UNDERSTANDING AND TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS THROUGH
THE IMPACT OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

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Abstract
The purpose of this study is to analyze the characteristics of an effective administrator and the dynamics and outcome of her administrative decisions.

Keywords: achievement gap, accountability, adequate yearly progress, assessment, at-risk schools, high achieving schools, instructional leadership, leadership, transformational leadership, mission, vision

1. Introduction
In order to address the crisis of academic failure, schools must address the approaches of educational leadership and the impact of administrative decisions have on the dynamics of the school. According to research, effective principals implement changes within the school while effectively combining knowledge and skills to promote successful learning environment. Effective leaders are able to influence and to move their staff to the next level of proficiency.

Among all high achieving schools’ characteristics, school leadership is paramount. Findings from a number of research disciplines, particularly investigations of high achieving schools and successful school change, highlighted the importance of administration. Principals exercise a measurable effect on student achievement and school effectiveness. [1] School principals maintain the focus of the overall vision and goals. In times of conflict or challenges, it is the principal that redirects the school’s focus on monitoring instruction.

Lynch explains that the principal is the ultimate authority at the school level, and he or she is responsible for governance of all aspects of the day to day operation of the facility. On the local level, educational governance is classified into four levels including the school board, the local superintendent, the local school district and the principal. [2] Moreover, principals are the lead instructional leaders of the school in addition to managers, teacher evaluators, and liaisons to the community.

Creating high achieving schools require changes in classroom methodology and leadership. Designed to create understanding and dialogue, educators and students must develop a learning environment that is conducive for all. Improved and increased communication in the classroom increases the school’s teaching options. This study purports to identify leadership characteristics which lead to an effective school.

1.1. Leadership
One issue that has emerged with frequency in the literature on school leadership is the degree to which principals feel confident that they have an impact on their schools. In his studies, [3] found correlation between achievement and strength of leadership for math and reading. Similar findings were reported by Villegas, Rogers, and Rodriguez. In their studies, they too describe the importance and the impact that effective principals have on student achievement. Villegas states at the center of his discussion is the belief that school success is inescapably associated to role of principal and the link between leadership and student achievement has become clearer. Recent research about successful schools strongly suggests
principals make significant difference. Particularly in Villegas’ study, he concentrated on the English language learners in schools. Using narrative inquiry and interviews, Villegas was able to determine the roles and behaviors of these principals. In his study, he did narratives of three principals and studied about eleven principals. He concluded that the principal is the single most important factor in the achievement of a school. The principal must connect with the students and thus the children will work harder. By working with the students, the principal keeps a pulse on learning. The selection of a principal is the heart of school improvement.

Leadership has a direct affect on the quality, high achievingness, and cohesiveness of the staff. In this research study, the practices of the principal are observed and how it affects the school’s staff and impacts instruction. The leadership sets the tone and foundation within a school [4]. According to Leithwood (2002), three areas in which the leadership of principals played a major role in ensuring success for all students included parent-school communication, collaborative decision making and improving student performance. As cited in [5], the administrators of the new millennium must be able to spin a web that is connected through relationships rather than power. By doing this, it encourages shared power and responsibility within a school’s learning community. With collective leadership, teachers and principals lose sense of self; it is an empowering experience for all members of the educational community [5].

In short, [5] describes the administrator of the millennium as supportive and collaborative rather than restrictive or directive. While improving the school’s climate and reculturing the school, they must focus primarily on relation-ships, trust and process, not on status, power, procedures and roles. The vision of the new ad-ministrator “must rely on school leadership that understand why” and how learning and teaching must and can improve. Principals must create learning organizations in schools, recreate the role of the principal and teacher and to develop a range of leadership roles by creating new possibilities for shared work and learning among staff as well as parents” [5]. Successful principals always involve faculty and staff in key decisions. According to [6], everyone within the educational community has the right to work as a leader. Principals empower the staff each time they distribute or allocate responsibilities.

1.2. The Role of the Principal

Serving in various capacities as: learner, leader, mentor, supervisor, manager, advocate, politician, envisioner, and educator, the principal is the head learner in the school [7].“Within the current context of administering schools in a period of community and media scrutiny, and student achievement, a school leader must be a constant and rigorous learner using various capacities and methods” (Matthews, p. 11). By modeling and engaging themselves in lifelong quests after knowledge, the principal influences others and instills this behavior in others.

Because it is the vehicle for creating change and reform in school, leadership is the most important role of the administrator. As a result of leadership, principals are empowered to create, to maintain and to change a school culture; to build a shared school vision; to solve problems; to make and to interpret decisions; and to develop collaborative strategies.

As a mentor, the principal plays a central role in assisting teachers and students to learn. In this role, principals serve as coaches of the teacher. Successful principals have to determine how to carefully implement the curriculum within the guidelines of the state and federal government. Generally, the local school’s role in curriculum analysis has two domains: content and electives. Administrators must carefully hire competent people to create teams to promote student achievement.

As a manager, the principal allocates resources and designs the budget and finances of the school. Moreover, they design and coordinate facilities, programs and activities. “Management decisions of innovative principals focus on how to enable internal and external school constituents to contribute to a learning organization where all students and adults learn” (Matthews, p. 13).
One of the most important managerial tasks of the principal is ensuring that the schedule is learner centered. Although many may view scheduling as a minor skill, it is a crucial aspect of school effectiveness and implementing a quality curriculum. What are the characteristics of a learning centered schedule? [8]. First, the schedule must maximize instructional time. Priority is given to students’ learning needs. The schedule must also allow the teachers professional growth and time for faculty collaboration. Teachers must also be given a teachable situation in which they are allowed to work in their areas of strengths. Fifth, the schedule must be flexible and learning oriented. Lastly, the schedule is responsive to the needs of the educational community [8].

As the chief communicator of the school, good speaking and listening skills help to build lasting relationships within the educational community. “The highly high achieving principal is a communicator—a genuine and open human being with the capacity to listen, empathize, interact, and connect with individual students, parents, and teachers in productive, helping, and healing ways, as well as the ability to teach, present, and motivate people in larger group settings” (McEwan, p. 3). In short, the effective principals must follow the three C’s: communication, consensus, and creative collaboration.

As an educator, the administrator is a self-directed instructional leader with a depth of knowledge regarding instruction, learning, research based curriculum that motivates the intellectual growth of everyone within the educational community [9]. Through providing professional development for teachers, principals show that they are developing learning communities and teacher leaders. Furthermore, they create cognitive dissonance [9].

As instructional leaders, Grossen recommends that administrator’s complete the following activities daily: 1) visit classrooms daily. Create a checklist for classroom walkthroughs; 2) focus on each teacher’s instructional delivery; 3) celebrate the academic success of at least five students each day; 4) learn the names of all the students; 5) help staff members and students resolve conflicts in an efficient and timely way; 6) support teachers in their disciplinary actions with students; 7) ensure that teachers have the training, materials, and protected time to do their jobs. Minimize interruptions from the intercom; and 8) plan a coaching session with every teacher [9]. Effective principals work successfully with analyzing hard data in numerical form from standardized and state assessments. The principal understands that students demonstrate their knowledge acquisition in a variety of ways. Other measures of assessment include student portfolios, teacher observations, and projects. Principals must transfer that knowledge to the staff through hands-on training in which teachers learn the process for disaggregating data to use as a diagnostic tool for instructional planning.

