use their creativity when motivating the staff to follow the vision and adopt new ideas and initiatives.

Steve Jobs, the former CEO of Apple, was fired from the company that he founded. During his years of hiatus from the company, Jobs worked to discover the capacities needed to become an effective leader. Over the next eleven years, Jobs focused his work on two projects, Pixar and NeXT. While Pixar became a billion-dollar company, NeXT never became profitable. Jobs learned from these experiences the importance of aligning an organizational strategy to its mission (Bolman & Deal, 2017). He also learned to appreciate the importance of relationships and teamwork (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The difference in Steve Jobs from when he was fired in 1986 until his return to Apple in 1997 was simply his understanding of how to lead and interpret the environment around him (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Often organizational leaders operate on a limited understanding of how to lead (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Upon his return he built a leadership team; this team aided in the development of iMac, iPod, iPhone, and iPad, thus becoming the world's most valuable and innovative company. Successful leaders use framing skills to synthesize data to develop goals and build teams to implement improvement methods (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Bolman and Deal (2017) defined reframing as the ability to examine

situations from all angles, developing diagnoses and strategies to improve the organization. Bolman and Deal (2017) noted the right combination of goals, roles, and relationships are critical to the performance of an organization.

Early research identified the principal as being the central agent for promoting change; ironically, the principalship has become overloaded with so many responsibilities that widespread change is unattainable (Fullan, 2016). During the implementation phase of Fullan's change theory, incremental changes occur, and stakeholders begin to invest in making improvements toward change by sharing responsibilities and carrying out the school improvement plan. Most often the school culture in chronically failing schools is described as toxic with low staff morale, high teacher absenteeism, self-preservation, and hostility. For effective principals to address school culture, they enlist the help of the entire faculty and staff. Muhammad and Cruz (2019) noted the goal of leadership should be to motivate employees and unite them toward the organization's common goal. Principals leading toxic school cultures develop ways to celebrate staff successes and create a work environment where employees feel supported. While improving staff culture is essential, effective principals need to focus on student culture to have a holistic approach toward school culture. One of the biggest issues in student culture within chronically failing schools is discipline. Staff members make complaints about the students being out of control, disrespectful, and disruptive throughout the school day. To combat such issues, effective principals work alongside other staff members to develop school-wide behavior management systems. Principals galvanize the shared effort of all staff members to implement the plan. Once principals create plans to address school and student culture, they move on to the cumbersome task of mapping out the School Improvement Plan (SIP). The SIP is comprised of yearly goals and student academic targets principals set and

measure at the end of the school year. As instructional leaders, principals guide the work of the school improvement plan in determining what areas the school will focus. Through the collaboration with teachers, principals can determine strategies for improving student learning. As instructional leaders, principals are also tasked with understanding the content students are learning. Additionally, instructional leaders utilize data analysis to guide SIP goals and initiatives, thus identifying areas where students struggle. Principals collectively use collaboration, their understanding of content, and data analysis to inform instructional decisions when developing the school improvement plan (McMurchy & Lemieux, 2018).

During the third phase of Fullan's change theory, continuation, principals start the process of embedding the change. As principals begin the solidification process, they carefully monitor restraining forces or driving forces. The role of the turnaround leaders involves simultaneously identifying the driving forces needed to promote change implementation. A combination of these counterforces will create polarization thus preventing long term change from occurring (Tomal et al., 2013).

To ensure school improvement efforts are lasting drivers of school change, leaders need to seek intangible versus tangible results. Tangible outcomes are a result of changes due to compliance. Such outcomes include increased student mastery and test scores, positive school culture, and ultimately an increased CCRPI score ranking to be removed for the chronically failing schools' list. Deep change includes long-lasting change, which occurs when employees buy into system values and beliefs (Tomal et al., 2013). For leaders to move from compliance to commitment, an improved school culture must be established where the faculty takes risks, teachers implore innovative strategies, and stakeholders are motivated to change (Tomal et al., 2013). Turnaround leaders need to establish school culture where employees are ready to accept

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and adapt to change (Tomal et al., 2013). Turnaround leaders must take a collaborative approach to change, relying on the help of others to achieve school-wide goals. These turnaround leaders need to utilize a cluster of competencies including affecting the perceptions of others, promoting a team approach, proactivity, and developing the capacity of staff members to develop a positive school culture (Public Impact, 2008). Effective principals need to constantly examine their roles as a turnaround leader to establish a positive school culture for student learning (Mendels, 2012).

Summary of Methodology

To adequately answer the research questions listed in this study, the researcher used the portraiture design method. Portraiture is a social science methodology illuminating the experiences, relationships, and culture of individuals and institutions. The researched used this method to highlighted examples of effective Title I principals were highlighted. The portraiture method allows the researcher to focus on the goodness, it does not deny issues within systems. The researcher reviewed data to determine repeated ideas using collective codes to develop categories used to generate a theory.

To identify effective principals of chronically failing Title I schools, the researcher used sampling procedures. Participants were selected based on the school's Title I eligibility, which is determined by the percentage of economically disadvantaged students. All identified principals led schools where more than 75% of the student body were economically disadvantaged, thus meeting the qualification of a Title I school. Additionally, the participants had at least three years of experience as principals at their schools. The student body of these schools ranged from 400 to 900 students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade.

The researcher collected data using the Seidman's (2013) three-interview series technique. Principals of chronically failing schools located in Northeast Georgia participated in

three 30-interview sessions. During the interviews, principals discussed developing their leadership styles, creating a positive culture, making decisions, and building student achievement. The researcher coded interviews for common themes among participants to determine similar leadership experiences and strategies used for school improvement and student achievement.

The researcher also collected data through observation. Principals were observed at their school for approximately two hours as they conducted daily duties within their schools. The researcher collected field notes to document the occurrences throughout the day. The researcher analyzed the field note data and coded for recurring themes. Additionally, school documents were collected to review how principals plan, organize, and implement school improvement measures. The researcher analyzed this data to determine influencing factors of leadership strategies on student achievement.

The researcher used data collected during interviews, observations, and document analysis to address the research questions. The analysis of transcripts, field notes, and plans led to determining common strategies and skills of school leaders as perceived by themselves and others. The researcher used Standardized open-ended interviews to determine the experiences of each participant. The researcher reviewed observations to view nonverbal expressions, communication methods, and the amount of time spent on activities. The researcher used document analysis to gain insight into how principals plan for school-wide change and student improvement.

Limitations

To avoid threats to the data, I first addressed subjectivity. As a teacher and now principal of a chronically failing Title I school, I am aware of the needs within these schools. While I am

not a principal of the identified failing schools in this study, there is no doubt there were some similarities that existed between my leadership and the selected principals. It was impossible for me to ignore the relationship between my leadership experiences and theirs. To combat subjectivity, Peshkin (1988) suggests identifying my 'subjective Is.' When investigating my 'subjective Is,' I related to the Ethnic-Maintenance I and the Non-Research Human I. As a researcher, I felt it was difficult for me to remove my Ethnic-Maintenance I as I tended to retain of ethnic values of others. It was crucial for me to identify when my ethnic connection began to interfere with my research study. The second subjective I that proved to be a challenge to me is the Non-Research I. I tended to empathize with others. I tried to put myself in their shoes to share the experience with them. As a researcher, Peshkin (1988) noted the study could become "blatantly autobiographical" when relating to and judging others in a softened view of their experiences. I needed to work to remain objective, collecting descriptive notes during interviews and observation to avoid imposing my subjectivity into the study.

Additional limitations for the study included a small sample size and locality, the race and gender of the participants, the level of the schools, and the global pandemic. Only three participants who worked in one school district in Georgia were selected for this study using purposeful sampling. Only three principals were willing to participate in the study, even though six schools met the sampling criteria. All the participants were black females. The male principal perspective is not taken for account in this study, and neither is the perspective of non-African American principals. The lack of racial and gender representation limits the study as only the experiences, strategies, and barriers of black female principals is considered Another limitation was the level of the schools all being grades Kindergarten through 5th grade. No middle schools nor high schools are represented in this study. The final limitation for this study was the global

pandemic. The researcher had to conduct interviews via Zoom instead of face to face due to the spread of the coronavirus. Additionally, the researcher conducted school observations when the enrollment of the selected schools was drastically lower than normal. Enrollment was low because many parents opted for their students to learn virtually from home instead of attending school, where their children could possibly contract the coronavirus.

When collecting data, I was aware of reactivity. Although eliminating my influence as a researcher on participants, settings, and others is impossible, I worked to under my role and use it productively (Maxwell, 2013). When observing I took rich, descriptive notes of the participants, happenings, non-verbal language, and attitudes. Interviews were recorded to maintain the authenticity of the participants' answers. Collecting descriptive notes and recording interviews allowed me to capture concrete events and to write verbatim transcripts, which provided a detailed grounding for data analysis.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were applied throughout this study.

Chronically failing school. A chronically failing school is a school identified by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement office as having a CCRPI score below 60 over three years, thus ranking in the bottom five percent of all schools within the state of Georgia (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2016).

College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). CCRPI is a comprehensive school improvement, accountability, and communication platform for all educational stakeholders promoting college and career readiness for all Georgia public school students (College and Career Performance Index, 2017).

Educational change theory. Educational change theory was a model proposed by Michael

Fullan focusing on four broad phases of change: initiation, implementation, continuation, outcomes (Fullan, 2016).

Effective principal. An effective principal is a principal of a previously chronically failing Title I school within the Glenn County School System who was able to improve student achievement levels thus having the school removed from the state's chronically failing schools list after three consecutive years.

Failing school. Failing schools are schools where students are not achieving at the levels of performance as outlined by the state or local education agency.

Instructional leadership. Instructional leadership is the principal's ability to serve as a lead learner within a school, by leading instruction, teacher collaboration, resource management, and student learning.

Race to the Top (RTTT). RTTT was a federal program of adopted standards and assessments, data systems, teacher recruitment, and support low achieving schools (United States Department of Education, 2016). RTTT was a $4.35 million dollar grant awarded to K-12 school district throughout the United States used to improve teaching and learning (United States Department of Education, 2016).

School climate. School climate is the "patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures". (National School Climate Center, 2021).

School culture. School culture is the manner in which faculty members share established shared beliefs and values (School Culture and Climate, n.d.).

School Improvement Plan (SIP). A School Improvement Plan is an extensive document

completed by schools that addresses areas of needed improvement. This plan lists objectives, goals, and action steps that serve as a road map toward addressing challenges.

Student Achievement. Student achievement is a defined scale where students are ranked based on assessment scores (Gratz, 2001).

Title I Schools. Title I schools are made up of children from low-income families where at least 40 percent of enrollment are eligible to use Title I funds to operate schoolwide programs and raise the achievement of low-achieving students (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Turnaround leadership. Turnaround leadership includes the actions, roles, and strategies used by principals to establish sustained change within a failing school.

Summary

In 2016, 130 schools in Georgia were identified as failing schools (Tagami, 2017). Many of these failing schools were Title I schools. Principals leading Title I schools must employ varying strategies to close the achievement gap existing between their students and students not living in poverty. Suggs (2017) noted one of the core components for improving student academic success in failing schools is having an effective leader. Determining how leadership experiences and strategies influence student performance in chronically failing Title I schools may benefit school principals in leading school improvement efforts.

II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

After decades of federal educational reforms, schools across the nation fail to improve student achievement. Within the state of Georgia, the number of failing Title I schools has increased despite receiving federal funds to aid in student achievement.

There has been little research indicating the importance of principal quality and specific strategies needed to improve school success and student outcomes (Branch et al., 2013). To meet the educational goal of increasing student learning, there needs to be a transition from managers to effective leaders (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). Effective school leaders seek to change teacher and student behaviors to improve student achievement.

The purpose of this study is to understand the roles and identified school principals with regards to improving chronically failing Title I K-5 schools in Northeast Georgia. The study will include efforts to determine the experiences of these Title I principals, the barriers they faced, and strategies they used to navigate school improvement toward increasing school-wide student achievement. Muhammad and Hollie (2011) described leadership as the intentionality of increasing productivity within the organization. DuFour and Marzano (2011) emphasized effective educational leaders as providing for teachers by giving resources and supporting them in designing and delivering effective instruction. Muhammad and Cruz (2019) discussed Richard F. Elmore's notion of effective leaders being cognizant of the right thing to do as the central problem of school improvement.

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: What are the life and career experiences of identified and effective K-5 principals serving in chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast Georgia?

RQ2: What are the strategies employed by identified and effective K-5 principals serving in chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast Georgia?

RQ3: What are the barriers, in any, faced by identified and effective K-5 principals serving in chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast Georgia?

To understand experiences, strategies, and barriers of effective principals in chronically failing Title I schools, this literature review is divided into four sections. The first section addresses national education reform in relation to the American education system and education within the state of Georgia. The second section focuses on how principals implement change leadership in schools. The third section includes a review of the literature regarding teachers' perceptions of leadership. The fourth section outlines turnaround leadership necessary for chronically failing schools.

The researcher conducted keyword searches in Odum Library and the Galileo database to collect literature. These keyword searches yielded results reviewed for relevant information on the topic. On reference pages are listed sources accessed for review to connect literature and discover additional sources related to principal leadership, school improvement, and student achievement. Most literature sources are from the past ten years; however, some references are dated past ten years. These references are relevant for developing an understanding of educational reform relating to school leadership and providing a holistic view of research on the topic.

Description of Literature

Historical Background of Reforms to Increase Student Achievement

Under the auspices of educational reform, public education in the United States has undergone changes in an effort to address increasing student achievement. These changes have manifested through reforms outlined by the federal government. Much of the basis for reform revolved around the political environment and public perception of education during the time the reform was written and enacted. Educational reformers are intensely motivated by the current political atmosphere. During the President George W. Bush administration, reformers were focused on accountability and pushed standardized testing as the method to measure student achievement. Even with the most extensive research and sophisticated evaluation system, it would be naïve to believe test scores and data analysis could contribute to improving the education of children (National Research Council, 2012). Much more is required beyond standardized testing to improve student achievement.

The United States has a long history of mandating educational reform to improve public education. While numerous reforms have been implemented, schools still fail to yield high student achievement. In the past few decades, education reformers have been actively seeking solutions for declining academics. The learning expectations for children have changed drastically over the past 100 years. The National Research Council (2011) revealed in the early 1900s "only about 10 percent of students graduated from high school, yet by the second half of the century the prevalent view was all students should not only be expected to graduate from high school, but also to aspire to college" (p. 20). From these reforms, the results of improving students' performance have been mediocre at best. High student achievement remains an issue,

thus low performing schools are constantly seeking out methods, programs, and remedies to aid in increasing student achievement.

Legislation, Initiatives, Purpose, and Results

As a part of Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, the United States Congress enacted legislation designed to provide equal access to all children. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) enacted in 1965 allocated federal funds toward the improvement of schools. At the foundation of this legislation, President Johnson promised to focus on education and civil rights. On the heels of desegregating schools there was much controversy regarding federal aid to schools. President Lyndon B. Johnson believed the government played an extensive role in reducing poverty by extending social welfare programs to include education (Lynch, 2016). Lynch (2016) explained one of the premises of Johnson's War on Poverty was the notion of education playing a significant role in reducing poverty and, therefore, legislation focused on improving the education of the poor. Under ESEA, Congress established Public Law 89-10 declaring the U.S. government would provide financial assistance to local education agencies to improve those educational programs serving children from low-income families (Boyle & Lee, 2015). This law marked the creation of the Financial Assistance to Local Educational Agencies for the Education of Children of Low-Income Families, commonly known as Title I. By providing funds to schools serving low-income communities, President Johnson sought to garner educational equity between the economically disadvantaged and privileged students. Title I of ESEA required schools receiving funds to perform comparably to schools not receiving Title I funds (McClure, 2008). Historically, states had authority over education, but, with the nation's concern on poverty, the creation of Title I established the influential role the federal government would play in education for decades to follow (Boyle & Lee, 2015). Title I

proved to be one of the most significant provisions of ESEA (Hanna, 2005). Under Title I a

formula was designed to determine which schools would receive funding. The formula utilized

numbers from student attendance in schools having a high concentration of students from low-

income families (McClure, 2008). Schools meeting the attendance criteria were granted Title I

funds to purchase textbooks, instructional materials, libraries, research on education, and

supplemental education centers (Lynch, 2016). In addition, funding was used for the creation of

state departments of education and hiring more teachers (Hanna, 2005). By 1967, the annual

budget of the United States Office of Education skyrocketed from $1.5 billion to $4 billion

"marking the federal government's definitive entry into public education" (Hanna, 2005).

President Lyndon B. Johnson sought to address the educational needs of students through

his War on Poverty. Although the plan to improve education was implemented, there were

several initial issues in the first five years of ESEA's implementation to include funding, racial

and religious biases, and interruptions of the law at the federal, state, and local levels (Paul,

2016). The reformers created ESEA with the expectation of once having received Title I funding,

school systems would reach out to disadvantaged children. With a shift in national priorities,

additional funding provided through Title I yielded modest results and barely lived up to the

claims of improvement the act promised (Paul, 2016).

After the implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA),

reformers still sought to make improvements in education and in 1983 the United States

Department of Education published the report titled *A Nation at Risk*. T. H. Bell and members of

the National Commission on the Excellence in Education published this report with the intent of

galvanizing the government's interest in holding schools accountable for student learning (Boyle

& Lee, 2015). Bell explained the creation of this reform was to address the issues in American

education and the public's perception of there being something remiss with the current educational system (U.S. National Commission on the Excellence in Education, 1983). The risks identified in the report included international comparisons of student achievement, illiteracy rates in the United States, and citizens lacking basic skills in reading, math, spelling, and computation (U.S. National Commission on the Excellence in Education, 1983). The report attributed America's failing schools to the lack of monitoring and promoting increased student achievement (Boyle & Lee, 2015). Bell and the committee concluded the declines in student performance were associated with the inadequacies in how the educational process was conducted (U.S. National Commission on the Excellence in Education, 1983). Based on their conclusion, the committee began to seek methods for improving the quality of education in the United States. As a result, states began incorporating and adopting new learning standards, teacher evaluation preparation programs, and rigor for student learning (U.S. National Commission on the Excellence in Education, 1983). Even though the report prompted the development of accountability measures, the committee called for the federal government to have more of a limited role in education (Boyle & Lee, 2015). Although the government was looking to play a smaller role in education, *The Nation at Risk* publication created a resurgence to improve student achievement, leading to numerous state reform efforts (Boyle & Lee, 2015).

In 1988 the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was reauthorized. States and districts were mandated to annually identify Title I schools not making progress towards increasing student achievement (Boyle & Lee, 2015). With the reauthorization, the federal government required states and districts receiving Title I funding to take steps toward assisting low performing schools and students by developing measures to track student performance (Boyle & Lee, 2015). The reauthorization of ESEA could have been in part conceived based on

the 1990 court ruling of Abbott v. Burke. In 1988, 20 families from Orange County, New Jersey filed a class-action suit against the state. The New Jersey Supreme Court ruled the state had failed its constitutional obligation to provide a thorough education to students in urban school districts (National Research Council, 2011). Much like President Johnson's goal for the War on Poverty, this ruling sought to ensure all students, particularly those living in the poorest areas, received a thorough and efficient education. Following this court ruling, New Jersey was required to implement a variety of reforms to ensure equitable educational resources were available in its schools (National Research Council, 2011). The disparity in funding for rich and poor school districts was unconstitutional, thus requiring the government to provide additional funding to districts with a greater number of children living in low socioeconomic areas. To address this issue, policymakers modified the purpose statement of Title I under ESEA of 1988. It would now focus on improving the educational needs of educationally deprived or low performing students by helping to reach on-grade level proficiency and improve achievement (Boyle & Lee, 2015).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), a 2002 update to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, sought to hold schools accountable by measuring student outcomes. As a result of the collaboration between minority and business groups, the goal of NCLB was to close the achievement gap between minorities and more advantaged students (Klein, 2019). The NCLB legislation intended for every student to receive a good education with good education defined as having passing scores on standardized tests in reading and math (Zhao, 2009). The law required states to issue standardized assessments to all students in grades 3 through 8. It was concluded students did not receive a good education if they did not pass the standardized test. Schools were expected to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) based on the percentage of students passing

standardized tests. Schools not meeting AYP were considered 'in need of improvement,' facing such sanctions as school choice and restructuring (Zhao, 2009). School choice offered parents the option of sending their students to alternative schools including private, charter, or a homeschool option if the students' zoned school was not meeting AYP goals. Restructuring of schools was based on failure to meet AYP goals five consecutive years in a row. For failing schools under restructuring, there were five options: chartering-close and reopen as charter school; turnarounds- replace staff and principal; contracting- outside entity governed the school; state takeovers- state education department members led school operations; and other-fundamental reform assigned by the state (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2006).

Just days before the sixth anniversary of the signing (NCLB), President George W. Bush entered Horace Greeley Elementary School in Chicago to announce the honor of the school becoming a Blue-Ribbon School (Zhao, 2009). President Bush referred to Greeley as the shining example for the NCLB guidelines as it exemplified the goals outlined in the national educational reform. The school had gained more than 32 points from 2002 to 83.3% of the students meeting or exceeding standards as measured on standardized testing (Zhao, 2009).

Even though achievement gaps were narrowing and mandated accountability lead to transparency of student learning, several problems existed with the NCLB act. Klein (2019) argued there were major portions of the NCLB law proven to be problematic. Problems included the inability to improve student performance in low performing schools, increased emphasis on standardized testing, and underfunding of Title I which was the main funding source for the law (Klein, 2019). The No Child Left Behind Act outlined stringent consequences for Title I schools failing to meet improvement targets (Boyle & Lee, 2015). By 2010, 38% of schools nationwide

failed to make annual yearly progress (Klein, 2019). In 2011, Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education, issued warnings to 82% of schools saying they would be labeled 'failing' (Klein, 2019). While lawmakers were aware of the need to rewrite the law, they would not be able to do so due to the upcoming presidential race and the possibility of a new administration taking over with its own thoughts and ideas on how to improve the system.

With the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act becoming increasingly unattainable for educators, the new administration under President Barack Obama worked to create a better law to fully prepare students to achieve at high levels to become college and career ready. In 2012, the Obama Administration started granting waivers to states, allowing them to develop a comprehensive plan designed to close achievement gaps, improve instruction, and increase student performance (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). On December 10, 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law. ESSA retained some components of NCLB such as standardized testing but differed by moving accountability from the federal level to the states (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). NCLB demanded schools improve student academic performance and measured student achievement using standardized testing, but this did not yield improved student performance and showed little student growth from 2002 to 2013. (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). Under the Obama administration, provisions were made to NCLB allowing states the autonomy to create plans for improving student achievement. (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). This shift signified the regression of the federal government's influence on education policy.

For over a decade, the federal government has endeavored to improve student academics through reforms measuring test score data in reading and math as well as graduation rates (Lam et al., 2016). The focus of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was to redefine

accountability systems and create a more balanced system of supports for states and districts. The purpose of ESSA was to provide high-quality education and close achievement gaps. Under ESSA, states became largely responsible for submitting accountability plans to the Department of Education where long term and interim goals were developed to address math and language proficiency as well as graduation rates (Every Student Succeeds Act., 2017). States had the flexibility to build accountability systems to include more robust measures of student learning (Lam et al., 2016). Not only would state administrators need to ensure goals were being met, but they would also be required to identify the lowest five percent of low performing Title I schools (Lam et al., 2016). After identifying the bottom five percent of failing schools, school leaders and district administrators reported more detailed and specific plans to the state education agency for monitoring and evaluation. Annually, states determined which schools were consistently failing and required those districts to provide school-level support (Lam et al., 2016). Districts intervened with failing schools by monitoring the school improvement plan and turnaround effort. If a school continued to perform poorly, then the state could take over and fire the principal (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2017).

While the federal government has played a substantial role in reforming educational goals for all students, schools have only made minimal progress toward increased student achievement. By increasing accountability measures, states were required to meet yearly progress showing student performance was improving. Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states were required to develop accountability plans to ensure districts were outlining methods for improving student achievement. In a study of five schools excelling in educating urban, poor students, researchers discovered the leaders of these schools were committed to the reforms they adopted (National Research Council, 2015). From this study, researchers were able to attribute district

and school improvement to a system-wide approach to aligned practices and data to support instructional needs for accountability (National Research Council, 2015).

Klein (2019) explained nationally under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) administrators have been tasked with identifying evidence-based interventions for improving their lowest performing schools. Klein (2019) went on to say educators have noticed a "dearth of available evidence-based interventions and a lack of information in state ESSA plans" in regard to improving failing schools (p. 16). Sara Kerr, the vice president of education policy implementation at Results for America, admits more states need to implement evidence-based interventions to address school improvement in failing schools (Klein, 2019).

Current Status of Educational Change in Georgia

Educational reform has been a long-standing topic of debate in the state of Georgia. Dating back to the early 1900s, Georgians have shown a concern for public education. From the compulsory attendance initiative in 1916 to school integration in the 1960s, leaders began to contemplate how to address problems associated with education, focusing on how to improve the state's schools (Grant, 2003). State reform strategies in Georgia during the 1980s focused on extensive standardized testing coupled with rewards for teachers and schools but had minimal focus on improving teacher knowledge and developing new standards (Fullan, 2016).

Under the leadership of Governor Joe Frank Harris, the state of Georgia experienced major educational reform through the Quality Basic Education Act (QBE). QBE was passed to address the funding differential among school districts throughout the state. Before QBE, state allocations were provided to schools based on the number of students enrolled, without the consideration of fiscal budgets or the district's ability to generate its revenue (Grant, 2003). Many urban and rural school districts experienced difficulty with keeping funding, thus

legislators advocated for funding equalization (Grant, 2003). Based on the funding formulas of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) additional funds went to districts where the largest number of poor children resided (Lewis, 2005). In addition to educational reforms addressing funding, policymakers required states to monitor and assess student performance. Through the passage of Improving America's School Act (IASA) of 1994, states, including Georgia, established content standards to foster instructional reform by implementing accountability measures to determine student achievement (Goertz, 2005). Current Georgia Standards of Excellence outline content standards for educators to use when developing lessons.

Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), schools not meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) after two years were identified as 'needs improvement' by the state of Georgia. Georgia provided a statewide system of support to ensure low performing Title I schools received assistance with the development of school improvement plans, analysis of school-wide data, identification and implementation of professional development, and the revision of school budgets (Goertz, 2005). The state of Georgia provided professional development workshops for Title I schools to address improving student achievement. Title I funded coordinators assisted schools with disaggregating data for the needs assessment and developing the school improvement plan (Goertz, 2005). Goertz (2005) explained several states including Georgia required schools receiving Title I funds to use the money toward school improvement planning initiatives or professional development.

Race to the Top (RTTT) was a $4.35 billion competitive grant given to states to increase student achievement and close achievement gaps (Miller & Hanna, 2014). The state of Georgia was awarded RTTT funds in 2010. Miller and Hanna (2014) explained in an examination of the U.S. States Department of Education's Annual Performance Report how many low performing

schools receiving RTTT funding showed improvement within a short time. Several RTTT states took action to intervene in low performing schools by implementing reform models. For many districts, new leaders were placed within these schools and charged with implementing school improvement models. Districts selected the transformation model, including whole-school reform, resulting in an increase of learning time and the replacement of the principal (Miller & Hanna, 2014). Miller and Hanna (2014) noted the utilization of another common reform method, the "school turnaround" approach, where the principal was replaced, and no more than half of the staff was rehired.

Georgia took an innovative approach to setting goals under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) centered on continuous school improvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The main goal was for all schools to improve student learning and close achievement gaps. While high-performing schools met improvement targets, low-performing schools were making progress, but not meeting improvement targets (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Georgia State Superintendent Richard Woods noted targets ultimately became unattainable for most schools resulting in stalled progress and the feeling of defeat emanating from among educators (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Georgia created a new target structure based on growth levels to set ambitious yet attainable goals. The goal of the new structure was to yield continuous school improvement. The state measured school-level improvement using the College and Career Ready Performance Index (U.S. Department of Education, 2019b). The Georgia Department of Education (GADOE) annually identified and intervened with the bottom 5 percent of schools with the lowest CCPRI scores (2019). Chronically failing schools are categorized as those identified once every three years. GADOE and school district administrators are tasked with ensuring schools implement interventions to include development of a school

improvement plan, implementation and monitoring of the school turnaround effort, and allowance of school choice to parents of children attending low performing schools (Klein, 2016).

Within the plan developed by the state of Georgia, the tiered approach was used to support schools. Tier 1 included universal supports all schools receive, such as resources and tools. Tier 2 and 3 schools received targeted or comprehensive support. Tier 4 schools were designated as turnaround schools. Based on tier levels, schools were given varying levels of intensive and tailored supports. Such supports included monitoring performance status, determining school progress toward improvement, and collaborating with the Georgia Department of Education (Georgia Department of Education, 2019c). School distinction levels were developed by Georgia's Systems of Continuous Improvement. The three main distinctions for schools in Georgia were Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI), Targeted School Improvement (TSI), and Promise Schools. Title I Schools were categorized as CSI when their three-year College and Career Readiness Performance (CCRPI) average was among the lowest-performing schools in the state of Georgia. The State Department of Education provided support to these schools with ongoing collaboration with state and district level school improvement specialists. Additionally, these schools received annual Title I - Part A money for school improvement (Table 1). CSI schools received funds in the amount of $150,000, whereas TSI schools received annual in the amount of $75,000 (Georgia Department of Education, 2019b). TSI schools were identified based on having at least one of their subgroups perform in the bottom 5% of schools within the state (Georgia Department of Education, 2019b). These schools were provided with supports including collaboration with district administrators and state school improvement specialists. Promise schools receive support in the form of district and school-level

reviews of continuous improvement. Title I schools were categorized as Promise based on the

three-year CCRPI average placing such schools as among the lowest-performing schools and

representing greater than 5% to 10% among schools. Promise schools received $20,000 in Title I

Part A funding (Georgia Department of Education, 2019b).

