

**THE RELATIONSHIP OF PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP TO  
ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING AND SUSTAINED ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**

A Dissertation

by

LEONARD JAMES HARDOIN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2009

Major Subject: Educational Administration

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	John R. Hoyle
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**ABSTRACT**

The Relationship of Principal Leadership  
to Organizational Learning and Sustained Academic Achievement.

(May 2009)

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Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. John R. Hoyle

Some research suggests that development of professional learning communities might be the organizational strategy that could make school reform more successful. While most schools have not institutionalized the essential components of learning organizations, studies have demonstrated that these attributes must be developed if professional staffs are to realize the full benefit of organizational learning and in the process, create a context of improvement.

The primary intent of this study was to learn and understand how principal behaviors influenced the development of shared leadership, shared vision, and supportive conditions; three essential dimensions of professional learning communities. Secondly, this study investigated how these conditions differed among schools which have and have not sustained high levels of student learning.

Understanding the influence of principal leadership on conditions for organizational learning can be partially understood through either quantitative or qualitative methods. From this perspective, the mixed methods design utilized in this study allowed both

qualitative and quantitative data to be analyzed and interpreted as evidence in understanding the study's problem.

Principal and teacher focus-group interviews were used to create a deeper understanding of how principals worked to create conditions for organizational learning. Kouzes and Posner's (2002) Leadership Practices Inventory - Self and Observer Forms were utilized to identify, describe, and measure the perceived leadership practices of principals.

The findings of this investigation suggest that principal leadership is a key factor in creating conditions for organizational learning and sustaining high levels of student achievement. Principals in this study who effectively identified and modeled espoused values were perceived to be highly visionary and appeared more effective at sharing leadership, inspiring vision, and creating supportive conditions. Principals who were able to develop a shared vision among staff created strong collaborative cultures characterized by an uncompromised focus on student learning. The findings of this study also indicated that principals who effectively Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, and Enable Others to Act, distributed leadership among staff and demonstrated a systems orientation to leading.

## DEDICATION

To my lovely wife, Tara.

To my children, Zachary and Alexandria, who are a constant source of joy,  
inspiration, and determination.

To my parents, Leonard and Dolores Hardoin, for their immeasurable love, support,  
and timeless example of fortitude and acceptance.

To my in-laws, Darlene and Bobby Bertrand, for their unconditional love  
and support.

To my good friend and encourager,

Jim Clairmonte.

(1942-2008)

To my Lord and Saviour,

Jesus Christ.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Following several decades of efforts to reform public education, there exists little evidence to suggest that schools have become significantly more effective at ensuring “high levels of learning for all students” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004, p. 1). For change to occur, educators must recognize that the design of schools they currently work in require fundamental change in both practice and the assumptions which drive those practices (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

This chapter addresses the challenge of school improvement by discussing the fundamental concepts, characteristics, and essential dimensions of professional learning communities as a means of effective reform. Within this context of improvement, the question of how school leaders create and sustain conditions that foster organizational learning remains a fundamental challenge for schools (Fullan, 2006; Hipp & Huffman, 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2000).

### **LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS**

“The term professional learning community (PLC) has emerged from organizational theory and human relations literature” (Huffman, 2003, p. 3) and is related to Senge’s (1990) description of learning organizations where “people continually expand their capacity to create desired results, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are

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This dissertation will follow the style and format of the *Educational Administration Quarterly*.

nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (p. 3).

Senge’s learning organization concept originated as an attempt to help businesses learn faster than their competitors (Liebman, Maldonado, Lacey, & Thompson, 2005) and was characterized by five specific disciplines: personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking (Senge, 1990). Challenging traditional thinking, reform minded educators embraced the notion of learning organizations and applied the disciplines of team learning and shared vision to the concept of school-based learning communities (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1992).

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES**

As a re-emerging practice (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006), professional learning communities (PLC’s) have been described as places where shared purposes, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility for student learning occur (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Huffman & Jacobson, 2003; Schmoker, 2006; Sparks, 1999; Strahan, 2003).

Contrary to mandated bureaucratic reforms, the development of PLCs is characterized by the locality of implementation, relevance to current practice and needs, and the combined influence of shared authority and responsibility for student learning (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Following a five-year national study, Hord (1997) concluded that “professional learning communities emerge as professional staffs learn together to direct their efforts toward improved student learning” (Huffman & Hipp, 2000, p. 5). Hord (1997) also identified the following characteristics as essential components of successful learning

communities: Supportive and shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application of learning, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice.

While each of the five dimensions identified by Hord are important, continued research has identified the integrated dimensions of shared leadership, shared vision, and supportive conditions as critical to the development and success of professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Huffman, 2003; Huffman & Hipp, 2000; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

## **ESSENTIAL DIMENSIONS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES**

If a vision for organizational learning and sustained student achievement is to be realized, the concepts of shared leadership, shared vision, and supportive conditions must be evidenced in the organizational readiness of schools (Beauchum & Dentith, 2004; Hord, 1997; Marks & Printy, 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

Understanding how principal behaviors impact this process and how principals influence the creation of school readiness factors remains an essential prerequisite in the development of effective learning communities (Fullan, 2001b; Hipp & Huffman, 2003; Leithwood & Reihl, 2003; Newmann et al., 2000; Schmoker, 2006).

### **Principal Leadership**

Principal leadership has been shown to have a significant impact on student achievement (Cotton, 2003; Fullan, 2002; Leithwood, Louis, Andersen & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Although this effect is believed to be indirect (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003), the principal's influence is



substantiated through the alignment of beliefs and actions that improve student learning through human and structural supports.

Through their on-going research of effective leaders, Kouzes and Posner (2002) have identified five practices and 10 corresponding commitments that all exemplary leaders, including principals, demonstrate. Each of the five practices reflect specific actions or behaviors that are consistent with the essential dimensions of learning communities (Blankstein, 2004; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour et al., 2004; Fullan, 2001; Hord, 1997; Huffman, 2003; Huffman & Hipp, 2000; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Schmoker 2006). Table 1 is an overview of Kouzes and Posner's leadership model illustrating the five practices and 10 corresponding commitments of exemplary leaders (2007, p. 21).

**TABLE 1**  
**The Five Practices and Ten Commitments of Leadership**

<b>Ten Commitments of Leadership</b>		
Practices	Commitments	
Model the Way	1	Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared ideals
	2	Set the example by aligning actions with shared values
Inspire a Shared Vision	3	Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities
	4	Enlist others in a common vision, appealing to shared aspirations
Challenge the Process	5	Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and looking outward for innovative ways to improve
	6	Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience
Enable Others to Act	7	Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships
	8	Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence
Encourage the Heart	9	Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for excellence
	10	Celebrate values and victories by creating a spirit of community

### **Shared Leadership**

In light of changing demographics, heightened accountability standards, local and federal reform initiatives, the role of the principal has become increasingly complex (Fullan, 2001b). As leaders, effective principals adapt to these changes by developing greater capacity among staff members (Lambert, 2005; Lashway, 2003; Spillane & Sherer, 2004) and creating conditions for organizational learning that focus on student achievement (Hord, 1997; Liebman et al., 2005).

In improving school communities, leadership is shared and “extends throughout the school to faculty, staff, and administrators” (Huffman & Hipp, 2000, p. 6). Subsequently, successful communities of learners share important issues and develop relationships in their efforts to improve student performance. This distributive concept of leadership challenges traditional structures (Schmoker, 2006) and requires both administrators and teachers to take responsibility for leading, decision making, and student learning (Huffman & Hipp, 2003).

### **Shared Vision**

Current reform literature suggests that the best hope for significant school improvement is transforming schools into professional learning communities (Blankstein, 2004; DuFour et al., 2004; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Schmoker, 2006). “Until educators can describe the school they are trying to create, [however], it is impossible to develop policies, procedures, or programs that will help make that ideal a reality” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 64).

If principals and school leaders are to effectively articulate the organizational outcomes they desire, the concept of vision must be understood and applied in the appropriate context of learning and improvement (Creemers, 1997; Hord, 1997; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). The primary task of the leader, therefore, is to develop a collective vision which represents all members of the organization (Hoyle, 2007; Huffman & Hipp, 2000). According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), the collective commitment to guiding principles that articulate beliefs and goals is what “separates a learning community from an ordinary school” (p. 25).

### **Supportive Conditions**

In order for a vision of organizational learning to be realized, the structures and procedures that will support and reinforce the intended outcomes must be in place (Brown, 2004; Marzano et al., 2005). For learning communities to successfully develop, “the integration of shared leadership, shared vision, and a collaborative school culture must be supported through both human and organizational structures” (Hipp & Huffman, 2000, p.10).

According to Leithwood (1994), human factors are identified as those relating to establishment of a shared vision and creation of a school culture characterized by norms of trust, collaboration and collegial relationships. Similarly, Hipp and Huffman (2002, p. 39) have reported that norms of “trust, respect, and inclusiveness,” are essential conditions for organizational learning.

In an effort to facilitate norms of collegiality and collaboration, organizational frameworks must be implemented that will promote and develop the capacity of staffs.

Staff members must be afforded opportunities to meet and dialogue, function as collaborative teams, and practice teacher leadership through shared decision making, planning, and collaboration (Liebman et al., 2005; Valentine, Clark, Hackmann & Petzko, 2004).

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Some research suggests that development of schools as learning organizations might be the organizational strategy that could make school reform more successful (Blankstein, 2004; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Schmoker, 2006). While most schools have not institutionalized the essential components of learning organizations, studies have demonstrated that these attributes must be developed if professional staff are to realize the full benefit of organizational learning and in the process, create a context of improvement (Hord, 1997; Leithwood & Reihl, 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

A primary problem facing the creation of effective learning communities is understanding how, and what principals do, to develop and sustain the process of collaborative learning and supportive conditions (Hord, 1997; Liebman et al., 2005; Mawhinney et al., 2005; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Numerous empirical studies and research syntheses have concluded that collaborative communities play a key role in school improvement (Leithwood & Reihl, 2003; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001), yet few schools have actually formed their visions into reality (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Hord, 1997).

Three fundamental components of organizational learning are shared and supportive leadership, shared vision, and supportive conditions (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Huffman, 2003; Huffman & Hipp, 2000; McClaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Although these constructs have been researched quite extensively (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Stringfield, 1995; Taylor & Angelle, 2000), how principals align the three components to school improvement plans has not been widely reported (Creemers, 1997; Bryk et al., 1998; Leithwood & Reihl, 2003; Schmoker, 2004). Conversely, additional case studies are needed to provide a practical knowledge of how principals create conditions for organizational learning (Hipp & Huffman, 2003; McClaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Newmann et al., 2000), distribute leadership and build capacity (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Marks & Printy, 2003), and provide the human and physical structures that improve and sustain student achievement (Huffman & Jacobson, 2003; Leithwood & Reihl, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003).

## **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The primary intent of this study was to learn how principal behaviors influence conditions for organizational learning. The reason for using a mixed methods study was to compare both quantitative and qualitative data from both the principals' and teachers' perspectives to better understand this problem. In this study, the Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) was used to identify and describe principal behaviors as they relate to conditions for organizational learning. Concurrently, case study interviews and focus-groups provided a practical knowledge of how principal behaviors influenced conditions for organizational learning.

The secondary purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between sustained academic improvement, conditions for organizational learning, and principal behaviors, in hopes of better informing school improvement efforts. Specifically, this study addressed the following questions:

1. How do principals share leadership, inspire responsibility for a shared vision, and create supportive conditions?
2. How do qualitative and quantitative data concerning principal behaviors converge?
3. In what ways do the behaviors and practices of principals distinguish themselves between schools which have and have not demonstrated sustained academic achievement?

### **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The conceptual framework of professional learning communities provides meaningful insight for addressing the needs of 21st century schools and students. The exponential rate of change impacting society and subsequent ramifications on public education requires a proportionate measure of change in the design and structure of schooling. In an effort to adapt, schools must learn to function as communities of continual learning. The need to identify, understand, and implement the critical attributes of learning organizations becomes, therefore, an essential component of sustained school improvement.

Shared and supportive leadership, shared vision and values, and supportive conditions are critical attributes of organizational learning. Until educators can envision

and articulate the school they are trying to create and translate that vision into daily practice, it remains unlikely that sustained achievement and institutionalized change will occur.

Understanding how principals distribute leadership, develop a shared vision, and create conditions for organizational learning was the focus of this investigation. Understanding the dynamics of these concepts can provide both the insight and meaning to guide practitioners and researchers in their quest to both understand and replicate conditions where quality learning and teaching occur.

## **OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS**

Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) - Through the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS), the Texas Education Agency annually reports a broad range of academic, demographic, and financial data for approximately 1,200 public school districts and charter schools in the state of Texas. This state-wide data base (AEIS) provides a comprehensive profile of over 7,900 public and charter schools, 300,000 educators, and over 4.5 million students. Information contained in the AEIS report is used to monitor and evaluate school performance in the state of Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2007).

Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) - The LPI includes 30 statements – six statements for measuring each of the five key practices of exemplary leaders. Both a Self Form (Appendix F) and Observer Form (Appendix G) of the LPI measures participants' perceptions of the leadership practices. Iterative psychometric processes have demonstrated the LPI to be a reliable and valid instrument. The LPI has been

administered to over 350,000 respondents since 1988 and reports consistent findings regardless of gender, ethnicity, cultural background and organizational settings (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

Member Checking - The process by which data and its interpretations are restated to the original source from where the data were obtained in an attempt to ensure that the information presented is accurate and properly interpreted (Lincoln & Guba, 1984).

Mixed Methods Study – A research design that focuses on the consequence of research, on the primary importance of the question asked rather than the methods used, and the use of multiple methods of data collection to inform the problems under study. Mixed Methods research is, therefore, pluralistic and orientated towards what works and practice (Clark & Creswell, 2007). The central premise of mixed methods research is that the combined use of quantitative and qualitative approaches provide a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone (Clark & Creswell, 2007).

Organizational Learning – A process of collective and individual learning in organizations where “people continually expand their capacity to create desired results, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured and where collective aspiration is set free” (Senge, 1990, p. 3). Organizational learning is characterized by shared purpose, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility for student learning (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Schmoker, 2006; Strahan, 2003).

Public Elementary Schools located in north Houston – The six Title One schools selected for this study that are located in north Houston and serviced by the Region IV Education Service Center. Three of the six schools selected have met the criteria for sustained academic improvement and three of the selected schools have not.



Shared Leadership – The collaborative interaction between school administrators and staff that establishes a culture of shared power, authority, and decision making.

Shared Vision – A collective commitment to guiding principles that articulate what staff members believe and seek to create.

Supportive Conditions – The human and structural conditions of a school which provide support for organizational learning and effective collaboration.

Sustained Academic Improvement – Academic performance in grades three, four, and five, which reflects a Recognized or Exemplary accountability rating by the Texas Education Agency during the 2004-06 school years.

Title One Schools - Schools located in the north Houston area having more than 60% of their students receiving free or reduced lunch assistance from the federal government.

Triangulation – The process of using multiple data-collection methods, data sources, analysts, or theories to check the validity of mixed methods findings to eliminate biases resulting from exclusive reliance upon on any one data-collection method, source, analyst, or theory (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996).

Trustworthiness - The qualitative aspect of this study which demonstrates truth value, provides a basis for applying it, and allows external judgments to be made about the consistency of procedures and neutrality of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1984).

Validity - “Validity within a mixed methods context is the ability of the researcher to draw meaningful and accurate conclusions from all of the data in the study” (Clark & Creswell, 2007, p. 146).

## **LIMITATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS**

### **Limitations**

1. Generalizability: Findings of this research may not be transferable to other populations (Lincoln & Guba, 1984). The extent to which the sample of this study reflected the population of teachers and principals in other elementary schools cannot be fully verified.
2. The degree to which participants responded objectively during interviews and focus groups was a limitation.
3. Researcher bias was considered a limitation based upon the understanding that the “researcher’s self was an integral constructor of the social reality being studied” (Gall et al., 1996, p. 20). Researcher bias was controlled by demonstrating an awareness of the participants’ numerous perspectives and avoiding the possibility of formulating premature conclusions.

### **Assumptions**

1. It was assumed that participants in the research understood questions in the survey, focus groups, and interviews, and their answers reflected objective opinions and perceptions.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

*“History, in brief, is an analysis of the past in order that we may understand the present and guide our conduct into the future” (Mead, S.).*

This chapter begins by discussing the recent history of school reform in the United States and the subsequent emergence of school based learning communities as a strategy for school improvement. Secondly, this chapter examines the characteristics of professional learning communities and the role of the principal in creating conditions which support their development. Leadership practices of effective leaders as identified by Kouzes and Posner (2007) will also be discussed relative to the development of shared leadership, shared vision, and supportive conditions; three essential dimensions of professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Lastly, this chapter concludes by examining the characteristics of high sustainability schools and the impact of organizational learning on sustained student achievement.

### **SCHOOL REFORM AND IMPROVEMENT**

The following paragraphs discuss the overarching moral purpose (Fullan, 1993) of public education and highlights efforts to reform that system in the United States. In light of the growing complexity and competitiveness of an ever changing society, Schlechty (1997) contended that, “the demands of modern society are such that America’s public schools must now provide what they have never provided before: a

first-rate academic education for nearly all students” (p. 235). According to Blankstein (2004), the moral imperative of providing a first-rate education is realized when failure is no longer considered an acceptable alternative and all students are successful. While many schools accept the notion of success for all, schools which have embraced and accomplished this ideal remain the exception rather than the rule (Darling-Hammond, 1996; DuFour et al., 2004; Louis & Kruse, 1995).

The belief that American citizens should provide an effective education for their children is not a recent phenomenon, but a fundamentally moral and democratic imperative (Fullan, 1993). As early as 1816, Thomas Jefferson called for at least three years of common education for all children. Nearly a century later, Horace Mann would argue that “every child had the absolute right” to a free, public education (DuFour et al., 2004, p. 17).