Effective principals also understand that they are the key to establishing a positive school culture. In order to create a positive school culture, a strong rapport between teachers and students must be evident. In comparison with other students at other schools, students failing in schools have very low self esteem. Students must feel a connection with their school. Teachers must convey strategies for students to cope with stress and build resiliency. Above all, to be successful, students need emotional security. Principals must view students as their clients and by every means; they must establish a positive connection with them. Everyone, the principal, students, teach-ers, and staff must develop a caring attitude about each other [10].

As the literature denotes, schools are institutions with their own culture that determines the daily operations, atmosphere and character of the school. Principals understand that the school culture is one of the most important factors in achieving success. To achieve a positive school culture, families must feel welcomed. Parent and community collaboration is also indicative of a schools’ success. Eliciting parental involvement and support is very crucial.
1.3. African American Females in Educational Leadership

In the literature, the significance of the African American principals in Pre-K-12 is underdeveloped. Historical and contemporary contributions of African American school leaders have not been documented in the traditional literature on educational leadership and administration. According to Dr. Tillman, [11] research by and about African Americans in school leadership positions has not become a dominant strand in the scholarship on educational leadership. The author indicates on the fiftieth anniversary of Brown versus the Board of Education no special issues on blacks in educational leadership were published in four major educational administration journals. According to [12], black principals are essential in public schools because they resist and fight deficit ideologies and institutions that deny minority children an equitable education. Their input is imperative in continuing to confront and challenge racism and to improve pedagogical practices for minority children. [12]

There are limited studies on black female principals because the number of black women in PreK-12 educational leadership positions while increasing gradually was still relatively small in comparison to their Caucasians counterparts. Furthermore, there is a limited number of African American researchers investigating issues affecting black school leaders. The inclusion of the contributions of African American female principals within pre-dominantly White feminist literature is problematic. According to Bloom and Erlandson, the black female experience from the perspective of a white woman results in negative outcomes, and their experience is devalued.

Because there are limited studies on black female principals, this study will add to the literature.

1.4. The School

Located in NC, the school is a new facility. It is located within a distinguished neighborhood. The school has solar panels on the roof and dormer windows which provide natural daylight. The school is shaped as the letter E in order to harness the sun’s energy in numerous ways such as in food preparation and dishwashing.

With in the school, there are various arts programs. To illustrate, in art class, the students are learning from an Australian musician and artist. He is building musical instruments. The students wear black and white shirts for the North Carolina Arts in Action program. This elementary school is a pilot school for this program. Only recently, Fayetteville Street School in Durham, NC joined this program.

Because it is based on a school wide framework, the school continues to be successful. The framework consists of five major components: inclusive education, quality student work, use of culturally proficient practices, effective literacy instruction and efficient use of technology.

To further promote student achievement, the school also has the IMACS Math Enrichment Program. IMACS stands for the Institute for Mathematics and Computer Science. The program focuses on creating a genuine understanding of the essential tools of solving math problems; it is just not rote learning. The program conveys to parents that the elementary school years usually are a child’s last chance to learn the language of logic, critical thinking, and problem solving.

The school is also a participant in the SNAC or Social Needs Advisory Council of Chapel Hill Carrboro Schools. The council’s primary focus is for members of the educational community to collaborate for the continuous improvement of the CHCCS Exceptional Children’s program. Their primary purpose is to influence district policy on EC issues. Each school has SNAC representatives who communicate frequently with the School’s Leadership team. School representatives are the primary liaison between SNAC and each school’s Exceptional Children community.

United Nations flags are throughout the hallways, and they represent the origin of many of the school’s students. The hallways are decorated with student work. Spanish and English signs are located outside of classrooms, offices, and other areas to assist students and parents.

Within each hallway, there are quads. There
are four classrooms in each quad. Classrooms typically have four computers, a project room, and black boxes that help teachers amplify their voices throughout the room. K-2 classrooms have bath-rooms. Each hallway is color coded. The green hall has fourth and fifth grade; the yellow hall houses kindergarten, first grade, and Pre-K. Out-side each classroom, there are printers and Smart boards that are shared among teachers.

The library is on a flex schedule. Students do not have a set time to come. Teachers may sign up for collaboration. There are two mobile lab units with twenty-four computers. There is also a Raptors’ report room where they broadcast their morning announcements. Fourth and fifth grade students are broadcasters for this program.

Parents are frequently within the school. They serve as volunteers. The school has a very friendly atmosphere in which parents feel welcome to host birthday and holiday parties.

As for the schedule, school begins at 7:55 a.m. At 8:01, students are considered as tardy. In regards to dismissal, the elementary school has a staggered dismissal at 2:24, 2:27 and 2:35 p.m.

1.5. The Staff

The elementary school has forty-eight teachers, and ninety-eight percent of the teachers are fully licensed. Ninety-eight percent of the teachers have Bachelor degrees, and thirteen teachers hold National Board Certification. Twenty-nine percent of the teachers have taught less than three years. Thirty-three percent of the teachers have taught from four to ten years.

In the interviews, the interview responses were examined for commonalities, which were identified as themes. The identified themes were categorized and direct quotes were used, when applicable, to provide supporting statements for the identified themes. The table below outlines the emergent themes based on the teachers’ responses.

Some of the teachers were asked to describe the relationship between the school and the community. According to the teachers’ responses, the relationship is positive and active. The community reflects the characteristics of the school and vice versa. For example, one of the teachers said, “How the community is-how the school is.” Also, the community participates in school-related activities on a regular basis. Similarly, the school participates in a lot of community services. Furthermore, the school has “excellent” business partners and volunteers from the community, which “is a direct result of the hard work of the administration and specialists, particularly the literacy specialists.”

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<td>Strong leadership characteristics</td>
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<td>Some shared leadership through committees and team work</td>
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<td>Communication is effective and continuous</td>
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<td>School is student-centered</td>
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<td>Strong parent and community involvement</td>
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<td>Safe school environment</td>
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<td>Effective instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emphasis on good professional development</td>
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<td>Effective use of assessment</td>
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Figure 1: Interview Identified Themes

1.6. Leadership-The Principal

The principal noted in this study is a veteran with a decorated career in education as a former teacher and assistant principal. She is extremely active in numerous national, state, and local organizations that focus on educational policy and practice. But most importantly, she leads staff development and mentors four principals, teachers, and students.

The principal served at Elementary School B before moving to the new school discussed in this article: Elementary School A. Elementary School A has a staff which is composed of new employees and former teachers from Elementary School B. Note the former teachers from Elementary School B had to reapply for their positions. The selection of the “right” personnel was very imperative.