Table 1

Funding Allocations (Georgia Department of Education, 2019c)

CATEGORY	MINIMUM 1003 ALLOTMENT
TSI	$75,000
CSI – Lowest 5% or former TSI schools	$150,000
CSI – Graduation Rate below 67%; only identification	$50,000
CSI – Alternative Education schools	$75,000
CSI – Promise Schools – Lowest 5.1%-10%	$20,000

Title I

School improvement for chronically failing Title I schools is possible; it will take a

concerted effort with a daring principal leading (Public Impact, 2008). Chronically failing

schools are in need of strong leaders who have the ability to impact organizational change to

improve student performance. Nationally, there were many schools with students failing, thus

there has been growing demands for effective leaders (Public Impact, 2008). While educational

reforms have attempted to address improving student achievement, minimal progress has been

made.

Financial Assistance to Local Educational Agencies for the Education of Children of

Low-Income Families, commonly known as Title I, was developed under the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act of 1965. Policymakers created Title I to provide funding for schools in

an effort to improve the educational opportunities of all students. Currently Title I funding is used to provide financial assistance to districts with children from low-income households. Districts are tasked with using Title I funds to improve student learning and increase student mastery toward academic achievement (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Title I funds are allocated in every state, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

Using mathematical formulas, the number of eligible students and state per pupil cost was calculated (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Under stipulations from ESEA, the formula for determining the authorization amount of Title I allocations by districts was calculated by multiplying the state per pupil expenditure (SPPE) factor by the number of students from low-income households (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). To qualify for Title I grants, districts must have met a minimum formula-eligible count or percentage. The percentage was based on the number of children ages 5 to 17 years old meeting at least one of the three criteria: (1) children living with families below the national poverty line; (2) children receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); (3) children in locally funded institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). There are four types of Title I grants districts can be awarded: Basic, Concentration, Target, and Education Finance Incentive Grants (EFIG). Qualifications for each of these grants varied (see Table 2).

Table 2 *Basic, Concentration, Target, and Education Finance Incentive Grants*

Grant Type	Qualification
Basic Grant	To qualify for a Basic Grant, a district must have at least 10 formula-eligible children ages 5–17 (each meeting at least one of the four eligibility criteria previously listed), and that number must exceed 2 percent of the district's 5- to 17-year-old population.

Concentration Grant	To qualify for a Concentration Grant, a district must have more than 6,500 formula-eligible children ages 5–17 (each meeting at least one of the four eligibility criteria previously listed), or more than 15 percent of the district's 5- to 17-year-old population must be formula eligible.
Targeted Grant	To qualify for a Targeted Grant, a district must have at least 10 formula-eligible children ages 5–17 (each meeting at least one of the four eligibility criteria previously listed), and that number must represent at least 5 percent of the district's 5- to 17-year-old population.
Education Finance Incentive Grants (EFIG)	To qualify for an EFIG, a district must have at least 10 formula-eligible children ages 5–17 (each meeting at least one of the four eligibility criteria previously listed), and that number must represent at least 5 percent of the district's 5- to 17-year-old population.

Each grant has a funding formula used to determine the authorization amount allocated to each district see Figure 3.

Figure 3

Authorization Amount Calculation (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019)
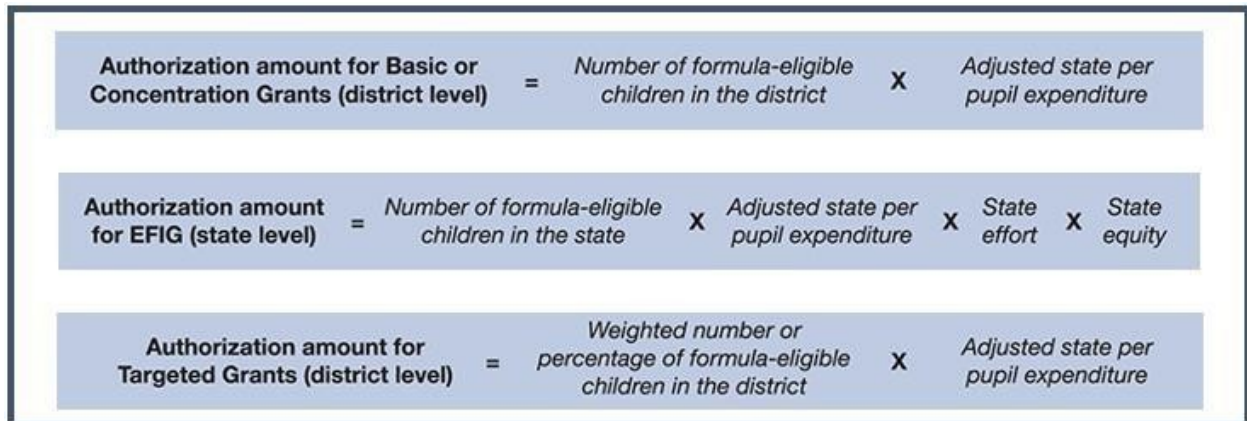
The state of Georgia received all four grants: Basic, Concentration, Targeted, and EFIG.

Preliminary Title I funding in Georgia for fiscal year 2020 is estimated to be $16.3 billion (U.S.

Department of Education, 2020). For fiscal year (FY) 2019 Glenn County received $17,253,376

in Title I funds; $18,161,057 for FY 2018; $15,708,265 for FY 2017; and $15,630,283 for FY

2016.

Schools across the country used Title I funds to supplement academic programs. Title I

funding was used to provide extra learning supports such as tutoring or summer programs,

technology, additional teachers, instructional specialists, and learning materials for students.

Title I, Part A was amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) from its original details

outlined by ESEA. Title I, Part A programs were aimed to focus on school improvement efforts.

Within the state of Georgia Title I, Part A Section 1003(a) School Improvement Grants (SIG)

provided funding to districts and schools for improving student achievement (Georgia

Department of Education, 2020). In 2009, the U. S. Department of Education awarded over $5.5

billion dollars in SIG among all 50 states, the Bureau of Indian Education, and the District of

Columbia (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). SIG funding also provided resources to support

interventions for turning around the nations' failing schools (U.S. Department of Education,

2015). Within the state of Georgia, SIG funds were used support the implementation of school

improvement plans, required by ESEA and ESSA, and to improve student outcomes in

chronically failing schools (Georgia Department of Education, 2020). Chronically failing schools

were identified based on their yearly College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI)

score. CCRPI was calculated using five main components: achievement, progress, closing gaps,

readiness, and graduation rate for high schools (Georgia Department of Education, 2020). The

five components were combined to give a final score range of 0 to 100 points. The state ranked

CCRPI scores of all schools; those schools ranked in the bottom 5% to 10% for three or more

years are considered chronically failing. There were three types of failing schools:

Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI), CSI-Promise, and Targeted Support and

Improvement schools (TSI (Targeted School Improvement)). CSI and TSI schools were

identified based on CCRPI scores below 60 points. To be removed or exited from CSI and TSI

status, schools must have demonstrated increased student achievement and increased (see

Figures 4 and 5).

Figure 4

Comprehensive Support and Improvement (Georgia Department of Education, 2020)

Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI)			
Criteria #	Criteria Category	Entrance Criteria	Exit Criteria
1	Lowest 5%	**Title I Schools Only:** When ranked according to their three-year CCRPI average, are among the lowest performing schools that represent 5% of all schools eligible for identification.	A school may exit if the school no longer meets the lowest 5% entrance criteria AND demonstrates an improvement in the overall CCRPI score greater than or equal to 3% of the gap between the baseline CCRPI score (the three-year average that led to the school's identification) and 100. This 3% improvement must be demonstrated from the highest of the three CCRPI scores used in the three-year average to the current CCRPI score.
2	Low Graduation Rate	**All High Schools:** Have a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate less than or equal to 67%.	Attain a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate greater than 67%.

Figure 5

Comprehensive Support and Improvement and Promise Schools (CSI Promise) (Georgia Department of Education, 2020)

CSI Designation	Entrance Criteria	Exit Criteria
Promise Schools	**Title I Schools Only:** When ranked according to their three-year CCRPI average, are among the lowest performing schools that represent greater than 5% to 10% of all schools eligible for identification. The purpose of Promise Schools is to provide supports to these schools to sustain improvement or provide proactive supports before they fall into the lowest 5% CSI category.	A school may exit if the school no longer meets the greater than 5% to 10% entrance criteria AND the school's current overall CCRPI score is greater than the baseline CCRPI score (the three-year average that led to the school's identification).

Figure 6

Targeted Support and Improvement (Georgia Department of Education, 2020)

Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI)			
Criteria #	Criteria Category	Entrance Criteria	Exit Criteria
1	Consistently Underperforming Subgroup	**All Schools:** Have at least one subgroup that is performing in the lowest 5% of all schools in at least 50% of CCRPI components.	A school may exit if no subgroup is performing in the lowest 5% of all schools in at least 50% of CCRPI components.
2	Additional Targeted Support	**All Schools:** Among all schools identified for consistently underperforming subgroup, have at least one subgroup that is performing in the lowest 5% of all schools in all CCRPI components. **Note:** Title I schools identified for additional targeted support will move to the CSI list if they do not meet the TSI exit criteria after three consecutive years.	A school may exit if no subgroup is performing in the lowest 5% of all schools in all CCRPI components AND the subgroup's current score is greater than the previous score for all components in which the subgroup is no longer in the lowest 5%.

Title I, Part A SIG funds were allocated based on the school's designation. CSI schools received between $75,000 and $150,000, annually; Promise CSI schools receive $20,000 annually; and TSI schools received $75,000 annually (Georgia Department of Education, 2020). Schools used SIG funds to develop schoolwide plans for implementing school improvement interventions, to include teacher professional development, tutoring opportunities for students, and family engagement activities for parents (Georgia Department of Education, 2020).

The American Institutes of Research (AIR) released findings in 2017 of a study on the effects of School Improvement Grants (SIG). Findings from the study revealed no significant effect between SIG funding and student outcomes (Carlson Le Floch, 2017). AIR conducted case studies in 25 small schools to examine how failing schools used SIG funds. Each school selected one of the four SIG models: Transformation, Turnaround, Restart, or School Closure (see Table 3).

Table 3

School Improvement Grant (SIG) Models (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2014)

SIG Model	Elements
Transformation	1. Replace the principal 2. Use rigorous, transparent, and equitable evaluation systems for teachers and principals 3. Identify and reward school leaders, teachers, and other staff who, in implementing this model, have increased student achievement and high school graduation rates 4. Provide staff ongoing, high-quality, job-embedded professional development that is aligned with the school's comprehensive instructional program 5. Implement such strategies as financial incentives, increased opportunities for promotion and career growth
Turnaround	1. Replace the principal 2. Using locally adopted competencies to measure the effectiveness of staff who can work within the turnaround environment to meet the needs of students 3. Implement such strategies as financial incentives, increased opportunities for promotion and career growth 4. Provide staff ongoing, high-quality job-embedded professional development that is aligned with the school's comprehensive instructional program 5. Adopt a new governance structure 6. Use data to identify and implement an instructional program that is research-based and vertically aligned from one grade to the next as well as aligned with State academic standards 7. Promote the continuous use of student data (such as from formative, interim, and summative assessments) to inform and differentiate instruction 8. Establish schedules and implement strategies that provide increased learning time

	9. Provide appropriate social-emotional and community-oriented services and supports for students
Restart	1. Local education agency (LEA) converts a school or closes and reopens a school under a charter school operator, a charter management organization (CMO), or an education management organization (EMO) that has been selected through a rigorous review process
	2. Enroll within the grades it serves, any former student who wishes to attend the school
School Closure	1. Local education agency (LEA) closes a school and enrolls the students who attended that school in other schools in the LEA that are higher achieving
	2. Schools should be within reasonable proximity to the closed school and may include, but are not limited to, charter schools or new schools for which achievement data are not yet available

The study of SIG in Michigan detected no effect on student outcomes when schools used the Turnaround model (Carlson Le Floch, 2017). Conversely, in the study of SIG in California researchers revealed schools using the Turnaround model showed significant gains in student achievement (Carlson Le Floch, 2017). Additionally, in the study of SIG in Massachusetts, researchers found SIG funding had a statistically significant impact on student achievement in reading and math (Carlson Le Floch, 2017).

Several reforms were enacted to improve education in the United States. Educational reformers sought to increase student achievement through funding, resources, and accountability. Even with the implementation of these strategies, schools still failed to reach annual goals set by the state and federal governments. Principals were being tasked with improving student achievement under mandated reforms proving to be ineffective and inconsistent increasing student achievement (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Georgia schools not meeting annual increases on the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCPRI) were labeled as failing. Consistently failing schools entered the comprehensive school support tier. Principals of failing

schools played a critical role in adopting reforms to meet the ever-growing educational needs of their students through school improvement.

<div align="center">*The Challenge to Lead Change*</div>

In 2002, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) predicted by 2012, 40% of principals in the United States would retire with no qualified candidates to replace them (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). The NASSP report noted there were only a few districts with structured recruitment and training programs to grow future leaders (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). Alvoid and Black (2014) explained school leaders felt they had insufficient training and support, causing the job to be no longer sustainable. Furthermore, once on the job, principals did not feel adequately supported in their roles by the school district (Alvoid & Black, 2014). Holden (2018) noted few studies consider how principal preparation impacts student achievement. Holden (2018) revealed in a 2015 study how principals participating in the preparation program noted they felt more effective, yet there was no impact on student achievement. While findings from multiple studies reflected indirect and direct relationships between school leadership and school improvement, principal preparation programs were essential for the development of leaders in low performing schools (Sutcher et al., 2017).

Principal Readiness: Collegiate Programs

The United States Department of Education had closely monitored the role of the principal at the federal and state levels and embarked on the transformation of over 5,000 schools (Wallace Foundation, 2013). The Southern Regional Education Board revealed training new principals to perform at high levels was the essential objective of university leadership programs (Gray et al., 2007). As researchers from the University of Minnesota and the University of Toronto concluded, principal preparation was pivotal; such studies revealed the "indirect

workings of school leadership had a statistically significant effect on student achievement" (Mendels, 2012, p. 55). Muhammad and Cruz (2019) claimed university programs placed little emphasis on training school leaders how to facilitate those behavioral changes among staff and students necessary for school improvement. Pounder et al. (2002) noted educational leadership programs can combat the collective challenges of social justice, collaborative communities, and school improvement.

A Wallace Foundation's research report indicated the national goal of transforming failing schools will be nearly impossible without effective principals (Wallace Foundation, 2013). The standards of many leadership programs for graduate candidates were ill-defined and lack rigor (Davis et al., 2005). Principal preparation programs did not develop leaders who are ready to lead (Fullan, 2016). As a result, aspiring principals are selected for their knowledge of coursework, not for their ability to successfully lead schools (Davis et al., 2005). The content focus of educational leadership programs must shift to achieve high student success (Pounder et al., 2002). Pounder et al. (2002) further discussed completing field experiences, identifying the program structure, and understanding the demographics of students as needed elements of design for leadership preparation programs. By gaining content through participating in leadership programs, principals developed the knowledge and skills necessary to guide schools toward improvement (Pounder et al., 2002).

Principal Readiness: Prior Assistant Principal Experience

Turnbull et al. (2015) conducted a study commissioned by the Wallace Foundation to analyze how six school districts implemented the principal pipeline initiative. Of first, second, and third-year assistant principals, 84% of the participants indicated they aspired to become principals (Turnbull et al., 2015). Principals relied on their experiences as assistant principals as

a basis for school leadership. Prior experiences assisted new principals in fulfilling on-the-job tasks; however, their skills needed to evolve as they begin their new role. The learning curve for new principals was steep and determining how to deal with the challenges of running a school can appear to be a daunting task (Young et al., 2013, p. 23). Kantor (2015) asserted assistant principals are now highly trained and aspire to higher levels of leadership. Assistant principals needed support as they transition into the principalship. Based on the preliminary findings of the Wallace Foundation study, school districts were beginning to implement training programs to support assistant principals who aspire to become principals (Wallace Foundation, 2018).

Principal Readiness: Mentorship

Principals can develop leadership skills through mentorship. Mentoring programs connect principals to other leaders who can assist them by modeling effective practices, navigating difficult situations, and testing ideas (National Association of Elementary Principals, 2003). The Southern Region Education Board (SREB) noted in the current era of education, schools were in constant need of strong leaders who are equipped to motivate people and elevate achievement (Gray et al., 2007). The SREB went on to say many principals were learning on the job (Gray et al., 2007). Public Impact (2008) noted a principal shared he was not clear on the "right things" to do as a school leader, resulting in superficial actions yielding minimal student improvement. Districts were capitalizing on the expertise of senior administrators through mentorship programs to support principals (Gray et al., 2007). Davis et al. (2005) noted there was an increasing number of districts developing support programs for principals to aid them in gaining skills necessary foreffectively leading schools. One support developed specifically for principals of low performing Title I schools in Georgia was the Governor's School Leadership Academy (GSLA). GSLA was developed through the partnership of Gwinnett County Public Schools, the Governor's Office of

Student Achievement, and the Georgia Department of Education. The purpose of the annual

GSLA cohort was to support principals in the change process to achieve school improvement

(Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019b). Cohort members were principals of

those lower-performing schools not meeting College and Career Ready Performance Index

target scores. Participants of GSLA engaged in job-embedded activities aligned to the state's

goals of improving low performing schools and further develop their leadership skills.

A 2009 study conducted by researchers through the Urban Institute reviewed longitudinal

data related to school performance and New York City principals. In contrast to previous studies

focusing on the quality of instruction by teachers, researchers sought to discover whether

principals impact school performance (Clark et al., 2009). Researchers used regression analysis

and descriptive statistics for determining the relationship between principal characteristics and

school performance. They collected detailed evidence of each principal's work experience,

training, and education were collected. The researchers collected data on school performance

measured as student achievement. School performance data spans from 1998-99 through 2006-

07 (Clark et al., 2009). Standardized tests in math and English, for students in grades 3-8, were

used as primary measures of school performance (Clark et al., 2009). To account for changes in

the standardized tests, scaled scores were normalized by year and grade level with a mean of

zero (Clark et al., 2009). Data also included student absenteeism and retention as outcomes

indirectly impacting student achievement (Clark et al., 2009). The researchers revealed three

findings from the study. The first finding reflected no significant relationship between school

performance and the principal's selection of an undergraduate or graduate institution or pre-

principal experience (Clark et al., 2009). The only exception to this finding was for

inexperienced principals who worked as an assistant principal in the same school. Second, the

researchers found a positive relationship between principal experience and school performance in relation to math standardized test scores and student absenteeism (Clark et al., 2009). The last finding revealed mixed evidence between principal training programs on school performance (Clark et al., 2009). An additional finding emerged from the analysis showed the positive impact of principal experience within the first few years (Clark et al., 2009). Implications from the study revealed the potential cause for the high turnover rate of principals was due to district administrators.

Leading School Change

The impetus of school change comes from varying directions and oftentimes makes change a difficult process (Tomal et al., 2013). Fullan (2002) argued only principals are equipped to handle the complex and rapidly changing school environment. He recognized principals can implement reforms leading to sustainable improvement in student achievement (Fullan, 2002). Today's principals were held accountable for student achievement measured by standardized test scores. Standardized test scores have catalyzed school leaders to launch new efforts each school year aimed toward increasing student achievement (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). Muhammad and Cruz (2019) added school leaders were under increasing pressure and apprehensively implemented programs to adjust instructional strategies presented to students. It was the goal of school leaders to influence student performance within low performing schools to increase achievement.

School leadership is a complex role—evolving over the past decades into a massive administrative position filled with numerous job responsibilities and endless tasks. There is a growing consensus on how the attributes of a principal can influence student achievement (Davis et al., 2005). Davis et al.'s (2005) review of research found successful leaders influenced student

achievement by influencing people and the school process. Leithwood et al. (2004) outlined

three sets of core leadership practices based on the influence of people and processes. These

three core practices included developing people, setting directions for the organizations, and

redesigning the organization (Leithwood et al. ,2004). Principals empowered the staff to do their

jobs effectively by providing models of practice and support to improve the quality of their work

(Davis et al., 2005). Bendixen et al. (2017) argued much was understood about the process side

of change, however, leaders tended to neglect the personal side of change. Supporting followers

and learning with followers were among the competencies describing how leaders should be

engage with employees throughout the change process. Bendixen et al. (2017) explained

successful change leaders made themselves available to listen to employee concerns and remove

professional barriers by providing employees the dedicated time to complete tasks. Leaders

should ask questions for clarity, gather feedback, and continually make adjustments to increase

productivity toward change (Bendixen et al., 2017). Fullan (2016) noted the most effective

principals were lead learners who participated in learning alongside teachers to move the school

forward. At the heart of improving school capacity, principals must focus on developing the

teachers' knowledge by establishing a professional community (Fullan, 2002). School leaders are

change agents improving school culture through the development of professional learning

communities (PLC) (Lunenburg, 2010). In the following studies by the Center on Organization

and Restructuring of Schools in 1995, the National Commission on Teaching and America's

Future in 2010, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform in 2005, the Wallace Foundation in

2010, and the American Educational Research Association in 2005, researchers were able to

confirm professional learning communities (PLCs) had a positive effect on student and adult

learning (Dufour & Mattos, 2013). A review of these studies by Dufour and Mattos (2013)

revealed the literature supports the notion of student learning increasing when teachers actively participate in PLCs. Dufour and Mattos (2013) claimed principals must focus on five key steps (Table 4) to cultivate the school culture necessary for PLCs to flourish.

Table 4

Five Steps to Success on the PLC Journey (Dufour & Mattos, 2013)

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1. Embrace the premise that the fundamental purpose of the school is to ensure that all students learn at high levels and enlist the staff in examining every existing practice, program, and procedure to ensure it aligns with that purpose.
2. Organize staff into meaningful collaborative teams that take collective responsibility for student learning and work interdependently to achieve shared goals for which members hold themselves mutually accountable.
3. Call on teams to establish a guaranteed and viable curriculum for each unit that clarifies the essential learning for all students, agree on pacing guidelines and develop and administer common formative assessments to monitor each student's learning at the end of each unit.
4. Use the evidence of student learning to identify:
    a. Students who need additional time and support to become proficient.
    b. Students who need enrichment and extension of their learning because they're already highly proficient.
    c. Teachers who help students achieve at high levels so team members can examine those teachers' practices.
    d. Teachers who struggle to help students become proficient so team members can assist in addressing the problem.
    e. Skills or concepts that none of the teachers were able to help students achieve at the intended level so the team can expand its learning beyond its members to become more effective in teaching those skills or concepts. The team can seek help from members of other teams in the building with expertise in that area, specialists from the central office, other teachers of the same content in the district, or networks of teachers throughout the United States that they interact with online.
5. Create a coordinated intervention plan that ensures that students who struggle receive additional time and support for learning in a way that is timely, directive, diagnostic, precise, and most important, systematic.

Principals need to set a school-wide focus for the PLC ensuring staff members are placed in collaborative teams. Within the PLC, teachers will review the curriculum to understand content and assessment needs or barriers. Members of the PLC will establish how to collect evidence of student learning for determining whether students need enrichment or reteaching. Finally, the PLC creates an intervention plan to address the learning of students who continue to struggle with mastering the content. A PLC involves shared leadership of empowering teachers to determine sequencing, instructional strategies, and assessment methods for instructing students (Dufour & Mattos, 2013). Through the establishment of PLCs, effective principals can eliminate teacher isolation and create collective responsibility for student achievement (Dufour & Mattos, 2013). Fostering a collective responsibility among staff members allows school leaders to set the direction for the organization.

A second core leadership practice is setting the direction for the organization. This involves the development of shared goals, monitoring of organizational performance, and promoting communication (Leithwood et al., 2004). As principals lead school change, they must define the goals of the organization to pinpoint the desired performance of staff and students. Principals must build a culture of collaboration among the teachers and communicate with them regularly to maintain a focus on reaching goal targets.

Bendixen et al. (2017) contended there are three competencies of change related to critically leading successful change: communication, collaboration, and commitment. Successful leaders placed a focus on communicating the "why" and "what" behind change; they were able to connect the change to the values of an organization to achieve buy-in for successfully yielding change outcomes (Bendixen et al., 2017). These types of leaders displayed enthusiasm, included

employees in the decision-making process, described their employees as having "can-do" attitudes, and often became role models for their employees (Bendixen et al., 2017). Leaders go first and set the example through their daily actions (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Bendixen et al. (2017) further explained successful change leaders build teams and encourage employees to take risks and tackle challenges.

School leaders should focus on the empowerment of all stakeholders in the decision-making process to include the creation of the school vision (Lunenburg, 2010). In an examination of 11 businesses with 15 years of sustainability, the effective leader was identified as being a catalyst committed to a vision and high-performance standards (Fullan, 2002). Much like a business leader, principals must be futuristic visionaries with the ability to transform schools through people and teams (Fullan, 2002). Principals were able to begin transforming schools by first redesigning the organization. As described by Leithwood et al. (2004) in their third core leadership practice, redesigning an organization requires modifying structures, building collaboration, and creating an improved school culture. Bendixen et al. (2017) explained initiating, strategizing, and executing as those actions aiding leaders in navigating organizational change from beginning to end. Successful leaders of change review data to develop a vision and the outcomes of an intended goal (Bendixen et al., 2017). These leaders then create an action plan to include timelines, tasks, and structures ensuring steps are completed to reach the goal (Bendixen et al., 2017). Fullan (2002) contended principals need to transform the learning culture of schools and the teaching profession. He goes on to say motivating teachers requires mobilizing their working conditions, building their capacities, and improving their morale (Fullan, 2002). Bendixen et al. (2017) added successful change leaders warrant the right people are in the right positions, understand their responsibilities, and realize their

performance is monitored using the appropriate metrics. Much organizational change is superficial and structural, thus transforming the culture is critical for changing how staff members in the organization work together to accomplish goals leading to deep, long-lasting change (Fullan, 2002). One factor Fullan (2002) noted as contributing to successful long-term change is relationships. When relationships improve among people within schools, the schools get better (Fullan, 2002). Building relationships is one of the most difficult skills for educational leaders. Principals must focus on relationships not just for increasing achievement scores, but rather to lay the foundation for continued change in the coming years (Fullan, 2002).

Organizational change is instrumental for stimulating organizational evolution and improving growth within the organization (Mason, 2004). Early research identified the principal as being the central agent for promoting change; ironically the principalship has become overloaded with so many responsibilities that widespread change is unattainable (Fullan, 2016). More recently in a 2010 study of 100 successful elementary schools in Chicago, researchers concluded principals were the key explanation for driving school performance (Fullan, 2016). When changes occur in schools, it is often due to organizational needs. An assessment of these needs will determine the level of change needing to occur. Change may begin with the first order. First order change is often seen as incremental change and is often manifested in schools through pilot projects and school improvement programs provided through grant funding (Tomal et al., 2013). Following first-order change, second-order change requires the norms and values within the school to change. At this level of change, stakeholders become invested in making improvements toward long term change by sharing responsibilities and building relationships with students, parents, and the community. Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) defined first order change as specific interventions, whereas second order change affects improved culture. Fullan

and Stiegelbauer (1991) moved the focus of educational research to the nature of change. Reviewing the progression of education over the last thirty years, most school reforms were based on the implementation of specific changes or first-order change. Joyce and Calhoun (1991) noted in their review of Fullan's work that research on the role of the principal indicated school leaders lacked the ability to establish conditions for schoolwide change.

In 2012, a causal comparative study was conducted to determine the difference in the beliefs of principals using change implementation strategies of high performing versus low performing schools (Colvin, 2012). The five-point Likert scale survey was completed by principals of leading Blue Ribbon, distinguished, and low performing schools. The Distinguished and Blue-Ribbon schools were considered high performing. The survey measured the beliefs of principals regarding the order of change for closing student achievement gaps. The independent variable was the academic performance of schools. The dependent variable was the principals' belief about what changes needed to be made to close achievement gaps. Responses closer to 5.0 indicated first-order change beliefs while scores closer to 1.0 indicated second-order change beliefs. Results from the one-way ANOVA denoted a statistically significant difference between group means (Colvin, 2012). The results of the one-way ANOVA supported the hypothesis there is a difference between high performing versus low performing principals' beliefs relative to changes required to close the achievement gap (Colvin, 2012).

Bendixen et al. (2017) asked two different groups of executives how they successfully or unsuccessfully navigated change in the past 12 to 18 months. The participants shared advice on important factors of success to include what to do more of, less of, and what to completely avoid (Bendixen et al., 2017). Participants noted the reasons for unsuccessful change as efficiency, improving growth, and having the right talent (Bendixen et al., 2017). The root cause for all the

participants needing to change their organization was the difficulty to move from the existing operating state to the new operating state (Bendixen et al., 2017). Findings from the study revealed change management requires leaders to focus on both the process and people.

Effective school leaders are invaluable. They realize there is a need for improvement. School improvement is not an easy feat and principals must be equipped with skills necessary for leading change. Successful principals take the time to build relationships with their staff members with such relationship building yielding long-term change and school-wide commitment. Leaders are able to begin empowering employees once relationships are developed. Principals can build teacher capacity through the development of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). In PLCs teachers and leaders collaborate about how to improve teaching methods and student learning. Principals are able to establish collective responsibility through collaboration and shared organizational goals. As school teachers and leaders work to achieve the common goal, principals have an essential role in navigating the complexity of school change. Their willingness to take risks and level of engagement leads the school to achieve positive results.