By the late nineteenth century, the world was quickly changing. In 1893, authors of the first major report on secondary education, The Committee of Ten, described U.S. high schools as a “chaotic nonsystem.” Subsequently, the Committee recommended a more standardized and rigorous academic curriculum to better prepare “students for careers in a complex and interdependent society” (Tyack & Cuban, 1999, p. 50).

By the early twentieth century, education extending beyond elementary school was considered a viable solution to the problems of immigration, urbanization, and industrialization (Tyack & Cuban, 1999). While advocates of progressive education viewed the public high school as a democratic ideal designed to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse society, opponents of the system argued it was excessively pluralistic and lacked the rigor of traditional school settings (Dewey, 1938).

As urban areas continued to expand, American schools confronted the challenge of educating the growing populations. Based upon Taylor's (1911) *Principles of Scientific Management*, educators adopted a standardized factory model of schooling, contending that one uniform system could meet the needs of the general population (Hoy & Miskel, 1996).

A half century later, the cycle of reform resurfaced as public schools were again criticized for their "lackluster and anti-academic character" (Tyack & Cuban, 1999, p. 52). Intensified by the Soviet launching of Sputnik, reformers called for a renewed emphasis on science, mathematics, and foreign languages (Spring, 1997). Having a contemporary tone, articles titled, "Crises in Education," "What Went Wrong with U.S. Schools," and "We Are Less Educated than Fifty Years Ago" articulated the perceived inadequacies of American schools (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 2).

Fueled by the outcomes of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, the Civil Rights Movement, and the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the "possibility of progress" characterized reforms of the 1960s and early 70s (Tyack & Cuban, 1999, p. 27). During this period of heightened societal change and increased political activity, effective school researchers discovered that schools, regardless of the children they served, could indeed "produce results that almost entirely overcome the effects of student background" (Marzano, 2003, p. 7).

Despite signs of improvement in the late 1970s, political sentiment gravitated towards the perceived mediocrity of public schools, while the "equity gains of the previous generation were increasingly downplayed or viewed as the source of problems" (Tyack & Cuban, 1999, p. 29). In April 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in

Education addressed the low performance of American public schools. In its report, *A Nation at Risk*, the commission critiqued the state of the nation's schools making frequent reference to such words as "decline," "deficiencies," "threats," "risks," "afflictions," and "plight" (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 2). Depicting the state of American schools, the report declared that, "We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament" (Tyack & Cuban, 1999, p. 33).

*A Nation at Risk* prompted a wave of structural reforms intended to increase student achievement through top-down regulations known collectively as the Excellence Movement (Spring, 1997). In 1991, despite nearly a decade of unparalleled financial investment, it was reported that the state of public education in America "is still a failure", and "is to our society what the Soviet economy is to theirs" (Finn, 1991, p. xiv, as cited in DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 4).

Failure of the Excellence Movement to significantly improve student outcomes influenced the 1989 development of Goals 2000 – eight national goals supported by an emphasis on "more rigorous educational standards, school-based management, enhanced roles for principals, and other decentralized components" (Fullan, 1993, p. 2). Despite the movement's efforts to encourage collaboration among school staff (Lieberman, Falk, & Alexander, 1995), researchers discovered that teachers and administrators in restructured schools were no more inclined to discuss conditions of teaching and learning than educators in traditional school settings (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995).

By the year 2000, education in America had undergone a substantial and significant change. Although high school graduation rates were at an all-time high, larger and more diverse populations of students were being served, and higher accountability

standards had given rise to the importance of student achievement, American students were still reported as being consistently lower in mathematics, science, and literacy, when compared to students in other industrialized nations (DuFour et al., 2004). Although the validity of these comparisons has been debated, alternative forms of education such as charter schools, home schools, and use of school vouchers, became synonymous with the concept of school choice (Spring, 1997).

Despite efforts to expand educational options, Americans' opinion concerning local school communities has consistently been reported as favorable (Rose & Gallup, 2007). The U.S. public school system in general, however, has been viewed less favorably in regards to preparing students for success in an increasingly competitive and global society (Fullan, 2001a; Rose & Gallup, 2007). Similar opinions regarding the state of America's public schools influenced the bi-partisan reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 2001, better known as No Child Left Behind (Jazzar & Algozzine, 2006).

The intent of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is to ensure that all students experience success and complete a rigorous curriculum of study. Outlined in the legislation's requirements are five goals and accompanying accountability standards for the nation's public schools. The five goals require high levels of achievement in reading and mathematics, stipulate that all students be instructed by highly qualified teachers, express the desire that all students graduate from high school, and that all schools be violence free (ESEA, 2001). While the moral intent of this legislation has been recognized, the expectations of policy makers that all student will demonstrate high

levels of learning necessitates school leadership that ensures both high expectations and norms of continual growth for both teachers and students (Huffman and Hipp, 2003).

## **BARRIERS TO IMPROVEMENT**

Fragmented change efforts, including the Excellence Movement of the 1980s, the Restructuring Movement of the 1990s, and most recently the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, have resulted in numerous reform initiatives, but “minimal signs of improvement” (Huffmann & Hipp, 2000, p. 3). Although efforts to reform have renewed the emphasis on student achievement (Blankstein, 2004), the unintended consequences of reform have resulted in a “system overload, characterized by fragmentation, incoherence, and unfocused purpose” (Hatch, 2001, p. 45).

Fullan (1996) attributed the perceived incoherence and sporadic improvement evidenced in America’s schools to the shortsighted implementation of “systemic thinking” (p. 422). Because contemporary society and schools are nonlinear and ever changing, Fullan (1996) believed effective “reforms must increase the capacity of systems to manage change on a continual basis” rather than adopt “regulations and structural reforms” that typically “maintain the status quo” (p. 428).

The complexity of educational reform in the United States is in many ways the result of the system’s sheer size (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). The apparent overload on the system has been characterized by the “lag time between advocacy and implementation, uneven penetration of reform in different geographic areas, and the different impact of reforms on various social groups” (Tyack & Cuban, 1999, p. 55).



According to Fullan (1993), the “juxtaposition of continuous change” set against a traditionally conservative enterprise has “resulted in a system that tends to retain, rather than challenge the status quo” (p. 3). Fullan (1993) contended that structural reform cannot precede cultural change, and that when change is mandated it generally “results in defensiveness, superficiality, or at best, short-lived pockets of success” (p. 3). Attempts to regulate structural reforms have resulted in what DuFour and Eaker (1998, p.13) consider a “misplaced focus” on improvement. Emphasizing structural change rather than cultural transformation, the “misplaced focus” of past reforms has perpetuated a system of incoherence, which according to researchers, is a fundamental barrier to improvement (Collins, 2001; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

Creating organizational coherence impacts improvement efforts through the alignment of values and norms focused on student learning. As such, the effects of organizational coherence have been shown to have a positive relationship to improved student outcomes (Schmoker, 2006), development of greater organizational trust (Blankstein, 2004) and meaning (Kouzes & Posner, 2007), clear and effective curriculum alignment (Reeves, 2004), and increased job satisfaction for teachers (Fullan, 2001b).

DuFour and Eaker (1998) have written that the cyclical pattern of reform efforts have failed to generate either “enthusiasm or opposition” among many educators, resulting in a culture of indifference and isolation (p.14). Consequently, teacher apathy and resistance are often perpetuated by the perceived lack of “meaningful staff development,” a “heightened suspicion of best practices” (Blankstein, 2004, p. 40), and a counterproductive application of strategic planning (Schmoker, 2006). In Fullan’s (1993) opinion, the failure to address the human side of change has resulted in a misalignment of

improvement efforts. Fullan (1993) has maintained that the solution to this problem is not found in added innovations or reforms, but in creating a “new mindset about educational change” (p. 3).

Darling-Hammond (1997) has written that educational change is a “fundamentally different enterprise” that requires a “new paradigm for education policy that shifts policy makers’ efforts from designing controls to developing capacity among schools” (p. 5). Rather than attempting to reform the system, Schmoker (2004, p. 427) has argued that “systemic reform” should focus on establishing and sustaining school structures that allow teachers to develop collaborative teams and norms of small, continuous improvements centered on teaching and learning (Collins, 2001; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), the most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement “is developing the ability of school personnel to function as professional learning communities” (p. xi). Similarly, Hoyle (2007) has stated that although “It takes time to become an effective learning organization,” it provides the “only feasible way to lead people” towards a collective vision for improvement (p. 69). The development of learning communities has also been cited by numerous researchers (Bryk et al., 1994; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Fullan, 1993; Hord, 1997; Kruse & Marks, 1998; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Liebman et al, 2005; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Mitchell & Sackney, 2001; Schmoker, 2006), state and national organizations, including the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) as a recommended strategy for improving schools (Blankstein, 2004; Lashway, 2003).

## LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS

In an effort to improve schooling, educational reforms must be meaningful, have a direct application to the work of teachers (Fullan, 1993), and be related to the core purpose of schools (Collins, 2001; Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, & Kleiner, 2000). Wheatley (1996) has stated that a primary barrier to successful change can be traced to the “fundamental but mistaken assumption” that organizations can be managed as machines (p. 3).

Rather than mandating change through structure and rules, Mitchell, Sackney, and Walker (1996) have asserted that contemporary organizations must be viewed through the “lens of processes and relationships” with “conversation as the central medium for both the creation of individual meaning and organizational change” (p. 52). From this perspective, the “conception of schools as learning organizations provides a promising organizational design in response to the continuing demands for restructuring” (Mitchell et al., 1996, p. 52).

“The term professional learning communities (PLC’s) has emerged from organizational theory and human relations literature and is related to Senge’s (1990) description of learning organizations” (Huffman, 2003, p. 3). According to Senge (1997, p. 17-18), learning organizations are characterized by five operating principles:

1. New capabilities are developed in the organization through dialogue and generative conversations, which produce concerted actions (p. 17).
2. Leaders work collectively to build capacity among members of the community.
3. Learning arises through performance and practice (p.18). Collaborative practices must be arranged in a manner which allows time for dialogue and reflection, which in turn encourages new thinking and practices.
4. Process and content become inseparable (p.18). The systems thinking approach counteracts fragmented thinking and decision making.

5. Learning becomes dangerous (p. 18). Although the need to change is realized, managing the ambiguity of change must be addressed.

Senge's (1990) concept of learning organizations was first applied to the business community in an effort to successfully adapt to change and sustain economic competitiveness. In *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge (1990, p. 3) described the conceptual purpose and potential benefit of learning organizations:

The tools and ideas presented in this book are for destroying the illusion that the world is created of separate, unrelated forces. When we give up this illusion we can build learning organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.

Applying these concepts to an educational context, Senge et al. (2000) reinforced the power of learning organizations, stating "The learning disciplines found in *The Fifth Discipline* offer teachers and administrators genuine help for dealing with the dilemmas and pressures of education today" (p. 7).

### **SENGE'S FIVE DISCIPLINES**

Senge (1990, p. 6) advocated that there are five components in learning organizations that "although developed separately, prove critical to the others success." The fifth and most important component, however, the discipline of systems thinking, is "required for creating learning organizations because it integrates the other four disciplines" (p. 6) by "fusing them into a coherent body of theory and practice" (p. 12).

The discipline of systems thinking provides a different way of looking at problems and goals – "not as isolated events but as components of a larger structure" (Senge et al., 2000, p. 78). By understanding organizational problems from a holistic

point of view, individual problems provide opportunities for system-wide improvement. Institutionalizing the discipline of systems thinking requires the ability to understand not only what is happening in a specific classroom, but in relation to the entire school organization. As such, systems thinking is evidenced through behavioral norms and organizational structures that reinforce system-wide improvement (Fullan, 1993; Hipp & Huffman, 2003; Hoyle, 2007) in individual schools and across multiple school sites (Fullan, 2006).

Senge's first discipline, personal mastery, refers to the personal growth and learning of individuals within the organization and reflects the belief that "organizations learn only through individuals who learn" (Senge, 1990, p. 139). Personal mastery is the act of "continually clarifying and deepening one's personal vision," "seeing reality objectively," and "committing one's self to lifelong learning" (Senge, 1990, p. 7). As such, personal mastery becomes an essential ingredient of the learning organization, fostering the development of both individual and organizational purpose.

The ability and willingness of individuals to adapt to change or attempt new strategies is based upon the second discipline, mental models. "Mental models are deeply engrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action" (Senge, 1990, p. 8). According to Senge, et al. (2000), "In any new experience, most people are drawn to take in and remember the information that reinforces their existing mental models" (p. 67). Conversely, mental models may become the barriers which hinder people from adapting to change. Developing the capability to talk safely and productively about various viewpoints, therefore, can both transform a school culture and promote organizational learning

(Lieberman et al., 1995; Liebman et al., 2005; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Senge et al., 2000).

Shared vision, the third discipline of learning organizations, is the combination of many personal visions, and suggests “genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance” (Senge, 1990, p. 9). While personal mastery provides the foundation for individual vision, understanding mental models allows actions to become generative, resulting in a shared purpose. Shared vision, then, represents a mental image of what is important to the individual and the organization, connecting people in the organization by a common aspiration (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Lambert, 2003). According to Bennis and Nanus (1985), “Vision promotes a condition that is significantly better than the status quo by expressing a realistic, credible, and attractive organizational future” (as cited in Hoyle, 2007, p. 2).

Team learning, the fourth discipline, assumes that although people will never think alike, they can learn together and collaborate effectively towards the accomplishment of organizational goals (Senge, 2000). Developing team learning builds on the integrated disciplines of shared vision and personal mastery. When supported with the proper organizational structures, these disciplines allow collaborative practices and team learning to occur (Huffman & Jacobson, 2003; Leithwood & Reihl, 2003), which impact the existing culture by promoting dialogue, reflective practice, a common language, and a shared vision for student learning (Liebman et al., 2005).

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES**

The term professional learning community (PLC) first emerged among researchers as early as the 1960s when they offered the concept as an “alternative to the isolation endemic to the teaching profession in the United States” (AllThingsPLC, 2008). Although early research suggested that effective schools operated as professional communities, Sergiovanni (1992) first applied Senge’s discipline of team learning to an educational context, implying that school learning communities resembled a connectedness among staff similar to a “family” or “closely knit group.”

The discipline of team learning and shared vision were soon adopted by educators and translated into the concept of school-based learning communities (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1994). In their original study, Kruse et al., (1994) identified the elements of reflective dialogue, deprivatization of practice, collective focus on student learning, collaboration, shared norms and values, and structural conditions, as critical to the success of organizational learning in schools.

In studying the effects of school reform and restructuring in over 1,500 schools, Newmann and Wehlage (1995) noted that schools which were the most successful utilized restructuring to develop collaborative learning communities. These communities, according to Newmann and Wehlage (1995), were characterized by a “shared purpose for student learning, engagement in collaborative activity to achieve that purpose, and a collective responsibility” for all students (p. 30). Lieberman stated similarly, defining PLCs as “places in which teachers pursue clear, shared purposes for student learning, engage in collaborative activities to achieve their purposes, and take collective responsibility for student learning” (as cited in Sparks, 1999, p. 53).

As a re-emerging practice (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006), professional learning communities have been characterized as places where shared purposes, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility for student learning occur (Darling-Hammond, 1997; DuFour et al., 2004; Huffman & Jacobson, 2003; Schmoker, 2006; Sparks, 1999; Strahan, 2003). Contrary to bureaucratic mandates, the development of PLCs is characterized by the locality of implementation, relevance to current practice and needs, and the combined influence of shared authority and responsibility for student learning (Darling-Hammond, 1997). According to Huffman and Hipp (2004), PLCs are “schools that continuously inquire and seek to improve teaching and learning” at the school level (p. 4).

Following a five-year national study involving 64 elementary schools, Hord (1997) identified and documented the characteristics of schools which had both a high and low readiness for organizational learning. Hord (1997) concluded that professional learning communities emerge as staff members learn collaboratively to improve conditions for teaching and learning in schools. Hord (1997) also identified the following characteristics as essential components of successful learning communities: Supportive and shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application of learning, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice. While each of the five dimensions identified by Hord are important, continued research has identified the integrated dimensions of shared leadership, shared vision, and supportive conditions as critical to the development and success of professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Huffman, 2003; Huffman & Hipp, 2000; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).



Kruse and Marks (1998) conducted a study of 24 schools in an effort to reaffirm that schools operating as professional learning communities had a significant impact on both the classroom practice of teachers and student achievement. Despite consistent findings suggesting professional learning communities benefit schools, the authors reported that research was having minimal impact on the practices of teachers and administrators (1998). Advocating their belief in the learning community concept, Kruse et al. (1994) commented that although “professional community within schools has been a minor theme in educational reform since the 1960s ... it is time it became a major rallying cry among reformers, rather than a secondary whisper” (p. 6).

An important step in converting the PLC concept from a “secondary whisper” to a “major rallying cry” (Kruse et al., 1994, p. 6) was the publication of *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement*, by DuFour and Eaker (1998). According to DuFour et al. (2004, p. 21), there are six primary characteristics of learning communities that are guided by an unrelenting focus on three critical questions: “Exactly what is it each student should learn?” “How will teachers know when each student has acquired the essential knowledge and skills?” “What happens when a student does not learn?”

The first three characteristics of learning communities according to DuFour and Eaker (1998) include a shared mission and vision, collaborative teams, and collective inquiry. Together, these practices provide the foundation of organizational learning by creating what Creemers (1997) and Fullan (2001a, p. 64) describe as coherence – “the extent to which a school’s program for students and staff is coordinated, focused on learning goals, and sustained over a period of time.”

The principles of action orientation and experimentation, continuous improvement, and results orientation, describe the remaining three characteristics and are referred to by DuFour and Eaker (1998, p. 151) as the “curricular focus” of learning communities. Fullan (2001a) commented that “Collaborative cultures are indeed powerful, but unless they are focusing on the right things they may end up being powerfully wrong” (p. 67). The curricular focus described by DuFour and Eaker (1998) creates and sustains a clear commitment to learning and ensures that the fundamental purpose of schools –“high levels of learning for all students” (DuFour et al., 2004, p. 1), is maintained as the unifying principle or idea behind professional learning communities.