The selected principal has received many honors and accolades. The principal has been Wachovia Principal of the Year in addition to serving as a state representative for the state school board. In 2007, she was recognized as the Central Regional Principal of the Year as well. The
principal is very nurturing and interactive with her staff and students. For example, she works diligently to motivate students by taking them to pizza parties.

One of the educational goals of the principal pertains to student growth at the individual level and not necessarily proficiency. The focal area for growth is reading. Another goal is to ensure the safety of all students. When asked what makes the school successful, the principal indicated that she will not settle for anything less. She explained that an expectation of success must be set. Also, she tries to provide teachers with the resources that they need to be successful. She communicates with the teachers on a regular basis with regard to the success of the school, and she tells the teachers “...you treat these children the way that you would want someone to treat your child.”

The principal and the assistant principal work as a team, but they have some distinct responsibilities. For example, the assistant principal is responsible for and oversees the Student Success referral program (SST), which deals with the referral of students before they go into the Exceptional Children’s program. The assistant principal’s strength pertains to disaggregating data.

The principal spends a significant amount of time at the school. For example, she begins her day at the school between 6:30am and 6:45am, and on Monday through Thursday, she doesn’t leave for the day until 6:30pm at the earliest and 8:30pm at the latest. The principal’s day consists of numerous meetings, which include meetings with teachers, parents and district meetings in particular. In addition, the principal tries to do a walk-through every day, but she does not always have the time. Finally, the top five priorities of the principal include (1) student success, (2) teacher morale, (3) being a listener, (4) conducive learning environment for all and (5) being a contributing member to the success of the schools in the district.

According to the principal, an ideal or effective teacher is one who utilizes multiple instructional strategies and who is flexible and nurturing. For example, “I see a teacher that is able to take a lesson and differentiate based on the kids.” The principal monitors the teachers’ lesson planning by having them post their objectives on the board, but she does not require them to submit their formal lesson plans.

With regard to the principal’s mentoring and preparation for becoming a great principal, the main influence came from her elementary education teachers and her 4th grade teacher in particular. In addition, some of the influence came from her church which “was the hub of everything.” When asked specifically how the program at the University helped prepare her to be a principal, she explained “they gave me the knowledge base, but no school or university program prepares you for the everyday to day things that you are confronted with.” She further explained that the university program provides the tools and knowledge, but the person must actually be able to apply those tools and knowledge. Finally, she explained “Until you actually feel it- see it- and live it, it is in a shell.”

The main challenge that the principal faces, outside of time constraints, is the fact that “I am a black woman who is running a privileged school and I am questioned frequently”. However, the fact that she has a well established reputation in the community serves, to some degree, as a buffer. Other challenges include the fact that at any given time parents and/or teachers can become upset with her leading to challenges on a daily basis.

In order to foster parent and community involvement in the school, the principal meets with parents on a regular basis, many parent and family events are sponsored by the school and parents sit on the School Improvement team. In addition, she has an open door policy and asks parents to help her out with various tasks. With regard to the community, the school has a close relationship with an independent living complex for elders across the street, where students are often sent to sing Happy Birthday to the residents and visit.

Teacher morale is kept high by constantly praising teachers when they do good work. For example, the principal explained, “Constantly send out kudos. Do a lot of lunches-feed them a lot-buy a lot of gifts.” She further explained that once a
year parents come in and watch the classes while the teachers and the teacher assistants go out to lunch for an hour and half. Students are rewarded through the Principal’s Lunch Club, which is once a month for two grade levels. The students get Principal awards. Specifically, lunch is ordered, music is played and the students can dance. In addition, they get their picture taken so they can get their names in the newsletter. Other actions are taken such as taking the students to California Kitchen, giving out birthday pencils and just walking up and down the halls to talk to the students.

Collaboration at the school is fostered through the relationship that the teachers have with the Instructional Resource teacher and through their Professional Learning Community meetings. In addition, the teachers have time to share and to collaborate with each other at faculty meetings. The principal meets with someone or a group on a weekly basis and has staff meetings twice a month.

1.7. Leadership-The Assistant Principal

In interviewing the assistant principal, she indicated that the principal had a clear vision for the school. Teachers were hired on the basis that collaboration was important to them. It is evident that the principal and assistant principal work as a team and share equally the responsibilities of administrators.

Her top five priorities were as follows: safety, parents’ comfort level, student achievement and growth, positive school climate, and mutual respect within the educational community.

The assistant principal interviewed indicated that she was currently in her third year at the school. The community in which the school is based, was described by the assistant principal as “a very affluent community.” However, the majority of the students are brought in from different communities. The free or reduced lunch rate is approximately 15% and the largest minority is Asian. The school has many ESL students, some of which have any English skills. The school campus has its own large playground, a basketball court, a field in which teachers can do activities and the Pre-K have their own playgrounds.

The assistant principal’s typical work day begins somewhere between 7:20 am and 7:30am. She first checks her email and then touches base with the principal. Then, she usually does classroom walk-throughs in the morning. The district expects 10 classroom walk-throughs a week. There is no actual paperwork, since the work is done on the PALM pilot and then uploaded onto the internet, where a report is generated automatically.

One of the educational goals of the assistant principal is to be a literacy collaborative school, which they currently are. The school utilizes the professional learning community model. Every year since its inception, the school has been a School of Excellence and has done well with regard to state testing.

Although, there is no school wide discipline program, school wide expectations for behavior do exist. Discipline problems are not widespread or a major concern for the school. Also, the district has behavior specialists who help them with behavioral plans. The specialists are brought in to work with the student and the teacher as needed.

The principal and the assistant principal have distinct responsibilities in some cases, as was pointed out in the principal interview. For example, the principal is responsible for the student support team. However, the evaluation process is shared equally between the principal and the assistant principal. The evaluation process consists of classroom walk-throughs. Every principal and assistant principal went through PEP (Program for Experienced Principals) and a program called SAIL (School Administrators as Instructional Leaders), which taught them how to do classroom walk-throughs in 3-4 minutes. During the walk-through, they are looking for particular things and they have a PALM pilot, which has all of the teacher’s information in it and the evaluators are able to fill in the necessary information. The evaluation topics of interest include student engagement, classroom environment (student work on the walls), collaboration and question asking, instructional strategies used, types of questions asked (questions requiring higher levels of critical thinking), etc. In addition, the dis-
strict is changing the teacher evaluation process so that it is more formative and therefore associated with continuous improvement. Finally, teachers also do professional growth plans each year and set two SMART goals through the PLC model, which are measurable and achievable.

The decision making process at the school is done through a school leadership team, which is the planning team. In addition, there is a school improvement team that is mandated by the state. There is also a lot of “shared decision making” with faculty and staff. However, the budget decisions are made solely by the principal, although the teachers have some autonomy with regard to how they use the allocated money.

To reiterate, the top priorities of the assistant principal include (1) safety-emotional and physical development of students, (2) student achievement and (3) ensure that adults are in a happy environment. For example, the assistant principal explained “Safety, parents are comfortable that their child is taken care of emotionally and physically as if they are in their own homes.” “That is my top concern.” The assistant principal also explained that although they are a high achieving school, there are some students who are not proficient. They have some students that do not make adequate growth. With regard to the happiness of the adults, the assistant principal wants faculty to enjoy their work, feel respected and feel part of a bigger family when they come to work in the morning.