Teacher Perception

Today's role of the principal is a stark difference to the mid-1900s (Alvoid & Black, 2014). The role of the principal has evolved from one of a building manager to becoming a leader who can do it all: inspire, coach, and build teams (Alvoid & Black, 2014). These leaders are tasked with creating an ideal work environment for teachers and a positive learning atmosphere for students. Muhammad and Cruz (2019) noted teachers were twice as likely to leave the profession when rating their school leaders as ineffective. Bambrick-Santoyo (2018) revealed staff culture "makes all the difference in the world" with regards to student achievement

(p. 264). An environment of sustained student growth is a result of leaders creating a positive staff culture (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2018). As the research on school leadership expands, the same categories emerge. From research conducted by the Universities of Minnesota and Toronto (Plecki et al., 2009) and a meta-analysis conducted by Marzano et al. (2005), the findings suggest four categories with one being the development of people. Within this category, school leaders need to provide individualized support and model-values and practices (Marzano et al., 2018). Hattie (2015) synthesized the findings by combining the results of more than 65,000 studies revealing teacher efficacy as the "second-highest-ranking variable of 195, relative to its positive impact on student learning."

Support

Teachers must feel supported by administration. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) surveyed teachers about their decisions to remain in a school or leave it. The results of the study showed administrative leadership and support as a critical element (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Branch et al. (2013) solidified this notion in adding highly effective principals possess the ability to retain effective teachers. Without feeling their voice is heard, teachers will lack buy-in and only fulfill outlined job requirements. Good leadership improves teacher motivation and the work setting which, in turn, can fortify classroom instruction (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Kouzes and Posner (2007) noted leadership as a relationship among those who lead and those who follow. Leaders need to communicate the "why" and develop trusting relationships among the staff to influence change in schools (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). Kanter (1983), a former professor at Harvard Business School, investigated human resource practices in relation to organizational productivity to determine what hindered organizational performance and concluded organizational change requires leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

In a 2012 interview conducted by Lucas Held, the Wallace Foundation's communication director, Linda Darling Hammond explained in her interview with the Wallace Foundation (2013) beyond focusing on data and test scores, principals need to develop relational elements to build trust and respect among the faculty. Leaders should understand how to connect people to a purpose, thus ensuring the right people with the right attitude are focused on guiding changes (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). Mineo (2014) provided an analogy of trust as the glue binding leaders to their followers and building the capacity leading to organizational success. Leaders should not expect change to become a reality without first having identified the needed skills of those intended to carry out change initiatives. Givens (2008) found trust had a significant correlation to worker self-efficacy and said trust could be a determinant of organizational success or failure. Leaders can establish trust through two dimensions, character and competence (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). Kouzes and Posner (2007) cautioned leaders against raising the bar too high as workers will fail and, if they fail often, will quit. Instead, the bar should be raised incrementally to increase the level each time (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). By doing this, workers achieve success and begin to build self-confidence. Through small successes leaders encourage workers to stretch themselves and commit to the reason for change.

Part of the Decision-Making Process

"We" is a magic word; it fosters collaboration and builds trust. Kouzes and Ponzer (2007) discovered while interviewing participants about their personal best leadership experience, they were three times more likely to use the word "we" to describe the experience as opposed to the word "I." Effective principals attack teacher isolation and work to build relationships with a focus on improving student achievement through continual instructional collaboration (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Principals are then able to take advantage of the culture of collaboration by

creating opportunities for teachers to learn from one another (Mendels, 2012). No single

individual has the "knowledge, skills, and talent to lead a district, improve a school, or meet all

the needs of every child in his or her classroom" (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 51). Muhammad and

Cruz (2019) agreed with this notion, advocating for a guiding coalition which is comprised of

administrators and teachers who work to influence change through the implementation of

initiatives. These initiatives include focusing on increasing student learning, aligning research-

based strategies to increase student learning, and providing support to staff who are struggling

with implementing change initiatives (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). Workers perform better when

they are able to take charge of change (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Leaders should include a

representative group of members for discussing the school's values, listening for themes about

critical issues, and building consensus to reach a resolution when problem solving (Kouzes &

Posner, 2007). Kouzes and Posner (2007) explained leadership as a method for allowing people

to contribute to a common goal. Muhammad and Cruz (2019) highlighted the most dominant

factor for teachers' ratings of principal effectiveness as providing the opportunity for teachers to

participate in the decision-making process. A team of researchers at the University of

Washington conducted a study revealing effective principals encourage teachers to work together

on a variety of activities to include aligning curriculum to instructional practices, developing

assessments, and conducting peer observations (Plecki et al., 2009). A group of researchers from

the University of Minnesota and the University of Toronto conducted a study, finding schools

with higher scores on math tests tended to have shared leadership among the teaching staff

(Seashore Louis et al., 2010). Principals need to seek ways to include teacher perceptions and

expertise as the basis for school improvement planning.

Dedication to Improvement

The School Leaders Network (2014) found principals account for 25% of "a school's total influence on improving student academic performance." A widely held belief among educators is students do not care how much you know until they know how much you care. The same is true for leaders. Teachers need to know a leader cares about students and is committed to helping improve student learning. The number one priority for principals is to zero in on high priority activities to aid all students in attaining academic success (Gray et al., 2007). Hopkins (2012) explained principals need to spend time on the important things yielding long-term dividends. Spending time daily to focus on student success shows a principal's dedication to ensuring all students receive a quality education. Principals garner support from stakeholders by showing their job commitment. Effective principals work to build relationships with all students throughout the building. The motivation of highly rated principals is their commitment to the vision and a belief all students having the ability to perform at high levels (Mendels, 2012). Teachers should be able to easily recognize a school leader's dedication to improve student achievement when the leader is committed to the job. Attaining a level of commitment among the leader and staff requires a dramatic culture shift toward academics and collective efficacy (The Center on School Turnaround, 2017). Principals develop collaboration among members of the community by inviting them into the school to discuss and reflect on student learning (The Center on School Turnaround, 2017) and sharing the high standards for learning based on the established school-wide vision of commitment to student success (Wallace Foundation, 2013).

Empirical Study on the Principal and Teacher Perception/Support

In a study about how school leadership related to teacher job satisfaction, principals distributed the Leadership Practice Inventory (LPI) to their teachers in accredited schools in the

southeast region of the Association of Christian Schools International (Barlow, 2015). The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between teachers' perceptions and principals' leadership practices (Barlow, 2015). The LPI consisted of 30 open ended items ranked on a 10-point Likert scale related to Kouze's and Posner's leadership practices (Barlow, 2015). The LPI consisted of Approximately 270 surveys were collected using Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) to measure teacher perception and job satisfaction (Barlow, 2015). The JSS contained 36 items ranked on a 6-point Likert scale; the survey was divided into nine subscales: pay, promotion, supervision, benefits, contingent rewards, operating procedures, co-workers, nature of work, and communication (Barlow, 2015). The researchers posed six research questions based on teacher perception and the five leadership practices: Model the Way, Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart. The surveys were entered into SPSS to determine descriptive statistics. Outliers were removed to reach score means and standard deviations to reveal variables of interest. Researchers' analysis of the data showed large to moderate effect sizes between teacher perception and job satisfaction (Table 5).

Table 5

Results from the Leadership Practice Inventory and Job Satisfaction Survey (Barlow, 2015)

Null Hypothesis	Effect Size
H01: There is no significant correlation between teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership practice (as measured by the LPI (Leadership Practice Inventory) Observer) and teachers' reported job satisfaction levels (as measured by the JSS (Job Satisfaction Survey)).	*r=.63* Large effect size signifying a strong relationship between teacher perception and principal leadership practices. Null hypothesis was rejected p>.05
H02: There is no significant correlation between teachers' perceptions of principals' model the way leadership practice (as measured by the LPI Observer) and teachers' reported job satisfaction levels (as measured by the JSS) when inspire a shared vision,	*r=.61* Large effect size signifying a strong, positive relationship between teacher perception and the principal's leadership practice of Model the Way.

challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart are controlled.	Null hypothesis was not rejected p>.05
H03: There is no significant correlation between teachers' perceptions of principals' Inspire a shared vision leadership practice (as measured by the LPI Observer) and teachers' reported job satisfaction levels (as measured by the JSS) when model the way, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart are controlled.	$r=.54$ Large effect size signifying a moderate, positive relationship between teacher perception and the principal's leadership practice of Shared Vision. Null hypothesis was not rejected p>.05
H04: There is no significant correlation between teachers' perceptions of principals' challenge the process leadership practice (as measured by the LPI Observer) and teachers' reported job satisfaction levels (as measured by the JSS) when model the way, inspire a shared vision, enable others to act, and encourage the heart are controlled.	$r=.57$ Large effect size signifying a moderate, positive relationship between teacher perception and the principal's leadership practice of Challenge the Process. Null hypothesis was not rejected p>.05
H05: There is no significant correlation between teachers' perceptions of principals' enable others to act leadership practice (as measured by the LPI Observer) and teachers' reported job satisfaction levels (as measured by the JSS) when model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, and encourage the heart are controlled	$r=.62$ Large effect size signifying a moderate, positive relationship between teacher perception and the principal's leadership practice of Enable Others to Act. Null hypothesis was rejected p>.05
H06: There is no significant correlation between teachers' perceptions of principals encourage the heart leadership practice (as measured by the LPI Observer) and teachers' reported job satisfaction levels (as measured by the JSS) when model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, and enable others to act are controlled.	$r=.59$ Large effect size signifying a moderate, positive relationship between teacher perception and the principal's leadership practice of Encourage the Heart. Null hypothesis was not rejected p>.05

Combined, the five practices accounted for 40.5% of teacher satisfaction (Barlow, 2015).

Researchers concluded of all the five leadership practices, Enable Others to Act was a statistically significant predictor of teacher job satisfaction (Barlow, 2015). The four leadership practices of model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, and encourage the heart, when independently analyzed in the multiple linear regression did not significantly predict teacher job satisfaction (Barlow, 2015).

Culture

School culture is a set of collective values, norms, and rituals created by workers in a school (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). Some suggest culture comes before instruction. Bambrick-Santoyo (2018) revealed educators argued the game plan should be to delay instruction until the culture is right. Choosing how to navigate a change in school culture is a complex decision for school leaders. Fullan (2001) explained in leading a culture of change the leaders are not placing changed individuals into unchanged environments. On the contrary, leaders are changing the environment and creating new settings ideal for learning (Fullan, 2001). MacNeil et al. (2009) explained organizational and educational theorists agree the principal's impact on student achievement, while indirect, is mediated through the culture of the school. Educators have debated whether culture or student achievement should be the initial focus for leaders. Bambrick-Santoyo (2018) pointed out the arguments are equally flawed because both culture and student achievement are vitally important and must happen simultaneously. This becomes a challenging task in low performing Title I schools. Often these schools experience several daily discipline issues lessening the number of instructional minutes a teacher is able to teach. While the goal of the school leader is to encourage teachers to plan using curriculum standards and deliver lessons, students are unable to learn in a classroom with unruly peers. By the same token, if a school leader chooses to sacrifice instruction to have the teachers explain and practice school rules, instructional minutes are not being used to teach content standards. School leaders will need to devise a plan to not only address order, but also outline how to ensure students are learning to establish an orderly school culture where students are achieving.

School Culture

Transforming a failing school into a high performing school is difficult for school leaders. Principals are overwhelmed with challenges plaguing schools in need of improvement. One of those challenges is observing the school culture and initiating change to improve the culture. Principals in low performing schools seek methods to establish a culture where teachers and students are ready to develop and willing to improve. Often failing schools are referred to as 'turnaround schools' because the current student performance needs to be "turned around" to improve student achievement. For schools where students are failing, principals become change agents seeking to turnaround the school's current structure and create an improved organizational structure to build a positive school culture. Principals must first understand the school's current culture before implementing changes. Fullan (2016) revealed it is relatively easy for principals to adopt structural changes; however, the implementation of cultural changes such as relationships, capacity, and motivation are more difficult to accomplish. To determine whether a school needs a culture change, school leaders will need to assess the current status of the organization. The readiness to change the current cultural status requires motivation and self-awareness combined (Bradt et al., 2016). School leaders must assess the staff's readiness to accept and adapt to change once it is determined the school requires change (Bradt et al., 2016). With a completed assessment, Bradt et al. (2016) suggested conducting a three-part approach: 1) determine specific values and behaviors, 2) identify areas of focus, and 3) provide feedback and recognition. School leaders should take a collaborative approach to change. Public Impact (2008), a national education and policy management consulting firm, noted principals of low performing schools cannot influence change alone and must rely on others. Leaders of turnaround schools need to utilize a cluster of competencies to include affecting the perceptions and actions of others,

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promoting a team approach, and developing the capacity of staff members to develop a positive school culture (Public Impact, 2008). Turnaround leaders must possess the abilities to set clear expectations and hold one another accountable. These leaders should anticipate situations where expectations are not met, handling them in advance when they can (Public Impact, 2008). Turnaround leaders must induce the behaviors of the staff members by tapping into their needs and identifying their motives (Public Impact, 2008). Leaders will need to constantly review their expectations to establish a positive culture for student learning. Culture is not formed, rather it is established by repeated practice building habits of excellence (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2018). School leaders must focus on student culture by setting high expectations modeled by faculty members and establishing a vision. Bambrick-Santoyo (2018) noted vision becomes a reality when leaders build a system for it. Student culture will only be successful as one's maintenance of it; without regular maintenance the leader will only experience a honeymoon period followed by discipline issues and teacher noncompliance (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2018). School improvement does not happen overnight, and principals must possess the leadership qualities necessary to maintain school-improvement and accomplish meaningful change (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Testimony from successful principals suggests the focus on establishing a positive school culture is fundamental for ensuring student achievement (Busch & Fernandez, 2019). Busch and Fernandez (2019) stated the sustainability of change principals must first work on changing the culture of the school, not the structures by which the school functions and operates.

Historically, qualitative studies are used to determine how school culture impacts student achievement by uncovering the unseen and subtle elements (Busch & Fernandez, 2019). With an increased emphasis on accountability and the upturn in the number of failing schools, there has been a renewed focus on using diagnostic data to guide school improvement (Busch &

Fernandez, 2019). In a quantitative study conducted by Busch and Fernandez (2019), the experiences of a middle school principal were compared to student achievement scores and results from an organizational health assessment. Diagnostic data were collected using the organizational health survey to determine teacher and student perceptions. This data was quantified into measures related to the effectiveness of the school. Busch and Fernandez (2019) found the principal strongly influences school culture. Through principals' interactions with school culture, they are able to shape beliefs, values, and attitudes required for establishing a positive learning environment for impacting student performance (Busch & Fernandez, 2019).

In a study on the effects of school culture, researchers sought to investigate the school climates of three types of schools- Exemplary, Recognized, and Acceptable- as measured by the Texas Accountability Rating System. The schools were categorized based on the percentage of students passing the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). Exemplary schools had at least 90% of students pass the TAAS (MacNeil et al., 2009). Recognized schools had at 80-89% of students pass the TAAS (MacNeil et al., 2009). Acceptable schools had at least 50-79% of students pass the TAAS (MacNeil et al., 2009). The school climates within these schools were measured using the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI), which measures 10 dimensions of school climate. These 10 dimensions include optimal power, equalization, resource utilization, cohesiveness, morale, innovativeness, autonomy, adaption, and problem-solving adequacy (MacNeil et al., 2009). The setting of the study took place in a suburban school district and the sample was comprised on 29 elementary, middle, and high schools (MacNeil et al., 2009). Approximately 1,727 teachers took the OHI survey which consisted of 80 items with each being rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics were used to report the mean of each rating scale. Results of the MANOVA indicated significant differences ($F = 3.22$, $df = 2, 34$, $p < 0.001$)

among exemplary, recognized, and acceptable schools (MacNeil et al., 2009). Subsequent univariate ANOVAs and post hoc comparisons found $p < 0.05$ indicating Exemplary schools outperformed Acceptable schools on student achievement by demonstrating higher score ratings for healthier school climates (MacNeil et al., 2009). Further post hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD indicated no statistical significance between exemplary and recognized schools nor recognized and acceptable schools (MacNeil et al., 2009). Researchers suggest when the principal "supports clear goals for the school that are accepted and supported by the staff, then organizational health scores will be higher, reflecting his or her leadership influence on climate" (MacNeil et al., 2009). Researchers recommend further studies on the comparisons between school climate and student achievement to determine how principals can focus on improving student achievement (MacNeil et al., 2009).

Student Culture

Dysfunctional school cultures have distinctive characteristics, particularly in low performing schools. Common cultures within low performing schools are characterized as one of having low expectations where students and teachers seem defeated and make excuses (Duke et al., 2007). In a culture of low expectations, rules are not consistent nor are they enforced. Principals leading dysfunctional cultures spend a great deal of time addressing discipline issues and are not able to devote much time focusing on daily instruction.

Students seek to have their needs met in the classroom much like they expect their needs to be met at home. Abraham Maslow (1943) explained this at the base of the hierarchy of needs. At the first level, people seek to have safety and security needs met. School leaders need to place a focus on establishing order and clear expectations to address students' needs for safety. (Marzano et al., 2005). Duke et al. (2007) revealed educators agree a relationship exists between

student performance and a structured learning environment. Duke et al. (2007) went on to say students are unlikely to focus on learning if they do not feel the school is safe. Duke et al. (2007) reported the experiences of principals who felt the school culture impeded their improvement efforts. When interviewing principals, Duke et al. (2007) discovered four elementary and six middle school principals perceived discipline problems as obstacles for impeding their turnaround efforts. One middle school principal reported his school had 10,000 referrals for the year among 925 students and breaks down to almost 30 referrals per day (Duke et al., 2007).

The time principals and teachers spend on discipline lessens the amount of time available for instruction. This is counterintuitive to the goal of leaders seeking to develop a safe learning environment. Two types of behavior management systems need to be in place to build a safe and welcoming learning environment: school-wide and classroom level discipline plans. School-wide discipline plans are usually developed by the principal and leadership team members. Classroom level discipline plans are created by individual classroom teachers. While principals establish school-wide behavior expectations, teachers institute classroom expectations in how they manage students. Kafele (2015) recalled during his principalship the challenges he experienced regarding behavior and improving student achievement. He remembered dealing with overwhelming issues requiring immediate and time-consuming attention (Kafele, 2015). Responsibilities were prioritized to ensure his ability to maximize his time focusing on instructional goals (Kafele, 2015). Research revealed student behavior can vary from class to class depending on the skill level of teachers implementing effective classroom management techniques. In a survey of Pre-Kindergarten to 12th grade teachers, the respondents identified classroom management as their greatest need (Losen, 2011). Researchers found a strong correlation between effective classroom management and improved student learning outcomes

(Losen, 2011). When teachers successfully implement classroom management techniques, incidences of misbehavior decrease and student productivity increases (Losen, 2011). Losen (2011) suggested the school environment improves through the implementation of a zero-tolerance discipline policy. One method for establishing a school-wide zero-tolerance discipline plan is by developing a systemic behavior plan. The Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program is a data-driven approach to improving the learning environment within schools (Losen, 2011). Principals develop PBIS plans to address underlying issues in the school by emphasizing appropriate student behaviors to avoid punitive measures for misbehaviors (Losen, 2011). PBIS provides a system of supports designed to focus on collective student behaviors, defined school structures, and systemic routines for educators (Losen, 2011). Principals should set school-wide goals of reducing the number of office referrals when implementing PBIS (Losen, 2011).

Turnaround Leadership

In the United States there are school principals who have successfully implemented changes to close academic achievement gaps. Historically, school leadership has been defined as a hierarchical position. Under this assumption the belief is those higher in position possess the most power (Lunenburg, 2010). Most scholars believe this is an ineffective approach to leadership (Lunenburg, 2010). While teachers impact only a classroom full of students, principals impact all students in the school (Branch et al., 2013). Increasing principal quality is vital for improving teachers and students learning. Principals must simultaneously invest in understanding teaching methods, how students learn, as well as how to become an effective leader (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019).

Role of the Turnaround Leader

A turnaround school is a school undergoing a dramatic school change in its overall performance (Public Impact, 2012). School turnaround does not happen without a bold leader who set higher goals and establish clear standards for performance (Public Impact, 2012). Muhammad and Cruz (2019) discussed leaders as those who create positive change to enhance the performance and morale of workers. Based on data drawn from the 2014 U.S. Department of Education report, Muhammad and Cruz (2019) concluded effective leadership is an essential need for influencing positive school change. The first step to influencing positive change is by starting with a change in the school culture (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019).

Krasnoff (2015) noted effective principals are most impactful in high poverty schools. Through meta-analyses, researchers found principal leadership correlates with student achievement and there were strong links between principal behaviors and student performance (National Association of Elementary Principals, 2013). Mendels (2012) stated there are discussions at the national and state levels about educator effectiveness and school turnaround with an emphasis on school leadership. Turnaround leaders cannot achieve an increase in school performance because practices have not worked and must be changed to improve student learning (Public Impact, 2008). Failing schools experience shock with new leaders. Shock occurs when significant changes need to be made immediately to yield results when the organizational culture is not accepting of change (Bradt et al., 2016). Bradt et al. (2016) added it is critical for leaders to understand how the school arrived in its current status. This understanding will provide invaluable insight for the drivers of change. Principals bring new thoughts, concepts, and ideas into the school. Improvements in education rest on the school principals' ability to introduce improved methods and implement new requirements (Kantor, 2015). Principals

communicate their ideas in the form of a school vision. School leaders must use their creativity when motivating employers to follow the vision or adopt new programs. Kafele (2015) contended effective leaders create a vision of excellence for the entire school. Kafele (2015) went on to say principals of high poverty schools must be intentional about their vision to meet the demands of student success. Leaders must create a vision void of the organization's current challenges, never assuming people working within the organization have the knowledge and skills to implement change (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). Leaders cannot command commitment, but they can inspire it through their vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Kouzes and Posner (2007) explained it is difficult for followers to believe in the message if the messenger does not know what he or she believes. In other words, workers cannot follow a vision if the leaders do not clearly communicate the vision.

Kouzes and Posner (2007) revealed vision as the force for inventing the future and it is not just the leader's vision, but it is a shared vision. While creating a vision is important for the school leaders to establish, it is critical for staff members to first understand the schools' current performance and realize their role in implementing the plan for change (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). Marzano et al. (2018) explained the importance of leaders articulating the shared vision to staff in order for them to be a part of the concerted effort to improve the success of students. Leaders must assist staff members with understanding why change is necessary (Marzano et al., 2005). Without an understanding of what is driving change, the faculty and staff will struggle to make adjustments (Tomal et al., 2013). Principals of failing schools must be skilled in navigating change to achieve sustained and successful change needed for school improvement (Tomal et al., 2013). Marzano et al. (2018) agreed effective leaders are successful when workers are able to transition the vision into action and implementation.

Researchers have delved into the notion of effective school leadership driving high student achievement. The Wallace Foundation has completed extensive research on the key responsibilities of school leaders and defined pivotal practices of effective leaders. Of these practices, shaping a vision and creating a hospitable climate played significant roles as key components to closing the achievement gap among students who are more or less advantaged (Wallace Foundation, 2018). From the report by the Wallace Foundation (2018), researchers described effective principals as leaders who are able to cultivate a schoolwide vision of academic success with goals focusing on student progress. For principals to share the vision, they must constantly communicate with stakeholders to ensure proper implementation of the schoolwide plan. A study of principals of Title I schools revealed communication skills are essential for establishing relationships, developing trust, and for leading teachers to improve the quality of their daily instruction (Waters et al., 2003). Another determinant of effective instruction is the environment in which students learn. Principals who established a healthy learning environment of safety and orderliness create a supportive school, where teachers are responsive to students, thus building a positive school climate focused on good instruction (Wallace Foundation, 2018).

In a study conducted by the Wallace Foundation, researchers analyzed a subset of six studies to quantify how much principals contribute to student achievement (Grissom et al., 2021). The researchers analyzed data for more than 22,000 principals in four states and two urban school districts (Grissom et al., 2021). Grissom et al. (2021) found a "1 standard deviation increase in principal effectiveness increases the typical student's achievement by 0.13 standard deviations in math and 0.09 standard deviations in reading (p. xiii). Grissom et al. (2021) translate these results using the following scenario,

the impact of replacing a below-average elementary school principal (i.e., one at

the 25th percentile of effectiveness) with an above-average principal (i.e., at the

75th percentile) would result in an additional 2.9 months of math learning and 2.7

months of reading learning each year for students in that school (p. xiii).

Researchers concluded that the principals' contribution to student achievement was

nearly as large as the impact of teachers in similar studies (Grissom et al., 2021).

Instructional Leadership

Today's role of the principal has evolved into a position with a focus on student

achievement and accountability. Historically, principals were school managers, ensuring daily

functions of the school ran smoothly. Rousmaniere (2007) pointed out that by the 1950s,

principals were middle managers involved in minimal school improvement efforts. However, in

the past two decades, the role of school leaders has shifted into a higher focus on instructional

practices and student achievement (Wallace Foundation, 2018). With an increase on instructional

focus, principals should foster a learning environment that is conducive to student learning,

where teachers share in the responsibility of providing effective instruction (Lerum, 2016).

Additionally, principals provide a strategic vision for the school and attain the necessary

resources needed to support the goals for student learning (Lerum, 2016). School leaders play a

crucial role in developing a vision; in order for it to be effective, it must be a vision to which all

stakeholders can commit. Ideally the vision should focus on effective instructional strategies to

yield high student achievement. Research conducted by Leithwood et al. provided details on the

influence of the school principal and student learning, revealing leadership ranked in second

place to teacher impact among all school-related factors contribute to what students learn at

school (National Association of Elementary Principals, 2013). Further research attributed this

influence on an emphasis on strengthening the professional community, teachers' engagement in professional community, and the use of instructional practices associated with student achievement (National Association of Elementary Principals, 2013). Linda Darling-Hammond (2011), a leading authority on education policy and the teaching profession, interestingly points out educators do not understand the role of the principal involved building teacher capacity as it relates to the quality of instruction.

Instructional leadership is key for a school principal to be able to impact the overall academic success of a school. Waters et al. (2003) shared having school principals with the knowledge and skill to make the improvements can increase student performance. These researchers reported instructional leadership as one of the definitive characteristics of successful schools (Waters et al., 2003). As instructional leaders, principals cultivate learning environments that allow for teacher collaboration and support teachers in the professional learning process by sharing knowledge and acquiring resources. While instructional leadership is an effective strategy for school principals, it remains a vague notion that many school districts and leaders are not able to precisely implement; ultimately resulting in continually low performing schools with low student achievement rates (Waters et al., 2003).

An integral part of instructional leadership revolves around building a positive school culture. Schlein (2004) defined culture as shared assumptions of an organization used for internal integration and external adaptation. A combination of knowledge and skills will allow principals to build a school and student-centered culture. Dutta and Sahney (2016) noted the principal impact on the school environment by creating a positive school culture. With a focus on learner-centered and knowledge-centered environments, school leaders are able to greatly influence student achievement (Dutta & Sahney, 2016).

Leaders set the focus in the school as the instructional leader. Kafele (2015) explained student achievement as the number one priority for school leaders. Former principal, Dewey Hensley, who served as Assistant Commissioner for the Kentucky Department of Education, recalled reading Pierce (1935), when the role of the school leader or principal in the 19th century was used interchangeably as another word for teacher (Wallace Foundation, 2018). Principals are lead teachers for the faculty and staff. Principals guide teachers to understand content standards as instructional leaders (Mendels, 2012). Principals have many roles, one of which is the ability to serve as an instructional leader. As instructional leaders, principals are tasked with understanding the content students are learning. Gene Bottoms, founding director of High Schools That Work, reasoned school leaders need to understand the big ideas of the core curriculum (2003). Bottoms' (2003) list of things principals needed to know about curriculum and instruction included state and national standards, course leveling, an understanding of literacy, and grading and assessment practices. Plecki et al. (2009) found effective principals are connected directly with the teachers and their classroom, thus, they are intimately familiar with the core curriculum of the school. To directly improve teaching and learning, effective principals should spend 75% of their time focused on instruction (Finnigan & Daly, 2014). The Minnesota Toronto study (Plecki et al., 2009) revealed characteristics of strong and weak instructional leaders with strong leaders conducting spontaneous, unannounced visits and weak leaders scheduling all observations ahead of time with little to no feedback provided (Seashore Louis et al., 2010). Bambrick-Santoyo's (2018) study of 65 principals in Miami's public schools found principals spent less than 6% of their time on daily instruction. Hopkins (2012) explained principals needed to block an hour each day to conduct classroom walkthroughs because it is important for teachers and students to see the principal in the classrooms as much as possible.

Bambrick-Santoyo (2018) noted exceptional leaders are intentional about the purpose of observations. Such leaders place less emphasis on scoring by providing specific feedback and scheduling follow-up meetings with teachers to determine the implementation of suggested comments. Bambrick-Santoyo pointed out Laura Garza, principal of Anne Webb Blanton Elementary school, was able to increase student learning in reading and math to 60% and higher by spending her time on the most important things which included observing classrooms daily.

Data Analysis

Although data alone cannot influence change, it can help people to understand the why of change (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). Leaders can use data to influence others to align their behaviors toward the desired change (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). Dufour et al. (2016) pointed out data alone will not necessarily inform teaching practices; thus, it cannot serve as a catalyst for improvement unless the compared data points are put in a context for teachers to understand. Muhammad and Cruz (2019) advocated for leaders to use data to show the alignment from teaching to student learning.

Principals can determine effective methods for improving student learning through their collaboration with teachers. Instructional leaders utilize data analysis as a basis to guide instruction and identify areas where students struggle. Data analysis is used to inform instructional decisions throughout the school. Data-driven instruction is about knowing what students need to learn and determining effective methods to help them in mastering the content (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2018). Leaders need to understand data, use it to inform decisions, and make plans to communicate it to stakeholders regarding their roles in the change process (Public Impact, 2008). Ordóñez-Feliciano (2017) discussed principals in the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) article, asserting school leaders know data analysis is

invaluable when designing good instruction (Ordóñez-Feliciano, 2017) further explained principals implementing instructional changes are likely to see an increase in student achievement when involving teachers in the data analysis process. Additionally, NAESP contended in order for teachers to embrace data-driven instruction, leaders must engage data analysis processes and guide decisions about instruction (National Association of Elementary School Principal, 2011). From his observation of principal Mary Ann Green Stinson at Truesdell Education Campus, Bambrick-Santoyo (2018) explained she completely altered the learning environment and outcomes during thirty-minute weekly data meetings. Bambrick-Santoyo (2018) went on to say these were the "most game-changing thirty-minute conversations" (p. 29) because assessment was no longer the "endpoint of learning, but in reality, it's where learning begins" (p. 30).