### **PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES IN PRACTICE**

McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) stated that while there are “various definitions of teacher learning communities, they all feature a common image of professional community where teachers work collaboratively to reflect on their practice, examine evidence about the relationship between practice and student outcomes, and make changes that improve teaching and learning for particular students in their classes” (p. 4).

Although learning communities operate at different times, places, and levels within a school, three specific functions emerge: “They build and manage knowledge, they create a shared language and standard for practice and student outcomes, and they sustain aspects of their school’s culture vital to continued consistent norms and instructional practice” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 5). Such schools, according to Chasin and Levin (1995, p. 134) are not simply “conventional schools with new principles or programs,” but reflect “dynamic environments in which the entire school

and its operations are transformed” through a unity of purpose, the empowerment of staff, and a focus on identified strengths.

As teachers and principals work through the development of learning communities they acquire both a “knowledge *of* and *for* practice” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 6). Collaborative teams of teachers build a store-house of best practices and develop their understanding and application of these practices through professional dialogue, conversations about learning, and the analysis of student work.

Because a school-based community provides a forum in which everyone has access to the knowledge base, the collective capacity of staff members develops to provide high quality instruction and learning for all students. Through the ongoing learning and adjustment of practices found in school-based communities, teachers develop a “collective mindfulness” about student progress (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 1999, as cited in McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 7). As a result, the community develops a shared language and understanding of their practice. This shared understanding emerges as teacher isolation diminishes and coherence evolves across teams through the sharing and integration of both ideas and practices.

While the concepts of shared vision, collaborative and shared leadership, and shared learning provide the foundation for teachers to take collective responsibility for students’ success, it is the community’s collaborative culture and organizational structures which empower teachers to act upon the school’s shared vision for learning (Bryk et al., 1998; Kruse et al., 1994). In their examination of school efforts to establish PLCs, Hipp and Huffman (2002, p. 38) have “found supportive conditions to be the glue that is critical to hold the other dimensions together.”

The primary problem facing the creation of effective learning communities is the development of school conditions and structures that support and facilitate the process of organizational learning (Hord, 1997; Lieberman et al., 1995; Newmann et al., 2000; Schmoker, 2006). In Darling-Hammond's (1996) summary of the *National Commission on Teaching and America's Future* report, she concluded that "most schools cannot produce the kind of learning demanded by new reforms ... because they do not know how and the systems they work in do not support their efforts to do so" (p. 194).

As a well-documented, but still emerging reform strategy, few schools have yet fully implemented and institutionalized the essential dimensions of professional learning communities (Blankstein, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Fullan, 2001a; Hord, 1997). Although much research reflecting the conclusive impact of PLCs on student achievement is promising (Bryk et al., 1998; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour et al., 2004; Kruse & Marks, 1998; Strahan, 2003), "much less is known about how to start and sustain them" (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 11).

Studies describing and measuring the effects of collaborative learning, shared leadership, and organizational variables related to PLCs suggest a powerful model for continuous learning and school improvement (Bryk et al., 1998; DuFour et al., 2004; Duke, 2007; Fullan, 2006; Hord, 1997; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Strahan, 2003). According to McLaughlin and Talbert (2006), a "school's capacity to confront the challenges entailed in developing professional learning communities depends upon the knowledge and skills of teacher community facilitators and broad school leadership for change" (p. 37). Huffman (2003) and Leithwood and Riehl (2003),

have indicated that meeting this challenge is primarily dependent upon the principal's ability to set direction and inspire a shared vision for learning.

## **PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES**

If a vision for organizational learning and improved student achievement is to be realized, the concepts of shared leadership, shared vision, and supportive conditions must be evidenced in the organizational readiness of schools (Beauchum & Dentith, 2004; Hord, 1997; Marks & Printy, 2003). As principals and staffs seek to manage and implement meaningful change, they must understand the reciprocal nature of relationships and organizational structures (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Understanding how principal behaviors impact this process, and how principals influence the creation of school readiness factors remain an essential prerequisite in the development of effective learning communities (Fullan, 2001a; Hipp & Huffman, 2003; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Mawhinney et al., 2005; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Newmann et al., 2000; Schmoker, 2006).

### **Principal Leadership**

Researchers and theorists believe that principal leadership has been demonstrated to have a profound impact on student achievement (Bryk et al., 1998; Cotton, 2003; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano et al., 2005). Although this effect is believed to be indirect (Arnold, 2007; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003), the principal's influence is mostly realized by ensuring that all components

and actions within the school support the learning of students through human and structural supports (Liebman et al., 2005).

As an effective leader, the principal's influence is primarily accomplished by creating a vision and developing goals and supports which align with that vision (Fullan, 2001b; Hipp & Huffmann, 2003; Lashway, 2003). As the primary designer of organizational leadership (Lashway, 2003), the principal is required to be a "lead teacher and learner" (Senge et al., 2000, p. 15). Although numerous theories and models of principal leadership are identified in the literature, principals must demonstrate an array of exemplary leadership practices as they seek to develop the capacity of their staffs and effectively lead school improvement initiatives (Cotton, 2003; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Lambert, 2005; Marzano et al., 2005). As such, "contemporary theories of leadership suggest that principal behaviors cannot be prespecified, but are dependent upon the setting, nature of the organization, and the goals being pursued" (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 9).

In Marzano, Waters, and McNulty's (2005) meta-analysis of principal leadership, 69 studies involving 2,802 schools were analyzed in an effort to identify exemplary leadership practices that influence student achievement. Although Marzano et al. (2005) identified 21 behaviors that exemplary principals demonstrated, he cautioned that "research on principal leadership must not only attend to general characteristics of behaviors, but must also identify specific actions that affect student achievement" (p. 41).

According to Leithwood and Riehl (2003, p. 6), the current situation in education has taken on the characteristics of a "frontier culture" that suggests the need for a "critical transformation" of leadership. "Although there is no one precise formula for effective

leadership behaviors, contingent relationships can be drawn out in enough detail to illustrate potentially useful configurations” (p. 9). Research agendas, therefore, should “focus less on the development of particular leadership models and more at discovering how flexibility is exercised by principals in various leadership roles” (p. 9). Hoyle (2007) commented that while studies indicate “some leaders are better than others in scanning the environment and adjusting their style to address ongoing and emergent issues,” the research remains “sparse on analyzing relationships between leadership styles and institutional performance across schools, universities, and other public and private agencies” (p. 11).

### **CONCEPTS OF PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP**

In an examination of articles on educational leadership published in administrative journals from 1985 to 1995, Leithwood and Duke (1999) identified six distinct models of principal leadership: instructional, transformational, moral, participative, managerial, and contingent. Lashway (2003, p. 5) suggested that while each conception of leadership provides a different approach and purpose, effective principals work from a “leadership contingency,” incorporating various behaviors as they seek to provide “focused instructional leadership, initiate change, develop collaborative structures, and provide a moral purpose” for the organization. The following paragraphs address these four responsibilities relative to contemporary models of leadership and the role of the principal in establishing professional learning communities.

## **Instructional Leadership**

Despite the term's frequent use, the concept of *instructional leadership* has numerous applications (Marzano et al., 2005). One particular description, however, is that instructional leaders attend to four primary roles: "Resource provider, instructional resource, communicator, and visible presence" (Smith & Andrews, 1989, as cited in Marzano et al., 2005, p. 18). Within this loosely defined concept, instructional leaders are assumed to provide a clear instructional vision, high standards for student learning, utilization of data-based decision making, an emphasis on professional development and collaborative communities, and active participation in classroom instruction (Lashway, 2003).

In terms of learning communities, instructional leadership becomes one of "shared instructional leadership and involves the active collaboration of principals and teachers on curriculum, instruction, and assessment" (Mark & Printy, 2003, p. 371). The principal's primary influence according to Senge et al. (2000), is creating an "environment that encourages awareness and reflection, that gives people what they ask for, and that enables staff members to develop the ability to make choices" (p. 273). Within this setting, the principal solicits ideas, insights, and the expertise of teachers who share responsibility for staff development, curricular development, and supervision of instructional duties.

Principals in learning communities serve as instructional leaders by developing the capacity of others to lead in the instructional setting (Bryk et al., 1998). Chasin and Levin (1995) viewed this as a constructivist approach to learning, which involves empowered decision making, a commitment to values such as risk-taking,



experimentation, and continuous learning, and the belief that school staff serve as resident experts. According to Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999), shared instructional leadership overlaps with transformational leadership because it involves intentional change, aspires to increase teachers' efforts within the organization, and emphasizes the improvement of teaching and learning.

### **Transformational Leadership**

Through their research of learning communities, McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) indicated that professional learning communities “cannot be mandated into existence,” but require a change in culture that is “difficult to establish in any profession, but especially in the isolated, individualistic world of teachers” (p. 11). According to Fullan (2001a), creating conditions for organizational learning requires second order change. While first-order change impacts the day-to-day operations of a school, second-order change impacts the assumptions and beliefs of staff members which “alter the system in fundamental ways and requires new ways of thinking and acting” (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 66).

The fundamental shift in thinking and acting produced by second-order change characterizes the qualities of professional learning communities (Hord, 1997; Leithwood & Duke, 1999), and reflects the adaptation of Senge's (1999) five disciplines. Through their research on learning communities, Huffman and Jacobson (2003) concluded that the creation of second order change is a fundamental strength of transformational leadership.

As the role of the principal has evolved from manager to instructional leader, studies conducted in the last two decades have associated transformational leadership

with successful school restructuring (Schlechty, 1997; Taylor & Angelle, 2000). An effective leadership concept, transformational leadership focuses on “problem finding, problem solving, and the collaboration of teachers with the goal of improving organizational performance” (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 15). In an effort to develop the collective capacity of schools to achieve results, “transformational leadership seeks to elevate participants’ levels of commitment to encourage them in reaching their fullest potential, and to support them in transcending their own self-interest for the larger good” (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 372). Addressing the challenges of educational reform, Leithwood (1994) developed a transformational model of school leadership that included six specific dimensions of practice believed to be necessary for principals to successfully meet the challenges of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The first dimension identified by Leithwood (1994) regards the “identification and articulation of a vision” which is developed collaboratively, continuously communicated, and modeled among all stakeholders. Leithwood’s concept of shared vision is supported by the second dimension of transformational leadership; “acceptance of school goals” (p. 511). Leithwood (1994) suggested that leaders develop this coherence by assisting staff members in the creation of department or individual goals that are consistent with and support the school’s vision for learning.

Thirdly, transformational leaders offer “individualized support” by knowing teachers’ interests and strengths and connecting them to individual goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Leithwood, 1994). Principals promote this sense of collaborative activity by being approachable, assisting in times of need, and providing recognition for individual and group success.

Creating circumstances for “intellectual stimulation” is a fourth dimension of transformational leadership (Leithwood, 1994). Similar to Senge’s (1990) concept of mental models and personal mastery, the principal “challenges the basic assumptions of teacher’s work as well as unsubstantiated or questionable beliefs and practices in an effort to improve individual and group practice” (Leithwood, 1994, p. 511).

“Modeling desired practice” (Leithwood, 1994), the fifth dimension, is realized through the authentic and genuine actions of the leader and is reported by Thompson (1995, p. 95) as “the single most powerful mechanism for creating a learning organization” (as cited in DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 111). Demonstrating respect towards teachers and students, recognizing other’s efforts, aligning personal actions with spoken words, and providing meaningful feedback, are practical means of modeling espoused beliefs while developing credibility among staff members (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

Lastly, the practice of “maintaining high expectations” (Leithwood, 1994) for staff and students is accomplished by advocating and ensuring excellence, innovation, hard work, professionalism, and commitment, within the context of school goals.

Leithwood (1994) reported that the six dimensions of transformational leadership must be practiced and provided within a context of supportive conditions. In so doing, Leithwood (1994) maintained that transformational leaders “shape the [school’s] governance structure by distributing the responsibility and power for leadership widely through the school” (p. 511). As a result, the role of shared decision making and problem solving, collaborative planning and conversation become the sustaining elements of the school’s culture.

In creating conditions for organizational learning, transformational leaders serve as change agents who provide intellectual direction and innovation within the organization while empowering and supporting teachers as partners in decision making (Hoyle, 2007; Marks & Printy, 2003). Within this context of change, Senge (1990) compared leaders to “stewards, designers, and teachers,” and suggested that through these roles organizations are created wherein “people expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models” (p. 340). Senge’s views resonate closely with the transformational model of leadership (Leithwood et al., 1998, p. 243), which in the opinion of Marzano (2003), provides a promising model of leadership for change.

### **Distributive Leadership**

Bryk et al. (1998) wrote in their comprehensive study of Chicago school reform, that “transformative principal leadership was the most significant common feature” in the experiences of actively restructuring schools (EARS) (p.248). While principal leadership appeared key, Bryk (1998) acknowledged that “no one person can transform a school,” stating that in EARS schools it was the “collective and human resources” that facilitated improvement efforts (p. 248).

Schools that have demonstrated a high-readiness level for professional learning communities have experienced a fundamental change in culture, wherein teachers are viewed as leaders, are encouraged to initiate change, and share responsibility for decision making (Eaker, DuFour, & Burnette, 2002). Faculties in such schools have been reported

by Huffman and Hipp (2000), to demonstrate higher levels of engagement, a heightened sense of decision making, and increased ownership for learning.

Efforts to effectively restructure schools have prompted both discussion and inquiry concerning distributive leadership practices (Lashway, 2003). As flatter, team-based structures replace traditional hierarchical organizations, initiatives aimed at developing teams as learning communities place an increased emphasis on the sharing or distribution of leadership (Hoyle, 2007; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). According to Chasin and Levin (1995), the sustainability of capacity requires the development of many leaders. Similarly, Eaker, DuFour, and Burnett (2002), stated that “one of the most fundamental cultural shifts that takes place as schools become professional learning communities involves how teachers are viewed.” Rather than seeing teachers as mere “implementors” or “followers,” principals in learning communities become “leaders of leaders” (p. 22).

While support of distributed leadership is increasingly widespread, research concerning its effects is still in development (Lashway, 2003). “As an organization-wide phenomenon, the total amount of leadership contributed from all sources in the school may account for significant variation in school efforts” to improve (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 16). Although this opinion has yet to be proven, the distributive aspects of shared leadership are consistent with and characteristic of the essential dimensions of professional learning communities (Eaker et al., 2002; Hord, 1997; Liebman et al., 2005; Valentine et al., 2004).

## **Integrated Leadership**

Transformational leadership emphasizes second order change, the importance of shared vision, and development of an enduring sense of organizational purpose. The transformational leadership model according to Leithwood and Riehl (2003) and Marks and Printy (2003), however, lacks an explicit focus on teaching and learning. As such, the transformational model of leadership does not specifically address the instructional leadership skills required for substantial school improvement (Fullan, 2002).

While instructional leadership emphasizes the technical core of instruction, curriculum, and assessment, it is primarily involved with the day-to day activities of teachers and students (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999). When instructional leadership becomes shared, however, it can serve to advance a school towards the accomplishment of organizational goals and bring a shared vision to fruition (Marks & Printy, 2003).

As a prerequisite to effective instructional leadership, transformational leadership builds capacity and inspires organizational change. Instructional leadership alone builds individual and collective competence. When instructional leadership is shared, it moves beyond its traditional application and enables teachers and staff members to work collaboratively towards sustained school-wide improvement (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005).

In their analysis of Newman and Associates' School Restructuring Study (SRS) (1995), Marks and Printy (2003) explored the relationship between transformational and instructional leadership practices. In reporting their findings, Marks and Printy (2003) concluded that efforts to restructure schools require principals to demonstrate

transformational skills, but that “transformational leadership alone does not imply instructional leadership” (p. 392).

Because the primary goal of restructuring is student achievement, effective principals incorporate a blend of shared instructional leadership and transformational leadership behaviors. Marks and Printy (2003) believed that when transformational and shared instructional leadership is combined, it results in an integrated form of leadership. Marks and Printy (2003, p. 392) discovered that “where integrated leadership was normative, teachers provided evidence of high-quality pedagogy and students performed at high levels on authentic measures of achievement.” The authors also found that in schools where transformational leadership was absent, instructional leadership was not shared, but confined to the principal.

In their empirical study of learning communities, Louis and Kruse (1995) have reported that two sets of conditions were found to contribute to the development of professional learning communities: structural conditions, and human and social resources. Principals who demonstrate an integrated form of leadership develop professional community “through attention to individual teacher development, and by creating and sustaining the structural conditions and social interaction patterns that support community” (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 30).

## **LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF EFFECTIVE PRINCIPALS**

In Fullan’s (2001a) opinion, the fostering of organizational learning becomes a critical component of effective leadership, which requires leaders “to see problems as

opportunities, realize that change cannot be mandated,” and to “ensure that individualism and collectivism have equal power” (Fullan as cited in Marzano, 2005, p. 22).

Attempting to develop collaborative learning communities, schools must create what researchers refer to as second order change (Cuban, 1988; Fullan, 2001a; Marzano et al., 2005; Quartz, 1995), which impacts the school culture through a coherence of values, vision, and the distribution of leadership. Focused less on procedures, second order change or “reculturing,” as Fullan described (2001a), impacts the way people think, learn, and work collaboratively as a community.

The complexity of leadership required by today’s principal is characterized by multiple roles, responsibilities, and complex interactions among stakeholders. Nearly every study of school effectiveness and improvement has reported that the principal is a key factor in the process of school improvement and that effective principals master an array of leadership styles demonstrating flexibility as needed (Cotton, 2003; Fullan, 2002; Lashway, 2003; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005).

When the goal of 21<sup>st</sup> century schools is sustainable improvement, business and education leaders continue to have more in common. The principal of the future therefore, “must become a cultural change principal – attuned to the big picture, a sophisticated conceptual thinker who transforms the organization through people and teams” (Fullan, 2002, p. 17). Fullan (2002) added that leadership studies across all professions “increasingly apply to the principal because the principal in a professional learning community is a CEO” (p. 17).



## **LEADERSHIP PRACTICES INVENTORY**

As a result of extensive research on the practices and skills of effective leaders across all professions, Kouzes and Posner (2002) developed the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI). The LPI is used to identify and measure the five practices and ten corresponding commitments of effective leaders identified by Kouzes and Posner (see Table 1).