1.8. The Teachers’ Perspectives

The teachers were also asked about the school’s culture and the rapport among faculty, staff and students. Based on the teachers’ responses, the rapport among faculty, staff and parents is positive and supportive, which is partly due to the fact that the principal consistently meets the needs of the teachers and staff. For example, one of the teachers explained, “I think we get along pretty well. I think that is one of the things that make the school such a successful school. That parents are always coming to volunteer and staff members try to be one big family and help each other out.” However, not all of the teachers felt that the rapport with parents was positive. For example, one of the teachers explained, “In the program, I work a lot in a self contained program with students with severe disabilities. I think that the parents have difficulties; it is not a complete partnership. It is because of them going through their own denial or grieving.” However, the principal does one on one counseling with the parents of special ed children. Therefore based on the teachers’ responses, the relationship and rapport between the parents and the teachers appears to depend on the situation of the student.

The teachers were also asked to describe the characteristics of the principal as well as her role in within the school. Based on the responses, it appears as if the principal has the final word and has the strong hand in the discipline process. For example, one of the teachers said, “She has the ultimate word in the school.” However, it also appears as if she only gets involved in the discipline process if necessary and therefore serves as a type of intervention. For example, one of the teachers explained, “Her role is to kind of take on situations where things are not working. She is here to assist us.” Also, one of the teachers explained that the State of North Carolina is in the process of a major revision that requires the use of regulations and forms. Therefore, the principal is responsible for understanding those new regulations and becoming familiar with the necessary forms. Another teacher indicated that the principal goes out of her way to get good staff development.

The climate of the school was also addressed in the teacher interviews. For example, when asked if they had a voice with regard to various functions at the school (i.e. selecting resources, the budget, hiring of new staff, professional development) the teachers’ responses suggest that the amount of voice they have depends on the subject. For example, one of the teachers said, “It fluctuates. Points in the year we look at things in particular. But, if you have a particular grievance you will be heard. There is a time and a place that improvements are made. We are trusted to make the right choices.” Another teacher explained, “I feel like I have a voice with schedules and the au-
tonomy I have with my work. Not always necessarily with decisions.” Also, the teachers tend to feel that they have the ability to be creative. All of the teachers interviewed indicated that the principal was fair and uses fair leadership practices. Furthermore, the school was considered to be “student centered” and the teachers viewed the school as safe.

In addition to the positive culture and climate, teachers serve on committees, which is an effective form of communication at the school. The committee members work as a team to solve problems and work towards continuous improvement. For example, the technology committee exists to help improve the school’s use of technology, which the principal “strongly supports”. Also, the fact that the principal’s expectations are clearly and concisely communicated indicates that she has good communication with the faculty and staff.

The instruction delivery methods were also discussed in the interview and the teachers indicated that they have uninterrupted blocks of time for instruction. Also, assessment is used effectively with the primary purpose of identifying students’ needs and forming students. For example, one of teachers explained, “We give pre-tests before instruction. We teach based on that and if they already know it we skip over that and teach something else. After we teach, we assess. We look at the objectives and what the students get and what they did not. We re-teach or Safety Net. We reassess.”

Finally, the teachers’ responses suggest that quality staff development is an essential component of the climate and culture of the school given the fact that the principal “goes out of her way” to obtain effective and useful professional development opportunities for the teachers at the school.

There are varying needs within the school that impact the instructional program and school climate. The school is an inclusive school, where students receive support and services through collaborative and consultative teaching in the classroom with the specialists and classroom teachers working as a team to provide necessary scaffolding, support and challenge for all students. Two district FOCAL classrooms (self contained special education classes focusing on careers, academics and life skills) are housed at the school; however, these students also receive inclusive services in the general education classrooms appropriate for the grade level and needs of the students. The PreK classroom provides comprehensive education to students who are eligible for Head Start, More at Four, special education or is tuition paying, all within a blended Pre-K setting.

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As the following tables indicate, various services are provided to students who represent almost thirty two percent of the school’s student body. Supported by differentiated classroom instruction and collaboration with gifted specialists, students are provided gifted education. Areas of special education are supported by various specialists in the school with a commitment to inclusive education, minimizing fragmentation in the

Table 2: Student Demographics

<table>
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<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>39N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>36N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N=40 in each category for the subgroup to count in NCLB.
student day, and ensuring a full continuum of services. ESL (English as a Second Language) services are provided through direct services, monitoring and consultation by the ESL teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special Education</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>School %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autistic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmentally delayed</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educable mentally disabled</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-handicapped</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthopedically impaired</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other health impaired</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviorally emotionally disabled</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Learning Disabled</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech Language Impaired</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Impaired-Deaf and</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard of Hearing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>10.10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even though the school has had high academic success, the data in the table above indicates that the school has obstacles to face and areas of need. Students need to be encouraged to excel and achieve high growth and achieve proficiency for all Exceptional Education population. Data from end of grade tests over the past two years indicates that this group of students failed to meet AYP proficiency standards in math and in both reading and math in the following year.

2. Purpose of the Study

According to Sparks (2005), aspects of principal leadership were carefully studied to determine the characteristics and behaviors that most influenced high student academic performance. The purpose of this study was to identify effective characteristics of successful schools, particularly administrators. Moreover, the purpose of this study focuses on the dynamic factors that make schools achieve. Survey data was used to address the research questions posed in this study, along with in depth interviews with the principal, assistant principal, faculty, and staff. Identifying components and comparing perceptions of essential features from successful schools may be critical elements of the learning environment for students to achieve academic success in these schools.

To investigate these questions in great depth, researchers posed the following questions:

1. What does the educational community perceive as best practices for this principal?
2. What are the key elements or characteristics that led to the principal’s success?
3. Does this principal focus on the factors that facilitate true student learning or only on student achievement itself?
4. Is the school merely an organization? Is successful student achievement more process or outcome oriented?

2.1. Assumptions

The following assumptions were present in this study:

1. Principals initiate change to create high achieving schools.
2. Leaders incorporate certain best practices to establish high achieving organizations.
3. Some answers have been concealed to protect participants’ identities within the district.
4. The responses of the participants may have inflated to impress the researcher.
5. The behaviors of the school principals and other stakeholders planning and implementing can be replicated in any school district to affect the desired high performance of learners.

2.2. Participants

For this investigation, researchers gathered data from participants in an affluent school located in the Carolinas. The participants represented various faculty and staff within the school. The tables included below give a description of the schools, demographics, teacher credentials, and other pertinent information that pertains to the school. In this study, there were ten interviews and twenty-one participants responded to the surveys. Note every participant did not include his or her ethnicity, position, or duties. The table below
Table 4: Gifted Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gifted</th>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>First</th>
<th>Second</th>
<th>Third</th>
<th>Fourth</th>
<th>Fifth</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>School %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academically Gifted</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(nurturing and Identified AIG)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: ESL Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ESL</th>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>First</th>
<th>Second</th>
<th>Third</th>
<th>Fourth</th>
<th>Fifth</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>School %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct Service</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultative</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Proficiency Scores

AYP Proficiency Standard 65.8 76.7
Rashkis EC Proficiency 52.6 73.7
Rashkis EC Proficiency 38.9 92.9

reflects information that was shared in the individual surveys or interviews. Within this study, the author observes not only the teaching faculty but all members of the staff as well as former parents.