Summary

In 2016, 130 schools in Georgia were identified as failing schools (Tagami, 2017). Many of these failing schools had a high population of students living in poverty. Due to the percentage of economically disadvantaged students enrolled, these schools receive Title I funding. Principals leading Title I schools must employ varying strategies to close the achievement gap existing between their students and students not living in poverty. Determining how leadership strategies influence student performance in Title I schools can benefit school administrators. With this knowledge, administrators can learn how to improve failing schools. There is an increasing amount of research being conducted on how principal influence school effectiveness, but less is known with regards to aiding principals in developing capacities to improve school functions and student learning (Davis et al., 2005).

The common denominator of school success can be attributed to strong leadership

(Wallace Foundation, 2013). Principals have a multifaceted role with many daily demands pulling them in numerous directions. Even with endless, tiring duties, principals must ensure they focus on supporting teachers. To build support, principals engage with teachers at a relational level by nurturing their needs and asking them about their personal goals. Doing this creates a bond and trust between teachers and leaders. Once principals have established relationships with teachers, they must include teachers in the decision-making process. As teachers collaborate with each other and the principal, they become committed to school change. Additionally, teachers can offer suggestions on how to implement changes to directly impact student success. For lasting change, teachers will look to the principals to determine his or her dedication to change. When teachers recognize the principal's care and devotion toward the staff and students, the level of trust and commitment is cemented. This creates a culture shift focused on collectivity toward achieving increased student achievement.

The purpose of this study was to understand the roles of identified school principals with regards to improving chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast, Georgia. The study included efforts to determine the experiences of the identified principals, the strategies they use to improve student achievement, and the barriers they face.

III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Methods

After decades of developing education reforms in America, schools continue to work towards improvement and student achievement. The state of Georgia developed plans for improving student performance under the Every Student Succeeds Act and received millions of dollars from the federal Race to the Top grant. While there was early evidence of students making academic progress, 75% of the identified schools failed to meet the necessary gains to increase school-wide student achievement after four years of Race to the Top funding and initiatives (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). Fullan (2016) explained principals are the center of leading change within schools and play a crucial role in school improvement. Tomal et al. (2013) contended effective principals realize the need for school improvement, actively implementing change to impact teaching and student learning.

The purpose of this study is to understand the roles of identified school principals with regards to improving chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast, Georgia. To be removed from the chronically failing schools' list, these principals were able to achieve a yearly 3% increase in their College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCPRI) score. CCRPI is a comprehensive school improvement metric for schools in the State of Georgia, encompassing four main components: Achievement, Progress, Achievement Gap, and Challenge Points, for a combined scale score of 100 points (Georgia Department of Education, 2017).

Data were collected to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the life and career experiences of identified and effective K-5 principals serving in chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast Georgia?

RQ2: What are the strategies employed by identified and effective K-5 principals serving in chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast Georgia?

RQ3: What are the barriers, in any, faced by identified and effective K-5 principals serving in chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast Georgia?

Research Design and Rationale

To adequately answer the research questions in this study, the portraiture research design method was used. Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot, a sociologist and biographer, invented portraiture to document the "culture of schools, the life stories of individuals, and the relationship among families, communities, and schools" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xvi). By using this method, I will be able to show examples of success among identified Title I principals within the local school system. Portraiture is an intentional process searching for what is good, while not denying there could also be imperfections (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Kouzes and Posner (2007) metaphorically call leadership an art, explaining much like other art forms, leadership is a form of personal expression. Credible leaders express themselves in their unique way (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Lightfoot (1983) established connections between principals' personalities and organizational culture. She called these 'life-drawings' because the text resembles a painting with words. By tracing the stories of these principals, I will seek to capture details of their experiences to determine how school leadership influences school-wide student achievement.

As a portraitist researcher, I resisted documenting failure. This is a difficult task as there is negative regard for failing schools in Georgia and rumors of ineffective educators as the cause.

Schools are not meeting the achievement goals specified by national and state-level reforms. However, the expectation of high student achievement remains. Using portraiture may allow me to counterbalance these feelings of negativity by uncovering school administrators who have been able to prevail despite the circumstances and increase student achievement in failing schools. Through a purposeful sampling process, school leaders will be chosen based on their successes regarding improving student academic performance. In this research study, I will work to understand the strategies they use to influence improved student achievement.

Research Setting

This study was conducted in the Glenn County School System. Glenn County schools are in Northeast Georgia. The median income of residents in this county is between $39,000 and $40,000 (United States Census Bureau, 2018). In 2016, the Georgia Department of Education revealed that 40 out of the 57 schools in Glenn County were failing schools (Crunching the numbers, 2017). These failing schools had not met set College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCPRI) scores, making the failure rate for the county 70.2% (Crunching the numbers, 2017). Based on the 2018 list of turnaround schools provided by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2018), only eleven Glenn County schools were labeled as chronically failing. I will select principals for this study based on their school's CCRPI score increases of 3% or higher since the 2016 school year. The selected schools will no longer be labeled as failing according to the 2019 CCRPI scores. Through this selection criteria, schools will be identified; principals leading these schools will be selected to participate in this study. Maxwell (2013) explained that qualitative studies usually have a small number of participants for understanding their actions and how meaning can be shaped from their circumstances.

Through data analysis, I will be able to determine which schools were removed from the

chronically failing schools' list. The schools will have similar demographics. Each school is in a low socioeconomic area where public housing is available. Single-family houses are rented in areas near the school. Many homeowners are elderly and do not have students attending these schools. Most students attending these schools have parents who are renting these homes. The neighborhoods appear dilapidated, with unkempt lawns, broken or missing shutters, broken down cars in the driveways, and grime-covered exteriors. The school buildings were constructed between the 1920s and 1960s, there has been little updating to the structure of the building. However, technology is current with smartboards, desktops, and student laptops.

Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling was used to identify principals who had improved student achievement in Title I schools located in Glenn County. Using purposeful sampling allowed me to select those principals who had experienced success leading a failing school to improved student achievement. Participant selection was based on the following criteria:

1) Must be principals in Title I schools as determined by the percentage of economically disadvantaged students. All identified principals will lead schools where low-income families make up at least 40% of enrollment thus meeting the qualification of a Title I school.

2) Must be principals with a minimum of three consecutive years of experience serving in chronically failing schools. This criterion was used due to the annual calculation of the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) for determining an average increase in a school's score.

3) Must be principals of schools with a student enrollment that ranges between 300 and 600 in grades kindergarten through fifth grade.

4) Must have shown a three-year increase in their school's CCRPI score of 3% of more.

This process of participant selection included analyzing state CCPRI date to determine which schools were labeled as failing as of 2016. Between 2016 and 2019, the school district restructured several schools due to low enrollment, caused district administrators to work on a rightsizing plan. During the years of district rightsizing, five elementary schools and one middle school were closed. Students from these schools were rezoned to neighboring schools within the district. In addition, one kindergarten through eighth-grade school was split, and is now functioning separately as one kindergarten through third school and one fourth through eighth-grade school. Two new K-8 schools were built as well. During the rightsizing process, the district superintendent reassigned several principals, placing them in the school she selected. Previous principals of identified chronically failing schools were reassigned to district jobs and others retired. A few principals throughout the district were placed in the chronically failing schools. In my review of CCRPI data, I found six schools, all elementary level, to have increased CCPRI score averages from 2016 to 2019. Principals of these schools will be selected to participate in the study.

All the selected participants served at least three consecutive years as principal of their current school. Each principal had a Tier II Educational Leadership certification. This certification was attained by one enrolling in an approved program of educational leadership, meeting the program requirements, and applying for certification through the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GAPSC).

Interviews

Portraitists creates portraits of the participants' experiences shaped from dialogue exchanged between the portraitist and subject (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The conversations between portraitist and subjects need to be meaningful to yield an authentic piece (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Seidman's (2013) three-interview series is a technique used to explore the meaning of people's experiences in their lives. The three-interview series were used in this research study to gather data on the experiences of successful Title I principals. Identified principals of Title I schools in Glenn County, located in Augusta, Georgia, participated in three-interview sessions. Interviews took place off school grounds to create a level of comfort or ease for the participants when discussing school matters. According to Seidman (2013), the interviewer's task in the first interview is to have participants discuss their life history, followed by participants' recounting experiences related to the topic during the second interview. In the third interview, participants reflected on their experiences and make meaning of potential connections. During the first interview, participants shared how they became an educator and their journey to leadership by recounting their early experiences. Seidman (2013) noted for the second interview participants share concrete details; participants discussed details about their daily experiences as a principal within a Title I school. In the third and final interview, Seidman (2013) stated participants should reflect on the meaning of their experiences, making intellectual and emotional connections. During the third interview, participants shared their thoughts on the connection between school leadership and how they felt it positively influenced student achievement. I adhered to Seidman's (2013) 90-minute per interview recommendation of time frame for interviews. An analysis and coding of the interview data provided common themes

leading to the creation of similar strategies used by the principals. Interview questions were developed based on readings about school leadership. Data collected during these interviews were recorded to avoid the researcher's consciousness interfering with the interpretation of interview data (Seidman, 2013). Seidman (2013) noted that recording interviews preserves the original data and assures participants their comments were not mishandled. The interview recordings and notes were uploaded to MAXQDA, an analytic software, to be transcribed. With the MAXQDA program, interview data were organized by excerpts into categories. I created a matrix of categories after highlighting and labeling the interview transcripts. This process of data analysis aided in narrowing the interview material to determine if what participants say was important to them.

Observations

In addition to creating a dialogue between the researcher and participant to discover 'goodness,' portraitists sought to document the 'goodness' of subjects in their settings (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I used observations as an additional data collection method to reflect on the participants' experience and discern patterns positively impacting student success. Maxwell (2013) noted observations enable researchers to draw inferences from perspectives not obtained during an interview. Two-hour observations of each participant were conducted during the school day to document each participant's daily interactions with stakeholders. The observer shadowed the participants as they fulfilled their daily duties. Portraitists prefer to view participants in a physical setting where norms, rituals, and values can be observed (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Additionally, Lightfoot and Davis (1997) noted portraitists try to capture the specifics of the physical setting, documenting elements to provide a feeling of embeddedness. Observations are a powerful method of learning about

participants' behaviors in occurrence with their surroundings (Maxwell, 2013). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explained a portraitist is concerned with searching for a central story, developed by watching, listening, and interacting with actors in the physical setting.

To collect observation data, I created a data matrix to record the following categories: appearance, verbal behavior and interactions, physical behavior and gestures, and people who stand out. I also created a field notebook to record my observation data. Information collected in my field notebook included my experiences, observed interactions with other people, reactions and behaviors of people, conversations among others, how and where people are positioned in relationship to one another, their comings and goings, physical gestures, and body language to create a holistic view of each participants' observation experiences.

Documents

In combination with interviews and firsthand experiences through observations, document analysis was used to provide a perspective of the principals' planning and school improvement implementation. Maxwell (2013) explained using multiple data collection methods for qualitative research is common. Collecting data using multiple methods aids in triangulation and gaining information about varying issues within the schools. Using public data available on the Georgia Department of Education's (GADOE) Accountability site, historical College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCPRI), scores of each low performing school were reviewed. A three-year comparison of scores reflected a school's performance with regards to student achievement and student growth percentages. Information from the Georgia Department of Education Accountability Office site also provided longitudinal data on the school climate score or star rating. The star rating was calculated based on students, teachers, and parents' opinions on the culture of the school. To develop a better understanding of how principals'

initiate school success, district-level reports and annual school improvement plans were reviewed. Additionally, minutes from leadership team meetings, faculty meetings, and professional learning trainings were reviewed. School documents were used to create a large amount of data used to analyze for determining how each principal strategized to improve the school and increase student achievement. The collection of these data highlighted to identify themes and establish codes. A matrix was used to analyze and organize the information.

<p align="center">*Data Analysis*</p>

Interviews

Interview data were first analyzed using pre-coding. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explained portraitists actively select themes for creating and defining the narrative of participants. Saldana (2013) described pre-coding as coding words and short phrases by "circling, highlighting, bolding, underlining, or coloring rich or significant participant quotes of passages that strike you (as)…' codable moments' worthy of attention" (p. 20). After pre-coding, open coding was used to develop tentative labels to summarize chunks of data and establish initial codes in the data. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) suggested identifying emergent themes by analyzing data for repetitive refrains and cultural rituals to triangulate data from various sources. To continue the analysis of interview notes, in vivo coding will be used to honor the participants' voices. Saldana (2016) explained the primary goal of in vivo as using the words of the participants to capture the meanings of their experiences. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explained portraits must scrutinize data to carefully search for the story to emerge. While actively selecting themes, portraitists should be strategic when determining where to focus the narrative (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Connections were tracked by participant-inspired categories. Also, I coupled in vivo coding with written analytic memos to reanalyze initial codes.

Saldana (2016) noted in vivo coding should not be used as the sole coding method as it could limit the perspective of the researcher when analyzing data. Finally, to analyze interview transcripts I used values coding. Saldana (2016) defined values coding as the method of applying codes based on participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs. Once the transcripts were coded for values, the next step was to categorize them to determine their collective meaning.

Observations/Field Notes

My research data included non-participant observations of the participants. This data was recorded in the form of descriptive anecdotal field notes. Saldana (2016) noted some methodologists recommend coding all recorded fieldwork to reveal how the researcher might generate social insight from daily occurrences. The field notes were first coded using in Vivo coding to capture the behaviors of the participants' actions. In Vivo, codes were clustered from macro to micro-level categories. The second cycle of coding was used to search for the routines in observable activities, known as process coding. Using observation field notes I reviewed the actions of each principal to determine similarities and differences of their interactions with stakeholders in the school. I considered the interplay of observable behaviors to compare relationships between the codes to determine how they are related. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) noted looking for points of thematic convergence is like searching for the patterns through scrutiny until relationships are linked within the material. Connections were made between in Vivo and Process codes to develop core categories, leading to the final method of observation analysis, selective coding. Selective coding allows for the construction of new codes across participants' data to measure transferability (Saldana, 2016). Core categories emerged through selective coding, reflecting the behaviors, attitudes, and experiences of the participants.

School Documents

School documents data included student achievement data, school improvement files, agendas, meeting minutes, and organizational reports. An iterative review of the documents aided in identifying the principal's provision of knowledge concerning organizational development, school planning, and school change. Bowen (2009) noted document analysis provides a means of tracking change over time. He adds the researcher can examine periodic reports to determine how organizations have performed over time (Bowen, 2009). The combined analysis of these documents, observations, and interviews aided in the triangulation of data collection methods. Maxwell (2013) noted by triangulating the data the researcher's bias is reduced, thus increasing the validity of the study. The first coding cycle of document analysis was in Vivo coding. Using in Vivo coding I reviewed each document highlighting and underlining nouns, verbs, vocabulary, and phrases. During the second coding cycle, I used content coding as it applies to larger data forms to include documents (Saldana, 2016). Continuing a thorough examination of the documents I identified and organized categories determining relevant sections of the text to answer the research questions. Categories developed through document analysis were used to confirm codes established in the other data collection methods. Triangulation of all the data sources aided in forming coherent justifications for themes (Creswell, 2014). Reaching coherence comes from the organic flow between data and the interpretation of the portraitist (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Threats of Validity

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) stated using rigorous procedures, the researcher tries to rid the work of personal biases distorting or obscuring the reality of the topic. To avoid two specific validity threats, bias, and reactivity, I collected data detailing the events and

processes of this study. By recording participants' responses during the interview session, I was able to eliminate personal beliefs and perceptions. Additionally, when observing participants, I collected copious notes to describe specific and concrete events. I prepared an interview script before meeting with principals to avoid reflexivity. The interview script prevented me from asking leading questions, which may influence the participants' responses. By triangulating the data, I was able to ensure a comprehensive analysis of interviews and observations. Maxwell (2013) noted the triangulation strategy reduces the risk of bias, allowing for a better assessment of the explanations one develops. To combat self-bias, I triangulated data from interviews, observations, and school documents to avoid validity threats. Maxwell (2013) pointed out triangulation "automatically increases validity" (p. 128). Taking precautions to avoid mistaken conclusions, observation data were reviewed to ensure I only collected notes on what was seen versus personal thoughts, reactions, and opinions. Portraitists need to be vigilant in identifying sources to challenge their perspectives (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) went on to explain there is a balance between personal predisposition, skepticism, and critique as all are central to a portraitist's research.

Generalizability for this study was minimal due to the single school district setting with only data collected on identified principals. Merriam (2002) noted generalizability is a major problem for qualitative research, as it is difficult in a statistical sense to generalize findings from a non-random sample. Instead, Merriam (2002) argued for qualitative researchers to use a working hypothesis to "take account of local conditions (that) can offer practitioners some guidance in making choices the results can be monitored to make better choices in the future" (p. 28). Merriam (2002) stated for qualitative research generalizability becomes possible through concrete universals. Merriam (2002) provided an example of concrete universal, sharing the use

of a vivid portrait of excellent teaching can be used as a prototype for the education of teachers. Through concrete universals, findings from the setting in Glenn County, GA can be transferred to similar situations of principals leading low performing Title I schools. Merriam (2002) explained the most common way to generalize qualitative research is through the readers' conceptualization of the findings in determining how it relates to their situation. This is known as a case-to-case transfer.

For readers to transfer findings from my study to their situation, rich descriptions of the principals' strategies were explained to "contextualize the study such that readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situation matches the …context, and hence, whether findings can be transferred" (Merriam, 2002, p. 31). Internal generalizability applies within the study, however, due to inadequate sample size, I was not able to thoroughly observe and ask questions of the participants. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) asserted instead of clearly articulating the sample selection, portraitist should seek to generalize the relationship to a point of statistically significant differences.

In this study, I identified principals of low performing Title I schools who had been able to improve student achievement at their schools. I sought to determine the strategies successful Title I principals used for increasing student achievement. To select these principals and schools, I used purposeful sampling to focus on the similar characteristics of participants and the setting. Data collection methods included interviews, observations, and school documents. Seidman's (2013) three-part interview protocols was used, and each principal participated in three 90-minute interviews. Observations were used to view each participant in their school settings. The principals were observed for two hours to determine their daily duties and interactions. State and district level school documents were reviewed to determine each principal's knowledge of school

planning and school change. For data analysis, a combination of coding methods was used to establish categories. The triangulation of all three data sources aided in the formation of comprehensive themes.

IV

PORTRAITS

This chapter will introduce the portraits of three principals: Wendy Smith, Victoria Date, and Ruby McNair. Pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of participants and individuals named and observed during the data collection process. Each of these participants serves as a principal of a previously failing Title I school as identified by the Georgia Department of Education. Mrs. Smith has a reserved personality and speaks in a meek voice. Similarly, her school had similar characteristics of calmness and order. Mrs. Date loves teaching and learning. Her background as an instructional coach drives her passion for student literacy. Mrs. McNair is uncensored. She speaks her mind and lets her opinions be known. She is unafraid of making changes to get the results she needs. In this chapter, I present the narrative analysis of each participant's interview in combination with observations of their schools and use the participants' own words to highlight their voices. Each narrative begins with the Art of the Start to discuss each participant's journey to leadership and career experiences. The following section, Landscaping and Sketching, describe each participant's observable behaviors and strategies during my observation at their schools.

Portrait of Wendy Smith

The Art of the Start

When Mrs. Wendy Smith logged into the Zoom meeting, she was seated in her office chair. She was still in the school building at five o'clock in the evening even though the school dismissed at three o'clock. During our greetings, she told me she had had a good day at school,

her students were celebrating Red Ribbon Week, and she had stayed late to catch up on some paperwork. Naturally soft-spoken and caring, Wendy asked how my day was and whether I had been staying healthy during the pandemic. After our greetings, Wendy shared her journey to leadership. She leaned back in her desk chair to ponder for a few moments and revealed she did not major in education. Her great-grandmother always told her she would be a teacher. Hearing her great grandmother's voice as if it were yesterday, Wendy remembers her saying, "Why don't you be a teacher like the lady down the road?". Ignoring her great grandmother's advice, Wendy pursued another aspiration after graduating high school by joining the army and serving for three years. Once her military service ended, almost out of nowhere, she "just knew" it was time to become a teacher. Wendy went to college and studied Business Education. After four years of studying teaching pedagogy, she earned a business education degree, began teaching in Mclean County, and then moved to Glenn County to teach middle school. It was her time at Hill Middle School that motivated her to become a school principal.

Hill Middle School was a Title I school of predominantly black students located near housing projects and drug-infested neighborhoods. This location was not an easy school to teach at, let alone lead. Pondering about her influence to become a principal, she touched her face and giggled a little, smiled, and then she began to tell the story of the bus driver. The school bus driver, who was also a member of her church, always used to say to her during afternoon dismissal, "When you become a principal, you can change things and make them how you want it." It was these 'seeds'- the daily words of encouragement from the bus driver- who inspired her curiosity and confidence to consider becoming a principal and enroll in leadership classes.

Influenced by a school leader, Mr. Andrews, the principal of Hill Middle School, where Wendy taught, she noticed how he interacted with students and focused on learning. She was in

awe of Mr. Andrews' leadership and began to consider becoming a principal. Wendy enrolled in leadership courses with a leap of faith, and as fate would have it, Mr. Andrews served as her mentor. Under Mr. Andrews, mentorship, she developed her leadership skills. She served on several committees under Mr. Andrew's tutelage to include the school leadership team, Future Business Leaders of America chapter chairperson, and grade level team leader. After long days of teaching in the classroom, Wendy would gather her notepad and pen, rushing from one end of the school to the other, grabbing the seat closest to Mr. Andrews, ready to take notes and give her input. Often, Wendy led the meetings. She would stand in the front of the room, asking the team questions and jotting down the thoughts on the whiteboard. Taking on all these leadership roles allowed her to learn how to navigate school leadership by organizing others to complete tasks. After a few months of serving in several leadership roles, Mr. Andrews asked, "Are you sure you want to do this?". He referred to becoming a school leader. Without hesitation, Wendy told him she was indeed ready to become a leader. Not too long after declaring her readiness, she received a phone call during the summer from Mr. Andrews.

Nervous to hear what Mr. Andrews had to speak with her about, she quietly listened on the other end of the phone to him explain that one of the Assistant Principals (AP) would be out for several months due to surgery and asked if she would serve in his place until the AP returned. Excitingly Wendy agreed to take the position, although she was apprehensive about how her peers would respond to her leadership role. After serving as interim AP for one year, Mr. Andrews asked her to become a full-time AP. Wendy was proud of her new position and took the role seriously. She attended every meeting during and after school, greeted students entering the school in the morning, worked with teachers to create better lessons, and managed to have time to do all the paperwork too! Wendy worked diligently for three years serving as an AP at Hill Middle School before moving to the elementary level. Unexpectedly during the summer of her

third year, she received a call from the district office informing her she would move to two elementary schools, working Monday through Wednesday at one school and Thursday through Friday at the other. Wendy did not understand why she had to move. She cried for days after receiving the news. She did not want to move; Wendy loved Hill Middle School and Mr. Andrews. She reluctantly cleaned up her office with tears in her eyes, leaving Hill Middle behind, and moved to the elementary schools.

The new school placements came as a culture shock for her. Both schools were non-Title I and had a history of receiving high standardized test scores, and the principals were welcoming and took her under their wings. The students were well behaved, and there were hardly ever any discipline issues. The staff was friendly and greeted her in the mornings; the halls were clean, and parents were involved in student activities and regularly attended meetings. At Hill Middle, Wendy dealt with several discipline issues each day and could hardly get working phone numbers to contact parents. She had moved from the pit to the palace and felt like Cinderella in her two new schools. Gazing out of the window, when she thought about her move to the elementary schools, she said, "It was the best thing that could have happened to me." Working at these two elementary schools helped her understand the curriculum, teaching pedagogy, school budgets, and student discipline. The principals of these two schools trained her on how to improve instruction, operate budgets, and manage school discipline by having Wendy work alongside them as they completed their principal daily tasks. Within no time, two years had gone by of Wendy working between these two elementary. By this time, she had gained confidence in her leadership abilities through observing her principals and improving her understanding of school operations. Now Wendy felt ready to lead her school! She applied for a principal position and was selected to serve at Galliard Elementary. Wendy remembers when she arrived at Galliard Elementary. Her goal was for the school to integrate arts into learning. When the

superintendent assigned her to Galliard Elementary in mid-summer, the district superintendent called a meeting to explain the school's art infusion program. The district superintendent told her to improve student academics and educate the whole child through the arts. Immediately forming a leadership team of administration, teachers, and support staff, she shared the goals for the school to include academics and art infusion. The first task for the leadership team was to review the school's mission and vision statements. It took several hours to reach a consensus among the leadership team members for the new mission and vision statements. The leadership at Galliard Elementary established these mission and vision statements in the summer of 2016:

> The mission is to educate the whole child through the integration of the arts throughout the curriculum to engage students, enrich content, and foster appreciation for creativity and diversity. The vision is to become a world-class educational institution that provides students the opportunities to grow academically and develop talents in the areas of Art, Music, Dance, and Drama while continuing to focus on our commitment to our local community.

To communicate the new mission and vision, Wendy held a faculty meeting. During the meeting, she told the faculty about the focus on student learning through the arts. She explained to them the school's special program was arts infusion. Arts Infusion included art, dance, drama, music, and orchestra. Fully aware of the staff's adjustments to incorporate arts infusion and cautiously rolling out the new mission and vision, she was concerned with how staff would buy in. She recalled, "They (teachers) seemed to be on board. There was no negative feedback." The leadership team proved to be helpful with staff buy-in as team members shared the message among their grade levels and provided clarity when staff asked questions. Further cementing the new mission and vision, Wendy regularly communicated the mission and vision statements by saying them during the morning announcements each day and printing them on weekly

correspondence to staff and students. Wendy intentionally aligned school improvement goals to the mission and vision statements, developing what she called the Lead Leadership Team. She knew the school could not improve with just her trying to lead all the initiatives. She would need the help of other key staff members in the school. The Lead Leadership Team consisted of the principal, assistant principal, and instructional specialist. During the summer of 2016, she met with the Lead Leadership Team to have the team members analyze school-wide state standardized test data from the Georgia Milestones Assessment (GMAS) to determine trends and next steps. They discovered from the analysis the need to create goals for literacy, math, and intervention. As a Title I school, an annual School Improvement Plan (SIP) requirement addresses improving student academic performance. In the SIP are three broad goals established by the school. Under each goal are action steps, timelines, materials, and funding. The Lead Leadership Team created three broad goals for literacy, math, and school climate.

Based on the SIP goals, the Lead Leadership Team decided to develop a plan to address intervention to include teachers understanding the importance of daily intervention. One of the SIP action steps included the Instructional Specialist (IS) providing monthly professional learning to the teachers. Each month during the teachers' collaborative planning time, they go to the Instructional Specialist's classroom where intervention materials, purchased using Title I funds, were already set out. The Instructional Specialist instructs teachers on using the program and materials with the students by modeling and doing role play. During the role-play, the IS would be the teacher, and the teachers would be the students. Teachers manipulated the resources and asked questions about student learning and misconceptions during the role play. In addition to monthly professional education, the Lead Leadership Team conducted weekly walkthroughs

to observe teachers during intervention time. After each walkthrough, the team met to debrief about the observation and created coaching plans for teachers needing more support.

Coaching teachers was the primary responsibility of the Instructional Specialist. The IS used the coaching plan when meeting with teachers about observations as guidance for co-teaching. When co-teaching the IS went into the classroom to teach side-by-side with the teacher, providing real-time feedback during the lesson. Wendy boasts, "my Instructional Specialist knows my vision and school goals for reading, math, and school climate. She puts the initiatives in motion to get us there!". Not only did the IS support teachers through coaching, but she also analyzed data. When analyzing middle of the year data, the team noticed an increase in student scores on Iready. Iready is an assessment given to students three times a year to measure their reading and math levels. Students demonstrated growth in comprehension and math fluency. The laser focus on improving intervention influenced these increases. Initially, Wendy was nervous about "how we (Lead Leadership Team) would get them (teachers) to understand what intervention would look like at Galliard," but the Lead Leadership and teachers executed the plan well, and the results showed student growth.

Wendy continually provides professional learning to the staff. Her staff needed three skills to meet the school improvement goals: a focus on academics, data analysis, and increased communication. Before she arrived at Galliard, the previous principal did not have a focus on academics. Wendy knew she had to shift the mindset of teachers, so they put learning at the forefront. One of the first adjustments was incorporating weekly collaborative planning to reestablish a focus on academics. Collaborative planning allowed teachers to develop lesson plans, find resources, and get clarity from the Instructional Specialist about challenging learning standards. The teachers have collaborative planning two days each week for one hour each day.

Continuing the focus on academics, teachers improve their knowledge of instructional delivery by attending district professional learning (PL). Wendy said,

> I talked to the district program specialists to have them come out to the school to provide professional learning to my teachers on classroom management and data analysis. The teachers had PL on how to use Iready reports to provide intervention. I even had a state data specialist come to the school to show the teachers how to use SDLS (Student Data Longitudinal System).

Data analysis plays a huge part in how Wendy measures her student performance. She is constantly reviewing beginning, middle, and end of year data points. Wendy annually reviews Georgia Milestone Assessment data. From her analysis, she discovered an increase in math scores in 2018-2019, a decrease in English Language Arts scores, a reduction in science and social studies scores, and an overall increase for special education students' scores, which she attributes to targeting this group during the intervention. The Lead Leadership Team further helps to disaggregate the data and determines the standards students mastered. The team uses data to find out where students are successful and determine areas where students are not learning. The goal for providing professional learning about data to the teachers was to help them understand how to use data to develop lesson plans. Wendy is aware of the importance of teachers knowing deficit areas of students for planning purposes to address learning needs. She worked her first year tirelessly at Galliard Elementary to communicate the importance of data to her teachers, saying, "I had to make them aware of things that were going on.".