“The LPI was developed through a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative research methods and studies. In-depth interviews and written case studies from personal-best leadership experiences generated the conceptual framework of the LPI, which consists of five leadership practices: Modeling the Way, Inspiring a Shared Vision, Challenging the Process, Enabling Others to Act, and Encouraging the Heart” (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 1).

Each of the five practices and ten corresponding commitments of the LPI are consistent with the dimensions and critical attributes of professional learning communities (Blankstein, 2004; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour et al., 2004; Hord, 1997; Huffman, 2003; Huffman & Hipp, 2000; Kruse et al., 1994; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Schmoker, 2006) and have been found to have a strong predictive validity of the over-arching construct of transformational leadership (Carless, 2001; Sheard, 2004; Tebbano, 2002).

Similar to many management tools, the LPI has been used extensively as an assessment tool to collect and analyze data about the leadership practices of participants (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). A comprehensive review of dissertation abstracts involving both quantitative and qualitative studies have also shown the LPI to be useful in

understanding the relationships between principal leadership, shared vision, school improvement, and organizational learning (Balcerek, 1999; Bankes, 1999; Floyd, 1999; Griffin, 1996; Knab, 1998; McAdam, 2002; Starcher, 2006).

Although quantitative studies examining the principal's direct impact on student performance have consistently reported a weak correlation (Arnold, 2007; Brent, 2007; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Sheppard, 2007; Soileau, 2007; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003), studies by Marzano et al. (2005), Cotton (2003), and Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom (2004), claimed that the principal's indirect contribution to student achievement may account for as much as 25% variance in learning, second only to "classroom instruction among all school-related factors" (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 26).

Supporting this claim, Hallinger and Heck (1996, p. 39) wrote:

The fact that leadership effects on school achievement appear to be indirect is neither cause for alarm or dismay. As noted previously, achieving results through others is the essence of leadership. A finding that principal effects are mediated by other in-school variables does nothing whatsoever to diminish the principal's importance.

One example of the principal's indirect relationship to student achievement as measured by the LPI is found in Jarnagen's (2004) study of high school principals in Tennessee. Comparing LPI scores for principals and staff against teacher responses on the Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire, Jarnagen (2004) discovered significant correlations between each of the five individual leadership practices, as well as the combined average of all five leadership practices to school morale. Similarly, in her study of high and low performing elementary schools in North Carolina, Stone (2003) reported a strong positive correlation between teacher perceptions on Braskamp's and Maehr's Instructional Climate Inventory, Form T, and the LPI Self and Observer Forms. Contrary to evidence

disclaiming the principal's direct impact on achievement, each of these studies demonstrate the utility of the LPI in assessing the indirect impact of principal behaviors on student achievement through the practices, policies, and cultural norms that affect school conditions for learning.

Further examples of such findings are reported in a Texas A&M doctoral cohort study (Arnold, 2007; Brent, 2007; Sheppard, 2007; Soileau, 2007) and Balcerek's (1999) investigation of principal leadership in North Carolina. Although these studies reported an insignificant relationship between student performance and the perceived leadership practices of school leaders as measured by the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2002), the principal's impact on establishing a vision (Balcerek, 1999), developing capacity, and creating a collaborative culture (Arnold, 2007), were identified as practices that produce a powerful, yet indirect impact on student achievement.

Results of the Texas A&M cohort study indicated that on an individual and combined basis, the correlations between principal behaviors (LPI) and student achievement at the elementary (Arnold, 2007), middle (Sheppard, 2007), and high school level (Soileau, 2007), as well as the superintendency (Brent, 2007), revealed almost no linear relationship existed. The individual and combined coefficients for each of the four studies indicated that less than 2% of student achievement was attributed to the perceived leadership practices of principals and superintendents as reported on the LPI (Arnold, 2007; Brent, 2007; Sheppard, 2007; Soileau, 2007).

In her examination of all K-8 principals in North Carolina (N=1,632), Balcerek (1999) also concluded that there was no statistical difference between the LPI ranking of principals in relation to school performance. Utilizing the LPI as means to understand

leadership behaviors and patterns, however, Balcerek (1999), Arnold (2007), Sheppard (2007), Soileau (2007), and Brent (2007) concurred, that (1) modeling was reported as the most frequently practiced behavior by principals, (2) inspiring was perceived as the least practiced behavior among principals, (3) principals on average perceived themselves as more capable than their followers, (4) observers are more critical of leaders than leaders are of themselves, (5) schools with the highest combined scores from principals and observers were not necessarily the highest performing schools, and (6) agreement of scores among principals and staffs does not constitute high student achievement.

Although studies utilizing the LPI as a means to examine the direct relationship between leadership practices and student achievement among all schools do not indicate a positive relationship, studies investigating the same relationship specifically among Blue Ribbon Schools consistently indicate a strong positive correlation between the LPI and student achievement (Griffin, 1996; Knab, 1998; Koster-Peterson, 1993). This finding is consistent with Kouzes and Posner's (2002) research which demonstrates the LPI's ability to specifically discriminate between high and low performing leaders.

When used as a means to predict student performance within a wide range of both high and low achieving schools, as opposed to studies specifically investigating either high or low performing schools, the LPI consistently reports a weak predictive ability or correlation between perceived principal leadership and student achievement. This observation gives weight to Reeves' observation (2006, p. 14) and Soileau's (2007) comment, that correlational studies alone may not provide enough "evidence to make cause and effect statements" (p. 118).

Although the LPI measures the extent to which leaders are perceived to demonstrate the five practices of exemplary leaders, principals must exercise their skills within the context of their given situation (Hoyle, 2007). “Because leadership is a reciprocal process between leaders and constituents” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 28), behaviors become contingent upon the setting, the needs of the organization, and the goals being pursued. Learning how principals exercise leadership and demonstrate flexibility within different settings, therefore, may be more important than the mere identification of specific skills or behaviors (Hoyle, 2007; Lashway, 2003; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005).

In light of these findings, the following section discusses each of the five leadership practices and provides insight regarding how the behaviors identified by Kouzes and Posner (2002) relate to the role of the principal in developing conditions for organizational learning and high student achievement.

### **Model the Way**

Organizational commitment and high achievement result in part from the modeling of the behaviors and attitudes that leaders expect of others (Chasin & Levin, 1995; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Although learning communities function at “multiple levels within a school” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 5), leaders must consistently model established norms for behavior and be sensitive to the “shared language and standards of practice” (p. 5) that shape and define the school’s culture.

When modeling the way, effective principals articulate and model their espoused values and are authentically committed to the principles and actions which consistently

reflect their beliefs (Sergiovanni, 2001). Because learning organizations are viewed through the lens of “processes and relationships,” leaders must remember that “conversation becomes the primary medium for meaning and change” (Mitchell et al., 1996, p. 52). As such, it becomes incumbent upon the principal to earn and sustain a high degree of personal credibility by articulating and clarifying personal values through both words and actions.

Modeling the way is closely related to personal mastery, Senge’s (1990) second discipline of learning organizations, and requires the “continual clarification and deepening of one’s personal vision” or core beliefs (Senge, 1990, p. 7). The process of clarifying one’s purpose, values, and intentions, is profoundly personal and provides the enduring strength to sustain efforts over time (Blankstein, 2004). Effective principals not only clarify personal beliefs, but work to develop shared meaning throughout the organization (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hoyle, 2007).

Leaders are their organizations’ ambassadors of shared values and must set the example by aligning personal actions with espoused values. How principals spend their time, engage in conversation, ask purposeful questions, and utilize feedback, send strong messages to staff members (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Because the principal’s primary task is to establish a shared vision and to create goals and supportive structures which align with that vision (Fullan, 2001b; Lashway, 2003), it becomes imperative that the principal’s behaviors and actions exemplify the espoused values of the learning community (Hipp & Huffmann, 2003; Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

### **Inspire a Shared Vision**

A fundamental characteristic of learning communities is an unwavering focus on student learning (DuFour et al., 2004; Hord, 1997; McClaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Huffman and Hipp (2000) wrote “that if you don’t have a vision, it is impossible to develop effective policies, procedures, and strategies targeted toward a future goal, or aligned to provide consistent implementation of programs” (p. 6). Senge (1990) also stated that “you cannot have a learning organization without a shared vision” (p. 209). As an essential dimension of learning communities, “effective visions present a realistic, credible, and attractive future for the organization” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 62), that inspires and motivates others to accomplish a common goal.

By discussing opportunities, appealing to the personal aspirations and welfare of others, and by speaking with conviction, effective leaders encourage ownership and development of a shared vision. As Kouzes and Posner (2002) indicated, “Envisioning the future is a process that begins with passion, feeling, concern, or an inspiration that something is worth doing” (p. 124).

Although leaders are responsible for developing a shared vision, Kouzes and Posner (2007) indicated that “leaders cannot command commitment, they can only inspire it” (p. 17). Inspiring the commitment of others, leaders must relinquish the temptation to control and develop a “tolerance for risk and ambiguity” (Hoyle, 2007, p. 3). As such, effective principals engage in designing the “corporate future through visioning and persuading others to share the vision” (Hoyle, 2007, p. 3).

Enlisting others in a common vision often becomes a process of conversation and requires leaders to have an “intimate knowledge of peoples’ dreams, hopes, aspirations,

visions, and values” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 17). As visions become shared, the leader’s enthusiasm and commitment is internalized and reinforced by others as they also begin to envision what can be achieved together (Hoyle, 2007; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Huffman (2003) and Leithwood and Riehl (2003), believed that the successful development of learning organizations is primarily dependent upon the principal’s ability to set direction and inspire a shared vision for learning.

If a shared vision for learning is to be realized, effective leaders must demonstrate a “profound vision of service,” an “ability to communicate the vision to others” and the “persistence to move towards the vision” (Hoyle, 2007, p. 37). Conversely, Hoyle (2007) wrote, “If visions are to become shared, [they] must meet each person’s intrinsic need to reach for higher performance and to gain a feeling of personal accomplishment for the good of others. While personal vision is the most powerful for individual accomplishment, it holds little potential for becoming a corporate vision unless it is embraced in the organization” (p. 60). Leaders, according to Hoyle (2007), “must create a desire to be a part of a cause beyond themselves” (p. 61).

### **Challenge the Process**

The principles of action orientation and experimentation, continuous improvement, and results orientation, comprise the “curricular focus” of learning communities as described by DuFour and Eaker (1998, p. 151). The curricular focus of DuFour and Eaker’s (1998) PLC model embodies the concept of challenging the process by maintaining an unrelenting focus on the success of all students by encouraging experimentation and risk, innovation, and learning. The fundamental premise of PLCs –



“that all children can learn at high levels” (DuFour et al., 2004, p. 1), challenges the status quo prevalent in many schools (Schmoker, 2006), and requires staff members to “learn how to learn together” (Senge, 1990, p. 3).

In their research of exemplary leadership practices, Kouzes and Posner (2007) found that “every single personal-best leadership case collected involved some kind of challenge” and that whatever the challenge was, “all cases involved a change from the status quo” (p. 18). In an effort to create positive change, leaders challenge others to try new approaches and are “willing to search for opportunities to innovate, grow, and improve” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 18).

Creating opportunities for innovation, leaders must orchestrate a climate for action and experimentation by listening to team members, recognizing and supporting good ideas, and by demonstrating a willingness to challenge the system. Understanding that action and experimentation involves risk, “effective leaders approach change through incremental steps and small wins” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 19) and making necessary adjustments as needed (Collins, 2001; Schmoker, 2004).

As leaders, principals must attend to the capacity of staff members to manage challenging situations and the ambiguity of change (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Developing a culture which nurtures safe and trusting dialogue, therefore, becomes an important feature of challenging the process (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Because leaders are learners, principals, along with staff members, must learn together as they adapt to changing organizational conditions.

### **Enable Others to Act**

Kouzes and Posner (2007) wrote that a key realization for all leaders is the need to “develop cohesive and collaborative teams, with trust as the framework” (p. 221). “To get extraordinary things done in organizations” Kouzes and Posner (2007), found that “leaders have to enable others to act” (p. 20). In cases which have been analyzed, Kouzes and Posner (2007, p. 21) found that effective leaders routinely “discuss teamwork, trust, and empowerment as essential elements of their efforts.”

“The basic structure of the PLC is composed of collaborative teams whose members work interdependently to achieve common goals” (DuFour et al., 2004, p. 3). A prerequisite condition of learning communities, therefore, is the development of collaborative teams (Hord, 1997; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Kruse et al., 1994; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Valentine et al., 2004). Kouzes and Posner (2002) supported this finding, stating that “Collaboration is the critical competency for achieving and sustaining high performance” (p. 242).

Building collaborative teams requires trust (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Effective leaders develop trust by empowering those who are “affected by results and who have a stake in the organization’s vision” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 20). As such, leaders of collaborative teams, “enable others not by hoarding the power they have but by giving it away” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 21). When sharing power and authority, however, principals must provide the human and structural conditions through which staff members can practice collaborative activities (Huffman & Jacobson, 2003; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). By empowering others and modeling trust, the capacity of

staff members is strengthened as they work together within a culture of interdependency (Lambert, 2003).

Aligning work structures through common planning times, vertical and horizontal teams, frequent and relevant staff development opportunities, and ongoing professional dialogue, effective principals ensure that the school's vision becomes a guide for both developing trust and collaborative teams (Fullan, 2002). In developing conditions for organizational learning, principals must understand that building a school's capacity to learn is a collective rather than individual task. Staff members who engage in collaborative team learning are empowered to learn from one another, and thus create the momentum for continued improvement (Senge, 1990).

### **Encourage the Heart**

“Constituents look for leaders who demonstrate an enthusiastic and genuine belief in the capacity of others, who strengthen people's will, who supply the means to achieve, and who express optimism for the future.” In brief, “leaders must keep hope alive, even in the most difficult of times” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 349). Fullan (2001a) and Senge (1990) believed that hope is a vitally important ingredient for success and becomes the driving force behind the creation and communication of individual and group meaning. According to DuFour et al. (2004), the most salient feature of PLCs, is that they are “designed to touch the heart” (p. 6). Kouzes and Posner (2007, p. 22) indicated similarly, that a critical aspect of all leadership is “encouraging the hearts of constituents to carry on.”

Encouraging others is a moral imperative for authentic leaders and becomes a practical means of reinforcing behaviors which align with established group norms and values (Blankstein, 2004; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Effective principals offer encouragement by recognizing individual and group contributions, celebrating values and achievements, and linking positive behaviors with concrete and affective rewards (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). In studies describing sustained reform efforts and organizational learning, collaborative and relationship-enhancing leadership has been shown to have a significant effect on student achievement and the development of successful learning communities (Blankstein, 2004; Duke, 2007; Mawhinney et al., 2005; Newman & Wehlage, 1995; Strahan, 2003).

### **ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS FOR SCHOOL-WIDE LEARNING COMMUNITIES**

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) reported that “large scale quantitative studies identifying the practices common to most successful leaders are consistent across multiple organizational contexts and are usually considered the most robust and reportable results” (p. 17). Taken from school and non-school contexts, this evidence points to three broad categories of leadership practices that contribute to success: “setting direction, redesigning the organization, and developing people” (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 17).

Each category reported by Leithwood and Riehl (2003) as an effective leadership practice, parallels the concepts of shared vision, supportive conditions, and shared leadership, all of which are recognized as essential conditions for the development of professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Huffman, 2003; Lieberman

et al., 1995; Liebman et al., 2005). Conversely, Leithwood and Riehl (2003) wrote that although “these three categories of leadership practices should be considered the basic skills of leadership” a “lack of mastery likely guarantees failure” (p. 21).

The following paragraphs discuss how principals work to influence the development of shared leadership, shared vision, and supportive conditions, which according to researchers remains a fundamental barrier to the creation of professional learning communities (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Hipp & Huffman, 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

### **Shared Leadership**

In light of changing demographics, heightened accountability standards, and local and federal reform initiatives, the role of the principal has become increasingly complex (Fullan, 2001b). As leaders, effective principals adapt to these changes by developing greater capacity among staff members (Lambert, 2005; Lashway, 2003; Spillane & Sherer, 2004) and creating conditions for organizational learning that focus on student achievement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997).

In improving school communities, “leadership is shared and extends throughout the school to faculty, staff, and administrators” (Huffman & Hipp, 2000, p. 6). By empowering staff members, “successful communities of learners share important issues and develop relationships in their efforts to achieve results for students” (p. 6). This distributive concept of leadership challenges traditional paradigms (Schmoker, 2006) and requires both administrators and teachers to take responsibility for leading, decision making, and student learning (Eaker et al., 2002). In terms of learning communities,

“shared leadership becomes a broad concept that is separated from person, role, and a discrete set of individual behaviors. Embedded within the school community, shared leadership is about learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively” (Lambert, 1998, p. 5).

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) reported, that “staff member capacities and motivations are influenced by the direct experiences organizational members have with those in leadership roles as well as the organizational conditions within which people work” (p. 19). Improving the quality of teaching and learning - as a matter of building capacity, is developed, therefore, through the personal attention provided by a leader, as well as through opportunities to practice and improve in unison with others. Aside from creating human and structural conditions which facilitate collaborative work environments, effective principals initiate thoughtful conversations which engage staff members in the emotional and cognitive processes that broaden their capacity to serve (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Senge, 1990). Charting the evolving reform of Chicago schools since 1998, Bryk and colleagues found that principals in improving schools have demonstrated this process by “expanding the professional capacities of staff, promoting the formation of coherent professional communities, and directing resources towards the enhancement of quality instruction and learning” (Bryk et al. 1998, p. 270).

In their research of professional school communities, Kruse et al. (1994) maintained that “merely granting teachers greater responsibility doesn’t guarantee that instruction will improve” or that it will “translate into an increased focus on teacher professional competence” (p. 6). Kruse et al. (1994) reported that sustained professional contact must include a focus on “collective reflection, development of standards and

expectations, and formulation of plans for action; all of which are hallmarks of well developed professional communities” (p. 6).