3. Data Preparation and Analysis

To analyze the data, SurveyMonkey and Microsoft Excel were utilized. The surveys were based on a 5 point Likert scale indicating levels of agreement: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, and not sure. Therefore, all items linking to one of the dimensions in Table 1 were averaged to obtain an overall continuous dimension score. However, Items 17 and 53 were reverse scored prior to computing the dimension score so that higher ratings would consistently be associated with more favorable ratings. Histograms were constructed in order to display the distributional characteristics for each survey dimension. The overall reliability of the survey, based on Cronbach’s alpha, was high (a = .91).

Charts and tables were constructed in order to display the characteristics for each survey dimension.

In this study, there were ten interviews and twenty-one participants responded to the surveys. Of the total number of respondents that disclosed information, there is one male and fourteen are female. The participants are classified as follows: one African-American male, five African-American females, one Hispanic female, and seven Caucasian females. Thirteen of the teachers have National Board, and thirty-three have advanced degrees.

In addition to the teacher surveys, the principal completed a self-assessment of her educational leadership skills with regard to setting instructional direction, resolving complex problems, communication skills and ability to develop self and others. The principals’ survey results were compared to the general findings provided by the teachers to determine congruency.

3.1. Characteristics of the Research Sample

The teachers surveyed in this study had between less than one year and thirty-two years of teaching experience, with an average of 11.47 years. The summarized educational attainment levels in the table indicate that the most common degree was a bachelor’s degree (47.6%). However, several participants had a master’s degree (38.1%).

The licensure types of the teachers are summarized in the table below. The results indicate that
Table 7: Interview Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Gender</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Committees/Duties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Kindergarten Student</td>
<td>Ambassador, Cedars Retirement Facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Receptionist/Office</td>
<td>Parent Committee, SIP team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Therapist</td>
<td>Technology, Social Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Fifth Grade Technology</td>
<td>Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Cafeteria Manager</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Fifth Grade</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Custodian/former parent</td>
<td>SNAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Third grade</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Former Teacher, substitute and tutor</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Art teacher</td>
<td>Girls on the Run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>SIP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Asst. Superintendent</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Teachers with Advanced Degrees and NBCT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not respond</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Graduate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>61.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Summary of Surveys

The participants within the study varied in regards to their experience and education. However, the teacher/staff interviews indicated that as many as seven teachers did not state their license type. The results also indicate that some of the teachers had more than one type of license. However, in general, teachers tended to have licenses relating to elementary education.
their principal had strong leadership characteristics and communicated effectively. The principal encouraged parental and community involvement in addition to emphasizing good professional development.

Overall, the survey data analysis findings indicated that the teachers ranked their school favorably, on average, across all of the dimensions. However, there were slight differences in the mean ratings across the various dimensions. As for the principal survey, the principal rated herself as frequently to almost always engaging in positive leadership behaviors. The dimension with the most favorable rating was educational leadership (4.93) as shown in the graph below.

Based on a comparison of the collected teacher survey data, interviews, and the archival Teacher Working Conditions survey data and the School Improvement Plan, there is a congruence in perceptions of the leadership in the school and it is viewed positively. This congruency is on dimensions of: (1) curriculum/instruction, (2) assessment, (3) culture and climate, (4) educational leadership, (5) professional development and (6) parent/community involvement. The teacher interviews also provided support for strong and positive curriculum/instruction, assessment, culture and climate, educational leadership, professional development and parent/community. Furthermore, the principal’s self ratings suggest that she (the principal) has solid educational leadership abilities.

The principal and assistant principal interviews suggest that student achievement is good and therefore not a major concern, which may be why it received a lower dimension rating on the survey and why the SIP did not speak to student achievement objectives and goals as frequently as teacher collaboration and development objectives and goals. In addition, both administrators interviewed had positive culture and climate as one of their top priorities, which corresponds with the survey results. Furthermore, both administrators focused on professional learning communities and professional development, which corresponds with the survey results and the SIP.

The table below provides a summary of all of the data sources and the practices and characteristics that were identified as strengths. The results in the table indicate that the most strongly supported themes were professional development and positive culture/climate. The archival survey did not address several of the themes and therefore “NA” was indicated in the table, which means not addressed or not assessed.
ing into consideration those themes that were not assessed, full support was given with regard to positive culture/climate and collaboration/communication.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Teacher Survey</th>
<th>Principal Interview</th>
<th>Teacher Interview</th>
<th>Archival Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture/climate</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborate/</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate Educational leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/community</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum/instruction</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Findings

The key elements or characteristics that appear to have led to the successfulness of the students include the principal’s: 1) fairness and equitable approach, 2) direct involvement with faculty, staff, students and parents, 3) commitment to obtaining and maintaining resources for professional development of the teachers, 4) focus on intra-individual growth of students vs. proficiency, 5) high expectations and 6) ability to communicate expectations in a clear and concise manner.

Based on the survey data analysis findings, the teachers ranked their school favorably, on average, across all of the dimensions. However, there were some differences in the mean ratings across the various dimensions. The graph below provides a visual depiction and comprehensive summary of the mean ratings. (Table: Dimension Mean Ratings for Successful Schools Survey)
Based on all the data provided for this study, the results suggest that the best practices used by effective principals of successful schools pertain to fostering a positive school culture and climate, which depends on the principal’s ability to exhibit strong and fair leadership capabilities, invest in the teachers through professional development focusing on instructional strategies, provide teachers with collaboration and planning opportunities and develop reciprocal relationships with parents and the larger community. With this being said, the key to successful student achievement appears to be process oriented than outcome oriented. In other words, focusing on the factors that facilitate true student’s learning appears to pave the road to academic success more than focusing on the student achievement itself.

Figure 3: Dimension Mean Ratings of Successful Schools Survey

(Mean Ratings: Students-3.71, Curriculum-4.05, Assessment-4.40, Ed. Leadership-3.87, Shared Leadership-3.80, Vision-3.98, Culture-4.18, Parent-4.09, Professional development-4.21)

6. Conclusions

As the social fabric changes, schools must adapt and make fundamental changes in response to cultural and technological advances. In light of the challenges of the twenty first school system and a shortage of qualified candidates, the definition and the role of the school principal is undergoing an evolution. Principals are at the center of curricular and instructional improvements within their schools. Studies have shown that principals who are knowledgeable about and actively involved with their schools’ instructional program have higher achieving students in comparison to principals who manage only the non-instructional aspects of their schools. Principals must assume the responsibility for instructional decisions; coordinated instructional programs, and place the emphasis on academic standards. Note that principals of high performing schools support and facilitate instruction in every way possible.