While Wendy has had tremendous success at Galliard, it has not come without barriers, admitting there are always unexpected things happening that interrupt her day. One interruption, angry parents, who come to the school and want to meet with her immediately. Although she

may not have the time, she still meets with them because of her open-door policy. She wants to talk with parents and solve issues they are having, saying, "this creates positive relationships". Another interruption is unscheduled meetings with district personnel who come to the school to discuss anything from reports to approaching deadlines. The most frequent interruption is student behaviors in the classroom. When she first arrived at Galliard, Wendy experienced several discipline issues with students disrupting class. She would have to stop whatever she was doing to rush to go to a classroom to retrieve a student who was throwing a fit, hitting another student, or being defiant to the teacher. At other times, teachers would just send misbehaving students to the front office without any notice. It was critical to remove students who disrupt the learning environment, she says, adding, "A teacher has to be able to teach. They can't do that with a disruptive student.". She further explained,

> We were set up to get PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports), but
> never got the program. Culture and climate are listed on the school improvement
> plan. We wanted to start using Eagle Bucks to reward students for good behavior.
> The Physical Education (PE) teachers have good relationships with the students.
> Students with good behavior went to the gym with the PE teachers once a month
> to have a party. Students who did not have good behavior could not attend special
> events.

Written in the school improvement plan for the past two years are action steps to decrease discipline referrals. The Lead Leadership team developed these action steps using components for a Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program. PBIS is a framework used to improve discipline and create positive learning environments for students to succeed. Faculty and staff established school-wide expectations and created the acronym S.O.A.R. S.O.A.R.

stands for **S**afety, **O**wnership, **A**chievement, and **R**espect. During the morning announcements, Wendy reminds the student about modeling appropriate behaviors and has them recite the

S.O.A.R. acronym. Based on the PBIS plan, students at Galliard Elementary with zero discipline occurrences earned Eagle Bucks. Eagle Bucks are the school's token economy system used to reinforce desired student behaviors. Students can redeem their Eagle Bucks for prizes in the school store. They like items from the store, including toys, pencils, and journals, to name a few. Students are motivated to behave so they can earn Eagle Bucks to shop in the store. Another PBIS incentive students could earn was attending the bi-monthly Popcorn Friday. Wendy invited students with no discipline referrals for two weeks to Popcorn Friday. She also awarded students without tardies and absences to the Popcorn Friday party to improve attendance. Rest assured, Wendy has learned how to manage these barriers over the past three years by relying heavily on her front office staff and Lead Leadership Team to address interruptions. "I have a good team", she says. They help her to protect her time to focus on instruction. With the help of her team, the barriers are now minimal, and she has been able to focus solely on school improvement efforts.

The Georgia Department of Education removed Galliard Elementary from the Georgia Department's chronically failing schools list in 2019. Wendy remembers being happy to hear her school's name as the district's superintendent read each schools' name aloud during a monthly administrator meeting. She quietly grinned and could not wait until the meeting was over so she could share the good news with her staff. Wendy celebrated with her team by buying a large cake, balloons, and decorations. She gathered all her staff in the lunchroom and praised them for their hard work, which led to increased student performance, improving the schools' College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) score. Although Wendy held a grand celebration with her staff, "I knew we had to move on," she said. She could not bask in their victory too long

as there was still work to do to ensure the school stayed off the failing school's list. Wendy

captured her approach that led to the removal from the failing list in the following anecdote:

> I prayed a lot. Had a lot of think time. I met with the Assistant Principal,
>
> Instructional Coach, and Counselor about how to make changes. I told the staff
>
> we would have to make changes. Can't expect something different if we do the
>
> same thing; we would get the same results. We had to teach teachers how to
>
> understand data. We conducted peer observations. The staff didn't like it.
>
> Teachers provided direct instruction in those small groups and grouped students
>
> by their ability to provide interventions. I'm not sure that I would change anything
>
> that was done. I wanted to go into classrooms more often, but there were
>
> interruptions. I worked more closely with teachers through data analysis. At the
>
> end of the year, some teachers left. There was a sense of urgency that came upon
>
> them (teachers) when they saw the low score (CCRPI); they knew they had to
>
> make a change; then they were more receptive.

Emphasizing daily intervention with students helped to improve their learning deficits. The Lead

Leadership Team worked with teachers to analyze data to determine student performance levels

and provide instruction geared to address areas where students struggled. The Lead Leadership

Team used information from the data analysis to determine what supplies and programs needed

to be purchased. They used Title I funds to purchase technology and provide professional

learning for staff and tutoring for students. Seventy-five laptops and two charging carts were

purchased to use for students to complete Iready lessons daily. A professor from a local

university, paid by Title I funds, provided professional learning to teachers on teaching reading.

A sizable percentage of the Title I funds was used to pay for Saturday School. Wendy invited

students performing in the bottom 10% of their grade in reading or math to attend Saturday School. Saturday School occurred on Saturday mornings; parents dropped students off at the school for two hours of intense tutoring with teachers who worked at Galliard Elementary. Reflecting, Wendy admits she could have done more by observing teachers and guiding data analysis, but her schedule was not always conducive for getting those things done. She had to devise a plan for observing teachers more and training teachers how to analyze data better. The idea of devising and executing a plan comes from her mentor and former principal, Mr. Andrews. She recalled, "Mr. Andrews planned and executed his plan in a meeting. He would break things down. I'm working on breaking things down."

Landscape and Sketching

Galliard Elementary School is a two-story building nestled among houses in a quiet neighborhood. It comprises two structures: the main school and the gymnasium. The school's front entrance has a small water fountain and steps leading to the second level. When I entered the front office, the receptionist greeted me and quickly used the two-way radio to notify Wendy that I was waiting. Wendy is a tall, full-figured woman. Despite her appearance, she has a gentle way about her. She is quiet and listens more than she speaks. When the secretary explained the school was running low on student masks, Wendy calmly showed her where she had stored additional masks. Without getting upset or becoming frustrated, she quietly solved the problem in less than two minutes. Once we left the office, she took me on a tour of the building. I immediately noticed students' work hanging in the hallways. As I stood by the media center, I could hear a teacher reading a story to her class. As we walked closer, I peeped into the classroom and noticed ten students seated in their desks with their eyes glued to the teacher. This teacher was animated, and she used her hands and face to tell the story. Doing this seemed to

engage her students. When she finished the book, she began to ask the class questions about the main idea and the five-story elements. Her students were ready to give the answers; they were raising their hands and jumping in their seats, trying to get her attention so they could answer.

After observing the class, Wendy showed me where teachers attended collaborative planning. Aswe entered, I watched two kindergarten teachers talking and two other staff members looking at instructional materials. The kindergarten teachers were discussing their plan for introducing sightwords for the upcoming unit. The teachers agreed to have students master words before adding more words to the list. They also mentioned the need to introduce words their students would frequently see in their weekly readers. As the teachers talked, one teacher filled out a form titled "Collaborative Planning Minutes." I leaned over to ask Wendy the use of this form. She explained when the teachers lead their collaborative planning. They use the form as evidence of their planning for the upcoming week. Teachers have collaborative planning every Tuesday and receive professional learning (PL) from the instructional specialist every Thursday. This week the instructional specialist would provide PL on student intervention. The other two staff members in the room, the AP and IS, organized materials for the new program teachers would beusing for intervention. The program was called 95% Group, a reading and comprehension program, paid for using Title I funds. Earlier in the summer, when developing the school improvement plan, the Lead Leadership Team, which consists of Wendy, her AP, and IS, decided to purchase the program to assist teachers with providing intervention. As we left the room, I met a few more staff members. The two teachers, AP, and IS who all agreed they loved having Wendy as their principal.

Wendy seemed eager for me to continue our tour by observing classrooms. I was able to watch each grade level Pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade. Every single teacher was teaching

when I went into the classroom. All the students were listening and participating. We headed up two flights of stairs to reach the second floor where grades second through fifth-grade classrooms were located. In a fifth-grade classroom, the teacher taught a lesson on idioms and asked the students to give examples. Most of the students took a couple of minutes to think of an example.As soon as they thought of an answer, their hands shot up to be called on. The teacher provided positive feedback on the students' responses. Even if the answer was incorrect, she guided the students thinking to help them choose a better example.

When we left the fifth-grade class, Wendy shared that this teacher had been struggling with time management, but the instructional specialist was working with her to improve the use of instructional minutes for teaching. We continued to walk down the hall where music was playing. The music was coming from the Arts Hall. Galliard Elementary is an arts-infused school and offers students music, dance, drama, and art. I saw Kindergarteners dancing and singing along with the teacher and video on the screen through the window. The song they were singing was called "Boom Chicka Boom." When the video and song ended, one student said, "That was fun. Can we do it again?".

In the arts' hallway, there were several pictures of famous actors, singers, and dancers. Just down the hall to the left were the third and fourth-grade classes. I observed these classes during language arts. Third graders were learning how to determine cause and effect by using keywords from the text. The teacher showed an example of cause and effect, then had students practice identifying which phase was the cause and the effect. She reminded students to look for keywords to help them with identifying the cause and effect. In the fourth-grade class, one student read a selection aloud as her peers highlighted words with the –aw, -au, and –al sounds. The last classrooms I observed upstairs were second grade and gifted. Students in second-grade

classrooms were using a phonics program called Fundations. The students were making words using consonant blends (e.g., st, sw, br, gr, cl, cr). As the students worked independently, the teacher walked around the room to assists students individually.

The AP shared how much she appreciated Wendy. She explained before Wendy became the principal at Galliard Elementary, her job as AP was much harder. It was more challenging because the previous principal lacked structure. She told me there were always discipline issues; the principal would have her solve all the discipline problems. She added there was no order in the school, no accountability for teachers, no faculty meetings, no required lesson plans, and a nonfunctioning student intervention system. She paused and began to smile, then said how things changed when Wendy came. She explained,

> Mrs. Smith (Wendy) had high expectations. She taught us how to look at the
> learning standards, assessments, and data. We had faculty meetings and
> leadership team meetings. The school started following the district initiatives for
> academics. She took the time to build relationships with us.

The IS explained how Wendy placed a focus on weekly collaborative planning. Collaborative planning is a meeting with teachers on the same grade level where they plan lessons for the students and analyze their assessment data. She told me in 2018 teachers attending collaborative planning one day a week. Now, teachers have collaborative planning two times a week, one for planning and the other to receive professional learning and development.

While Galliard Elementary does not have a formal Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program, they reward students for good behavior. Last winter, Wendy invited students to dance at the gym where they played with other students. Students are now rewarded

more for academic performance since the discipline issues have decreased significantly since Wendy provided structures. Teachers reward students for working hard in class and increasing their scores on weekly and monthly assessments. Another improvement since Wendy became principal is instruction and teacher collaboration. The AP revealed this with the prior principal. She always felt the teachers should have been collaborating because they were not using best practices. In previous years, teachers had planning time but used it as free time to talk with other staff members instead of collaborating. Wendy focused on a collaborative plan to allow teachers to grow and learn from each other's expertise. The IS recalled, "In 2018 we had professional learning one day a week. Now we have collaborative planning and professional learning. Last year I ran the show and facilitated it (collaborative planning), but now they (teachers) lead their own."

Teamwork characteristic is essential for leaders to influence organizational success. The staff at Galliard Elementary work together to make improvements. A core team called the Lead Leadership Team (LLT) was an idea Wendy adopted from her mentor. The LLT consists of the AP, IS, and herself. As a team, they made the initial decisions about instruction, programs, and schedules before presenting them to the school leadership team. The purpose of the LLT is to have shared leadership among her core team members. She admits that she will ultimately be responsible for all the decisions, but it is important to have everyone's input and work as a team. Wendy also shares responsibilities with the LLT and school leadership team members by delegating responsibilities to ensure teachers meet deadlines, implement programs, and analyze student assessment.

Portrait of Victoria Date

The Art of the Start

      A teenage romance opened the door to Victoria Date's journey to an educational career. At 15 years old, Victoria began dating a young man, later to eventually become her husband. This young man's mother, a teacher herself, encouraged Victoria to consider teaching as a profession. Admitting she frequently played "teacher," Victoria shared, "There was only one problem with becoming a teacher…they didn't make enough money." In high school, Victoria indicated students were encouraged to pick a career path. Once again, she averted any aspirations of becoming a teacher for the same reason, low salary. Years later, Victoria emerged from college with her degree and a major in business. Having secured a position as a loan officer at First Union Bank, now Wells Fargo, Victoria confessed to hating this job and requesting a change in job responsibilities. A switch to a part-time teller position allowed Victoria to return to college and enter the teacher program. Following the suggestion of her new mother-in-law, Victoria finally decided to become a teacher. A career as a middle school teacher ensued for the next ten years. As she approached her eleventh year in the profession, Victoria and her husband were excitedly awaiting the arrival of a new addition to the family when she received a call from her principal, Mrs. Baker.

      Mrs. Baker told Victoria about a position that would be perfect for her and America's Choice Instructional Coach. She accepted the position and loved coaching! Victoria always had a desire to be in leadership and ultimately become a principal. Several years after becoming an instructional coach, she decided to step out on faith and enrolled in a leadership program. As a part of the program, her college advisor assigned Victoria a mentor, her current principal, Mrs.

Baker. For assignments, she shadowed Mrs. Baker frequently to learn the roles and responsibilities of a principal.

Once she completed her leadership program, she received a call during the summer from Mrs. Baker about an Assistant Principal (AP) position at her school. Victoria was not Mrs. Baker's first nor second choice for the job. Interestingly, Mrs. Baker had asked two other individuals who both declined the position, but both recommended Victoria as a candidate. She accepted the AP position and worked with Mrs. Baker to improve the school environment and student learning. After six years as an AP, Victoria decided it was time for her to become a principal. After all, she had tons of experience leading teachers and organizing initiatives. Being promoted to principal would not be an easy feat for Victoria. Even after numerous applications and interviews, she was not able to get a principal position. Then one day she got a call "I just knew they were going to tell me I was going to be promoted," Victoria said, but this was not the case. The Human Resource department had called to tell Victoria they were transferring her to Jackson High School as an Assistant Principal. She cried like a baby when she received the news because she felt she was not a good leader and had failed. Surprisingly, she loved the job as an AP at Jackson High School. Victoria explained,

> At the high school level, students really need you. I was the ninth-grade
> administrator and helped them to think about and plan their career paths, whether
> that was college, military, or the workforce. I was used to working with younger
> kids and didn't know how I could work with and relate to older children.

In her contentment at Jackson High School, helping students determining their career paths, Victoria finally received 'the' call. She would be the principal at Craig Elementary. She loved Craig Elementary, "We were working hard to improve the school and change mindsets." Her

work would be in vain as the district closed Craig Elementary due to low enrollment only one year after Victoria became principal. Feeling like a failure and questioning her leadership, she could not help but think the school closure had something to do with her. She was hopeful; she was placed at Baywood Elementary as principal later that summer.

"I have had the pleasure of working at all levels, elementary, middle, and high school," Victoria revealed. The combination of these experiences prepared Victoria for the role at Baywood Elementary. Baywood would need stability. There had been three principals at Baywood over the past four years. Victoria knew her first task would be to build relationships with the staff, students, and parents. They needed to know she cared and was committed to improving the school. She was attributing her decision to build relationships with her mentor, Mrs. Baker. "Mrs. Baker, that woman had a way with people. I remember riding the school bus during preplanning to visit the students' neighborhoods and pass out supplies and food. Doing this helped us to build relationships with the parents and community.," she said. Victoria's leadership philosophy centers around educating students through a collective approach. She said,

> All hands-on deck. We (Principal, Assistant Principal, Counselor, Media
> Specialist) all have a lot of time. We should all go into classes to help students
> learn. During ELA (English Language Arts) we need to go in and read to these
> students. Even if that's just reading with the everyday.

Victoria is adamant about all staff members taking part in educating students. She said, "I always think as a teacher." School organizations use shared decision-making among the administrative leadership team, consisting of the principal, assistant principal, instructional specialist, and counselor. The administrative leadership meets every Monday. "I usually have a plan, but I put it out there to get input from the team.", Victoria says. Doing this builds shared

leadership and the valued expertise from her administrative team. The staff and students could not have made progress without the ideas and work of the administrative leadership team.

When Victoria arrived at Baywood Elementary, her first task was to review the mission and vision. She stated, "During the first week of pre-planning, I met with the leadership, and we reviewed the mission and vision. We determined what that (mission and vision) looked like at our school. Teachers are teaching, and students are learning.," she said.

To garner staff buy-in for the newly created mission and vision, Victoria met with the entire faculty to share her vision, explaining what her expectations were from day one. She said,

They were apprehensive at first, but I had interactions with them to reinforce the mission and vision. I communicated often, putting it out there all the time. I always refer to them (staff) as the Bear Family. I also had to have courageous conversations when people weren't in line with the mission and vision.

Baywood Elementary school has closely aligned its mission and vision to the school goals outlined on the School Improvement Plan (SIP). As a Title I funded school, Victoria writes an annual SIP to include all the school goals and justification for receiving Title I funds. Each summer, the administrative leadership meets to analyze school-wide data to determine areas of instruction to focus on for the upcoming year. Somebody analyzed Georgia Milestones Assessment (GMAS) state standardized test to uncover student deficit areas. The administrative leadership disaggregated the data finding a significant percentage of students struggled with writing and did poorly on the constructed response section for the GMAS. Students also performed poorly in the Numbers and Operations domain on the GMAS. Once the administrative team analyzed the data and identified areas of need, the team set out to develop the SIP.

Following district guidelines, the administrative team created goals for literacy, math, and school climate. Victoria admits, "I always start with reading because that impacts everything, then focus on math facts and fluency. The biggest issue is not that our students don't know the skills, it's that they don't retain the skills.". As part of the SIP literacy goal, teachers were provided professional learning on a Benchmark reading intervention program. Using the Benchmark program, students received repetitive lessons on phonics and reading comprehension each day. Teachers had not been using the Benchmark resources before her becoming the principal. She said,

> They (teachers) needed a shift in mindset. Most were in the mindset that all they needed to teach was letters (alphabet) and sight words. They didn't think students should be reading at the end of kindergarten. I would ask them, what's your role in making sure students achieve on the Georgia Milestones?

In combination with professional learning, the administrative leadership team observed teacherseach month. Those teachers receiving unsatisfactory observations received coaching from the Instructional Specialist (IS), who helped teachers improve their instructional strategies. The IS modeled lessons for teachers and taught lessons alongside teachers to assist them with pacing skills instruction to maximize instructional strategies and minutes. "Beyond the leadership team,at every faculty meeting I recognized a teacher who was doing something spectacular to displaytheir skills. Doing this allowed teachers to share best practices," Victoria indicated that Iready top performing students receive awards and classes to motivate teachers and students. She explained, "for Iready we do teacher and student celebrations for the increases in January and May. Students earn incentives for being the top performer and one class gets a prize.," she said.

While Victoria has experienced significant increases in student performance, it has not come without barriers. Two barriers immediately stand out: teacher retention and a growing English Language Learner (ELL) population. The school district promoted many veteran teachers to leadership and curriculum positions within the district. Having her teachers get promoted was not an issue. It was the timing of the promotion. Many of the promotions occurred in late July, making it hard to find quality teachers during July as most had already accepted a position. With a small pool of qualified teacher applicants, Victoria hired waiver teachers. Waiver teachers are those who possess a bachelor's degree but have not completed a teacher preparation program. Victoria's frustration with hiring waiver teachers is the amount of instructional and student discipline management they require. Currently, there are five waiver teachers on staff. The other barrier of the growing ELL population relates to having adequate academic support since only two ELL teachers are on staff at Baywood Elementary. Most of her teachers do not speak Spanish, making it difficult to provide instruction to ELL students. Her only saving grace, a local pastor of a nearby Hispanic church. He volunteers his time one Saturday a month to teach Spanish at no cost to any teachers who attend the session.

Landscape and Sketching

On my way to visit Baywood Elementary, I drove past several mobile homes. There were two mobile home neighborhoods, Glenn Estates Mobile Homes and MacNair Mobile Homes. There appeared to be more than 50 mobile homes in each neighborhood. Before making the left turn to enter the school parking lot, I could not help but notice the bright yellow building on the right. On the side of the building was a mural of an African American man playing the saxophone. The sign read Mrs. Tracy's Soul Food. The school was directly across the street from the soul food restaurant and nestled among trees. Adjacent to the parking lot was a white house

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with shrubbery overgrowing the front porch, windows, and sides. It was difficult to determine whether anyone resided in the home. There were no cars parked in the driveway, and the house appeared inhabitable. I headed to the front door and noticed the circular entrance as I pressed the button to access the building. The front office receptionist greeted me and offered her assistance. She quickly phoned Victoria, telling her I was waiting in the front office.

As I was waiting for Victoria, I noticed the office décor in school colors of blue and yellow. The counselor's office door was covered in red bulletin board paper with letters spelling out the name of a local university. A student entered the office and stood on a social distancing sticker on the floor. He remained quiet and made eye contact with the front office receptionist. Although the pair made eye contact, neither spoke a word. The front office receptionist began typing something on her computer and then handed the student a slip of paper. She had written him a tardy pass to class. I was astonished the front office receptionist had not greeted the student by saying 'good morning.' There was no interaction between her and the student. Victoria emerged from her office, dressed in a black and brown matching suit jacket and skirt, she greeted me and then showed me to her office. Her office had a large executive desk and small circular table. There were piles of paper on her desk, table, and bookshelf; she explained the papers were student report cards. She was planning to go through each report card to determine which students were passing or failing. She planned to have the teachers provide grade recovery opportunities to failing students.

We walked out of the front office into the hallway. School spirit posters, student work, and posters with positive sayings adorned the white and blue walls. I noticed a sign outlining hallway expectations for students, such as walking feet, quiet voices, and hands to yourself. A showcase of students' pictures who modeled excellent behavior during October were posted on

the Student of the Month bulletin board. In the center of the hall there was a large sign that read

"No Bullying." The walls displayed student learning: cotton balls to form the letter "C," a

flipbook describing harmful organisms, and a graphic organizer on division strategies to solve

the math word problem. I observed a Kindergarten using dry erase markers to practice forming

the letter "A."

In the first-grade class, I heard the teacher say, "All set" and the students replied in

unison, "You bet." This call brought commanded order, and all the students turned to look at and

listen to the teacher. The teacher had just finished reading a book and began to ask her students

about the main idea. Just a few doors down, second graders were working on how to spell words

using letter sounds. The teacher said a word aloud. Then the students wrote out the letters on

their dry erase boards. In the next hall, I observed a third-grade class where students were

copying questions from the board. The students were quiet as the teacher sat at her desk using the

computer. At the end of the hall, a quiet room of fifth graders used their text, Bud Not Buddy, to

find supporting evidence for questions on their worksheet. On the board, a timer indicated seven

minutes remaining. The fourth-grade class was empty but posted on the board was a two-by-two

diagram with the equation 41 x 25 written around the perimeter. Victoria explained the students

were in the gym for physical education, and the teacher was in collaborative planning.

As we walked to the collaborative planning room, I noticed classes in the hallway lined

up to use the restroom. Students stood silently on the floor stickers and took turns entering the

restroom. The teacher stood at the front of the line monitoring the students. Just past the front

office and library was the collaborative planning room. It was about the size of a regular

classroom. Posters were hanging of teaching strategies. Several posters had the phrase

"Quickwrite" on them. Another sign read, "Collaborative Planning Guiding Questions." I came

in the room and quickly found a seat to not interrupt the video already in progress. Two women were watching a video about Canvas, an online learning platform. When the video ended, Victoria introduced me to the two women, one was the Instructional Specialist (IS), and the other was a fourth-grade teacher. She explained I was there to observe best practices at Baywood. The IS shared there were many academic challenges before Victoria became the principal. She further explained emphasizing students learning to read. She remembered three years ago when the teachers implemented the Sight Word Trivia Bowl. She used the trivia bowl to motivate students in grades Kindergarten through third grade to increase their sight word recognition fluency. She made individualized flashcards for each student based on their fall assessment data. Other initiatives put in place by the leadership team- which consisted of the principal, assistant principal, instructional specialist, and counselor- included communication and data analysis.

To bridge the communication gap between parents, the faculty and staff began using Class Dojo. Class Dojo is a communication platform connecting families to the school day through messaging, photos, and videos. By doing this, the IS explained parent participation increased. Victoria also analyzed data and held weekly meetings. During data team meetings, teachers determined which students needed targeted instruction and planned lessons to address deficit areas. Progress monitoring students each week provided additional data for developing student success plans. The teachers completed student success plans outlining students' current performance and their learning goals for the end of the year. If students met their annual goal, teachers rewarded them in May with awards and medals. In addition, to motivate the students to improve academically, teachers were prompted to enhance instructional practices. They created non-negotiables: teach the curriculum, use data to inform instruction, communicate with parents, and create a positive learning environment. Teachers started to have professional learning and

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collaborative planning. Collaborative planning was established two days per week for grade-level teams to meet with the instructional specialist to plan lessons for the upcoming week. The school provided teachers with professional learning sessions based on the area of need of the teachers.

The leadership team conducted monthly instructional walks to observe teachers, then provided feedback and coaching to improve their teaching practices. The IS said, "There was a shared responsibility to get students learning." As I listened to the Instructional Specialist share the school initiatives, the Assistant Principal (AP) walked into the room and took a seat at the table next to me. She interjected and said, "Victoria is big on literacy. She always has our kids reading." The AP also noted how Victoria encourages and supports academic initiatives. The AP paused for a moment, then admitted, "We weren't always able to focus on academics because discipline was an issue. Her (Victoria) approach to discipline is a team approach. She believes in structure and giving a warning. She follows district protocol."

The school has established the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program. They started programmatic incentives just as Never Been Absent (NBA), Never Found Late (NFL) for tardies, and Student of the Month. Community partners provided tangible items such as toys and candy to give as incentives to the students. Not only do the community partners offer incentives, but they also offer food and bilingual language lessons. The surrounding churches donate food and school supplies every year to parents and students who are in need. The minister of the Hispanic church provides Spanish lessons to the teachers at Baywood to assist them with communicating with English Language Learner students. The community partners have helped Victoria establish a sense of the community within the school and positive behavior among students by rewarding them for following the expectations.

In the fall of 2019, Victoria received news Baywood Elementary would be removed from the state failing schools list. She remembered feeling elated but being realistic; "I went back to reflect on the how and why of the increase. Internally I reflected to pinpoint how the increased happened." Trying to understand better, I asked Victoria what strategies she thought led to the increase in scores. She sat quietly for a moment thinking and then responded, "I had laser approach to it (student learning). This made teachers focus on learning. We were intentional about how the students were taught and what they learned.".

As a part of the Title I School Improvement Plan (SIP), the administrative leadership team outlined a program for tutors to come to the school and work with low-performing students. The school used Title I funds to pay for retired teachers to come to the school and tutor students who were struggling readers. Title I funding also paid for Saturday School. They offered Saturday School to low-performing students who were failing reading, math, science, or social studies. These students attended school on Saturday mornings for three hours and received tutoring from Baywood Elementary teachers. They used Saturday School as targeted intervention to improve learning for low-performing students. Victoria experienced success with Saturday School, tutoring, and focusing on learning.

While Victoria saw improvement with her focus on learning, it was not this strategy alone that had led to the increase in standardized test scores. She attributed her success to a mentor principal who played a significant role in her leadership capabilities. Victoria said,

The biggest thing that helped me in my role as principal was my previous principal (Mrs. Baker). I watched her. We were in a state monitored middle school. It was not a positive experience, but it prepared me to always monitor the data.

Modeling her leadership after her mentor, Victoria, remembered how Mrs. Baker focused on student learning. There were many tasks to get done in a state-monitored school; Mrs. Baker assigned different tasks to everyone to get them accomplished. Mrs. Baker also observed teachers often to monitor their instruction. All these traits are evident in Victoria's leadership practices. Another component of her leadership was her participation in a first-year principals' cohort hosted by a state college. This cohort "played a significant role because we (principals) observed other school leaders and talked with them often," she said. Principals in the cohort spent time collaborating with principals and school improvement specialists. They shared ideasand problem solving.

<center>*Portrait of Ruby McNair*</center>

The Art of the Start

An effervescent spirit filled with cheer and laughter is the best way to describe Ruby's demeanor. During my first encounter with her, she was cheerful and joking about how old she was, saying she not used to using "all this technology." I reassured her, telling her, you are only as old as you feel. Ruby replied, "But my bones feel old," bellowing out in laughter in her true Southern Belle accent. She took a few moments at the beginning of the interview to share how busy her day was and explain she was glad to have a moment to rest. After Ruby seemed settled, I asked her to share her journey to an educator. Raising one hand in the air, she exclaimed,

I had not planned on being and educator. I wanted to be a clinical psychologist, but my mom always knew I was going to be a teacher from an early age. My mom was a teacher and taught high school English. She got her master's degree and became the ELA (English Language Arts) Coordinator, then an assistant principal, and then a principal. She got her Doctorate Degree and was promoted to Director of HR (Human Resources).

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Even with all the coercing and motivation from her mother, Ruby studied psychology in college and earned her bachelor's degree. Oddly enough, Ruby's first job out of college was as a teacher assistant. She explained,

> I became a second-grade teacher assistant in an elementary school and fell in love! That's when I knew I wanted to be a teacher. I started taking teacher preparation classes at night. My mom helped me study for the TCT (state teacher exam). I began teaching third grade, then fourth grade. I taught nine years.