In other case studies involving learning communities (Lambert, 2005; Liebman et al., 2005; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Newman et al., 2000), the concept of school capacity has been found to positively impact instruction and student achievement. Understanding the principal’s role in facilitating this process of change, Fullan (2001a) indicated that “school capacity is seriously undermined if it does not have ... quality leadership” (p. 65).

Although leadership roles of teachers and principals may overlap in learning communities, Leithwood et al. (1999) reports that “additional research is needed to understand how these sources of leadership interact to influence improvement efforts and how they may work synergistically to add value to schools” (p.15). According to Leithwood (1994), the development of greater capacity and leadership which is shared, requires not only a renewal of commitment, but a restructuring focused on goal accomplishment and the redefinition of peoples’ vision for improvement.

### **Shared Vision**

Current reform literature suggests that the best hope for significant school improvement is transforming schools into professional learning communities (Blankstein, 2004; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Mitchell & Sackney, 2001; Schmoker, 2006). “Until educators can describe the school they are trying to create [however], it is impossible to develop policies, procedures, or programs that will help make that ideal a reality” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 64). Creemers (1997, p. 15) has

stated similarly, that “Educational effectiveness is more consistent, cohesive, constant, and controlled when an appropriate vision provides a basis ...” for action. For schools to accomplish their desired outcomes, visions must be internalized by staff members and aligned with the organizational structures and conditions that support the articulated focus for improvement (Cotton, 2003; Creemers & Reezigt, 1998; Hipp & Huffman, 2003; Valentine, Clark, Hackman, & Petzko, 2004).

If principals and school leaders are to effectively articulate the organizational outcomes they desire, the concept of vision must be understood and applied in the appropriate context of learning and improvement (Creemers, 1997; Hord, 1997; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Kruse et al., 1998). In terms of learning communities, effective visions create value for both students and staff as shared purposes and understanding result in the alignment of both organizational structures and the actions of people (Lambert, 2003). As a result, shared vision “becomes the unifying force for participants working collaboratively” and adds “coherence to both programs and learning practices” (Lambert, 2003, p. 6). Sergiovanni (2001) indicated that visions without substance create cultures wherein staff members work as “subordinates” who comply, as opposed to “followers” who “respond to ideas, values, and purposes” (p. 148).

An effective vision presents a realistic picture of what an organization can become and inspires participants to reach for a future goal (Hoyle, 2007; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). The importance of vision is emphasized by Senge (1990) who believed “you cannot have a learning organization without a shared vision” (p. 209). The primary task of the leader, therefore, is to develop a collective vision which represents all members of the organization. According to DuFour and Eaker (1998, p. 25), the



“collective commitment to guiding principles that articulate beliefs and goals is what separates a learning community from an ordinary school.” Because guiding principles are shared collectively, “they become embedded in the hearts and minds of the staff members” resulting in the capacity to construct meaning (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 25).

Vision is a concept in a learning community that leads to norms of behavior that have a primary focus on student learning and are supported by staff members (Hord, 1997; Hoyle, 2007). Vision has been further described as “moral imagination” (Greenfield, Licata, & Teddlie, 1990, p. 94), a “problem finding behavior” (p. 93), moral purpose (Fullan, 2001a), and the “integrity of words ... which creates a powerful force ... bringing clarity to the organization” (Wheatley, 1999, p. 56). Vision, in the opinion of DuFour and Eaker (1998, p. 26), becomes a “collective commitment to guiding principles that articulate what staff members believe and seek to create.” Without this collective commitment and vision for change, it becomes impossible to establish a true community of learners (Senge, 1990).

According to Creemers and Reezigt (1998, p. 130), the concept of “vision may help explain the levels of variance” between schools with regards to student achievement and the ability of school teams to align improvement efforts with actual goals. Subsequently, the principal’s most important affect on student achievement results from his/her efforts to establish a shared vision for the school and develop goals and structures which align with that vision (Fullan, 2001b; Hipp & Huffmann, 2003; Lashway, 2003).

## **Supportive Conditions**

In order for a vision of organizational learning to be realized, and the development of people within the organization to occur, structures and procedures that support and reinforce intended outcomes must be in place (Brown, 2004; Marzano et al., 2005). According to Schmoker (2006), most improvement efforts are sporadic and temporary because leaders fail to establish and sustain the structures which are necessary for continuous improvement. If learning communities are to be successfully implemented, “the integration of shared leadership, shared vision, and a collaborative school culture must be supported through both human and organizational structures” (Huffman & Hipp, 2000, p. 10).

Senge (1990) believed that although teams may possess the proper direction and initiative, learning communities will remain difficult to establish if purposes and structures are not aligned and mutually supportive. In his opinion, systems thinking provides an essential framework for the development of learning organizations because it integrates and aligns the human and structural conditions with the fundamental beliefs and actions of the team.

Development of effective learning communities, for these reasons, is intrinsically problematic and requires profound changes in school culture, communication patterns, and structural conditions (Fullan, 2001a; Marzano, 2003). McLaughlin and Talbert (2006, p. 11) reported that, “learning communities are difficult to establish and sustain, due to a lack of trust, time, and talent.” The need for providing supportive conditions in terms of human and physical supports, is critical therefore, and provides the framework

through which all components of learning communities are supported and evolve (DuFour et al., 2004; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Kruse et al., 1998; Valentine et al., 2004).

Leithwood's (1998) synthesis of several large scale studies researching school conditions affecting organizational learning concluded that in-school factors were both human and structural. Similarly, Stropkaj's (2002) qualitative research investigating how principals created and sustained professional community within schools indicated that both social and structural conditions had a positive impact on the development of organizational learning. Critical to the development of learning communities, supportive conditions are provided through collegial relationships and physical or organizational structures such as the utilization of funding, the allocation of tangible and non-tangible resources, and the creation of formal and informal means of communication (Hipp & Huffman, 2003). Initiatives without these supports reflect an absence of clarity and coherence, and generally "result in short lived and fragmented efforts" (Schmoker, 2004, p. 427).

### **Human Conditions**

According to Leithwood (1998), human factors are identified as those relating to establishment of a shared vision and creation of a school culture characterized by norms of collaboration and collegial relationships. Similarly, Hipp and Huffman (2002, p. 39) emphasized that norms of "trust, respect, and inclusiveness with a focus on relationships" are essential conditions for organizational learning. Human structures that create inclusive and productive environments include "teacher attitudes that are consistently positive, an academic focus for students, norms that support ongoing learning and

improvement, not the status quo; a collective shared vision, participatory decision-making, teachers who share and learn with each other, and a sense of responsibility for student learning and success” (Boyd, 1992, as cited in Hipp & Huffman, 2000, p. 9).

Based upon data collected from schools studied by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, Kruse et al. (1998, p.5) found that learning communities have an “openness to improvement that is supported by norms of trust and respect,” and where “teachers are honored for their expertise.” Kruse et al. (1998), noted that “serious and lasting change cannot be sustained” unless “teachers feel they are supported in their efforts to learn more about their profession and to make decisions based on that new knowledge” (p. 5). Kruse et al.(1998), contended that the findings of their research “adds weight to the argument that the structural elements of restructuring have received too much emphasis in many reform proposals, while the need to improve the culture, climate, and interpersonal relationships in school have received to little attention” (p. 8).

### **Structural Conditions**

In an effort to facilitate norms of collegiality and collaboration, structural conditions must be implemented to avoid logistical barriers to improvement. Staff members must be afforded the opportunities to meet and dialogue, function as teams, and practice teacher leadership through shared decision-making, planning, and collaboration (Huffman & Hipp, 2000).

The need to provide appropriate structural conditions is necessary if second order change is to be sustained (Marzano, 2003). Because cultural change cannot be mandated, teachers must be given opportunities to practice and learn collaborative processes

(Marzano, 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). “Structural changes that are not supported by cultural changes, [however], will likely be overwhelmed by the culture, for it is in the culture that any organization finds meaning and stability” (Schlechty, 1997, p. 136).

Providing structural supports is necessary, if teachers are to function and grow as members of a learning community (DuFour et al., 2004). Fullan (1993) believed that it is through this collegial process that individual thinking, being, learning, and norms of collaboration are nurtured and developed. In their discussion of effective leadership behaviors, Leithwood and Riehl (2003) stated that providing structural supports “facilitates the work of organizational members,” and that such “structures should match the changing nature of the school’s improvement agenda” (p. 20). Hord (1997) and Huffman and Hipp (2000), maintained that structural conditions include and are influenced by the size of a school, proximity of staff to one another, existing communication systems, and available time and space. In creating structural conditions that support PLCs, principals must engage with their staffs to identify possible barriers and determine the most appropriate means of facilitating the learning process.

## **HIGH SUSTAINABILITY SCHOOLS**

In his research on high-performing organizations, Collins (2001) discovered that great organizations “simplify a complex world into a single organizing idea, a basic principle, or a concept that unifies and guides everything” (p. 91). Similarly, the guiding principle or unifying concept of PLCs is an unwavering commitment to ensure “high levels of learning for all students” (DuFour et al., 2004, p. 1). This commitment to

learning, for both students and staff, becomes a distinguishing factor of effective learning communities and results in what Fullan (2001a) described as coherence – “the extent to which the school’s programs for students and staff are coordinated, focused on learning goals, and sustained over a period of time” (p. 64).

Although current research is “thin” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 129), professional learning communities have consistently been linked to improved student outcomes (Bryk et al., 1998; DuFour et al., 2004; Huffman & Hipp, 2000) and are believed to provide a promising strategy for improvement. Development of PLCs requires comprehensive school-wide reform (Duke, 2007; Schmoker, 2004) and is “evidenced through the collaborative practices of staff members, resulting in improved teaching and learning” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 9).

In case studies of 15 high-performing high-poverty urban schools that had improved and sustained achievement, Duke (2007) concluded that “systemic change” (p. 25) based upon local needs and unique to each school had characterized the transformation from low-achieving to high-performing. Though differing in size, geographic location, and specific plans for improvement, Duke (2007) discovered that each of the 15 schools created and implemented similar, but “essential” (p. 26) conditions for change: (1) a shared vision and mission, (2) identification of core beliefs (all children can learn, commitment to teamwork, shared responsibility for student success), (3) distributive leadership, (4) focus on literacy, (5) additional time and support for learning, (6) institutionalization of team planning and ongoing analysis of student work, (7) shared use of data, (8) continuous staff development based on student needs, (9) instructional

focus based upon formative assessments, and (10) timely efforts to engage parents (The Center for Public Education, 2005).

In a three-year study of low-income elementary schools which improved and sustained school-wide achievement from less than 50% proficient to more than 75% proficient on state achievement tests, Strahan (2003) concluded that “professional staffs developed supportive cultures that enabled participants to coordinate and strengthen professional learning communities” (p. 127). The central dynamic cited in this report, as well as that reported by McLaughlin and Talbert (2006), DuFour et al. (2004), and Reeves (2004), was that “data-directed dialogue, purposeful conversations, and formative assessments, fueled collaborative practices” (Strahan, 2003, p. 126).

According to Reeves (2004), “schools with the greatest gains in student achievement consistently used common assessments” (p. 70) to “improve teaching and learning, not merely to evaluate students and schools” (p. 114). Fullan (2002) described the process of continual assessment and adjustment of practices as critical to school improvement and attributes increased student achievement to the continuous link between ongoing assessment and instructional improvement.

Researching the characteristics of high-performing schools in North Carolina, Cooper, Ponder, Merritt, & Matthews (2005) identified the use of on-going formative assessments, analysis of work, and timely student interventions as key components of school success. In schools where the use of formative assessments and instructional supports were routinely practiced, the researchers found that student learning improved and the expectation for high achievement was perceived as a cultural norm among staff.

DuFour et al. (2004) reported similar findings in their study of four high achieving PLCs, indicating that continuous improvement was centered around a strong clarity of purpose, a collaborative culture, norms supporting collective inquiry into best practices, and an orientation for action. According to DuFour et al. (2004, p. 138), these schools demonstrated “that a shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning is a powerful coherence-maker.” Rather than adopting externally driven staff development initiatives and programs, effective teacher learning communities develop sustained improvement and a deepening of practice based upon analysis of their school’s specific needs (Duke, 2007; Liebman et al., 2005; Strahan, 2003) and by avoiding the fragmented interference of externally driven initiatives (Newmann et al., 2000; Tyack & Cuban, 1999).

Attempting to understand the development of effective learning communities in schools, Huffman and Hipp (2000), and McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) conducted separate multi-year studies investigating the emerging characteristics of schools engaged in the process of creating PLCs. Like McLaughlin (2006), Huffman and Hipp (2000) reported that “high-readiness” schools were very uncommon, differed dramatically from more typical “low readiness” schools, and that these differences were distinguished by the “emerging integration of shared leadership, shared vision, and a supportive school culture” (p. 10).

McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) reported that teacher learning communities differ from typical school communities based upon their “strong commitment to serving all their students well, innovation in subject instruction to improve student learning, and success in obtaining resources to support their collaborative work” (p. 17). In describing



and classifying school cultures they have studied, McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) “identified three types of professional communities – typical or weak community, strong traditional community, and teacher learning community” (p. 18). Accordingly, the strength and effectiveness of each community is distinguished by “three general facets of professional culture which shapes both students’ and teachers’ opportunities to learn” (p.18). “Comparing teacher communities on these dimensions of culture” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 18), reveals both existing strengths and potential barriers to change:

- *Technical culture*: commitment to high levels of learning for all students, students as active participants in the learning community, an integrated curriculum, and use of formative assessments to guide instruction and learning.
- *Professional norms*: degree and extent of collaborative practices centered on teaching and learning; team learning and inquiry based upon the knowledge of many and “developed collaboratively” (p. 19)
- *Organizational policies*: staffing opportunities and content assignments based upon capacity, expertise, and student needs, not tenure and experience; “collective definition of resource needs and sources” (p. 19), equitable and collaborative efforts to share and develop resources.

In typical or weak communities, a “tradition of teacher autonomy” and isolation prevents the “formation of shared technical culture” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 18) and prohibits the collective learning and shared personal practice indicative of effective learning communities (Hord, 1997). In weak communities “Conversations about instruction and leadership for improvement” are mostly absent, and teachers “persist with practices that current research deems ineffective” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 18). Because conditions which support individual and team learning are limited, collaborative activities centered on student and team learning remain largely unrealized, as does the hope for sustained student success.

While strong traditional communities deviate somewhat from these tendencies towards isolation and the status quo, most decisions about assessment and student learning are centered on teaching and a combination of “accountability pressures and changing student populations” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 20). A major difference between learning communities and traditional schools is the focus on learning rather than teaching (DuFour et al, 2004). The shift in thinking that typifies a strong learning community results in a culture where sharing and team learning become routine rather than unexpected (Kruse et al., 1994). Strong traditional communities have plans for improvement, but norms of trust, a shared responsibility for student learning, and collaborative activity focused on teaching and learning remains largely undeveloped (Bryk et al., 1998; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

Strong teacher learning communities, by contrast, develop and thrive in schools which have undergone substantial reculturing (Fullan, 2001a; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Subsequently, reculturing results in the component that “separates a learning community from an ordinary school; its collective commitment to guiding principles that articulate what the people in the school believe and what they seek to create” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 25).

The change in thinking and being which characterizes learning communities creates a mindfulness of learning and a culture of collaboration focused on continued student success. In strong learning communities, the “technical culture, professional norms, and organizational policies” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 18) are intertwined and have evolved to reflect the collective mindset that “high levels of learning for all students” is truly possible (DuFour et al., 2004, p. 1)

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

During the last 50 years, school reform agendas have consistently mandated change through top-down structural regulations which have had minimal impact on the quality of learning in schools. Efforts to improve schools through regulatory mandates and restructuring have also resulted in a system which is perceived as marginally effective, fragmented, and characterized by an incoherence of purpose and direction.

Although legislative reforms have emphasized structures, rules, and external mandates, it is believed that lasting reform must be systemic, requiring a reculturing of the traditionally conservative system prevalent in many schools. The development of professional learning communities has been suggested as an effective means to bring about sustained change and high levels of learning for all students. Developing effective learning communities has been found to be problematic, however, and requires leaders to overcome barriers to improvement through deep, systemic change that impacts the way people, think, believe, and act.

The primary intent of this study was to learn and understand how principal behaviors influence conditions for organizational learning. Current research suggests that organizational variables related to PLCs may have a profound impact on teaching and learning, but little is known about how to develop and sustain organizational learning in schools.

Because principal behaviors are reported to have a profound impact on student achievement and school reform, this research focused on understanding how principals shared and developed leadership, inspired responsibility for a shared vision, and created the supportive conditions essential to the success of professional learning communities.

Furthermore, this study was intended to understand how these conditions differed between schools which have and have not sustained high levels of student learning.

Kouzes and Posner (2007) suggested that exemplary leadership practices consistently result in exemplary performance across all organizational settings. Although effective leaders use a variety of leadership strategies, this study sought to identify and describe principal behaviors based upon Kouzes and Posner's (2007) research and to understand in what ways these practices distinguished themselves between schools which have and have not demonstrated sustained academic improvement.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

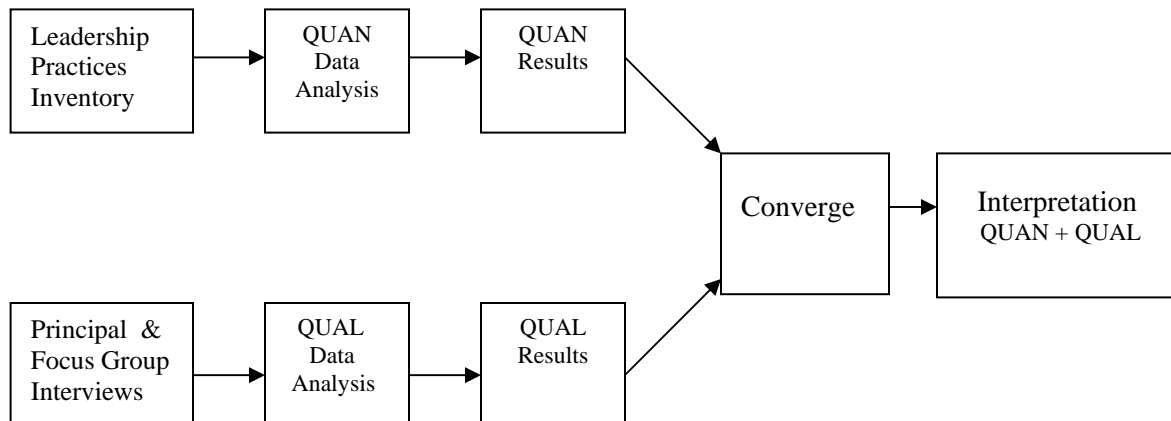
Understanding the influence of principal leadership on conditions for organizational learning provides a highly contextual and socially dynamic problem which can be partially understood through either quantitative or qualitative methods. According to Clark and Creswell (2007), “When a quantitative design can be enhanced by qualitative data, or when a qualitative design can be enhanced by quantitative data, a mixed methods design is the preferred design” (p. 33).