The interviews and research observation with the survey confirmed the findings of the literature. The literature stressed the importance of the principal being knowledgeable of resources and the curriculum. The researcher’s conclusions, based on this study’s findings, confirm the theory set forth at the beginning of the study. Possible revisions to the theory concerning the behaviors and practices of principals in successful schools are presented at the end of the discussion of the conclusion. The conclusions are reported using the view of the school as an organized social system. Findings from the study and the survey led to the following conclusions:

6.1. Structure

1. Enhancing the principal’s vision is a primary goal of the faculty and staff.
2. Teachers embrace and enhance the principal’s vision.
3. The principal serves as a facilitator and mentor to other principals in the local school district.

6.2. Process and Procedures

1. The success of all students is the school’s primary mission.
2. Principal ensures the regulations and safety procedures are followed by students, community, and staff.

6.3. Human Resources

1. Regarding the purchase of resources, the principal seeks input from teachers and faculty.
2. The principal provides professional development for the growth of teachers and the strengthening of instruction.
6.4. Curriculum and Instruction

1. The principal ensures that the focus of instruction is the implementation of the adopted curriculum and the teaching of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study.
2. The principal ensures blocks of uninterrupted instruction.
3. The principal ensures implementation of direct instruction and teaching.
4. The principal emphasizes that direct instruction and research instructional practices are essential practices of all teachers.
5. The principal supports instructional programs, resources, and strategies that address individual student needs.

6.5. Assessment and Accountability

1. The principal supports ongoing assessment to guide instruction.
2. The principal periodically meets with teachers and instructional resource teachers to review data and to restructure remediation groups.

6.6. Environment, parental and community involvement

1. The principal ensures that all parents receive adequate interpretation services and information as needed.
2. Ensuring that the needs of a diverse community are met are essential to the principal.
3. By creating a positive climate, the principal show families and community members that they are valued and respected. The school is inclusive.
4. The principal ensures that the school benefits from funds from a variety of sources.
5. Other: African American females face dual barriers of race and gender discrimination.

7. Implications and recommendations

Using the findings from the school survey and interviews, the following implications and recommendations are presented:

7.1. Structure

1. Implication: School improvement occurs when leaders build bridges between cultures and strengthening ties between socioeconomic and ethnicities. Stronger relationships mean stronger schools.
2. Recommendation: It is essential that the principal continue to provide professional development that encourages teachers to cross cultural barriers.

7.2. Curriculum and Instruction

1. Implication: The curriculum and classroom instruction must be the major focus of the school.
   Recommendation: It is essential that the principal continue to recognize effective classroom instruction ensures student success and convey these expectations to the educational community.
2. Implication: Programs and resources must address the individual needs of students.

7.3. Recommendation

The principal must successfully implement the program to address the achievement gap for black males and the socio-economic gaps among students.
3. Implication: Collaboration and cooperation among staff are vital for school success.
   Recommendation: Principals should be allowed to hire their own staff to ensure building an effective team for collaboration.
   Implication: The primary job of the principal is instructional leader.
   Recommendation: It is critical that the principal has enough time to perform the task of instructional leader and delegate responsibilities to other parties.

7.4. Assessment

1. Implication: The principal monitors benchmarks to improve instruction and teaching throughout the year.
   Recommendation: It is critical that the principal have the opportunity to provide staff development for test taking strategies for English language learners.
7.5. Parental and Community Involvement

1. Implication: The culture of the school values the family and community.

Recommendation: Principals must work to make families from every socio-economic group feel valued and to become partners with the school, working for the success of the students.

Successful leadership is the key constituent in achieving quality schools. Again, research has indicated that the powerful impact of leadership in securing school development and cultural change. Effective administrators properly utilize style and strategy. Style reflects one’s personal behaviors and makeup while strategy is a chosen behavioral pattern designed to gain the cooperation of the educational community in accomplishing goals. Built on three basic strategies, administrators are successful when they implement hierarchical, transformational and facilitative strategies. As an effective curriculum leader has a clear systemic view of the school as a social system, its purpose and its goals.

Whereas in the initial study, the author did not initially focus on the school as a social system. However, the findings indicate that the effective leader treats the school as a social system. This study further confirms that an effective principal works on all the dimensions of a school in order to be effective. Further research needs to be done on the school as a social system.

8. Limitations

The following limitations were present in this study:
1. Limitations include the bias of the researchers, the effect of the observer in the environment on the actions of the subjects, the generalization of the findings and lastly, the role of memory and perception in recreating the actual accounts. It is assumed that the participants will give accurate accounts.
2. Because it is limited to one school and district, this study may not necessarily reflect other high achieving schools. The results are not generalizable to the leadership of schools in other geographical areas.

Time is another limitation of this research study. A longitudinal study throughout a school year could follow specific administrators, teachers, principals, policies for implementing best practices from the beginning through the duration of the school year. Longitudinal studies are more effective because they follow the educational community, particularly after new policies are implemented.

9. APPENDIX A:

9.1. Interview Questions for Administrators

1. Tell me about your school. What are some of its unique characteristics: history, programs, students, teachers, community, parents? What are the demographics?
Free and reduced students? Minorities? Categories? ESL students? EC?
2. What is your school’s educational program? Does it have specific educational goals, vision of learning, or response to accountability measures? Awards? ESL, EC, AIG, literacy, math programs?
3. What strategies have you used to close the achievement gap?
4. What is the role of your assistant principal? Grade level chairs?
5. How do you inform and include parents and other community leaders into your school?
6. Are you committed to a specific instructional approach here?
7. What do you consider good teaching? Describe an high achieving lesson.
9. What is your school’s improvement plan? How well has it been implemented? Successful?
10. What special programs have you implemented into your school to promote student achievement?
11. Explain your school’s organization/decision making structure (informal and formal).
What are the roles and responsibilities of your positional leaders?
12. What is your work schedule? (arrival and departure) Describe your typical day.
13. In regards to hiring, budgets, staffing patterns (scheduling, teacher responsibilities, number of administrators), curriculums, and professional development, how do you make your decisions? (in collaboration with other leaders)
14. What groups (district) affect your decision making? What is your relationship with them?
15. What are your top five priorities? How much time is allotted for each? What impact does it have on students?
16. Describe your daily schedule. How does it compare with what you were hired to do?
17. In your opinion, did your university’s administrative program prepare you for this job?
19. Describe your school’s performance. Testing?
20. Describe the role of your guidance counselors.
21. Who influences the school the most? Parents? Board? Organizations?
22. What do you believe about the nature of learners? Explain your belief in educating all students.
23. To what degree do your teachers understand and utilize cooperative learning?
24. Describe your motivation and training to be an administrator.
25. How have your mentors influenced you?
26. Do you think your school is successful? Why?
27. What is your school’s mission and vision?
28. What makes this school unique?
29. What do you celebrate at this school? How do you reward students and staff?
30. What programs have you started at your school since you became principal? What is your role?
31. What are the reasons for the levels of student achievement at your school?
32. How do you motivate your staff to create an high achieving school wide learning climate?
33. How does your school sustain a positive learning climate in each classroom?
34. In your opinion, what factors are needed for students to learn high achieving by and at high levels? How do you ensure that your students learn?
35. Describe collaboration and shared leadership in your school.
36. In what ways do you create family and community involvement?
37. What do you do to ensure teachers are teaching the curriculum and students are learning?