Ruby admitted she always felt like a natural leader but never considered becoming a principal. Until, one Sunday while sitting in church, her pastor preaching a sermon called, 'What would you do if you weren't afraid?'. It was as though he was speaking directly to her, which motivated her to go back to school to earn her master's degree. Influenced by her principal, who encouraged her to become an administrator, she applied for an Assistant Principal (AP) position and got the job! The school district shared Ruby 's AP position between two Title I middle schools. Ruby would spend two and half days a week at each school. She worked for two principals, Mr. Barney and Mrs. Paulett, with similar roles at both schools. "Mr. Barney was too nice, he believed everything the teachers, parents and students said. People took advantage of him. Mrs. Paulett was very meticulous and a micromanager.," she said. Ruby decided to apply to become a principal and moved to Deering Elementary through working diligently between both schools. Victoria confessed her principalship,

> I am not proud of this but want to share it with you because it's a part of my story. When I became the principal at Deering, a close friend of mine came to the school and wanted to enroll her son into kindergarten, but he was not the appropriate age to start kindergarten. The mom gave me his birth certificate. It was a fake birth

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certificate. My supervisor found out it was fraudulent, and I was demoted back to

assistant principal. But everything happens for a reason. I was placed at Hill

Elementary and Walker Elementary. I was the first black assistant principal of

both schools. The principals were great. Mrs. Conrad always prayed with me.

Working at those schools set me up for the principalship at Drayton Elementary.

Ruby had quite the journey to becoming a principal. Her previous experiences as a teacher and

assistant principal in Title I schools prepared her for the position at Drayton Elementary.

Working in the non-Title I school, Hill Elementary and Walker Elementary, provided Ruby with

a model of how a school should run. "Title I schools are tough. That is a different kind of parent

and student, but I was used to it. I knew if I could teach there (Title I school), I could teach

anywhere.," said Ruby. Compassion is the most critical skill a leader should possess; the faculty

and staff should have compassion and understanding of how the students live outside of school.

"Mrs. Conrad taught me that we are the constant for students. You want to want better for your

students and create a better world for the students. Tell them you care," Ruby declared.

In her first meeting with the staff at Drayton Elementary Ruby stood in front of the staff

and proclaimed to them, "We will get off the list. Every decision I make will be about that,

getting off the list. It's not personal." The lunchroom full of staff fell quiet after her statement.

"They (staff) were trying to see what I was about. They were just watching," she says. The three

initiatives were to increase the school's College and Career Readiness Performance Index

(CCRPI) score, improve morale, and improve teaching. She started by sharing the CCRPI data.

The staff was shocked to learn how poorly the students had performed on the standardized test

but doing this helped them take ownership. The entire faculty and staff were provided a copy of

the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and reviewed it each month during faculty meetings. Ruby

admitted, "I couldn't do all the work alone, so I started to look at the talents of my staff. I wasn't the only brain in the building." In seeking out help, she built an Instructional Leadership Team consisting of the Assistant Principal, Instructional Specialist, and Intervention Coach. Ruby also noticed effective teachers and had them lead professional learning training for all teachers in the building.

Although Ruby and her Instructional Leadership Team worked diligently to improve teaching and increase student performance, there were still barriers impeding their progress. The barriers include student attendance and discipline. Ruby explained,

> Parents would not bring kids to school. They (parents) did not seem concerned about education or at least value it in the same way. Many of our students come from poverty. They (students) just need their basic needs met, food and clothing. So, our students come to us academically low. They don't know their ABCs, colors, nor how to count. It's surprising to me, but it happens. It shocks me when I look at a parent and realize they haven't done anything with their child.

Ruby feels that the lack of parenting also contributes to discipline issues, saying "Students act out because they don't get attention at home." During her first year at Drayton Elementary, there was a fight between students every day. The conflicts were violent, with students picking up classroom items and throwing them at each other. Ruby had to get a handle on discipline. Daily pep talks were given to the students during morning announcements, telling them if they fought or showed violence, they would be suspended from school. Ruby recalled,

I took a hit on suspensions because I suspended so many kids. My Area Superintendent had a meeting with me about the high suspension rate. That's how we got PBIS. We started small. Students without any behavior problems for two hours received an incentive.

She rallied the entire faculty and staff to assist with discipline and attendance issues. The Intervention Coach researched Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) programs and worked with the Instructional Leadership Team to design a plan specific to the students at Drayton Elementary. She created a team consisting of the school registrar, social worker, and parent facilitator to address attendance. The attendance team met every two weeks to review student absences, sent letters home to parents, conducted parent conferences, and submitted referrals to the local family service department. Discipline issues began to decrease, and students started to come to school regularly.

In May of 2019, Ruby learned her school's CCRPI score had increased by more than ten points. She remembered feeling happy, grateful, and thankful to God. She shared, "I spread ownership, delegated, and trusted people to do the job that they were paid to do." Everyone, staff, students, and parents, took ownership and worked to improve teaching and to learn at the school. As she continued to reflect, she mentioned three things attributing to her tremendous success: her teachers' quality, funding support, and leadership preparation. "A few teachers really needed to leave the school. They were not helping us reach our goal.", she explained. Those teachers are no longer at Drayton Elementary because they were ineffective. Ruby retained teachers who demonstrated high student growth and hired new teachers. The school used Title I funds to purchase resources to support student learning to include much-needed laptops for students to complete Iready reading and math lessons. They also purchased flat-screen smartboards to replace the outdated ones. Title I funding allowed for the purchase of intervention

programs, library books and paid for teachers to attend professional learning sessions to address student performance. While purchasing much-needed resources for teachers and students contributed to increasing student improvement, leadership experiences cemented student growth. Ruby's mentors were instrumental in guiding her through the school turnaround process. She had three mentors over the past four years, all of which are past principals of failing Title I schools that showed improvement. "They listened to my concerns and gave me advice.", Ruby said.

Landscape and Sketching

On a chilly November morning, I pulled into a parking space in front of Drayton Elementary. The school was located just off the main road with several fast-food restaurants, stores, and small businesses. As I approached the front door, I noticed a parent dropping off her student at school. This scene seemed odd as no other cars nor parents were dropping off students. School had started 35 minutes ago, and this student was tardy. I walked in behind the parent and student, waiting a six-foot distance due to safety measures for coronavirus. I overheard the front office receptionist explain to the parent that the student was tardy and had missed breakfast and part of the daily reading instruction. The parent asked the receptionist if the student could still get food because he had not any breakfast. The receptionist smiled and replied, "Of course," and then told the student to go to the lunchroom to get breakfast. The receptionist greeted me in the same courteous manner and walked me to Ruby's office.

Ruby has a quaint office nook located in the back of the main office with a large window facing the school's front parking lot. She decorated her office with many green frogs, school spirit gear, and drawings given to her by her students. Eighteen drawings were hanging on her closet door. Many of them read, "Mrs. McNair the best principal." As I sat across the desk from her, she smiled and explained how excited she was to tell me about the good things going on at

Drayton Elementary. First, she explained how they were dealing with constraints due to coronavirus by adjusting the daily schedule and having students eat in the classrooms instead of going to the lunchroom. Just as she was getting ready to provide more details, the front office receptionist stepped into her office and told her to come to the front desk to speak to a police officer. In shock and freezing for a moment with uncertainty, she asked me to wait in her office while taking care of the matter. As I sat patiently waiting, I overheard Ruby's conversation with the police officer. A student had been dropped off at school by her mother but never went inside the building. Instead, the student walked back home and refused to go to school.

The mom called the police to have them take her back to school. When Ruby came back to her office, she explained to me what had happened with the student and shared the student left campus last week as well. Ruby was uncertain because the student left campus but explained the student has been attending sessions each day with the school counselor to provide socioemotional support.

Providing support is a skill that Ruby has mastered. During our school walkthrough, she introduced me to her assistant principal, instructional specialist, and intervention specialist. When Ruby conducted the observation to highlight the progress at Drayton Elementary, these three staff members expressed how much growth the school had experienced. The assistant principal shared a story of when Ruby arrived:

> When she arrived, morale was low. She and our old Assistant Principal worked to
> build morale, by implementing weekly student recognition, Bullpup of the Week.
> We also did Bucket fillers. People from the state department came to help us look
> at data. The administrative team did monthly walkthroughs with teachers. Mrs.
> McNair (Ruby) and the Assistant Principal reviewed data notebooks.

The Assistant Principal went on to explain how data played a large part in increases student academic performance. Ruby had teachers increase the number of minutes students used the personalized learning platform called Iready. The rationale for increasing the number of minutes students used Iready was based on research conducted by Curriculum Associates, revealing when students use Iready for forty-five minutes or more per week, they could grow by one grade band within a school year. The leadership team implemented Iready Thermometers for each classroom. Ruby colored the classroom Iready thermometers each time a student from the class completed an Iready lesson and recognized students for usage with an Iready Brag Tag and Top Iready Scorer of the Week.

Ruby introduced me to her Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Coach. The PBIS Coach exclaimed,

Since Mrs. McNair (Ruby) arrived discipline is much better! I was about to quit because our old principal had no leadership. Our previous leader seemed like she had given up. Her first year, she (Ruby) made it known she was in charge. She supported teachers with student behaviors. She sent kids home. Our suspensions were high the first year because she was sending a message. She helped us to develop high expectations.

Summary

This chapter presented the portraits of Wendy Smith, Victoria Date, and Ruby McNair. These three principals worked in Title I schools listed on the failing schools list by the Georgia Department of Education. The participants each shared their journey to education and their strategies for improving school culture, teachers, and student performance. Chapter 5 includes the findings of all three data collection methods, interviews, observations, and school documents; an analysis of data will be coded to develop themes.

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RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to understand the roles of identified school principals with regards to improving chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast Georgia. In this chapter, I will analyze all participants and their experiences with improving a chronically failing Title I school. The findings addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the life and career experiences of identified and effective K-5 principals serving in chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast Georgia?

RQ2: What are the strategies employed by identified and effective K-5 principals serving in chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast Georgia?

RQ3: What are the barriers, in any, faced by identified and effective K-5 principals serving in chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast Georgia?

The study included efforts to determine the experiences of the identified principals, the strategies they used, and any barriers they faced during their school improvement efforts. Data were collected using interviews, observations, and reviewing school documents. Participants were identified based on the 2016 College and Career Readiness Performance Index score (CCPRI) below 60, resulting in becoming a chronically failing school identified by the Georgia Department of Education. On the 2019 CCRPI score report, schools with increased scores were removed from the chronically failing schools' list. The principals of these schools were selected to participate in the study. All participants have served for at least three consecutive years as principals of their current school. Each principal has a Tier II Educational Leadership

certification issued by the state of Georgia. The enrollment of each school ranges between 300 and 600 students in grades Pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade. Creswell (2014) advised triangulating data from various sources to examine evidence and establish justifications for themes. Interview data, field notes, and written memos were analyzed using in vivo coding by highlighting and underlining phrases, actions, and vocabulary. Interview data were then analyzed using values coding to categorize attitudes, values, and beliefs for a collective meaning. I coded the field for a second-round using process coding to identify similarities and differences of observable behaviors. I wrote memos based on school document analysis to identify categories of relevant information to answer the research questions. The researcher used second-round codes to establish themes within the data. In Table 7, I prove examples of my data analysis. First, I used open coding by circling and highlighting similar phrases from interviews, observation, and school documents data. Next, I grouped related codes into categories, highlighted in red in Table 7, using in vivo coding to narrow open codes. In vivo coding allowed me to analyze the principals' behaviors and determine common vocabulary and phrases. As demonstrated in Table 7, I created themes during the second round of coding.

Second round coding methods included: values coding to analyze values, attitudes, and beliefs; selective coding to construct similar categories, and content coding to organize categories from school documents. See Table 7 for detailed data analysis processes.

Table 7

Data Analysis Matrix for Experiences, Strategies, and Barriers of Successful Title I Principals

Codes from Open Coding		Categories from in vivo coding	Experience in Title I school	Theme from second round coding	Leadership Basis
	• hard work • mentor • challenging • low performing school • graduate courses • alternate route certification • leadership courses • AP experience • no structure • turnaround school		➢ Mentor ➢ Leadership experience		
	• teams • leadership team • smaller team • round table • data driven • shared decision making • deadlines • input • make changes • consensus • weekly meetings • student growth • schedules • calendars • collaborative discussions		Shared Leadership ➢ Core Teams ➢ Leadership teams ➢ Shared decision making		
	• school partnership • Iready • GMASCCRPI • collaborative planning • data analysis • PBIS • SIP • action steps • reading and math skills • writing skills • technology • ability levels • parental involvement • behavior expectations • high expectations • accountability		Identifying students' needs ➢ Iready ➢ SIP ➢ PBIS ➢ Action steps ➢ Incentives		

Codes from Open Coding		Categories from in vivo coding	Identifying the Staff's Need	Theme from second round coding	**Culture and Climate**
	• teacher retention • reassign teachers • transient teachers • remove teachers • train teachers • flexibility • communication • staff recognition • modeling • expectations • rewards • shared leadership • delegate • teamwork • peer observations • moral builders • courageous conversations • accountability		➤ Teacher Retention ➤ Remove/train teachers ➤ Delegate ➤ Teamwork		
	• PBIS • incentives • discipline problems • student suspensions • acceptable behaviors • attendance • PBIS lessons • Rewards • School-wide discipline • positive culture • vision and mission • teamwork • communication • summer planning • delegate • leadership • mindset shift • buy-in • improve teaching • resistant staff • CCRPI		School Climate ➤ PBIS ➤ Incentives ➤ Positive Culture ➤ Vision and mission		

Codes from Open Coding		Categories from in vivo coding		Theme from second round coding	School Funding
	• Title I budget • supplies • technology • intervention program • books • headphones • highlighters • pencils/pens • chart paper • folders • printers • instructional personnel • professional learning • Saturday school		Title I Funds ➢ Title I budget ➢ Supplies ➢ Technology ➢ Intervention program		
	• churches • clothing • food • school supplies • staff luncheon • staff lessons • incentive • clothing closet		Community Partners ➢ churches ➢ food ➢ supplies ➢ clothes		
Codes from Open Coding	• Iready • GMAS • CCRPI • intervention programs • 95% reading kits • math number talks • reading and math skills • observations • modeling • ability groups • personalized learning • teacher led • student stations • reading and math levels • incentives	Categories from in vivo coding	Interventions ➢ Intervention Programs ➢ Iready ➢ Personalized Learning ➢ Incentives ➢ Reading and math levels	Theme from second round coding	Teaching and Learning
	• weekly data review • Inst. Special. • plan lessons • presentations • teacher discussions • professional learning • plan assessments		Collaborative Planning ➢ Data review ➢ Plan lessons and assessments ➢ Professional Learning		

Themes emerged from the stories told by all three participants. While the focus was primarily on the experience of the principals, school improvement strategies, and barriers to increasing student achievement, Title I requirements and funding also informed the findings. The emergent themes fell into four main groupings: leadership basis, culture and climate, school funding, and teaching and learning. The first, leadership basis, contained three subthemes: experience in a Title I school, shared leadership, and identifying the students' needs. The second, culture and climate, included subthemes on student discipline and identifying the staff's needs: the third, school funding, covered themes regarding Title I funds and community partners. The fourth, teaching and learning, comprised two subthemes- collaborative planning and intervention -related to how teachers teach and assess student learning.

Leadership Basis

In reviewing the participants' stories, there were a few recurrent themes concerning their leadership journey. The participants came into teaching as a second career and earned leadership certification through a college-based program. They learned from their principal mentors how to manage a school and improve student learning. Each of their mentors modeled how to set high expectations and establish clear standards for achievement to change the overall school performance. The participants were aware of the driving forces to improve student performance, including meeting state mandates, test scores, and teacher capacity (Tomal, Schilling, Trybus, 2013). Each participant discussed their experience teaching and leading in a failing Title I school. Mrs. Date admitted her previous work in a failing Title I school helped her understand how to lead school turnaround. The participants also attributed increasing accountability among the entire staff through shared leadership. The principals focused on empowering their staff and trusting them to perform tasks adequately. Each participant had a core leadership team for making school-wide decisions. The participants explained how they used data to identify the students' needs. The core leadership teams analyzed diagnostic data to make determinations regarding student performance.

Mentoring and Experience in Title I schools

During the first interview with each participant, I asked them what events motivated them to become principals. They all told me it was a mentor who influenced them to become a principal. Mrs. McNair smiled as she reminisced about her influencer, Mrs. Conrad, an affluent elementary school principal. Mrs. McNair worked as Mrs. Conrad's AP (Assistant Principal). During her time as Conrad's AP, she observed her frequently as she completed her daily tasks.

Mrs. McNair revealed, "I learned a lot from Mrs. Conrad, to be sympathetic and don't forget what it's like to be in the classroom. She taught me that "we are the constant for students; we have to sympathize with them."

Mrs. Date recalled a similar influence of her former principal, Mrs. Baker. Mrs. Date worked as Mrs. Baker's Instructional Specialist before being promoted and working as her AP. As a part of her leadership classes, the college advisor assigned Mrs. Date to have Mrs. Baker as her mentor. "She was great with people and patient," Mrs. Date remarked about her mentor. Modeling her leadership style after Mrs. Baker, Mrs. Date knows the importance of building relationships with people. For instance, like her staff, she communicates with them weekly to keep them informed about things going on in the school, district, and state.

Mrs. Smith shared the same influence as the other two participants, naming her previous principal and mentor, Mr. Andrews. Mrs. Smith remembered talking with Mr. Andrews often about leading a school and how he encouraged her to get her leadership degree. One of the degree program requirements was to have a mentor: the obvious choice, Mr. Andrews. Mrs. Smith shadowed him many days as he completed his normal responsibilities. From him, she learned how to lead a team and devise a plan. Mentorship played a significant role in developing the leadership capabilities of the participants. Gray et al. (2007) revealed experienced educators mentored effective principals in programs using real-world leadership experiences. Each participant noted how they observed their mentor's leadership and are now using the same strategies in their position as principal.

Although the turnover rate for principals is high due to stress, increased job responsibility, and lack of support, the participants received observable and on the job training through mentorship; they were able to use the skills learned to sustain their principalship (National Association of Elementary Principals, 2003). In 2000, a study conducted by the National Association of

Elementary and Secondary Schools revealed principals noted mentoring programs as one of the factors for improving their leadership skills (National Association of Elementary Principals, 2003).

All three participants have been leading a Title I school for at least three consecutive years, but they are no strangers to the Title I setting. Mrs. McNair has worked in Title I schools her entire career except for two years. She started teaching in a Title I school and then became an Assistant Principal. She admitted, "Title I schools are different, there are different kinds of parents, but I was used to it. I learned if I could work there (Title I school), I could work anywhere." Mrs. Date shared a similar experience, having worked in only Title I schools. She, too, started as a teacher in a Title I school. Then she became an Instructional Specialist, Assistant Principal, and currently principal of a Title I school. Mrs. Date had a unique experience as she worked in a Title I school under state supervision for low performance. In her interview, she talked about how the state monitoring process was not a positive experience, but it taught her always to monitor student data. Mrs. Smith also learned the importance of monitoring student data through her experiences in Title I schools. She worked in Title I schools for most of her career. She spent only three years in a non-Title I school. Mrs. Smith revealed, "It didn't bother me to work in Title I schools." She loves the students. Although Mrs. Smith would not take back her Title I experiences, she confessed it was her time in non-Title I schools where she learned what good teaching and a positive learning environment should look like. Mrs. McNair echoed this sentiment saying, "I learned a lot from these schools."

Interestingly, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. McNair worked as Assistant Principal at the same two non-Title I schools during different years. I was surprised to hear both participants gained strategies for leading Title I schools while working in non-Title I schools. They told me non-Title I schools have order, all the staff has a common goal, the principal is always visible, and

parents are involved in student learning. Many of these factors are not consistently present in Title I schools. The participants expressed having frequent discipline interruptions and low parental involvement at the Title I schools.

The participants' previous experiences in Title I schools were an asset, as they had prior knowledge of barriers and strategies needed to lead a failing Title I school. The participants were equipped to handle issues addressing student discipline, data analysis, and improving school culture. They brought with them prerequisite leadership skills for a failing Title I environment. Mrs. McNair mentioned how Title I schools were different from non-Title I schools, meaning the leadership skills for both types of schools must be different as well. The participants were able to lead their schools to increased student achievement using their working knowledge of Title I schools.

Shared Leadership

Among the common statements regarding data usage used to determine student needs was a recurrent theme of a core leadership team analyzing assessment data. This theme was a surprise because all schools in Glenn County are only required to have a leadership team consisting of the principal, assistant principals, teachers, and support staff. The development of a core leadership team was unique to the participants, and they all had one! Each principal identified a core team, although they all gave them different names. Mrs. Smith's core team was called the Lead Leadership Team, Mrs. Date's the Administrative Team, and Mrs. McNair's the Instructional Leadership Team.

The roles of these core leadership teams were remarkably similar. Mrs. Smith's Lead Leadership Team consisted of herself, the Assistant Principal, the Instructional Specialist, and the Early Intervention Program teacher. Every summer, the team met to analyze Georgia Milestone data to develop the School Improvement Plan (SIP). The Lead Leadership Team also met each month throughout the school year to review student performance on Iready and

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classroom assessments. They monitored progress toward reaching SIP goals. Mrs. Smith added the Lead Leadership Team helped with teacher buy-in when rolling out the new mission and vision. She also delegated tasks to the Lead Leadership Team such as designing professional learning sessions for teachers, completing reports, observing teachers, and serving as the supervisor in her absence. Another task of the Lead Leadership Team was developing and implementing the Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) program to combat student discipline.

Mrs. Date's Administrative Team consists of herself, the assistant principal, the instructional specialist, and the intervention teacher. The role of the administrative team is to analyze school-wide student data and determine what action steps to take toward increased student performance. During July, the Administrative Team outlined these action steps on the SIP. Throughout the year, team members reviewed student assessment data to include Iready to determine whether students were making growth in their learning. The Administrative Team created a structure for collaborative teacher planning by outlining the week teachers' days to discuss student learning targets. The Administrative Team aligned collaborative planning topics to the action steps for addressing student learning needs. The team also provided professional learning training to the teachers. Like Mrs. Smith's Lead Leadership Team, the Administrative Team designed components of PBIS. The Administrative Team also created the PBIS program, designed to reduce discipline occurrences throughout the school day. The Administrative Team chose PBIS core values and incentives the students would receive for following the behavior expectations.

Mrs. McNair's built a core team, called the Instructional Leadership Team, consisting of herself, the assistant principal, the instructional specialist, and the intervention coach. The

Instructional Leadership Team's tasks involved data analysis, teacher support, and discipline. The team analyzed data year-round starting in the summer by reviewing Georgia Milestones Assessment scores and through May with end-of-year assessments. Using the results of the data analysis, the team developed action steps for the School Improvement Plan. Mrs. McNair revealed that an asset to the Instructional Leadership Team was her AP, who previously worked in a state turnaround school. "She (AP) is excellent! She helped us to get off the list," Mrs. McNair exclaimed. In addition to analyzing state assessment data, the team reviewed monthly Iready reading and math reports. These reports displaying student usage and progress were shared with teachers in an email each week. Another task of the Instructional Leadership Team was to improve teacher quality. The team designed a collaborative planning schedule for teachers to work with the Instructional Specialist once a week. Mrs. McNair remembered, "My Instructional Specialist was a dynamic classroom teacher, so I promoted her. We asked for her input on the things she was doing in her classroom and used those strategies."

The core teams established by each participant served as a governing body for analyzing student data, determining yearly school improvement action steps, and developing school-wide discipline plans. The core team members also conducted classroom observations by going into classes to watch teachers give instruction and observe how students responded to the lesson. Team members would follow up with teachers after each observation and provide feedback and modeling to show teachers how to use strategies during lessons. Each core team collected and monitored student assessment data to determine whether the action step goals were met. Another key role of the core teams was to develop school-wide discipline plans. The teams worked to develop a school-wide discipline program, PBIS, by using research-based classroom management strategies. The PBIS initiative outlined expected student behaviors for every setting in the school: classroom, hallway, office, lunchroom, gym, computer, media center, and

playground. With the roll-out of PBIS, Mrs. McNair said there was a decrease in discipline referrals by nearly 50%. She attributed the decline to rewarding students for a positive behavior instead of focusing on negative ones. Building a core leadership team allowed the participants to share leadership responsibilities and get tasks accomplished. Bambrick-Santoyo (2018) acknowledged principals could not serve as sole leaders; they must forge a leadership team to assist with school improvement efforts.

Identifying the Students' Need

In 2018, the district superintendent required all schools in Glenn County to write school improvement goals under the three categories: literacy, math, culture, and climate. The table below shows school improvement goals from each participant's school.

Table 6 *SIP Comparison Tables*

School Year 2018-2019	LITERACY	MATH	CULTURE & CLIMATE
Baywood ES	By the end of the 2018-2019 school year, the percentage of students performing on grade level in reading will increase by 25% as measured by the Iready Diagnostic Assessment.	By the end of the 2018-2019 school year, the percentage of students performing on grade level in math with an increase by 25% as measured by the Iready diagnostic assessment.	By the end of the 2018-2019 school year, the CCRPI score at Baywood Elementary will increase by 5%.
Drayton ES	Increase the number of students scoring proficient in English Language Arts by 5 percentage points as measured by 2018-2019 Georgia Milestones.	Increase the number of students scoring proficient in Math by 5 percentage points as measured by 2018-2019 Georgia Milestones.	Implement a school-wide PBIS behavior framework to increase the school climate star rating from 2 stars to 3 stars.

Galliard ES	K – 5th-grade students will perform at or above grade level in ELA/Reading on Iready assessments.	K – 5th-grade students will perform at or above grade level in Math on Iready assessments.	Policies, procedures, and a high performing school culture will be developed, implemented, and monitored from August 2018 to May 2019

Literacy goals focused on increasing the percentage of students on grade level in English Language Arts/Reading from the previous year. At Baywood, Mrs. Date and the Administrative Team developed school improvement goals based on an analysis of Georgia Milestones Assessment data. The literacy school improvement goal focused on measuring students' reading levels using Iready assessment data. The Administrative Team put several actions steps in place for reaching the goals. Action steps for the literacy goal included integrating daily silent, quiet reading time for all students, professional learning for teachers on vocabulary and writing instruction, Principal's Book Club, and the implementation of Walk to Read. Each day, teachers set aside 15 minutes for school-wide silent reading to help students improve their reading skills. Teachers attended training on developing lessons to increase students' vocabulary, writing and improve their reading comprehension. Monthly the principal read books aloud to each class, and students answered comprehension questions to participate in the Principal's Book Club. Walk to Read was an initiative developed by the Administrative Team. The purpose of Walk to Read was for students to go to different classrooms based on their reading levels for lessons to increase levels and improve comprehension skills. Teachers analyzed Iready reading data were to determine whether the students were showing improvement in reading.

Similarly, at Galliard Elementary, Mrs. Smith and the Lead Leadership Team outlined literacy school improvement goals focused on performing at or above grade level using Iready

assessments and writing training for teachers. The Lead Leadership team used the following action steps to assist in achieving the goal: professional learning on data analysis of Lexile level scores and Writing Across the Curriculum, peer observations, and Accelerated Reader. Lexile levels measure a student's reading ability. Teachers used Lexile levels to select texts students would be able to read with little difficulty. Mrs. Smith provided training to her teachers on how to analyze Iready data by using Lexile levels to increase students' reading ability by choosing the appropriately leveled text. Teachers also attended professional learning on Writing Across the Curriculum. During this training, teachers learned how to teach writing strategies and incorporate writing activities throughout all content areas. Mrs. McNair worked with her Instructional Leadership Team to develop action steps for literacy goals to include data analysis, professional learning, and collaborative planning for teachers. Mirroring Mrs. Smith's action step, Mrs. McNair provided teachers with training on analyzing student reading data. Teachers used a data analysis protocol to retrieve scores, assign groups based on ability, and develop tiered instruction for students based on data. Teachers also began to participate in collaborative planning to plan for weekly lessons by understanding content standards to help students improve their comprehension skills.

Math goals focused on increasing the percentage of students on grade level in math from the previous year. Mrs. Date and her team outlined the following action steps for reaching their math goal: analyze weekly formative assessments, incorporate the use of interactive notebooks, and conduct daily problem-solving practice. Teachers assessed students each week on math standards and analyzed results to determine areas where students were struggling. The teachers planned remediation lessons to improve students' understanding of the math standard they performed poorly on. Students used interactive math notebooks to organize math foldables, activities, timelines, and sample problems. Interactive notebooks are usually composition books

where students keep and organize their notes. Students used the interactive notebooks to practice and study for tests. Daily practice was conducted to improve students' math problem-solving skills. Each day teachers posted a different math word problem was posted for students to solve.

Students at Drayton Elementary practiced daily math strategies to improve their number sense and mental math strategies. Mrs. McNair used daily math practice as one of her action steps. Other math action steps included using exit tickets and Iready for math intervention.

Exit tickets are quick formative assessments usually given at the end of a class to determine how well students learned the information taught in class that day. Mrs. McNair had teachers use exit tickets three to five times a week. Teachers used exit ticket data to determine which students would work within a smaller group. They also developed Iready intervention groups to allow students class time to complete lessons within their personalized learning path.

Mrs. Smith also used Iready as a part of her action steps. Teachers reviewed student Iready quantile levels. Quantile levels measure what students can understand mathematically. Using quantile levels, teachers were able to monitor students' understanding of math concepts using quantile levels.

All the participants led Title I schools identified as chronically failing in 2016 by the Georgia Department of Education. Participants revealed their approach to diagnosing the needs to improve student performance. A common statement from all the participants was the use of data. The participants held a meeting with their core teams once the Department of Education released the Georgia Milestones Assessment (GMAS) scores to the schools to analyze the data. Each core team member disaggregated the data by domains, performance levels, and teachers. They used the data report to determine action steps necessary to improve student learning, then outlined action steps on the Title I School Improvement Plan (SIP). One initiative Mrs. Date

recalled developing from their data analysis was the Walk to Read intervention time. She said, "We disaggregated the data and grouped every kid in the building. Every student went somewhere in the building to work on reading for 30 minutes. This process was our intervention block for reading."