From this perspective, the mixed methods design utilized in this study allowed both qualitative and quantitative data to be interpreted and compared as evidence in understanding the study’s problem. Although numerous forms of mixed methods studies have been used to investigate organizational factors which affect schooling (Bryk et al., 1998; Huffman, 2003; Lambert, 2005; Marks & Printy, 2003; Marzano, 2003; Mawhinney et al., 2005; Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004), mixed methods research in education remains an emerging practice (Clark & Creswell, 2007).

#### **THE RESEARCH PLAN**

The mixed methods triangulation design utilized in this study incorporated a single-phase design in which both quantitative and qualitative methods were implemented during the same time frame and given equal weight (Figure 1). As discussed by Morse (1991, as cited in Clark & Creswell, 2007, p. 62), the triangulation design is intended to “obtain different but complimentary data on the same topic.” The single-phase timing of this design is also referred to as “concurrent triangulation” and involved

the “concurrent but separate, collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data” (Clark & Creswell, 2007, p.64). By merging both data sets together during the final interpretation the development of a valid conclusion about the research problem was made possible.




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Source: Clark and Creswell (2007)

**Figure 1. The Triangulation Design**

## POPULATION

The subjects involved in this study represented a purposeful sampling of six title one elementary schools located in the north Houston area. Based upon data obtained from the state’s Academic Excellence Indicator System (2007), three of these schools were recognized for sustained academic achievement, and three were not. Five of the six schools were located in urban-suburban settings, while one school (S3) was located in a small growing community bordering northeast Houston. Each of the participating schools served students pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, with the exception of one school (S2), which served students pre-kindergarten through fourth grade. Demographic characteristics of these schools are provided in Table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
**Demographic Characteristics of Selected Schools**

Schools	Enroll.	Ec. Dis.	LEP	Af. Am.	Hisp.	White	Other	TAKS Achievement		
								2004	2005	2006
S1	740	81	21.8	44.1	52.2	3.1	0.6	Exem.	Exem.	Exem.
S2	713	90	70	16.4	81.8	1.6	0.2	Rec.	Rec.	Rec.
S3	610	64.8	17.5	2	31.1	61.2	0.7	Exem.	Exem.	Rec.
S4	915	68	14	20.6	37.5	39.8	2.1	Rec.	Rec.	AA
S5	783	65	41.5	39.7	43	3.7	2.1	AA	AA	Reg.
S6	648	76.4	20.1	44	36.4	17.7	1.9	AA	AA	AA

Exemplary (Exem.), Recognized (Rec.), Academically Acceptable (AA)

Participants consisted of six elementary school principals and 38 teacher volunteers who served as members of their school's Campus Improvement Plan Committee or Teacher Leadership Team. Four schools each had six teacher participants, and two schools (S1, S3) had seven. Principals of participating schools served in their position for a minimum of three years; specifically during the 2004-2006 school years.

For the purpose of this study, schools which have sustained academic achievement are those which have either been identified as a recognized or exemplary campus during the 2004-2006 school years by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). By contrast, schools not meeting this criteria during the 2004-2006 school years were not considered to have sustained academic achievement.

High achieving schools, or those who have sustained academic achievement, have been identified in this study as schools 1, 2, and 3 (S1, S2, S3). Likewise, principals (P) of these schools have been labeled P1, P2, and P3. Similarly, focus-group (FG) members of these same schools have been labeled FG1, FG2, and FG3. Low-achieving schools

have been labeled S4, S5, and S6. Following the same pattern, principals (P) of low-achieving schools have been identified as P4, P5, P6, while focus-groups are listed as FG4, FG5, and FG6.

## **PROCEDURES FOR COLLECTING DATA**

This study progressed in three stages. Stage I began with a provisional list of north Houston elementary schools who had matched the criteria for participation based upon the state's 2004-2006 AEIS data. During January and February of 2008, principals of eligible schools were contacted until six principals were identified who had agreed to participate in the study. All aspects of the study were discussed with each principal candidate, including tentative timelines and procedures, collection and analysis of data, instrumentation, and selection of teacher focus-group members.

Stage II of this of this study included the concurrent but separate collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, including campus improvement plans, principal surveys, and transcriptions of interviews which occurred during the spring of 2008. Prior to each interview, principals were given a Participant Information Form (Appendix C) and the Leadership Practices Inventory-Self Form (Appendix F). Semi-structured principal interviews utilizing the constant comparative methodology addressed leadership practices, conditions for organizational learning (shared leadership, shared vision, supportive conditions), and utilization of school improvement plans. Principal interviews were transcribed, allowing for the comparison of information that was categorized during and after the interviews.



On the day of each principal interview, teacher focus-group interviews were also conducted. Prior to each focus-group, teachers received and completed Participant Consent Forms (Appendix B) indicating their voluntary participation in the study. Leadership Practice Inventory-Observer Forms (Appendix G) were distributed and completed prior to each focus-group interview.

Focus-group interviews utilizing constant-comparative methodology were conducted to obtain a common language or theme from among the many points of view (Gall et al., 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1984). The focus-group interviews employed a semi-structured format, which allowed each successive participant to elaborate and expound upon the prior respondent's comments (Gall et al., 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1984). Member checking occurred throughout each focus-group interview to confirm interpretations and understandings. Principal and focus-group participants were also given an opportunity to review and comment on the accuracy of the typed transcripts following each principal and focus-group interview.

Stage III of this study involved the continued analysis, merging, and interpretation of data from principal and teacher focus-group interviews, the LPI-Self and Observer Forms (Kouzes & Posner, 2002), the continued development of categories and themes, and review of campus improvement plans. Interpretation of data involved the convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings for the purpose of comparing and contrasting different results. Analysis and interpretation of the mixed methods study is provided in Chapter IV.

## **INSTRUMENTATION**

This mixed methods study involved the concurrent, but separate collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. The different data sets were merged together during the final interpretation, with each given an equal weighting and emphasis (Clark & Creswell, 2007). The Leadership Practices Inventory – Self Form (Appendix F) and Observer Form (Appendix G), provided quantitative data that helped identify and describe principal behaviors which influenced conditions for development of professional learning communities. Principal interviews and teacher focus-group interviews provided qualitative data that served as the primary data-gathering instruments for understanding *how* principal participants created conditions for organizational learning.

### **Validity of Mixed Methods Research**

Because mixed methods research utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data, the issue of validity presented a legitimate concern, which if not addressed, may have become problematic (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). According to Clark and Creswell (2007, p. 146), mixed methods validity is based upon the researcher's "ability to draw meaningful and accurate conclusions from all the data in the study." To minimize the problem of validity in this study, both quantitative and qualitative data were taken from the same population and given an equal weight.

According to Clark and Creswell (2007), the different data sets used in mixed methods research require the establishment of validity within the context of both quantitative and qualitative methods. From a qualitative or constructivist point of view, trustworthiness, the conventional equivalent of validity, was established by certifying that

interpretations and meanings generated through the case study interviews and focus-groups were both accurate and unbiased (Gall et al., 1996). By contrast, quantitative validity was based upon the psychometric properties and standardized administration of the LPI Survey (Kouzes & Posner, 2000).

### **Principal Interviews and Teacher Focus Group Interviews**

This mixed methods design utilized principal interviews and teacher focus-group interviews for the purpose of gaining a practical understanding of *how* principal behaviors influenced conditions for organizational learning. Principal and focus-group interviews allowed the researcher and others to be used as the primary data-gathering instruments to interpret and understand the contextually embedded values and multiple perspectives which influence school improvement efforts (Bryk et al., 1998; Hord, 1997).

Throughout the course of this study, principal and teacher focus-group interviews were transcribed, analyzed, and categorized using the constant comparison method to establish identifiable themes and meaning (Lincoln & Guba, 1984). Questions used during the interview process were based upon the *Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement Research Protocol* (Hipp & Huffman, 2003; Hord, 1997).

The Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement Research Protocol was developed by Hord and her colleagues (1997) during the final phase of the five year, multi-methods study to identify and differentiate between exemplar and non-exemplar learning communities. While Hord found that these schools were uncommon, six schools were identified as high-readiness schools (Hipp & Huffman, 2003). By leading participants through a series of semi-structured interviews, Hord and her colleagues were

able to identify themes that substantiated the thoroughness of Hord's five-dimensional PLC model. These themes now serve as the critical attributes for each of the five dimensions of learning communities as described by Hord (1997) and Hipp and Huffman (2003).

For the purpose of this study, semi-structured principal interviews (Appendix D) and focus-group interviews (Appendix E) were based upon the protocol's dimensions of Shared and Supportive Leadership, Shared Values and Vision, and Supportive Conditions. While each of the five dimensions identified by Hord are important, the integrated dimensions of shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, and supportive conditions are critical components for the development and success of professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Huffman, 2003; Huffman & Hipp, 2000; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

### **Leadership Practices Inventory**

The Leadership Practices Inventory-Self Form (Appendix F) and Observer Form (Appendix G) were administered to principals and focus-group participants for the purpose of identifying and describing principal behaviors which influence conditions for organizational learning. "The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) includes thirty statements – six statements for measuring each of the five key practices of exemplary leaders": Modeling the Way, Inspiring a Shared Vision, Challenging the Process, Enabling Others to Act, and Encouraging the Heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 3).

Both the Self and Observer Form of the LPI measures participants' perceptions of leadership practices from a personal and observer's point of view based upon a ten-point

Likert-scale. The Likert-type scale represents the frequency of perceived leadership behaviors ranging from (1) “Almost never does what is described in the statement,” to (10) “Almost always does what is described in the statement” (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 3).

The LPI has been administered to over 350,000 participants and has been shown to be a valid instrument for assessing individual leadership behaviors (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Internal reliability for the LPI Self and Observer Form is consistently reported “above the .75 level” for each of the five leadership practices (Kouzes & Posner, 2000, p.1) and demonstrates “similar levels of internal reliability” regardless of gender, ethnicity, cultural background, or the organizational setting in which the inventory is administered (Kouzes & Posner, 2000, p. 7). In studies involving test-retest comparisons, “scores on the LPI have been relatively stable over time” with test-retest reliabilities “generally reported at the .90 level and above” (Kouzes & Posner, 2000, p. 8).

## **ANALYSIS OF DATA**

The single-phase timing of this study’s design involved the concurrent but separate collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. Consistent with this method, the concurrent triangulation of data allowed for quantitative and qualitative data to be collected and analyzed separately, and then merged during the final interpretation by examining similarities and patterns through use of both discussion and tables (Clark & Creswell, 2007).

From a qualitative perspective, coding, categorizing, theme development, and the interrelationship of themes were analyzed and reported regarding participants’

perceptions of principal leadership, existing conditions for organizational learning, and how principal leadership influenced development of these conditions.

Descriptive analysis was used to report and interpret quantitative findings from the LPI-Self and Observer Forms (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). These data identified perceived principal behaviors from both a self and observer's point of view. Data from the LPI Self and Observer Forms helped determine if self reports were consistent with observer reports, and identified patterns of leadership practices most conducive to conditions for organizational learning and sustained academic achievement.

From a mixed methods perspective, both quantitative and qualitative data sets were merged to develop a more complete representation and interpretation of the findings. The study's three research questions were addressed as follows:

For research question one, case study data transcribed during principal and teacher focus-group interviews was organized by school, and separated into three broad categories: shared and supportive leadership, inspiring a shared vision, and creation of supportive conditions. These categories were further analyzed by separating individual responses into small independent phrases, and then organized by the most salient themes occurring within and across each category. This process was repeated and modified four separate times until a sense of redundancy became evident. The resulting themes were then elaborated upon to provide a clearer description of principals' and teachers' interpretations of how principals created conditions for organizational learning. Descriptive statistics were also used to analyze both LPI-Self and Observer Form results to identify, describe, and compare what leadership behaviors were perceived as most commonly employed by principals in their daily interactions with staff members.

For question two, case study and LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) data were further analyzed by school to determine (1) how individual case study data from principals and focus-group members converged, (2) how quantitative data from the LPI-Self and Observer Forms converged, and (3) how quantitative data from the LPI-Self and Observer Forms converged with the qualitative data for each school.

The final analysis of data addressed the third research question by separating both qualitative and quantitative data into two groups: the three schools which had sustained high academic achievement and three schools which had not. The final merging of data allowed for a more complete interpretation of the findings by distinguishing between the behaviors and practices of principals from high and low achieving schools and how these behaviors contributed to the development of organizational learning and sustained student achievement.

## **CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter was a discussion of the method of study including the research plan, population, instrumentation, instrument validity and reliability, data collection, and data analysis. As a mixed methods study, the concurrent but separate collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data was utilized.

Principal and teacher focus-group interviews were used to create a deeper understanding of how principals worked to create conditions for organizational learning. Kouzes and Posner's (2002) LPI-Self and Observer Forms were utilized to identify, describe, and measure the perceived leadership practices of principals. Further analysis and the merging of qualitative and quantitative data were conducted to interpret and

report findings with regards to (1) how principals created conditions for organizational learning, (2) the convergence of principal and focus-group member data, and (3) what leadership practices were perceived to have been most frequently demonstrated. Additional analysis was completed to determine distinguishable patterns of principal behaviors among schools which have and have not sustained high levels of academic achievement.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

The findings presented in this chapter provide a practical understanding of how principals created conditions for organizational learning in schools and how these conditions served to influence sustained academic achievement. A mixed methods design was employed in an effort to examine qualitative and quantitative data from both the principals' and teachers' point of view to better understand the problem (Clark & Creswell, 2007; Reeves, 2006). Throughout this study, patterns of leadership behaviors and organizational structures emerged that demonstrated a powerful influence on both the development of professional community and high levels of student learning.

#### **INTRODUCTION: EVERY SCHOOL HAS A STORY**

Each of the case study schools involved in this research had a compelling story that shaped its existing culture and provided a wealth of information. The data collected and analyzed revealed the unique backgrounds that influenced each principal's perspective of leadership and their vision for learning. One principal described this experience in the following way,

In the past, before our last principal, the school was very militaristic. Kids were treated very sternly and disrespectfully. There was a lot of fear and ignorance about data and testing. The staff was hard working, but they were misdirected. The past really motivated the change in our school which began about eight years ago. The dynamics of the building have really changed.

In another school, the existing culture and expectations for achievement made an immediate impression on the principal during her first year. She described this experience

as a condition which impacted both her interactions with the staff and her vision for the school,

As a new administrator I was an unknown. The principal I followed was a micro-manager. She had been there for 15 years and she was very focused on being exemplary – so the school had been split K-2 and 3-5 due to the focus on TAKS. The former principal took all the “crème” with her to the new school to open it. There was a lot of pressure on me to maintain exemplary, but I really didn’t know what exemplary meant coming from secondary. So, I took everything the team leaders said and went with it. They were very trusting, sincere, and hard working. I was the cheer leader – but I didn’t know a whole lot.

The stories described by each principal and focus group provided unique insight into understanding each school’s progression in terms of professional community and student achievement. As Hord (1997), Hipp and Huffman (2003) have described learning communities, schools move along a continuum of low to high-readiness with regards to the effects of shared leadership, shared vision and values, and supportive conditions. Illustrating this point, staff members described their schools as “having a lot of isolation,” “in-cohesive,” “constantly intertwined,” “a well oiled machine,” a school where “everyone’s a leader,” and “a school which is evolving and becoming.”

Although it was rare for staff members to use terminology such as learning community or organizational learning, several schools described aspects of their culture and existing practices in terms of what an effective learning organization should be.

Using McLaughlin and Talbert’s (2006, p. 18) description of professional communities, one school (S6) characterized a “weak community,” and one (S1) a “strong teacher learning community,” while the remaining schools fell at various points along the continuum of “traditional” and developing communities. Of the “traditional

communities,” one school designated as a low sustainability school (S5), discussed their desire to become a “professional learning community.”

### **Essential Dimensions as Categories**

Critical to the development of professional learning communities, the essential dimensions of shared leadership, shared vision, and supportive conditions must be evidenced in the normative conditions of a school’s culture (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Huffman and Hipp, 2000; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Valentine et al., 2004). How principals addressed this challenge was the focus of this study.

The *Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement Research Protocol* (Hord, 1997; Hipp & Huffman, 2003) provided the basis for principal and focus group interview questions. Embedded within the protocol were questions regarding the use of Campus Improvement Plans (CIP) to help understand how, and to what extent, schools utilized work plans in the development of the three essential dimensions of learning communities.

The percentage of unitized case study responses pertaining to each essential dimension and the development of CIP’s as reported by each school, are provided in Table 3.