10. Appendix B:

10.1. Interview Questions for Staff

- Describe the relationship between the school and the community.
- Describe the school’s culture and rapport among faculty, staff, and students.
- Describe the principal’s role in instruction and discipline.
- Do teachers have a voice in selecting resources? Budget? Hiring new staff?
- Do teachers have a voice in scheduling, the school improvement plan, and the everyday functions of a school?
- Discuss the principal’s role in staff development as it relates to improving instruction.
- Discuss the principal’s role in creating a school climate conducive for learning.
- Describe the communication/rapport/relationship among administration and staff.
- What is the climate like in your school?
- Is the community active in the school? Parents?
- Do parents and students support after-school programs and activities?
- Is the principal visible throughout the building?
- Describe your team planning sessions. How does your principal play a role in curriculum
15. How are students recognized? Teachers? Administrators?
16. Do teachers work as a team for the success of all students? Administration?
17. Are there uninterrupted blocks of time for instruction?
18. Describe your school’s discipline plan and your principal’s role in enforcing it.
19. Do you have volunteers? Business partnerships?
20. Do you have parent workshops? Curriculum nights? Family nights?
21. Are teachers encouraged to participate in decision making? Are there teacher leaders in the school?
22. Is this a child-centered school? What provisions are made for EC students? ESL? Gifted?
23. Is there shared leadership between teachers and the principal? Do you have a role in the hiring process?
24. Are teachers allowed to be creative?
25. Are the rules and procedures fair? Observations? Walk-throughs?
26. Are the expectations of the principal clear and consistent?

11. Appendix C:

### 11.1. Successful Schools Surveys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please write your position and grade level here.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students participate in an extended year schedule.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school staff embraces the vision of the principal for school success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent field trips enhance the curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An after school program for students reinforces academic skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers use assessment data to plan instruction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please write your number of years as an experienced teacher.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal and staff together develop the school improvement plan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please indicate your highest level of education and type of license.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum needs determine the type and frequency of staff development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Family members feel comfortable in the school. |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Not sure |
The principal provides teachers with enough supplies, books, and materials to deliver instruction.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
There is a feeling of respect among and between staff members and students.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Students are taught only in heterogeneous groups.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Teachers focus on the objectives when teaching the curriculum.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The staff gives the principal input on the purchase of resources.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The Internet is used for communication between school and home.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Most parents attend conferences concerning student progress.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The needs of the children come first in our school.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Parents are seen frequently in the school.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Frequent extra-curriculum programs enrich the curriculum.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Family members are encouraged to come to school.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Most people in this school believe all children can learn.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Successes are celebrated frequently by the principal.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Assessment is a vital part of the instructional process.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Leadership in the school is shared between the principal and staff.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Translators are provided for parents who do not speak English.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The school is a happy place for learning.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Students in this school understand and follow the discipline plan for behavior.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The school vision sets the stage for how the staff proceeds with instruction.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
After school programs are well attended by parents.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The principal is seen frequently throughout the building.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Teachers are encouraged to participate in decision making.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Community members volunteer at the school.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The principal understands good classroom instruction.
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Teachers frequently assess students on objectives.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The staff makes decisions with the principal concerning teaching and learning.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The principal manages funds to ensure the school has the best resources to teach the students.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
There are uninterrupted blocks of time for instruction.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Test taking strategies are taught.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The staff plans the program for the school in collaboration with the principal.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The culture of the school is conducive to learning.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
My school develops a plan to ensure all students are successful.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Students attend school on Saturdays to reinforce academic skills.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Direct instruction teaching methods are utilized.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The principal visits classrooms frequently.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Teaching methods and programs are based on research.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Most people in the school work for the success of all students.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The principal keeps the teacher-student ratio low.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The principal makes some academic decisions without the input of teachers.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Members of civic or social organizations volunteer in the school.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The district office determines class size.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The staff enjoys working in this school.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
Teachers are leaders in the school.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
School communication is printed in more than one language.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The school forms partnerships with businesses.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The principal uses a variety of funding sources to sustain programs at the school.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The principal knows the names of the students.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The school is the center of the community.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure
The school is safe and orderly.
Most people in our school believe the principal is an ethical leader.  
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure  
There is a parent liaison to assist parents.  
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure  
Most staff members participate in staff development.  
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure  
The discipline plan for student behavior is high achieving .  
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure  
A nurse on staff addresses the medical needs of students.  
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure  
Teachers in our school are free to be risk takers.  
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure  
The staff participates in the hiring process.  
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure  
The adopted curriculum is the focus of all classroom instruction.  
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure  
Homework completion is required daily.  
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure  
Teachers are honest with parents concerning student progress.  
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure  
School staff members hold classes for parents.  
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure  
Instructional time is protected from interruptions.  
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure  
Students are provided remedial services in reading, math, and science.  
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure  
Our school has extra-curricular activities (clubs etc.) to promote critical thinking.  
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure  
The principal promotes curriculum to address the academic needs of all students.  
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure  
Teachers and students have access to internet.  
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure  
Teachers and staff feel supported by the administration.  
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure  
Technology is integrated within the curriculum.  
Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure  

12. Appendix D:

12.1. Central Office, Parent, and Administration Interviews

12.1.1. Central Office Interview

In interviewing the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, she conveyed that the school is an excellent school primarily due to the leadership. Because the number of students who used free and reduced lunches decreased, the school lost its Title I status.

The school has many programs that enrich and stimulate student thinking. It uses the Balanced Literacy Framework with guided reading and vocabulary study. With math, students focus on problem solving, inquiry, and lesson formats.

The principal informs her staff that we will do this and she monitors the staff’s participation and progress. She also tells her teachers that they must have lesson plans; however, she gives them creative license in developing the lesson plans.

In regards to staff development, two are required with PLC. Unlike other principals, she “sticks to her guns” and she insists that her school and staff participate in equity plans. She demands that her staff discusses racial inequality and disparities among minorities. She conveys to her staff that “we are morally responsible for
all students.” Also, with staff development she takes the lead and requires her staff to participate. But most importantly, she has ownership in the schools’ goals, objectives, and plans.

The principal exhibits strong leadership and she is the Lead principal of CHCCS. She coaches and mentors many principals. She encourages other principals to think about the outcomes of their decisions and the impact that will made upon the school. The principal would be successful at any school in which she was placed.

As for her fostering relationships with others, the principal has a positive rapport with central office. She looks to them for guidance and gives positive feedback. Many schools have the mentality of Central Office vs. School Administration/School; however, the principal does not have this mentality. She embraces Central Office’s leadership.