Another aspect of shared leadership was developed with the implementation of collaborative planning. The participants established weekly times for teachers to meet with the instructional specialists to assist with planning lessons. The teachers were able to ask questions, gather resources, and receive instructional strategies on teaching standards. The participants shared the responsibility of reviewing Iready assessment data with their core team and teachers. Iready assessment data provided details on how students mastered reading and math levels and identified areas where students were still struggling. The core teams and teachers analyzed the data, discussed the findings, and then determined the focus areas from student scores. Mrs. Smith said, "Data plays a huge role. We review the beginning of the year, middle of the year, and end of the year assessments by breaking down the data to look at what standards they (students) need to master." Mrs. McNair said data plays a significant role in measuring school-wide goals. Her Instructional Leadership Team reviewed GMAS, Iready, and additional reading tests related to phonics. She said with her Instructional Leadership Team.

Data were analyzed then prioritized to find the students' greatest instructional need, which was reading. Mrs. McNair added, "We disaggregated further to determine what area of reading to work on phonics, decoding, or comprehension. The students could not read. Our students were struggling with reading and comprehending what they read." The teachers began with improving phonics and decoding to help students learn letter sounds and put those sounds together to read words. While comprehension has improved, Mrs. McNair admitted it was a work in progress. Mrs. McNair noted an additional method for using her data that the other two

principals did not. She told me her data analysis also helped her decide grade-level assignments for teachers. Mrs. McNair said, "It (data) told me I had to move people (teachers) from places (grade levels) they didn't need to be, because they weren't teaching effectively." Bambrick-Santoyo (2018) noted once-struggling schools experienced boosts in student achievement using data-driven instruction.

Culture and Climate

Each participant revealed their approach to improving school culture, including having a vision and building teacher morale. The participants discussed the need to establish a school vision and gaining staff buy-in. Staff members began to take ownership of the school vision, using their talents to organize initiatives. Each participant discussed motivating and uniting staff members to attain the school's common goal of increased student achievement.

School culture and climate refer to the beliefs held by staff members, teaching practices, relationships among stakeholders, and the school's effect on student performance. When I analyzed the interview data, I discovered each participant discussed how they established a positive culture within their schools. While each participant embarked on improving culture and climate in their way, they all addressed staff morale, teacher retention, and student discipline. Mrs. Smith explained how she used communication to create positive relationships among the staff. Mrs. Smith said:

I was upfront and honest. You can't talk down to people. Talk to them in a way

they will receive it. Smile and have a good attitude and welcoming spirit. This

get them focused on the tasks of students learning.

She was a servant leader, getting the teachers what they needed to be successful. Mrs.

Smith delegated responsibilities allowing teachers to take on leadership roles. She fostered

teamwork by having effective teachers serve as mentors to support struggling teachers.

Additionally, Mrs. Smith hosted morale builders, including staff luncheons, a Thanksgiving

meal, a Christmas breakfast, and an end-of-the-year celebration. She gave weekly shout-outs to

staff members who were doing an excellent job. Mrs. McNair also used morale builders to

improve staff morale; she too had luncheons, a Christmas Party, and an end-of-year

celebration. She recognized a staff member with outstanding performance during faculty

meetings and rewarded them with an Employee of the Month certificate. Mrs. McNair had

gained insight from a book titled *How Full Is Your Bucket?* and implemented elements of the

book by having teachers provide bucket fillers. She explained, "We do bucket fillers every

week. They (staff) give little notes with compliments to one another, and I share them during

the morning announcements." Mrs. McNair told me she was compassionate and understanding

with her staff. "I had flexibility with their work hours. If a staff member needed to be off, I

always told them to take care of family first. We are all human," Mrs. McNair said.

Mrs. Date built staff morale around attendance as well, although somewhat differently

than Mrs. McNair. Mrs. Date explained, "Staff attendance was meager the year before I came, so

I started to give incentives to come to work. I rewarded them for perfect attendance with coupons

to leave early, wear jeans, and leave early. I even gave out gift cards." Staff attendance improved

from the initiatives Mrs. Date put in place. With teachers coming to work regularly, students had

the opportunity to receive consistent instruction. Improving staff morale can help with teacher

retention. If teachers are happy, they will stay and perform.

In 2017, the nation's teacher retention rate was 16% for teachers leaving the profession

(Carver-Thomas, Darling-Hammond, 2017). The most common reason teachers leave the

profession is dissatisfaction. The frequently cited areas of dissatisfaction include accountability

measures (25%), unhappiness with school administration (21%), and unsatisfied with their

teaching career (Carver-Thomas, Darling-Hammond, 2017). Mrs. Smith admitted she worked

hard to keep her teachers happy, saying, "My goal was not to get rid of people but to make them

better." She provided training and mentors to support her teachers. Mrs. Smith has retained all

the teachers since her arrival five years ago except for three people: 2 retired and one moved out

of state. Mrs. Date has not been as lucky; her staff has been transient over the past couple of

years. "Many of my veteran teachers were promoted," she grumbled. She has not been happy

with losing veteran teachers, especially since they were offered jobs in late summer, leaving her

with only non-certified new teachers to hire. Mrs. McNair lost several teachers her first year at

Drayton Elementary. She was not sad about the losses, revealing, "We lost the teachers we

didn't need here anyway." She added a few teachers needed to leave the school, and she helped

them to go. Mrs. McNair met with ineffective teachers and the spring asking them not to return.

She noted the need to replace ineffective teachers with effective ones.

Climate and culture goals varied. Mrs. Date set out to improve the school's overall

College and Career Readiness and Performance Index (CCPRI) score. Mrs. McNair focused on

implementing PBIS to improve the school's star climate rating. A star climate rating is a

diagnostic tool used by the Georgia Department of Education to determine whether schools are

on the right path to school improvement (Georgia Department of Education, 2019b). Star climate

ratings range between 1-5, with five being the highest and one the lowest. In 2018, the star

climate rating at Mrs. McNair's school was 2. The rating includes the following school-wide

data: surveys (e.g., students, parents, and teachers), student discipline, safe learning environment,

and student attendance (Georgia Department of Education, 2019b). While Mrs. Smith did not

mention improving the school's star climate rating, she did list improving the school's culture by

implementing policies and procedures for a high-performing school. Although each principal wrote different climate and culture goals, all the goals relate to improving the overall culture within the schools. Mrs. Date and Mrs. McNair had similar action steps for improving climate and culture. Both outlined analyzing student discipline data and forming a team to review student attendance. All three principals listed incorporating the Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) program to reward students who exhibit expected behaviors.

Identifying the Staff's Need

The participants were assigned to their schools by the district superintendent. All three schools were Title I and identified as chronically failing schools by the Georgia Department of Education. The participants' largest task would be to bring about school change within their buildings. Doing this would not come without planning. In the table below is the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) scores for each school. The average CCPRI score for K-5 schools across Georgia in 2019 was 77.45.

Table 8

College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) Comparison Tables

School	CCRPI Score 2016-2017	CCRPI Score 2017-2018	CCRPI Score 2018-2019	CCRPI Score 2019-2020
Baywood ES	58.6	66.2	53.6	66.1
Galliard ES	41.4	60.6	65.8	60.6
Drayton ES	41	54.3	59.4	67.6

While the participants were elated to have their schools removed from the state's chronically failing school list, they each discussed their leadership and arduous work that led to the school's removal.

First, the participants worked to establish a positive culture. Based on the failing status of the schools, each participant used their leadership style to rebuild positivity throughout the school by sharing their vision. Mrs. McNair shared that she understood her staff, knowing they did not want to fail school. She admitted her initial thoughts were the low CCRPI score reflected the previous principal, not her, but she began to take ownership. By taking ownership, Mrs. McNair started to develop a vision for the school. She created a core team, the Instructional Leadership Team, and a large team of staff members for the leadership team. The teams had roundtable discussions to get everyone's ideas and input. Mrs. McNair explained that she observed everyone's strengths and heard their thoughts on improving the school during these discussions. Using input from both teams helped Mrs. McNair to establish her vision for the school, "Drayton Elementary is committed to providing the highest quality of education that allows all students to reach their maximum potential." To garner buy-in for the vision, she gave the faculty and staff a copy of the vision, announced it during morning announcements, and stated it during every meeting. Mrs. McNair also held a meeting in January to review and refocus on the vision and school goals. Even though the staff cautiously bought into the vision, they began to come around and give suggestions, taking ownership in improving the school.

Mrs. Date said her staff apprehensively accepted her vision for the school as well. She, too, needed everyone to make the necessary changes. Mrs. Date told me she took an "all hands-on deck" approach to develop her vision. During the summer, she met with the leadership team consisting of the assistant principal, instructional specialist, grade level lead teachers, and support staff to review the school's mission and vision. As a team, they decided what they wanted the school to be and how students would learn. Mrs. Date considered the team's input to establish the school's new vision, "**B**uild **E**ager **A**chievers **R**igorously and **S**uccessfully." The vision written as an acronym for BEAR, the school's mascot, was representative of the family-

like culture Mrs. Date wanted to build. She explained, "I always refer to them as the Bear family." Mrs. Date frequently shared the vision over the morning announcements and during meetings.

Similarly, Mrs. Smith shared her vision during the daily morning announcements, stated it during faculty meetings, and printed it on the top of every meeting agenda. Mrs. Smith's method of establishing a vision mirrored the other participants. She also worked with her leadership team consisting of the assistant principal, instructional specialist, guidance counselor, and grade level lead teachers. As a team, they talked about reestablishing a focus on educating the whole child through the arts. The team reviewed the mission and vision and then made changes to focus on the new school goals. Mrs. Smith used teamwork to establish the new vision, "Increasing academic achievement for all students and creating a culture of artistic expression through Art, Drama, Dance, and Music." Mrs. Smith noted her use of the team approach helped with staff buy-in, "Everyone seemed to be on board. There was no negative feedback. If teachers had concerns, they would come to talk to me." Establishing a school vision was no easy feat for the participants, but it needed to be done. Mrs. Date explained, "They (faculty and staff) needed a mindset shift. Teachers had low expectations for how much our students could learn." The mindset of low expectations is toxic in a school setting. Kafele (2015) explained all school leaders, "particularly those in communities facing systemic challenges such as poverty, drugs, or violence, must inspire excellence by helping students and staff to envision it in action, and must also consistently reinforce their expectations" (p. 7). Kafele (2015) added schools with a collective vision have a greater chance of attaining success.

Changing school culture is an arduous task, requiring a shared vision and buy-in from all staff members. The participants met with their leadership team to discuss school goals and determine the school-wide vision. Having a vision would not be enough as the faculty and staff

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needed to understand and follow the vision. Each participant used teachers on the leadership team to 'sell' the school-wide vision to other teachers; they also repeated the vision frequently to remind the staff of their common goal. The participants established a collective school-wide vision to focus on what was important motivate staff and students and create a sense of shared responsibility for student learning.

School Funding

The U. S. Department of Education allocates Title I schools a spending budget each school year. They identify schools as chronically failing for three consecutive years in Georgia as Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI). CSI schools receive $150,000 in Title I funds to support school improvement efforts. All the participants received $150,000 in funding for their schools. These funds were mostly, at least sixty percent or more, spent on instructional staffing salaries. Items and services purchased with these funds must be written in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and require a justification of the impact of the purchases on student learning. Figure 7 shows the categories for purchasing and the percentage of funds used by each participant.

Figure 7

Title I Budget Percentages by Principal
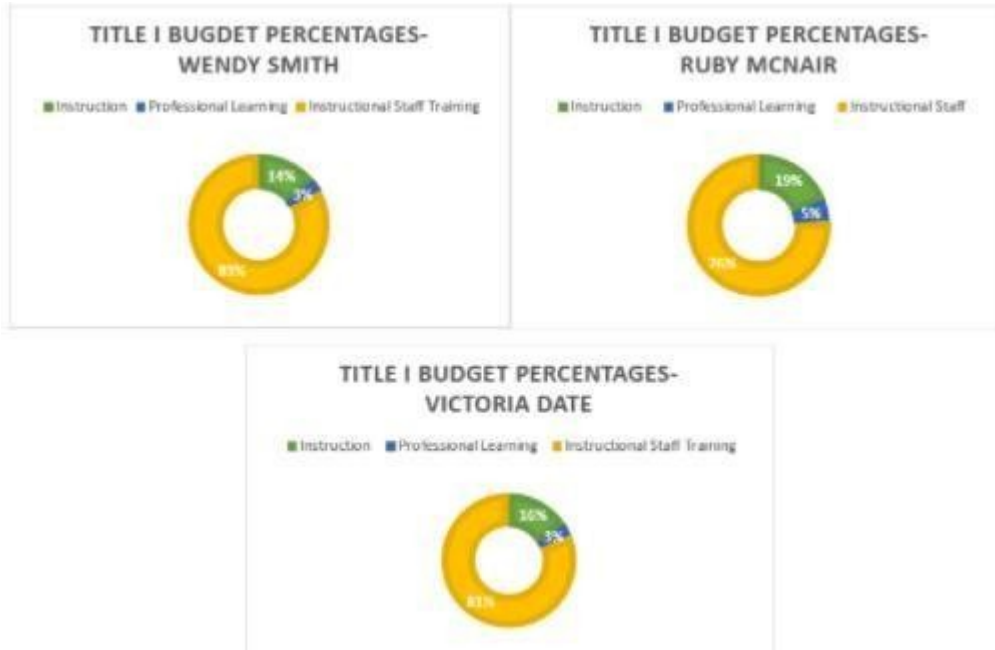
Title I Budget

At Galliard, Mrs. Smith used Title I funds to purchase items for instruction, professional learning, and instructional staff training. She spent fourteen percent of the CSI Title I funding to buy student laptops and the 95 Percent reading intervention program. The laptops were stored on a laptop cart and checked out to teachers weekly. Students used the laptops to complete Iready lessons in reading and math. Mrs. Smith is continuing to purchase student laptops each year to reach a 1:1 ratio. They bought the 95 Percent reading program as a resource for teachers to use during intervention time. Every teacher in each grade level used 95 Percent reading kits. The teachers used the kits to provide phonics intervention to struggling readers to improve their fluency and reading comprehension skills. Mrs. Smith also used CSI funds to pay for teachers to attend professional learning sessions. Using three percent of the funding, Mrs. Smith held professional learning sessions during the summer. They used the funds to pay for consultants to design and deliver the training to teachers.

Additionally, CSI funding paid stipends to teachers who attended the summer sessions. Sessions included training on Iready, data analysis, and classroom management. Mrs. Smith spent the largest percentage of funding, eighty-three percent of CSI funds, on instructional staff training for the Instructional Specialist's salary. The salary included base pay, insurance benefits, and FICA. The total compensation of her Instructional Specialist was $90,568. The school used the remaining instructional staff training funds to pay for a literacy consultant and Mrs. Smith to attend the state principal's conference. The literacy consultant provided support to teachers for creating reading lessons and working with students struggling with reading comprehension. Annually the state of Georgia hosts a leadership conference. Principals in Glenn County are highly encouraged to attend but must use Title I funds to pay for registration. During the conference, numerous presenters share information on improving student achievement and building positive school culture.

At Drayton, Mrs. McNair used CSI funding for the following categories: instruction, professional learning, and instructional staff. Mrs. McNair used nineteen percent of the funds to purchase student laptops, ActivPanels, and leveled libraries. Based on Iready data, Mrs. McNair and her team determined they would need more devices to allow students to use Iready more frequently. She gave student laptops to grade level to share among the teachers, allowing a rotation of devices for students to access Iready two to three times a week. Mrs. McNair experienced an improvement in students' Iready scores due to the increase in time students could access the program. Mrs. McNair also purchased ActivPanels to update the outdated Promethean Boards in classrooms. An ActivPanel is an interactive display replacing the traditional classroom, providing a tablet-like experience for the teacher and students. The ActivPanels Mrs. McNair purchased provided teachers with preloaded teaching tools, supplemental lessons,

annotation features, and advanced collaboration tools for students to work in groups. Another purchase Mrs. McNair made for instruction was acquiring leveled libraries. Leveled libraries are large collections of books ranging in difficulty levels from emergent readers to advanced readers. The Instructional Specialist gave each grade level leveled libraries for their students to choose books on their reading level. Selecting books on the appropriate level allowed students the opportunity to practice reading skills. They also used CSI funding to pay for professional learning. Professional learning sessions included instructional strategies for math and reading, data analysis, classroom management, and student writing—these funds paid for session materials, such as chart paper, pens, and folders. They used the greatest percent of funding to pay for instructional staff training, with a sizable portion going toward the instructional specialist's salary of $98,527. The remaining funds were paid for Mrs. McNair's registration fee for the state principal's conference.

At Baywood, Mrs. Date spent CSI Title I funds for the following categories: instruction, professional learning, and instructional staff training. Furthermore, she used sixteen percent of CSI funds to pay for supplies, intervention resources, books, and leveled libraries. Supplies included headphones for students, pens and pencils, calculators, folders, and printers for the teachers. Mrs. Date also purchased Iready reading and math student workbooks for teachers to use during intervention time. Also included in the purchase for instruction were books and level libraries. Mrs. Date selected ten books for each month of the school year to read to the school. These books were called the Principal's Book of the Month (PBOM). Using CSI funds, a PBOM was purchased for every classroom for grades Pre-Kindergarten through fifth. Level libraries were purchased and placed in the Instructional Specialist's room for teachers to access and select appropriately leveled text for their students. Mrs. Date used only three percent of funding for

professional learning supplies, such as chart paper, ink, paper, notebooks, highlighters, and dry erase markers. Mrs. Date had a book study with the faculty and purchased the *Engaging Students with Poverty in Mind text*.

The goal of the book study was for the faculty to learn how to connect and teach less fortunate students. The faculty was assigned specific chapters to read and met monthly to discuss their reading and share applicable strategies to use within the school. The last and largest category Mrs. Date spent CSI funds in was instructional staff training. Mrs. Date used eighty-one percent of the entire budget to pay for substitutes, stipends, conferences, and the Instructional Specialist's salary. Mrs. Date paid for substitutes to cover classes when her teachers attended professional learning during the school day. She also paid teachers stipends for attending summer professional learning sessions. These sessions covered topics on data analysis, Benchmark Literacy reading instruction, Number Talk, writing instruction, and Iready implementation. The salary paid using CSI funds was for the Instructional Specialist. Her salary was $92,914. Mrs. Date used the remaining funds to pay for admission to the state principal's conference.

All the participants spent Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI) funds in three categories: instruction, professional learning, and instructional staff training. On average, they spent about seventy-five percent of funds on instructional staff. Under the instructional staff training category, each principal paid salaries for their instructional specialist. These salaries accounted for over seventy percent of the overall CSI funds. Each principal discussed the critical role their instructional specialist played in improving teachers. The instructional specialist held weekly collaborative planning, modeled and co-taught with teachers, and were also core leadership members. Each participant spent about sixteen percent of their funds under the

instruction category. Mrs. Smith and Mrs. McNair both purchased student laptops for accessing Iready. Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Date bought level libraries with books for students to read based on their reading levels. Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Date purchased resources to improve focus on improving students' reading and math skills. Mrs. McNair was the only principal to use instruction funding to buy ActivPanels. She upgraded almost all her classrooms with ActivPanels to improve the interactivity among teachers and students. Mrs. Smith and Mrs. McNair both provided classroom management professional learning sessions. Mrs. McNair and Mrs. Date provided Number Talk professional learning. Each principal used five percent or less of their Title funds to pay for varying professional learning sessions based on student and teacher needs, they all provided training on data analysis to improve teachers on analyzing data to increase student performance. The remaining funds of the budget were used for each principal to attend the annual state principal's meeting. The participants used Title I funds to purchases resources based on their students' needs; these resources could not be funded without Title I money.

Community Partners

Little (2013) noted when schools and community organizations work together, and it benefits everyone. These partnerships support learning and better align goals, resulting in an improved program (Harvard Family Research Project, 2010). While all three participants worked to improve student achievement within their schools, support from the community outside of the schools proved essential for improvement. The participants were able to acquire resources not allowed to be purchased using Title I funds. Students in their schools were economically disadvantaged, needing food and clothing. Community partners proved to be vital in assisting students with getting additional food and clothing. The community partners also assisted teachers with supplies and skills to help them communicate with students. Community partnership

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allowed the participants to create a school without walls where organizations could help build a positive environment among the staff, parents, and community members.

During her interview, Mrs. McNair talked about when she studied psychology in college and learned about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. She said students needed to have their basic needs met first before they could learn. She added many students came to school hungry or with poor hygiene. Her partnership with a church less than a mile from the school and a civic organization helped meet the students' basic needs. Mrs. McNair explained, "We went out into the community to ask for partners. They have donated backpacks and school supplies. We even have a full clothing closet and snack pantry." At the beginning of each school year, the community partners come to the school to give out backpacks and school supplies. When students come to school hungry, they are offered a snack from the pantry. Students who have dirty clothes, poor hygiene, or soil themselves can select clothes from the clothing closet.

At Baywood Elementary, Mrs. Date has also forged partnerships with the community. Her partners include a fraternal organization and several surrounding churches. She said, "They have donated food, clothes, and even taught Spanish to the staff by talking to our ESOL (English as a Second Language) students." She added, "We have a large ESOL population here. Sometimes the students get off the bus in the morning and come to school without the parent registering them, and we have no way to communicate with them." Having the church pastor volunteer to teach Spanish lessons has been a huge benefit to the faculty and staff at Baywood Elementary.

Mrs. Smith has also benefited from community partnerships. Her school is adjacent to the neighborhood fire station. Firefighters frequent her school to give safety lessons to her students. They also volunteer to assist with American Education Week, Red Ribbon Week, and Read

Across America Week. Other than the fire station, Mrs. Smith does not have any other committed partners, but she does receive donations each year of school supplies from churches throughout the city. She noted gaining more community partners is something the Lead Leadership Team is working on.

Teaching and Learning

Collaborative Planning

Teachers make up the vast majority of personnel within schools. They are tasked with creating daily lesson plans to engage students. Teachers also work with students to help them achieve content mastery. Before teachers can attempt to succeed in their roles, they must have adequate training to perform tasks. The participants emphasized the importance of improving teaching quality within their schools. Each principal provided collaborative planning and professional learning sessions to teachers regularly.

At Drayton Elementary, Mrs. McNair provided teachers with professional learning sessions on effective instructional strategies, Number Talks, and literacy. Her teachers needed to learn how to engage the students by improving their lesson planning to include activities matching their ability level. Based on a review of the data, the Instructional Leadership Team determined teachers who needed training on improving students' understanding of basic math computation and phonics for reading words. The Instructional Specialist delivered a Number Talks professional learning to teachers to assist students with math fact fluency using mental math strategies. Number Talks was a district-wide expectation, but teachers at Drayton Elementary had not been using the program before Mrs. McNair becoming the principal. Mrs. McNair also made sure teachers began to implement phonics and daily silent reading. She had

teachers attend a professional learning session on teaching phonics and matching students'

reading ability to level to books they could read daily.

Similarly, Mrs. Date provided professional learning sessions to her teachers. She

explained, "Many teachers were not using the resources." For this reason, Mrs. Date had her

teachers re-trained on using the reading program called Benchmark Literacy and Number Talks.

The goal of the professional learning sessions was to improve teachers' understanding of how to

use instructional resources for them to develop better lessons for their students. Mrs. Date also

held professional learning training regarding constructed responses for her teachers to attend.

After reviewing the Georgia Milestones Assessment data, she said, "Our biggest trend was

writing because students did poorly. They either copied the prompt or left it blank." Mrs. Smith

also used her analysis of the Georgia Milestones Assessment to determine what professional

learning training the teachers needed.

Unlike Mrs. McNair and Mrs. Date, Mrs. Smith did not provide a Number Talk or

literacy training for her teachers. However, she did hold professional learning sessions on using

Iready, data analysis, and classroom management. The teachers learned how to maximize Iready

usage to increase student performance and how to read Iready data. Once teachers learned how to

use Iready and read the data, they could assign specific lessons to students based on their

readiness. The teachers also worked in smaller groups, four to six students, to teach them lessons

using Iready Tools for Instruction printable lessons. Another professional learning Mrs. Smith

provided was classroom management. Several teachers struggled with classroom disruptions and

discipline issues. To better support them and give them guidance on how to decrease classroom

disruptions, Mrs. Smith had a district behavior specialist come to the school to provide a session

on classroom management. Mrs. Smith said she did see a difference after teachers attended the sessions, "Teachers were able to get through a whole lesson without interruptions."

There is no "I" in the teacher. Teachers need one another to plan and share ideas. Collaborative planning is an uninterrupted time during the school day for teachers on the same grade level or teaching the same subject to develop lessons and assessments for students. All participants noted collaborative planning as a structure they put in place at their schools. All three participants have joint planning sessions twice a week led by the Instructional Specialists (IS). During the sessions, teachers sat at tables and talked with each other about their teaching standards. At Mrs. Smith's school, the teachers completed a collaborative planning form, including the notes they discussed. Mrs. Date's IS served as a facilitator of the meeting, took notes of the topics, and provided clarity on using the Canvas online learning platform. The rooms where they held collaborative planning were full of teacher resources to include books and math manipulatives. I could not observe collaborative planning with Mrs. McNair as the observation took place on a Monday, and sessions are held on Tuesday and Wednesday. However, she did describe the process to me. At her school, teachers attend collaborative planning with the IS. Teachers discuss the academic challenges students are experiencing with the learning standard, review data, and determine the teaching strategies needed to help the students learn. I was shocked to discover that collaborative planning was a new structure introduced to each school by the participants. Before the arrival of each participant to their respective schools, collaborative planning occurred inconsistently or not at all.

Each participant noted how there IS facilitated weekly collaborative planning meetings. It was atypical for schools to have an Instructional Specialist working on staff in the Glenn County school district, as Title I funding pays for this position. The average annual salary of an

Instructional Specialist ranges from $45,000-$100,000. The participants had chosen to hire Instructional Specialists to support and improve teachers. While critics argued instructional specialists have not contributed to higher graduation rates or test scores, instructional coaching programs' evaluations show how coaching is meaningful for teachers' instruction in reading, math, and science (Quintero, 2019).

Intervention

All named Iready as a key component in providing intervention for their students. Each participant understood daily math and reading intervention would help their students improve their skills in these subjects. The participants were familiar with daily math and reading intervention from their previous schools and knew with repetitive daily practice skills, and students would improve in reading and math. In 2015, the Glenn County school district bought Iready and assigned every student an account. Teachers, principals, and district administrators receive 12 months of training on using the program. Iready is a comprehensive program connecting diagnostic assessments with personalized instruction. Iready is an online learning platform designed to assess students in reading and math three times a year, August, January, and May. When students take the initial diagnostic assessment in August, they are assigned a personalized learning path based on their current level of performance. The online Iready platform lists performance level data by grade level and the performance range. For example, if a fourth-grade student takes the Iready reading diagnostic, her performance level may be listed as Grade 3. This listing indicates to the teacher that the student is performing below grade level in reading. Students receive tailored lessons to accelerate their growth. Teachers can assess ready-made lessons called Tools for Instruction to provide remediation and reteaching. Curriculum

Associates have linked Iready diagnostics to students' success on the Georgia Milestones Assessments.

In 2017, the Educational Research Institute of America (ERIA), in partnership with Curriculum Associates, the developers of Iready, conducted a study on the relationship between Iready and the Georgia Milestones Assessment and found a high correlation between the two (Curriculum Associates, 2020). Curriculum Associates (2020) collected data from approximately 37,000 students across five districts. The assessment correlations between the spring Iready diagnostic and the 2017 Georgia Milestones were above .70, showing the two assessments measure similar content (Curriculum Associates, 2020). Additional research in 2017-2018 showed students who use Iready for an average of 45 minutes a week for eighteen weeks have statistically significantly more growth than students not using Iready (Curriculum Associates, 2020).

All the participants noted Iready usage and intervention as a component of their school improvement. Initially, Mrs. Smith had her teachers use the Iready Tools for Instruction printed lessons due to a lack of technology. The following year she used Title I funding to purchase laptops and had students use them for Iready to increase the minutes they were on the program. The teachers and the Lead Leadership Team review Iready lesson data to determine how much progress the students were making. They implemented additional intervention time for students to complete more Iready lessons each day. Mrs. Date also used Iready for intervention. The teachers set goals for students to reach for the January and May assessments. They held celebrations for students who achieved their Iready goal. Mrs. Date said having celebrations motivated students to do Iready at school and log in at home to reach 45 minutes a week on the program. Teachers praised each student for their completion of lessons and high scores. Mrs.

McNair praised teachers and students for Iready usage. She explained how teachers needed to buy into Iready first to motivate and require the students to complete lessons regularly. The assistant principal started giving out the Iready Brag Tag of the week to students completing thirty minutes and two lessons. Teachers posted thermometers in their classrooms to color each time a student completed a lesson. Once the class colored up to the top of the thermometer, they received a party. The assistant principal also implemented the Top Iready User of the week. This award was for students who were completing the most lessons or had the most minutes using the program.

Each participant encouraged Iready usage and created a plan of how to reward students. The participants also analyzed Iready data to measure how students would perform on the Georgia Milestones Assessment. The school-wide intervention helped students to improve their academic performance. Teachers at these three schools matched their daily instruction to student performance levels on Iready and monitored data frequently. To meet students on performance levels, participants established school-wide interventions to supplement daily instruction. All three participants successfully improved student learning deficits in reading and math with implementing the school-wide intervention.

In this chapter, I provided participants' cross-analysis of data. Data were collected using interviews, observations, and a review of school documents. After several rounds of coding, the following four themes emerged: leadership basis, culture and climate, school funding, and teaching and learning. The analyzed data contributed to the literature on school leadership and school improvement. The final chapter will be a discussion and conclusion from the data collected.