**TABLE 3**  
**Percentage of Principal, Focus Group, and Total Group Responses by Category**

<b>Categories</b>								
<b>Schools</b>	<b>Shared Leadership</b>	<b>Shared Vision</b>	<b>Supportive Conditions</b>	<b>CIP</b>	<b>Misc.</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>High Sustain.</b>	<b>Low Sustain.</b>
<b>School 1</b>								
Principal	28	34	29	9	0	100		
Focus Group	34	34	27	5	0	100	<b>X</b>	
Total	31	34	28	7	0	100		
<b>School 2</b>								
Principal	44	27	25	2	2	100		
Focus Group	30	35	29	6	0	100	<b>X</b>	
Total	37	31	27	4	1	100		
<b>School 3</b>								
Principal	23	45	21	7	4	100		
Focus Group	28	34	35	3	0	100	<b>X</b>	
Total	27	39	29	4	1	100		
<b>Total Group</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>X</b>	
<b>School 4</b>								
Principal	44	23	22	7	4	100		
Focus Group	38	37	17	7	1	100		<b>X</b>
Total	41	31	19	7	2	100		
<b>School 5</b>								
Principal	48	31	15	4	2	100		
Focus Group	38	28	25	8	1	100		<b>X</b>
Total	42	29	21	6	2	100		
<b>School 6</b>								
Principal	40	27	27	6	0	100		
Focus Group	34	36	25	4	1	100		<b>X</b>
Total	36	32	26	5	1	100		
<b>Total Group</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>X</b>

Although the percentage of responses by category (or dimension) was not alone sufficient to draw definitive conclusions, they proved valuable because (1) emergent or reoccurring themes were generated from within each dimension, (2) insight regarding staff priorities, awareness, and attitudes were revealed, and (3) patterns of responses

provided a deeper understanding of the characteristics or condition of each dimension within each school community (Leithwood, Leonard, & Sharratt, 1998).

### **Reoccurring Themes**

Resulting from the case study of the six schools, 11 interactive themes emerged which provided an understanding of how principals created conditions which encouraged organizational learning and sustained high levels of student achievement. Four reoccurring themes emerged from within each of the first two categories (Shared Leadership and Shared Vision), and three themes emerged from within the category of Supportive Conditions. Corresponding categories and themes, as well as the frequency of response for themes within each category are displayed in Table 4.

**TABLE 4**  
**Percentage of Case Study Responses by Theme Within Each PLC Category**

<b>Shared Leadership</b>	<b>Shared Vision</b>	<b>Supportive Conditions</b>
Modeled Support (33.5)	The Main Thing (31.4)	Organizational Structures (39.5)
Opportunities for Empowerment (26.6)	Cultural Values (28.6)	Cohesive Relationships (30.1)
Shared Decision Making (26.6)	Press for Achievement (21.6)	Purposeful Conversations (30.4)
Developing Others (13.3)	Collaborative Change (18.4)	

The remaining portion of this chapter provides the findings and discussions of the study's three research questions. Beginning with question one, the following paragraphs

will provide a qualitative analysis of the case study findings through an elaboration of the identified themes and a descriptive analysis of the LPI Self and Observer Forms data (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

### *Research Question #1*

How do principals share leadership, inspire responsibility for a shared vision, and create supportive conditions?

## **HOW PRINCIPALS SHARED LEADERSHIP**

From within the category of Shared Leadership, the themes of Modeled Support, Opportunities for Empowerment, Shared Decision Making, and Development of Others, emerged to provide insight regarding how principals shared leadership within their schools. In their research examining characteristics of learning organizations, Huffman and Hipp (2000) stated, that leadership becomes shared when it “extends throughout the school to faculty, staff, and administrators” (p. 6). The following paragraphs provide an overview of the four themes which describe how principals shared leadership within their schools.

### **Modeled Support**

Creating conditions that fostered shared leadership, principals consistently made a conscious effort to develop relationships with staff members. By modeling expectations and supporting staff member’s efforts to fulfill expectations, principals encouraged and demonstrated the sharing of leadership. In schools where relationships had not thoroughly

developed (S6, S5) a lack of cohesiveness and relational trust was evident. Highlighting the importance of relationships, one principal (P4) commented,

It's all about relationships. Looking back at what I did when I first came is a lot of listening and building relationships – this has resulted in what we do now. I think what I do now developed around this; building relationships and communication. I am very relational and I want things to be real and meaningful. Summarizing my leadership, I would say I focus on relationships to accomplish goals and I go out of my way to show appreciation. I spend a lot of time developing relationships.

While most principals expressed the importance of developing relationships, it was the modeling and support of expected behaviors that solidified relationships and motivated staff to work towards group goals. Four of the six focus groups spoke frequently of their principal's "open door policy" and that they "walked the talk and talked their walk," which gave credibility to their leadership. As a result of gaining credibility with staff members, principals of more mature communities spoke frequently about the levels of trust enjoyed among staff members, which in turn created a safe, consistent, and nurturing atmosphere. When discussing the importance of trust and modeling expectations, one focus group (FG5) member commented that her principal "Trusts others to become leaders and allows leadership to happen. She distributes leadership and she expects us to distribute leadership as well."

### **Opportunities for Empowerment**

The desire and intention to develop a culture of shared leadership was communicated across all schools. Reflecting an opinion similar to others, one principal (P5) expressed, "Shared leadership is allowing everyone to have a part in being a leader and allowing others to step up to the plate." While traditional leadership assignments and

opportunities were evident in all campuses, leadership efforts to intentionally promote collaboration and organizational learning were less evident.

Formal leadership opportunities were typically shared through the roles of assistant principals, counselors, team leaders, instructional and intervention specialists, committee membership, and curriculum specialists who served as resources for other staff members. While most principals sought to develop collaborative leadership within a formal leadership team, fewer schools effectively distributed leadership throughout the campus by developing a shared responsibility for student learning and leading.

In a typical more traditional school (S2), focus group members agreed that, “The leadership team is leveled and people often times assume that the leadership team is above them or we get paid more, but we are all paid the same.” Similarly, staff members in more traditional settings discussed their schools’ leadership as “designed hierarchies” and “well defined leveled systems with representation on every team.” By contrast, members of a stronger community commented that leadership in their school was “Everyone’s responsibility because we are so intertwined.” The principal (P1) of this same school shared,

Leaders are a little bit of everybody. The biggest thing is that all the roles are intertwined and everybody in a grade level is a leader. Our assistant principal and ICU (Intensive Care Unit) Specialists see themselves as leaders as well. Everybody is a leader and everybody makes decisions on their own. Really, I am not in control – the teachers are in control. An example of leadership here is that on every grade level team different people facilitate and direct depending on the need in each specific instance. A lot of people are involved.

Although each principal intended to share leadership, those that provided opportunities for both positional authority *and* empowered decision making were found to promote a greater sense of ownership and responsibility. As one focus-group member



(FG3) explained it, “We don’t say it’s 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, or 5<sup>th</sup>’s responsibility; it’s everyone’s responsibility because we are so intertwined.” As such, stronger efforts to create cohesiveness and shared leadership among all staff members resulted in greater ownership and empowerment of staff.

### **Shared Decision Making**

The concept of shared decision making illustrated the sense of empowerment and ownership felt by one staff member who commented that working at her school (S2) had become more than just a job. In one principal’s opinion (P5), “Getting input from everyone is shared leadership.” She continued, “I may say this is where we need to go, but how it happens is up to the teams. How we get there is their decision.”

In the opinion of nearly each participant, a shared vision based upon “what’s best for kids” provided the foundation for shared decision making. Echoing an opinion similar to others, one principal (P1) stated,

Basically, our decision making is based on our vision and if you don’t know the vision, you don’t know where you are going. Everything revolves around instruction and how our decisions and actions impact instruction. That’s what our vision is all about.

As a vehicle for encouraging shared decision making, each principal had instituted a framework for leadership. Within this framework, team leaders, instructional coaches, administrators, and skills specialist created the nucleus of leadership teams within each school. While most principals operated from a more traditional hierarchical perspective, two principals (P1, P3) developed a flatter systemic approach to decision making that resulted in greater involvement, influence, collaboration, and cohesiveness among staff. One principal (P3) described this process in this manner,

Decision making has to do with asking what's important and what would you do? It builds a shared understanding and it is less formal...it's a shared understanding. We have not developed a formal strategic plan or vision, but we agree that all kids should be successful. Kids are important, and they also know that scores matter.

Describing their schools' efforts to share decision making, principals and focus group members alike consistently discussed their (1) openness to suggestions and desire for input, (2) freedom to make decisions and take risks, (3) ability to openly disagree and express points of view, (4) collaboration based upon a shared understanding, and (5) the presence of relational trust.

### **Development of Others**

Participants in four of the six schools spoke passionately about the development of others, or the formation of capacity among staff. One school (S6) shared that although their principal "Would teach everyone about leadership," the lack of application and follow through, combined with little staff incentive, hindered efforts to develop the capacity for leadership. Describing efforts to develop leadership in others, one principal (P1) commented,

The biggest thing about leadership in our school is that all the roles are intertwined. Multiple people can perform and share many responsibilities. I always multi-train people. When there is a district in-service, for instance, I always send several people. When someone leaves the school, I have someone ready to take their place.

Building capacity among staff members, principals used an assortment of organizational structures and strategies including alternating the facilitation of team meetings among members, mentor and mentee relationships and induction year programs for beginning teachers, book studies, informal sharing sessions, leadership academies,

district and campus training sessions, teacher led staff development, team planning and discussions about student learning, the utilization of peer coaching and modeling, and formal leadership opportunities.

Particularly unique to the development of capacity among staff members, however, was the consistency in which principals discussed their vision of the future and desire to sustain leadership within their schools. Several principals and focus groups discussed preparing for the future by routinely asking, “Who will replace you when you leave?” As such, principals and focus group members routinely shared how they provided opportunities for leadership among staff members and constantly looked for potential leaders among the staff and during the interview process.

The desire to develop the potential of staff was also accompanied by a genuine belief in others, an obvious trust for and among staff, and a focus on relationships. As the “lead teacher and learner” (Senge et al., 2000, p. 15) on her campus, one principal (P5) discussed how sharing leadership had been a struggle for her. She shared that delegating had been hard for her, but through a series of self-assessments and personal readings, she had learned not only to “really believe in people,” but that relationships and the establishment of relational trust were key factors in creating capacity. As an example of being the lead learner, this particular principal had modeled, and was attempting to establish a learning community within her school. Her final comment regarding the development of others was, “When people grow, we win.”

## **HOW PRINCIPALS INSPIRED RESPONSIBILITY FOR A SHARED VISION**

How principals inspired a responsibility for shared vision centered around the reoccurrence of four particular themes: The Main Thing, Cultural Values, Press for Achievement, and Collaborative Change. The following paragraphs provide an elaboration of each theme indicating how principals worked to inspire a shared vision.

### **The Main Thing**

Each of the six principals articulated their vision in terms of what their school could become. Of the six principals, four (P1, P2, P3, & P5) advocated a strong vision for achievement and learning, one emphasized relationships (P4), and another (P6) envisioned a school characterized by cohesiveness. Vision was described by one principal (P1) in the following way,

I have to keep in mind the main thing – which is student learning and focus on that. Doing what’s right for kids is the main thing. We have a vision statement, but I don’t know it. It’s not what’s written on paper, but what you do that makes a difference. My vision is to produce the best work out of every child I can and do whatever it takes – my job is usually centered on that. Our vision would be that all students are successful.

Describing their school’s vision, principals and focus group members described their vision in terms of deeply held beliefs that were modeled both personally and collectively. By identifying, sharing, modeling, and discussing deeply held beliefs, staff members consistently maintained that vision provided purpose and represented guiding principles for the organization. One focus group member (FG1) elaborated upon the “main thing” in the following words: “It’s part of a belief – we just don’t write it and hang it up, it’s a belief that’s inside us. We write it, but it’s more that paper and pencil.

It's a team effort found in doing what's best for the child. You really can't put it into words."

By sharing personal convictions, painting a picture of what the future could be, and by modeling beliefs through actions and words, principals established a sense of cohesiveness and consistency throughout their schools. This consistency of purpose – the main thing, was evidenced through decisions, structural supports, staff development opportunities, and student interventions that were aligned with and supported visions.

Although most focus group members recognized that vision must begin with the principal, FG4 maintained that, "Vision begins with one person, but it needs to represent a part of everyone." By encouraging discussion, sharing input, and seeking feedback, visions became shared. In the words of one focus group member (FG3), "Vision is the success of our students and the shared responsibility of seeing that happen."

### **Cultural Values**

Schools with strong and cohesive value systems also shared a clear collective vision. Although focus group members maintained that vision begins with the principal, it was the day to day practice, modeling, and communication of shared values that inspired and rallied staff around the collective vision. Four of the six schools (S1, S2, S3, & S5) articulated clear visions for the future that emphasized a focus on exemplary performance. Three of these schools (S1, S2, & S3) elaborated further, indicating that "all students would be successful."

Values which were translated into school visions were clearly presented as normative behaviors, attitudes, and generalizations about the way things were done on

each campus. One teacher described the impact of shared values on her school's (S3) culture by explaining that, "The typical 7:45-3:30 day isn't enough – you have to buy into it or agree. If you don't have those values you go somewhere else quickly. Hard work from everyone is expected. If you didn't buy into it, it would be difficult to stay."

A preponderance of comments indicated that values such as hard work, commitment to kids, doing whatever it takes, innovation and risk taking, accountability, and family, represented commonly held beliefs among schools. The most commonly held value among participants, however – a commitment to students, was elaborated upon by FG2: "We are here for one reason – whatever it takes for kids. Teachers are very dedicated here and kids are the most important thing. Anything we can do to help kids, we will do."

The dedication to students described by many participants resulted from the principals' insistence and commitment to the school's vision and mission. When the school's vision and purpose were consistently modeled and supported by opportunities for collaborative practices, staff members were able to formulate and internalize cultural values which gave both meaning and purpose to work. As such, principals routinely described their schools' cultures in light of their commitment to visions and missions that were translated into the behaviors and beliefs of staff.

By developing a sense of shared values, factors such as a focus on excellence, opportunities for collaborative practices, and a commitment to students became instrumental in establishing and inspiring a common vision among staff. The power of cultural values, however, was most strongly identified in the normative expectations among and between staff members in high performing schools (S1, S2, & S3). Focus

group members of high performing schools consistently expressed the understanding that if teachers didn't like the high expectations they wouldn't fit in or "went somewhere else." One teacher summarized her school's (S3) culture the following way: "If they didn't believe in what we do then they would go somewhere else. You have to have the same vision that all students will succeed. If you don't have the values, you don't belong here."

### **Press for Achievement**

In addition to emphasizing the "main thing" and reinforcing cultural values, principals inspired responsibility for shared vision through a persistent focus on student achievement. Although redundant, the continuous day-to-day business of student achievement was described by one principal (P1) as, "... a burden that's always there." She continued, "No matter how small the improvement, we have to keep getting better." The press for achievement was not only a persistent focus, but provided a contextual framework for the development of shared responsibility.

Through informal discussions, the use of school wide themes, and various collaborative processes, principals worked to develop a shared vision for learning. Staff members in several schools (S3, S1, S5, & S3) described themselves and "integrated," "entwined," "a family," and a "boat with everyone rowing in the same direction." One focus group member (FG1) described her school's press for achievement as a cross-grade level effort that not only connected the staff, but encouraged both "shared leadership" and a "shared responsibility for all kids."

While focus groups described their press for achievement as the attainment of exemplary status, most principals emphasized a shared vision for achievement that not only included TAKS accountability ratings, but the future learning, continued success, and self worth of all students. Summarizing this belief, one participant (S5) responded, “Although we have got to include kids in becoming exemplary, it goes beyond TAKS. We have to keep getting better. Next year when I come back we can’t go backwards. We have to keep getting better.” Describing her school’s (S3) press for achievement, another teacher commented, “We are all responsible for student learning. In the past, the focus had been on the primary grades, but we have changed that to include more students and achievement in all grade levels.”

In schools where a strong press for achievement was noted, the persistent cross-grade level focus on student learning and shared responsibility for achievement was clearly evident. The primary medium for transmitting this shared vision, however, was found in the principal’s conversations with staff during the development and reinforcement of group goals, talks about data and duties, and the systemic alignment of organizational plans, programs, and vision for improvement.

Whether through informal conversations, team discussions, or large group interactions, effective principals spoke continuously about improvement and extended the discussion to include students. When asked how their vision was shared, one principal (P5) responded,

By making sure kids understand what recognized and exemplary means. When we looked at the data with kids, they were surprised to find out what it meant and how data related to being recognized. By looking at accountability data with kids, they were better able to understand. We break up into teams and talk to kids individually about being exemplary and what it means to be successful.



To help students and staff develop a shared vision for achievement, effective principals fostered the development of collaborative processes. Opportunities to collaborate included common planning times, formal and informal discussions about student progress, and the monitoring of goals and benchmarks that reinforced the press for achievement. Resulting from these collaborative efforts, principals were able to develop a variety of instructional interventions and programs, hold discussions about goals and data with students and staff, organize flexible groupings among classrooms, orchestrate after school learning labs and Saturday tutorials, implement student mentor or buddy programs, and involve staff members in the overall press for achievement.

While collaborative processes reinforced the press for achievement, the degree to which staffs were held accountable for their participation in this process was found to significantly impact the overall perception of the principal's credibility. In schools where the principal appeared to maintain a high level of credibility (S1, S2, S3, & S5), the press for achievement was clearly reflected as a dominant cultural value. From an organizational perspective, the reciprocal relationship between shared values and principal credibility positively influenced the press for achievement and inspired responsibility for a shared vision.

Through the submission and discussion of required documentation, formative and informal feedback, rigorous performance expectations, the review of data, and discussions about learning, principals were able to demonstrate and maintain a press for achievement. The continual focus on achievement resulted in a sense of coherence between values, goals, and processes. Subsequently, the effect of organizational

coherence helped inspire and perpetuate both the responsibility for a shared vision and the press for achievement.

### **Collaborative Change**

Within the cultural context of each school, principals were confronted with circumstances which accelerated or hindered the development of a shared vision. While each principal inherited a unique arrangement of existing conditions upon becoming the campus leader, patterns of leadership behaviors emerged throughout this study which demonstrated similarities in how principals used these conditions to implement meaningful change, inspire action, and sustain responsibility for a shared vision.