12.1.2. Parent Interview

Parents view the principal as an expert. She is very knowledgeable of the curriculum, community, families and the district. When families go through difficult times, the principal and the elementary school always address the students’ and families’ needs. She provides opportunities for students regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Parents also conveyed that she wants to make sure that every child at the school is successful and she is creating a task force to address the problems of black males in schools. The principal listens to her parents and she is open to their concerns, questions, and feedback. She has the students’ interests, growth and development at heart.

12.1.3. Principal-Assistant Principal Interviews

In the interview with the assistant principal, she conveyed the principal started this school with her vision and that is a Literacy Collaborative school. The PLC’s were already in place and teachers were hired with collaboration in mind. Furthermore, as the AP, there is no set school discipline plan; however, there are school wide expectations. There are no major or widespread discipline problems but there have been instances of bullying. Some students do have aggression problems. Buses are sometimes a concern and there were a few write ups. After two incidents, students are not allowed to ride the bus.

What were her five top priorities? Safety, comfortable parents, student achievement and growth, positive work climate and respect were just a few of her priorities. Her typical day includes meeting with the principal and teachers. She does several walkthroughs a day. In evaluating teachers, she has one list and the principal has another list. At some point during the year, they exchange lists. In their administrative meetings, they are encouraged to observe the level of engagement in classes. They also look to see if the classroom is warm, safe and inviting. She noted that in the near future the North Carolina teacher evaluation, TPAI, will change. They instead will use YODA to check teacher behaviors.

We also had a brief discussion about the special populations in the elementary school. In our conversation, she noted that ESL newcomer students are served at a newcomer school. But it is only for middle and high school students. She is also involved with PBS and served as a facilitator in many of the committees.

The Principal

During the interview, the principal stated that the school is six years old. She has forty five certified teachers, three male teacher assistants, and one male teacher. During the first year, it was Honor School of Excellence. In 2005, the school had one hundred percent proficiency with the NC End of Grade tests. Last year, the school received the National Title I award for second place. For two years, the school was Title I but of the two years only one year was official. Furthermore, the school has received various awards for literacy.

As the principal, she has been recognized as the Wachovia Principal of the year for three years. She was the Regional Principal of the year and served as a representative to the School Board of North Carolina.

As for demographics, there are less than five percent Hispanic, twelve percent African American, sixty percent white, and twenty five percent Asian. Only a small percentage of students received free and reduced lunch, less than last year.
which was fifteen percent.

With the Smart goals, K-2 increased the number of student assessments by ten percent. All to ninety percent with the reading test data. As a school, they look at the weaknesses and the educational goals are based on growth. Students are viewed on an individual basis.

As I observed the school leader, I concluded that she is principal that knows her school. She is on top of things and addresses problems immediately. Twice a month, she has staff meetings. She has a commitment for continuity in education. The principal constantly checks the schedule to see if assignments are completed. She called an assistant to remind her that a bulletin board had to be completed. She describes her ideal teacher as flexible and nurturing.

The assistant principal helps her with the SST student success team and serves as the LEA person on the EC team. The assistant principal assists the principal hiring but most importantly helps her to disaggregate the test data. Both conduct walkthroughs about three times a week.

She expressed that the following are her top five priorities: student success, high morale, listening, creating a positive learning environment, and to be a contributing member of the school district. She conveyed that her university program gave her a knowledge base. But her mentors have influenced her since childhood. Her favorite mentor was her fourth grade teacher who is now eighty six years old. She did not attend kindergarten; all of her elementary school teachers were members of her dad’s church. They were very influential in the all black elementary school.

She believes in high morale with her staff. She gives lots of KUDOS, lunches, and gifts. One teacher won a fly a way lunch. On a daily basis, she distributes sweet strategies to staff. Students have a Principal’s lunch, dances, birthday pencils, among other prizes. Principal M. has a principal chit chat meeting with parents and they are invited to attend the school improvement committee meetings.

At the school, she has two ESL teachers. The Asian population is the largest minority. She has an IRT on staff which is an instructional resource teacher.

Students participate in chess club, math Olympiad, and other programs. Everyday, they recite the. During one of the meetings, she met with a teacher and the reading facilitator to discuss a parental concern. The parent expressed that she wanted success for her student. The parent was not satisfied with the classroom and wanted the child moved. In the meeting, they came to a consensus that the teacher has sufficient support and the PLC is there. The teacher is not working in isolation. The principal feels that all the children, just not one child, needs a solid literacy program. The principal conveyed that she can not justify moving one child to another classroom; the literacy program must be restructured for all students.

In the email, the parent also expressed concerns about how her child was monitored. Was the child a level J? Why wasn’t the child referred for Reading Recovery? The parent also expressed that the computer program was not challenging and who tracked the program on the computer? The parent also requested a yearly plan and constantly emailed the teacher.

The principal values her staff and listens to their concerns and feedback. The teacher expressed that during independent reading and story mapping, the child pretended to read but actually she was not. The child’s individual reading was not fluent but she constantly inserted words and did not read sentences exactly.

The literacy facilitator explained to the principal that the parent did not want the child to read independently but to have a teacher to constantly work with her child. This was not feasible with five hundred and eighty five students.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the principal will meet with the parent and she instructed the teacher what to communicate with the parent.

13. Appendix E:

13.1. Survey Comments

Survey Questions: I am trying to identify key characteristics of successful schools. Please provide any thoughts or ideas that you have that JASSH, vol 4(6), 2018
would help me better understand your school and its successes.

Please read comments from surveys below:
1. Literacy collaborative framework, positive behavior support system, gifted specialists, technology, resources and funds available to teachers to purchase resources and PLC’s make our school successful.
2. As far as reading and writing, I feel this school does not encourage looking at various methods of teaching and the many research based programs that are available. There is a one track mind here.
3. There are high expectations, strong literacy program throughout the grades, much parent involvement, and a highly dedicated and qualified staff.
4. High performing school, great wealth of resources. With that comes a lot of pressure to be the best, and push the kids harder. Can be very stressful on teachers and students.
5. Parental involvement, high standards, adherence to curriculum and assessments on SOL.
6. We have a family atmosphere. All kids belong to everyone—not just the classroom teacher. We all try to help and support the academic needs of our students.
7. Admin strongly supports teachers.
8. This is a school which has. By that I mean that we have the resources to maintain a good school. Money is, of course, not everything. We have many volunteer groups aimed at closing racial divides and disparities within our school groups.
9. I wish there was a choice of “sometimes.” What makes a school successful is based on the personalities of its members.
10. The teachers have a lot of say. The principal delegates work well here. Constantly reminded that all students can learn.

14. Appendix F:

14.1. Classification of NC Schools

Honor School of Excellence. At least 90 percent of the students’ scores are at or above achievement Level III and the school makes or exceeds its expected growth goal. Additionally, the school has achieved adequate yearly progress (AYP).

School of Distinction. 80-89 percent of students’ scores are at or above achievement Level III and school makes or exceeds its expected growth goal.

School of Excellence. At least 90 percent of their students’ scores are at or above achievement Level III and the school makes or exceeds its expected growth goal.

References