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CONCLUSION

After years of costly school improvement efforts, including Georgia's $400 million Georgia Race to the Top Grant (RTTT), Georgia's elementary, middle, and high schools have failed to improve school-wide student achievement significantly. The purpose of this study was to understand the roles of identified school principals in strengthening chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast Georgia. All the participants made significant gains in student achievement, having their schools removed from the chronically failing list of schools identified by the Georgia Department of Education. The researcher collected data to determine the principals' experiences, barriers they faced, and strategies to improve student achievement. Data collection included nine interviews, three with each principal—the researcher collected during observations through field notes taken when observing the principals and their schools. School documents were collected and analyzed. The researcher triangulated the interviews, observations, and documents to validate research themes. The researcher purposefully selected research participants for this study based on their increased College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) score.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are the life and career experiences of identified and effective K-5 principals serving in chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast Georgia?

RQ2: What are the strategies employed by identified and effective K-5 principals serving in chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast Georgia?

RQ3: What are the barriers, in any, faced by identified and effective K-5 principals serving in chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast Georgia?

Methods and Procedures

I used the portraiture research design to investigate successful Title I principals in chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast Georgia. I purposefully selected successful Title I principals in the Glenn County School System who improved student achievement in a failing school to participate in the study. Data were collected using multiple methods to include interviews, observations, and documents.

Interpretation of Findings

This chapter addresses each research question and explains how the themes are linked to the conceptual framework and literature review.

In Chapter 5, I examined three successful principals who undertook Title I schools previously identified as chronically failing. Each principal used their leadership ability to garner school change toward school and student improvement. The overall effectiveness of the principals was how they used strategies to increase student academic performance and improve the climate and culture within their schools. I found common themes were among all three principals, each contributing to their success. Each theme comprises several sub-themes; the first theme, leadership basis, contained three subthemes: 1) experience in a Title I school, 2) shared leadership, and 3) identifying the student's need. The second theme, culture, and climate included subthemes addressing student discipline and identifying the needs of the staff. The third theme, school funding, revealed two subthemes regarding Title I funds and community partners. The

final theme, teaching, and learning comprised of two subthemes - collaborative planning and intervention - related to how teachers teach and assess student learning.

Research Question #1: What are the life and career experiences of identified and effective K-5 principals serving in chronically failing schools in Northeast Georgia?

        Leadership Training and Mentors. The combination of life and career experiences of each participant proved to be effective in developing leadership skills in their schools. The participants discussed support from their mentors as crucial for making decisions for improving schools. The principals recalled the behaviors and procedures of their mentors and used the same characteristics in their leadership. All participants admitted to using similar behaviors and procedures for improving their schools. Principals used similar relationship-building strategies to include talking with teachers and talking with parents about student needs. They also used faculty meetings to inform staff members of district information, established collaborative planning, incorporated school improvement planning modeled by their mentors. These findings are consistent with research on principal mentors. Gray et al. (2007) analyzed survey data of seasoned principal mentors to determine the need for mentor programs related to developing strong leadership skills in principals. Gray found that effective principals had been mentored and engaged in real-world leadership experiences. School systems must support and retain principals using mentorship and leadership training programs. Gray argued "the paucity of quality mentoring programs is retarding states' efforts to ensure that every student attends a school where strong leadership results in high academic performance" (p.5). The study confirmed Gray's finding of principal mentoring influence on student academic performance.

        The journey to leadership for each participant was different. However, all three participants shared they were not education majors, choosing other career majors while in

college, and even working in their respective non-educational career fields for a few years after graduating. The participants confessed to not having an initial interest in the field of education. Interestingly, someone in all three participants' families encouraged them as young adults to become teachers. The participants intentionally avoided teaching mostly because they thought teachers did not make enough money. The low salary deterred them from even considering teaching as a career.

Nonetheless, education found each of them! Although the participants did not formally study education during their undergraduate years, they were able to gain pedagogical knowledge to become teachers and leaders within their schools. They all returned to college to earn a Master's degree in education.

Previous Title I School Experience. Each participant noted how previously working in a Title I school prepared them for the position of principal in their current Title I schools. They admitted to understanding the difficulties of working in a Title I school and working proactively to combat these issues. Title I schools require the completion of a school-wide improvement plan (SIP). The SIP is a lengthy document where school leaders must analyze data to determine the needs of students and teachers. The participants were able to navigate the SIP development using their prior experience in Title I schools. All three participants discussed how crucial data analysis was in developing the SIP. They mentioned having learned how to analyze data when working as teachers and assistant principals in other Title I schools. The participants admitted their experience in Title I schools helped them understand how to implement a school-wide discipline plan using the Positive Behavior Intervention and Support program. Furthermore, they acknowledged student misbehaviors as a component for school improvement. Without this exposure to the Title I experience, the participants may have been ill-equipped to tackle school

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improvement. These three principals possessed the knowledge of establishing goals, implementing action steps, and acquiring materials to support school improvement. They all had prior knowledge of the Title I school setting and used this experience as a catalyst for combatting similar issues within their schools.

These principals have galvanized change in their schools using their leadership training and support from mentors. In addition, each principal used a combination of life experiences and career experiences to ensure their schools' removal from the failing list. The participants recalled the behaviors and procedures of their mentors and using the same characteristics in their leadership. Although none of the participants chose education as their first career, they all attended graduate-level leadership programs. This triad of the previous Title I experience, mentorship, and leadership programs established the leadership foundation for this study's participants. They used this leadership foundation as an underpinning for tackling school change.

Research Question #2: What strategies are employed by identified and effective K-5 principals serving in chronically failing schools in Northeast Georgia?

The participants employed a myriad of strategies for improving their schools: school culture and climate, student needs, staff needs, Title I funds and partners, intervention, school-wide discipline.

Culture and Climate. A similarity among participants was their task of revising their school's mission and vision. Each participant explained the importance of reviewing the mission and vision to focus on the faculty and staff. This task aided the participants in setting high expectations for the staff. Participants developed core leadership teams to assist with staff buy-in for the newly revised mission and vision. Each principal met with their core teams in the summer to review the school's mission and vision. The teams discussed what the mission and vision

should be and finalized revisions of both statements. With each team's participation, the principals ensured their entire staff's buy-in to the revised mission and vision. These findings are broadly in line with research on school culture. Muhammad and Cruz (2019) revealed principals should unite employees toward a common goal. The first step to positively change a school is through transforming its culture (Muhammad and Cruz, 2019). All the participants acknowledged that improving the school culture would be difficult without support from all the staff members. They used teachers on their leadership teams to spread the word of the revised statements and convince them to buy in. These principals regularly communicated the mission and vision during daily announcements and faculty meetings. Moreover, in an effort to maintain a continued focus on student achievement, the principals regularly communicated the mission and vision during daily announcements and faculty meetings. Each of the principals set high expectations for the staff by creating a collective mission and vision everyone supported.

Identifying Students' Needs. Fullan (2016) noted several factors affect educational change and are used as an application for helping practitioners make sense of improving schools (Fullan, 2016). With principals being the gatekeepers of change, it has become increasingly important for them to understand how to lead change within schools. All the participants started with identifying the needs of the school. Each explained how they met with their core leadership team to analyze Georgia Milestone Assessment (GMAS) scores and Iready data. This analysis revealed areas of poor student performance. By developing the Title I School Improvement Plan (SIP), each principal worked with their team to determine three overarching goals to focus on for the school year: literacy, math, and culture and climate. The principals created action steps based on students' deficit areas were put in place. They also set a target, assigned tasks, and took the necessary steps to ensure they met all goals. Although these findings are compatible with previous research on the school improvement process, they differ from the school improvement

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fundamentals provided by Hanover Research. Schools may fall short of the active improvement process by relying on measurable outcomes; the focus should be on the actual processes of improvement (Hanover Research, 2014). The participants in this study relied on measurable outcomes to include Georgia Milestones and Iready scores, but they also established processes for completing SIP action steps. Each participant assigned tasks to their core leadership team members created collaborative planning schedules and implemented a school-wide discipline plan. The participants were able to combine measuring outcomes with an improvement process to increase student achievement.

Intervention. The principals implemented school-wide intervention programs as outlined by each goal to increase student performance based on their Iready personalized learning path. Using Iready assessment data, the participants developed school-wide intervention plans to assist with increasing student performance levels. Also, the participants changed the daily schedule to carve out minutes for intervention time and allow teachers to attend weekly collaborative session. The principals offered incentives to students for completing the most lessons and being the top performer. Each principal showed an increase in student achievement with the implementation of such a school-wide intervention. These findings are broadly in line with research on school intervention. Results from a linear mixed model study suggested that school intervention positively improves students' performance, particularly those in low socioeconomic status schools (Van Geel et al., 2016). All the principals outlined an intervention schedule to allow students to work on personalized lessons in Iready. The students completed lessons individualized to their learning ability levels. Each student could practice and improve upon those reading and math skills previously identified at a poor level of performance. Teachers

could work in smaller groups with the students and provide them with tailored lessons to improve their reading and math skills with daily intervention.

Identifying Staff Needs and Collaborative Planning. All participants shared the importance data analysis played in student improvement. They used Iready to assess students frequently and Georgia Milestones Assessment data to identify areas where students needed more instructional support. To assist their teachers with instruction, the participants implemented collaborative planning where teachers met with instructional specialists to plan lessons for the upcoming week. The instructional specialists provided support to teachers by modeling and giving feedback to improving instruction. The core leadership teams created School Improvement Plans (SIP) and analyzed school-wide data to determine student needs. The participants shared leadership and decision-making with leadership team members to develop and deliver professional learning sessions to teachers and assist with committees. These findings are broadly in line with research on collaborative planning. Dufour and Mattos (2013) revealed literature supporting teachers' participation in professional learning communities (PLC) positively influencing student learning. Dufour and Mattos' (2013) five-step PLC model noted organizing collaborative teams to share ideas for improving student learning. The principals established common collaborative planning times for teachers to meet with instructional specialists to determine effective strategies and assessment methods for measuring student learning. All the participants improved the daily instruction in their schools by establishing these collaborative planning for teachers.

Title I funds and Community Partners. The participants used Title I funds to pay the salary of instructional specialists, purchase instructional resources, and pay for professional learning and conferences. To ensure students' needs were met, school community partners

donated food, clothing, school supplies, and provided Spanish lessons. Without the support of community partners, these supplies would not have been available to the students. To ensure education funding, principals set aside federal and state dollars for salaries, textbooks, and maintenance materials. The participants utilized available Title I resources to fill in gaps where public funding lacked. Each principal purchased instructional materials and intervention programs as aids for helping students to improve their reading and math levels. All the participants paid the salary of their instructional specialists. The instructional specialists served as coaches to teachers and helped create lesson plans and develop teaching standards. The participants purchased learning resources for teachers to use when delivering daily lessons plans. They shared a common goal of improving teaching and learning. By purchasing instructional materials and paying for an instructional specialist, the principals could get additional learning aids and support their teachers.

Student Discipline. Another strategy the participants employed related to student discipline. All the participants noted how student misbehavior occurrences were high during their first year at the school. The Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) program, or its components, was implemented in all the participants' schools. PBIS was used to create school-wide behavior expectations and reward students for modeling expected behaviors. All participants experienced a decrease in student discipline referrals after implementing PBIS. Not only did participants need to remedy student misbehaviors, but they needed to address having students' basic needs met. These findings are consistent with previous research on how PBIS influences student discipline. Also, participants found that implementing PBIS had a positive impact on teacher perceptions and school climate. The participants implemented PBIS to lower student misbehaviors. With the decrease in student misbehaviors, teachers had more time to

teach the content standards. The teachers managed their instructional minutes and attributed more time working with students to help them understand the standards. Students learned more content when fewer misbehavior infractions occurred, thus contributing to minimizing distractions in the classroom.

Research Question #3: What are the barriers, in any, faced by identified and effective K-5 principals serving in chronically failing schools in Northeast Georgia?

  Culture and Climate. While the participants experienced tremendous success, it did not come without barriers. One barrier was teacher retention. The participant's teacher retention methods varied. One participant preferred to have ineffective teachers leave her school, while another participant provided support to assist ineffective teachers in making them better. Although one participant replaced ineffective teachers and developed them, both participants aimed to get effective teachers. Unlike the other participants, one principal complained about losing many effective teachers to promotions within the district. Having effective teachers in classrooms contributed to solid daily instruction and a better understanding of content standards. Each participant was to train uncertified teachers by providing collaborative planning support for these teachers using instructional specialists. These findings are consistent with previous research on teacher retention. Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas (2016) found teacher turnover rates impacted students' achievement by disrupting school stability. Due to teacher turnover in hard-to-staff schools, usually serving high poverty communities, the principals relied on uncertified teachers "hired as a last resort when fully certified teachers were unavailable" (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, p.1).

  Another barrier was time management. Participants were often interrupted by phone calls, district personnel visits, impromptu parent conferences, and student misbehaviors. The

principals delegated responsibility to front office staff and the core leadership team members to combat interruptions and protect their time, allowing them to free up time in their schedule to attend collaborative planning sessions and observe teachers giving classroom lessons. These findings support the literature on time management for principals. Hopkins (2012) explained principals could manage their time to set priorities for attaining yearly goals. Principals can improve their time management by delegating tasks to other staff and using their secretaries to screen phone calls and protect office hours (Hopkins, 2012). Although these findings are generally compatible, there was one area differing from the traditional open-door policy. All the participants had an open-door policy for faculty and staff to come by their office at any time to discuss concerns. Hopkins (2012) explained the one benefit of principals having a closed-door policy is to set aside time to complete tasks such as answering emails, completing reports, and daily tasks.

Even with teacher retention and time management barriers, the participants achieved school improvement and increased student achievement. The participants made decisions to retain effective teachers and remove ineffective teachers. They could delegate tasks to create time in their schedules to visit classrooms and be visible throughout the building.

The central characteristics in the data revealed a strategic process used by each principal to influence school improvement. The school improvement strategic process consisted of four steps (Figure 8):

Step One: Leadership basis

Step Two: Problem/Need Identification (Staff, students, parents)

Step Three: School Improvement Planning and Budgeting

Step Four: Implementation and Monitoring

Figure 8

School Improvement Strategic Process

Findings from this study support Fullan's (2016) change model. This change model has four phases: initiation, implementation, continuation, and outcomes. The first step addresses the current school performance. I discovered the participants' leadership basis – mentoring and previous experience in Title I schools-served as the initial factor for determining their success. While the steps in Fullan's model and my strategic process are similar, I feel the most significant difference lies in the initial step. From my findings, I discovered the importance of each principals' leadership basis. The leadership basis included their journey to leadership, previous experience working in a Title I school, and mentorship. I would modify Fullan's model by shifting his Initiation phase from step one to step two and then place the Leadership Basis as step one. I modified the model in Figure 9 below to illustrate the changes.

Figure 9

Modified Educational Change Process- School Improvement Strategic Process

Modified Educational Change Process: Effective Title I Principals			
Initiation: Leadership basis	**Implementation:** Problem/Need Identification	**Continuation:** School Improvement Planning and Budgeting	**Outcomes:** Implementation and Monitoring
Title experiences	Data Analysis	School Improvement Plan	Time Management
Mentorship	Mission & vision	Title I funding	Teaching and Learning
	Collaborative Planning	Community Partners	Shared Leadership
	Professional Learning		Teacher Retention
	Behavior Expectations		Data Analysis

As I triangulated the data, I found that each principal came into education as a second career; none were education majors. Their time working in these other fields could have contributed to their successes in education. For example, one participant served in the Army.

Thus, it could be argued that she learned discipline and structure during her time as a soldier, which she applied as a principal. Another participant worked as a loan officer, and the researcher could speculate that she used this knowledge to develop and manage the school Title I budget. The last participant worked as a teacher assistant and was able to observe the classroom teacher; these observations could have served as look-fors when observing teachers as a principal. Although none of the principals had a first love for education, each participant was motivated by a family member, mentor, or church member to become an educator.

Each participant had a mentor who was also a principal in a Title I school. It was no coincidence that the participants use similar strategies to their mentors. All the participants used leadership strategies mirrored from their mentors. This component of their leadership basis could be valuable for the readiness of a Title I principal when combined with their previous experience in Title I schools. This combination of mentorship and previous experience in a Title I school prepared the participants for their role as principal. The principals had an advantage when they began to lead their schools. They had skills such as relationship building, budgeting, and instructional leadership from their mentors. They also knew how Title I schools functioned and used this knowledge to better the schools they were leading.

The Georgia Department of Education (2018) guides principal mentorship to school districts throughout the state with a focus on six components: (1) Roles and Responsibilities, (2) Leadership and Organizational Structures, (3) Mentoring, (4) Orientation, (5) Ongoing Performance Assessment, and (6) Program Evaluation (Georgia Department of Education, 2018). While state authorities guide mentoring, the school district's responsibility is to establish a mentorship program, select mentors, and incorporate frequent support. One component I think could be added to the principal mentorship guidance is the job application and

feedback. Principals could benefit from having their mentor on-site at their schools coaching them through real-world situations. Additionally, mentors could provide feedback to the principals on their current practices.

The leadership basis as the initial step provides an understanding of the principals by explaining their journey to leadership, how mentorship played a role in their leadership skill set, and gaining knowledge through previous experiences in Title I schools. It is important to understand how principals come into leadership. Once educators become principals, mentorship is critical for developing leadership skills. Finally, previously working in the Title I setting allows future principals to gain the skills necessary for leading such schools.

The second step of the school improvement strategic process closely resembles Fullan's first step of initiation. Both steps require principals to analyze the organizational performance of the school. The participants were able to assess the current status and determine the schools' needs. They analyzed the data from the Georgia Milestones state standardized tests and Iready Scores. The principals were able to decide on the deficit skills students had. They used the data analysis to formulate a plan to improve deficits. These principals may not have experienced increased student growth without disaggregating data to determining the areas of learning needs for students. Not only did the principals identify the needs of students, but they also identified the needs of the staff.

Each principal found that their teachers needed assistance with knowing how to teach content standards. The principals established weekly collaborative planning and monthly professional learning to gain strategies required to improve teaching practices. Another action the principals did during the initiation step was to analyze school-wide expectations for behavior. Each principal reviewed discipline data to determine common misbehaviors among students.

These principals then worked with their teams to establish the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program. These principals also understood that students needed to follow school rules and expectations for learning to occur. The principals experienced a significant decline in student misbehaviors due to the implementation of PBIS. The students were encouraged to follow the school-wide expectations and rewarded with incentives for displaying the appropriate behaviors. The final analysis for the principals was to conduct an initial review of school funds. The principals determined funding amounts, expenditures, and procurement. Conducting this review aided principals in evaluating the use of Title I funding to decide which purchases to continue, eliminate, or add. Once principals determined funding statuses, they work to establish school goals in the SIP.

Much like Fullan's (2016) third step of continuation, the school improvement and planning step involved developing both a plan and school processes. In this step, principals used their analysis from step two when planning for school processes. I think this is the most comprehensive step as it includes the strategies integral for school improvement. The principals used shared leadership to establish school vision and garnered staff to gain collective buy-in and support. Furthermore, the principals used shared leadership to establish school vision and general staff to gain collective buy-in and support One of the biggest reasons change efforts fail is that there is no clear vision (Washington et al., 2011). Once the principals could get the staff onboard, they worked to develop a School Improvement Plan (SIP) that aligned with the vision. Action steps on the SIP guided the work of the principals. Such tasks included developing an intervention program, establishing collaborative planning, providing professional learning, budgeting resources, and improving student discipline. The principal used data analysis completed in the implementation step to develop a daily intervention based on students' deficit skills.

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Additionally, the principals developed a core leadership team to analyze data continuously throughout the school year. This constant measurement of student outcomes helped the participants determine whether they met the School Improvement Plan goals (SIP). The principals outlined the need for instructional support on the SIP and paid the salary of an Instructional Specialist using Title I funds. The Instructional Specialist facilitated weekly collaborative sessions to develop lesson plans and model instructional strategies based on content standards. The teachers improved their instructional practices by attending collaborative planning and gaining knowledge of teaching strategies from the instructional specialist. The instructional specialist also designed professional learning sessions for teachers geared toward classroom management, reading, and math. The principals intentionally budgeted for an Instructional Specialist and paid for professional learning sessions based on their teachers' needing to improve instructional practices. These principals who led chronically failing Title I schools possessed knowledge of school funding policies. The principals understood how the district allocates school funds, and the intended use for Title I funds is to increase student academic achievement and improve teacher capacity. All of these are processes needed to improve culture, teaching, and learning within the school.

The last step of the Fullan model and the school improvement strategic process are similar as both entail analyzing achievement, discipline, and assessment data to determine whether goals have been met. I would also argue that these principals and their teams could not have made adjustments in learning targets without constant monitoring of student assessment scores and discipline data to yield increased student performance. The last step of the model, outcomes, is just as important as the first, leadership basis. The last step is crucial because principals have to inspect and monitor the processes for effectiveness. The Outcome step is also

the step when principals decide whether a program, personnel, or resource is ineffective and determine the next steps to ensure student achievement can still occur among ineffectiveness.

Fullan's conceptual framework closely aligns with my findings. However, the framework did not relate to understanding parental involvement related to student achievement. Therefore, I conclude that the conceptual framework model would have to be redesigned to include parental involvement under the Initiation phase to receive input from parents.

There are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader (Krasnoff, 2015). Surely a myriad of things could contribute to increased student achievement and school turnaround to include changes in curriculum, new teachers, rezoning, increased funding, tutoring programs, and access to technology, to name a few. Many other factors contribute to such turnarounds, but leadership is the catalyst. (National Association of Elementary Principals, 2013). When Grissom et al. (2021) compared the impact of the principal versus the teacher, they found principals' effects on students were larger than teachers because principals "hire, retain, develop, and encourage teachers", thus improving conditions for teaching and learning (p.xiv). Grissom et al. (2021) provide this scenario to support their argument:

> For an individual student, exposure to strong teaching is paramount; a student learns more in a school with an effective principal in part because the principal makes it more likely the student gets that exposure. For a school as a whole, however, the effectiveness of the principal is more important than the effectiveness of a single teacher. Principals affect all 483 students in the typical elementary school, whereas teachers affect 21 students in the average elementary school classroom.

School leadership is among the most important factors contributing to student learning, "particularly from the perspective of state and district leaders and policymakers seeking to move the needle on student achievement" (Grissom et al. 2021). Grissom et al. (2021) contend it will be difficult to envision an investment in K–12 education with a higher ceiling on its potential return than improving school leadership" (p. xiv)

Implications of the Study

Qualitative leadership research had significant advances, focusing on sampling, data collection, and data analysis approaches (Knapp 2017). Lightfoot (1983) contended portraiture studies describe a school's culture and uncover implicit values guided by structures and decision making. This portraiture study focused on the experiences, strategies, and barriers the identified Title I principals faced when improving student achievement. I was able to highlight the participants' stories using the portraiture method. This method is not normally used to study school leadership. One benefit I found from using portraiture was that it provided insight into the participants' life experiences. I gathered the totality of their experiences before their school principalship and understood their motivations for leading Title I schools.

Leadership within Title I schools varies. However, understanding the life and career experiences, strategies employed, and the barriers the Title I principals face in this study are transferable through concrete universals. Using concrete universals, readers can conceptualize this study to determine how it relates to their situation. Leaders of chronically failing Title I schools can contextualize this study to discover how their situation mirrors the data and transfer findings as they apply. Readers of this study may gain information on beneficial career experiences, valuable strategies, and methods for combatting barriers within their respective Title I schools. For instance, a reader could understand the use of the Positive Behavior

Intervention and Support (PBIS) program and how, when implemented can reduce student behavior and discipline referrals. Although the sample size was small, school district leaders can use findings from this study as a reference for developing support and mentorship programs for their principals.

Additionally, educational policymakers can use the study to develop leadership programs. The policymakers can guide colleges in developing programs of study for educational leadership students. State and district leaders can use the study to design professional learning for current principals to assist school improvement efforts.

Limitations of Study

This portraiture study was limited to three participants serving as principals in a Northeast Georgia school district. Data limitations included the accuracy and honesty of the information provided by the participants. I triangulated interviews, observation, and school document data sources and three participants to increase validity by analyzing different data collection methods to reach convergence. I collected data through interviews, observations, and a review of school documents. Due to the global pandemic, I conducted virtual interviews using Zoom. Although the interviews were virtual, the researcher compared the participants' responses to their actions during observations. Virtual interviews did limit the researcher's ability to interact and read body language cues of the participants physically. The researcher confirmed observational situations with school documentation to information provided during interviews throughout the data analysis process. For example, during my observation of Mrs. Smith, I observed staff members preparing the 95% reading intervention kits; on her School Improvement Plan (SIP) it was listed to purchase and use 95% reading kits. Also, during her interview, she explained how her Lead Leadership Team analyzed student data, determining the need for a

reading intervention program. Another limitation is the study focused on female principals at the elementary level. The study did not include male principals nor principals at the middle or high school level.

The study was also limited by the sample size, levels of the schools, and the race and gender of the participants. The sample size for the study was small, representing only three principals and only highlighting one school district in Georgia. The small sample size limits the transferability of the study. The only school level represented in the study is Kindergarten through 5th grade; middle schools nor high school principal data is included in the findings. The study only represents female African American principals; the experiences, strategies, and I did not present barriers of male non-African Americans. Grissom et al. (2021) found three recent changes in leadership (1) the principalship is becoming more female-dominated, (2) principals' level of experience has fallen, particularly in high-needs schools, (3) drastic changes in the racial makeup of schools is not relative in the ethnic diversity of school leaders. Grissom et al. (2021) revealed, "principals of color may be high leverage, as they appear especially likely to have positive impacts on both students of color and teachers of color (p. xiv). Grissom et al. (2021) drew this conclusion based largely on qualitative literature on leadership illuminating "the approaches and strategies equity-focused principals use to affect schools serving historically marginalized student populations" (p. xiv).

This portraiture study was limited to formal interviews with the participants. Data using interviews with students, parents, and staff are excluded from this study due to IRB regulations regarding minors and research safeguards during the global pandemic. The COVID pandemic limited observational situations. The face-to-face enrollment of the participants' schools was significantly lower than usual as many parents had opted for their students to learn online.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this qualitative research was to understand the roles of identified principals in improving chronically failing Title I schools in Northeast Georgia. I used purposeful selection to identify participants successful in increasing school and student achievement. After comprehensive data analysis, analysis, I made the following recommendations for future research.

I suggest a quantitative study using a correlational research design to determine principals' leadership skills on a school and student improvement. Correlation researchers may determine the relationship between independent and dependent variables. For future research, the correlational resign design investigate how the leadership styles of successful Title I principals affect school and student improvement. Researchers would examine the effect leadership styles have on school College Career Readiness and Performance Index (CCRPI) scores by using statistical measures to determine whether there is a positive relationship between the two variables.

One surprising finding from the research was the participants' journeys to education. They alluded to perceiving that teachers did not make enough money and avoid the profession to secure a higher-paying career. All the participants chose to teach as a second career, taking graduate-level courses to become certified teachers. There is a traditional progression of becoming a teacher and then school principal (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Even though the participants did not complete undergraduate courses for teaching, they became good teachers who eventually developed the necessary leadership skills to become school principals. The participants used their experiences and graduate courses to catapult themselves to leadership, despite the traditional progression. Future case study researchers can determine how successful

Title I principals' educational journey influences school and student achievement. Researchers could determine the role career experiences and training play on the principals' leadership skills.

Final Conclusions

Sustained school improvement requires school leaders who "possess diverse skills" to impact organizational change (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). Improving a chronically failing Title I school is a cumbersome feat. New knowledge revealed from this study included the School Improvement Strategic Process. Using the four-step School Improvement Strategic Process, future principals can lead failing schools successfully by using their prior experiences, identifying their needs, planning for school improvement, and implementing the plan with continual monitoring. The four-step sequential process includes the following: (1) Leadership Basis, (2) Problem/Need Identification (staff, students, parents), (3) School Improvement and Planning, (4) Implementation and Monitoring.

Principals who want to improve a chronically failing Title I school should use their leadership basis as a foundation for tackling school improvement. They need to identify problems within the school and create a plan for how to address them. Developing a school-wide vision can assist principals with creating a plan for improving the climate and culture. Using the school improvement plan provides actionable steps for increasing student achievement. Once the principals have written the plan, they should delegate tasks and monitor the implementation of all programs. You must inspect what you expect! I have often heard veteran principals give this advice to beginning principals. This phrase refers to principals establishing expectations and following up with staff members to ensure they meet expectations. Future Title I principals will need to know how to allocate Title I funding to purchase resources.

Additionally, these principals need to garner support from the community to acquire basic student needs, clothing, and supplies. Without funding and donations, schools will lack the resources and basic care items needed by their students. School improvement is possible. While no two leaders are alike, the skills required for school improvement are similar and will yield successful results for student achievement.

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APPENDIX A:

IRB Exemption and Fair Use/Duplication Page

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

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

Protocol Number: 04089-2020

Responsible Researcher: Shawnda Spruill

Supervising Faculty: Dr. Michael Bochenko

Project Title: *Title 1 principals' leadership experiences and strategies influencing school and student improvement.*

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **Exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under Exemption **Category 2**. Your research study may begin immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- *Upon completion of this research study data (email correspondence, transcripts, participant name lists, etc.) must be securely maintained (locked file cabinet, password protected computer, etc.) and accessible only by the researcher for a minimum of 3 years.*
- *The Research Statement must be read aloud to each participant at the start of the recorded interview session and at the start of the observations. A copy of the Research Statement must be provided to each participant.*
- *Exempt protocol guidelines permit the recording of interviews for the sole purpose of creating an accurate transcript. Once the transcript has been created, the recording must be deleted from all recording devises. Recordings are not to be stored and/or shared. The transcripts must be securely maintained with research data for three years.*

☒ *If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at irb@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.*

Elizabeth Ann Olphie   *10.09.2020*   *Thank you for submitting an IRB application.*

Elizabeth Ann Olphie, IRB Administrator   *Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-253-2947.*