Concerning the historical context of each school, principals inherited campuses that were described as “micro-managed” (S1), “on the verge of being unacceptable” (S2), “exemplary” (S3), campuses which “were not cohesive” (S5, S6), having “traditions which are hard to break” (S6), and a school in which a significant change in staff and leadership had occurred (S5). In describing her first year on campus, one principal (P3) explained the importance of understanding the cultural context of the school and its impact on developing a shared vision,

The school had been split between the primary and intermediate grades due to the focus on TAKS. The former principal opened a new school and took all the crème with her to the new school to open it. She had been here for fifteen years, and she was very focused on being exemplary. Excellence had been here, but the previous principal took a lot of staff and students to the new school. There was a deficit attitude and a lot of pressure on me to maintain exemplary. The vision when I arrived therefore had to be one of developing a community spirit in the school because of the needs in our building at the time.

Whether principals had addressed pre-existing circumstances or emerging

problems, the need to recognize and manage the need for change became a factor in developing a shared vision. By seeing change as an opportunity for growth, considering problems as opportunities for change, or using an existing culture as a springboard for improvement, effective principals were able to assess existing conditions, formulate plans, articulate their vision through words and actions, and enlist the support of others. Although change forced nearly every principal to confront areas of personal growth, the importance of demonstrating proactive behavior was a prerequisite to positive change.

As the campus leader, four of the six principals expressed the need of being a learner as a result of the changes they experienced. One principal (P5) shared, “I learned the hard way. At first I use to just make decisions. Then, I would hear people say, ‘That’s just what she wants done.’ We weren’t getting the results I wanted and people weren’t being listened to. So, I learned quickly that I needed to hear from everyone. A lot of people know things that I don’t know.”

To successfully inspire a shared vision, principals described the necessity of becoming the lead learner and learning how to learn with others (Senge, 1990, p. 3). Demonstrating openness to honest feedback, a willingness to listen and seek input, the ability to convey an interest in what others say, and demonstrating a caring attitude, were key factors in establishing buy-in, trust, and the ability to integrate personal visions into a collective purpose. Another principal (P4) who had secondary experience, explained that his school was very open to change because he was willing to listen and was interested in hearing what was important to staff members. Principals who were able to articulate a vision for change, but who also realized that change must be the product of others, were most successful in inspiring responsibility for a shared vision.

## **HOW PRINCIPALS CREATED SUPPORTIVE CONDITIONS**

Supportive conditions involve both the human factors and structural supports of a school that serve to encourage and facilitate organizational learning (Hord, 1997; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Leithwood et al., 1998; Valentine et al., 2004). How principals created supportive conditions in each school was further clarified through the development of the following themes: Organizational Structures, Cohesive Relationships, and Purposeful Conversations.

### **Organizational Structures**

Attempting to enhance leadership opportunities and advance the vision of each school, principals utilized similar organizational structures, but differed greatly in the processes which were followed. “If it hadn’t been for the structures...,” one focus group member (FG6) commented, “The whole house would have fallen in. We had structures that helped us learn, but it was totally inefficient and unsuccessful.” By contrast, another teacher indicated that her school’s (S1) structures involved everyone, and that “it was a collaborative process and a framework which was in place.”

Most organizational structures were intended to benefit students either directly or indirectly. Whether analyzing data, reviewing student work, planning interventions or community programs, implementing Response to Intervention (RtI), or aligning the curriculum, student success and teacher growth were the intended purpose behind the majority of structural processes. Effective principals were especially adept in ensuring structural supports were aligned with their primary purpose or vision. As one principal (P1) indicated,

We don't have a lot of faculty meetings, but we do have a lot of grade level meetings which are broken down by content area. The intervention team meets every Friday afternoon to talk about kids and interventions. Most meetings however, usually involve the teachers and specialists talking about kids and what best for them.

Providing structural supports, principals utilized formal and informal common planning times, cross-grade level meetings, faculty meetings, modified schedules that allowed staff development during the instructional day, Saturday staff development sessions, weekly intervention and curriculum meetings, and administrative or team leader meetings. In addition, principals at all schools utilized the expertise of instructional and curriculum specialists, team leaders, and content representatives to facilitate meetings, serve as liaisons to the principal, and assist in managing organizational supports.

Despite similarities, the distinguishing factor among schools was the degree to which structural processes enhanced cohesive relationships or, by contrast, heightened teacher isolation. The extent to which principals involved others, as opposed to confining participation to a select group, impacted the effectiveness of each process. Through structural processes, principals created conditions ranging from ambiguous and inefficient, traditional, and structured within a framework of focused but informal collaboration. While schools demonstrated both tight and loose processes, the most effective schools were both tightly and loosely coupled (Kurz & Knight, 2003). One principal (P1) described this balance in the following way,

We take a lot of time to meet in small, informal groups where everyone shares. Sometimes it's meeting in the hallways, discussing kids in the classrooms, but it's always quick and informal. The formal and informal both have their place; there's so many people involved in our meetings they are very informal. Grade level and team leader meetings are considered formal and are on the calendar. We have certain things we need to get done. Grade level meetings are really staff development because we talk about instructional strategies and look at student work.

We have sixty minute conference times each day, so we spend thirty minutes talking about language arts, and thirty minutes discussing math and science. We have block scheduling, so we also talk about how we are using time.

Principals and focus group members discussed in detail both the purpose and processes of organizational structures. Principals who maintained a commitment to their vision, empowered others, and ensured a balance between the formal and informal aspects of organizational structures, however, clearly benefited from increased collaboration, a sense of collective learning, and higher student achievement.

### **Cohesive Relationships**

The degree to which organizational structures benefited schools was related to the formation of cohesive relationships. Although the presence of both structures and relationships was optimal, the formation of cohesive relationships demonstrated a greater utility than the implementation of organizational structures in the six case study schools.

As a teacher in a moderately structured, but low sustainability school (S6) commented, “Our principal is all about relationships, but she doesn’t foster relationships. There’s lots of isolation and non-involvement and all the teams have trouble with cohesion.” By contrast, a focus group member (FG2) from a high performing school indicated that her faculty resembled a family where everyone cooperated, where cohesiveness was important to everyone, and where “tremendous support” was always available.

As a means of cohesiveness, the presence of collaborative relationships permeated the work structures of effective schools. Although each school demonstrated various degrees of collaboration, participants described their schools as a “family that holds

people accountable” (S4), “a village that raises children” (S3), and a “team which communicates with everyone” (S5). Highlighting the importance of collaborative teams, one principal (P1) summarized, “You can’t strip out the human element.”

Collaborative relationships suggested a level of cohesiveness proportionate to the principal’s ability to lead as an active listener, to see the school staff as a united family and model similar values, and to create an atmosphere where the presence and substance of informal conversation became a typical mode of communication and decision making. Fundamental to the development of cohesive relationships was the establishment of organizational trust. As shared by principals and focus group members alike, relational trust was both developed and nurtured through active and genuine listening, and served as a spring board for constructive dialogue, risk taking, and a willingness to share. The impact of trust in developing cohesive relationships was described by one focus group member (FG1) in the following way,

It’s about building relationships with other people. We don’t feel that, “This is my team,” and teachers don’t say, “This is my classroom, don’t come in.” There is no isolation – everyone is a team. A lot of it is built on trust. The way we work really shows the trust we have in the staff. The kind of program we have here ... you have to have trust to work together.”

Developing cohesive relationships, principals demonstrated their trust in staff by allowing risks and empowering teachers to make both autonomous and collaborative decisions within the context of instruction, curriculum, and building procedures. These same principals demonstrated an openness to change, showed appreciation by recognizing individual and group efforts, and communicating their belief in others. One principal (P1) commented, “All I expect my teachers to do is teach, and to teach well.”

She continued, “I expect them to show trust, to believe in one another, to listen, to hear what other people are saying, and to keep me informed.”

Principals in developing and effective schools echoed the opinion, that “Relationships support the ability to say what needs to be said” (P5), “... are needed to accomplish our goals” (P5), and allow people the ability to “disagree without affecting their ability to work together” (P2). Although principals used a variety of strategies for developing cohesive relationships, one teacher (FG3) summarized the impact of these efforts in this way. “I would say it’s a safe environment. There is a difference here; it’s because we are all equals. We are all here to help...to support. Whatever the need is, we are here. We all work together.”

### **Purposeful Conversations**

Mitchell, Sackney, and Walker (1996, p. 52) have written that contemporary organizations must be viewed through the “lens of processes and relationships” with “conversation as the central medium for both the creation of individual meaning and organizational change.” Similarly, principals in the six case study schools sought to create and sustain achievement by developing cohesive efforts, a shared meaning and purpose, and effective work structures through conversations with and among staff members.

Four of the six principals (P1, P2, P3, & P5) in this study frequently engaged staff members in conversations about the school’s vision for achievement. When describing conversations about becoming an exemplary campus, one principal (P2) stated, “By communicating the vision to them, I think I can get everyone to work together. I am



telling them that we are committed to being exemplary. I tell them when I am in the classrooms, during announcements, by modeling, and talking to them. It's a day to day thing." Further emphasizing the importance of conversation, another principal (P1) commented, "Communication is happening all the time, and it's not something that's on the calendar, but it's flexible based upon the needs of kids and meeting those needs."

Although discussion about the school's vision and goals created a shared meaning and focus, principals regularly engaged staff in conversations prompted and extended by questions. As such, the use of questions became a primary catalyst for conversation, decision making, and collaboration. Questions such as, "What do you think?" "What are your concerns?" "How do you feel about...?" and "How did you do...?" provided a framework for numerous conversations about learning and students. One principal (P3) described this process by saying,

I tell the staff, "You are the most important people in these kids' lives." I ask them things like, "What do you need and what would you do?" That gets them making decisions. I think it has to do with asking what's important. I prefer to go directly to folks and ask them "How's it going?" I ask, "What do you need and what can I do?", a lot.

Effective principals not only modeled the ability to ask engaging questions, but encouraged team members to dialogue and ask questions throughout the building. One teacher (FG3) shared that in her building, there was "A lot of communication. If something didn't work when I taught equivalent fractions, for example, I would ask someone, "What do you do to teach this?" Similarly, in effective schools cohesive relationships fostered conversations about students, learning, and school conditions, while encouraging team learning and sharing. By contrast, the absence of productive conversation in a low-achieving school (S6) prompted a teacher to share, "Our principal

would let teachers talk about the problem, but just scratching the surface never really getting to the problem. Dialogue was not existent. We spent three hours in one meeting arguing about why parents had to be apart of the vision statement.”

Ultimately, most conversations originated from and related to the school’s vision for improvement and the needs of students. As conversations became generative, however, they served to: (1) develop and fosters shared beliefs, (2) ensure that staff members understood the principal was both “listening and hearing what was being said,” (3) maintain a focus on instruction and learning, (4) produce an understanding of instructional needs based on student work samples and outcomes, (5) align curriculum and instruction, (6) foster a climate of caring, (7) empower staff and encourage shared decision making, (8) inspire and motivate staff members, (9) encourage dissent, and (10) make “connections for sharing.”

The fundamental relationship of conversations to student learning was elaborated upon by one principal (P1), who stated, “When we talk, it’s usually about kids. When we talk, our conversations are focused on student learning. I need timely data about the kids on a day to day basis.”

## **CAMPUS IMPROVEMENT PLANS**

In the context of this study, the importance of continuous strategic planning suggests the need for principals and staff to consider the impact of campus improvement plans (CIP) on conditions for organizational learning and school improvement. Some researchers contend that the effectiveness of strategic plans, however, is contingent upon their usefulness as a dynamic, flexible guide for improvement, rather than a static,

prescriptive plan for action (Fullan, 1996; Schmoker, 2004). The findings below describe how principals utilized CIP's in an effort to develop conditions for continual learning and student achievement.

Each case study school indicated their use of campus improvement plans (CIP) as a means of monitoring and measuring progress relative to instructional goals. While most campuses conducted annual needs assessments and developed their CIPs during the summer months, fewer campuses (S1, S2, & S3) actually reviewed or modified the plans during the year to reflect the changing needs of the campus. An example of this dilemma was provided by one teacher (FG5), who after speaking at length about the development and importance of her school's CIP, concluded by saying, "Our CIP committee hasn't met this year."

In developing CIPs, all principals utilized electronic templates that were standardized on a district wide basis. During this process, principals shared leadership with committee members and created plans that (1) were written during the summer months, (2) were based upon campus needs assessments, (3) reflected the outcomes of prior year objectives, (4) identified measurable goals as a means to inform current year progress, (5) articulated formal vision statements, and (6) prescribed the organizational structures and processes to be used as a means for improving instructional outcomes and strengthening the school community.

Although each school utilized a committee to formulate and write the CIP based upon identified needs, how campuses utilized their plans during the year varied. Two schools (S4, S6) wrote their plans and never met to review or modify them during the year. Another school's principal (P5) indicated that "the CIP is a working document," but

supporting evidence indicated it was never reviewed or modified during the year. A third campus (S2), indicated they reviewed their CIP three times a year, but a focus group member (FG2) commented, “It’s mostly a principal thing.” Of the two remaining schools, one (S3) stated that “The CIP is always being adjusted” and that they met “frequently to revise it.” Similarly, another campus (S1) indicated that they review their CIP “... several times a year. We stop doing what’s not working and try something else. We go back and forth and adjust a few times a year. In the end we are supporting teachers and the needs of the classroom.”

Describing the content of CIPs, principals and focus group members indicated that school work plans were used not only to identify and document instructional goals, but strategies to improve the “teaching and learning environment”(S5), “as guides for decision making”(S1), a “process for developing collaboration and the school’s vision” (S3), a means to “prove we did things” (S2), and a process for building a “shared understanding ... that all students will be successful” (S3).

The principal (P1) of a high sustainability school, summarized her school’s planning process by saying, “Our CIP addresses what we will do – it’s our first plan. We try to align everything so we can target our needs. I am very conscientious that we address everything in the CIP. We meet three times during the year to modify the plan. We build the CIP to guide our decisions and we spend a lot of time up front developing it. We look at data, we budget, and plan how we’re going to improve.”

In schools (S1 & S3) where CIP’s were reviewed and adjusted frequently, the notion of continuous learning and experimentation fueled the collaborative process. Commitment to the school’s vision and values, and an awareness of current needs

consistently directed efforts to modify and adjust plans. Describing her school's CIP process, one focus group member (FG1) commented, "A lot of schools have gaps, but we are very forward thinking and it depends where every teacher is. We are all connected, so if it's not working we change it." The pattern of constant monitoring and adjusting exemplified the practices of high achieving schools and was fueled by a desire to continually improve and ensure that all students would be successful.

### **LEADERSHIP PRACTICES INVENTORY**

The LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) was used in this study to identify, describe, and help understand how the perceived leadership practices of principals influenced conditions for organizational learning and sustained student achievement. In order to better understand this relationship, the LPI scores of both principals and focus group members were computed and analyzed on an individual and aggregate basis. LPI self scores for principals and the average observer scores for each campus were calculated for each of the five individual LPI practices and compared for similarities and differences.

Descriptive statistics were used to (1) calculate the individual and combined mean score ranking for each leadership practice among principals and observers, (2) determine the individual and combined mean percentile rankings for each leadership practice among principals and observers, and (3) report the range of scores among all Self and Observer reports. The purpose of this analysis was to assist in clarifying how principal behaviors impact organizational learning and sustained student achievement as determined by AEIS accountability ratings for the 2004-2006 school years.

Utilizing the Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes and Posner, 2002), principal participants completed the LPI–Self Form and focus-group members the LPI–Observer Form. Both the Self and Observer Form of the LPI contain 30 statements, or six statements for each of the five leadership practices: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart (Table 5). Each statement is rated on a ten-point Likert-scale. The Likert-type scale represents the frequency of perceived leadership behaviors ranging from (1) “Almost never does what is described in the statement,” to (10) “Almost always does what is described in the statement” (Kouzes and Posner, 2002, p. 3). Individual scores on both the Self and Observer Forms range from a minimum of 6 to a maximum of 60 points for each of the LPI practices.

**TABLE 5**  
**Leadership Practices and Corresponding LPI Statements**

<b>Leadership Practice</b>	<b>LPI Statements</b>
Challenge the Process	1, 6, 11, 16, 21, 26
Inspire a Shared Vision	2, 7, 12, 27, 22, 27
Enable Others to Act	3, 8, 13, 18, 23, 28
Model the Way	4, 9, 14, 19, 24, 29
Encourage the Heart	5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30

Table 6 provides a rank order comparison of the combined means of all campuses for principal self-reports and observer-reports for each of the five leadership practices compared to the established LPI norms as reported by Kouzes and Posner (2002). The comparison reveals that both groups indicate Enabling Others is the most reported leadership practice. Although LPI norms reflect Model the Way as the second most

observed behavior with mean score rankings of 47.0 for self-reports and 47.8 for observers, case study schools reported to the contrary, citing Encourage the Heart as the second most observed behavior with mean score rankings of 50.17 and 51.22 respectively. Model the Way was reported the fourth least observed practice among observers (50.47), and the third least observed practice by principals, along with Challenge the Way, each having a mean score ranking of 49.33.

Consistent with Kouzes and Posners's (2002) findings, the combined mean score of 48.0 for principal self-reports among case study schools demonstrated that Inspire a Shared Vision was perceived as the least practiced behavior. The combined average of observer scores, however, indicated Inspire a Shared Vision (50.77) was the third most observed behavior with a mean score slightly greater than Model the Way (50.47) and Challenge the Process (50.38). Unique to this study was the fact that the mean score rankings for all leadership practices as reported by principals and observers are notably higher than the established norms for all five leadership practices as reported by Kouzes and Posner (2002) among both self and observer reports. The one exception to this finding was Enable Others to Act, which is reported by Kouzes and Posner (2002) to have a normative mean score ranking of 48.7 among self-reports, placing it slightly ahead of the principal mean score ranking of 48.0 for Inspire a Shared Vision.

**TABLE 6**  
**LPI Norms of Case Study Schools Compared to Norms Established by Kouzes and Posner Ranked from Most to Least Observed**

<b>Case Study Principals' Mean Score Rankings</b>	<b>Kouzes and Posner Research Norms-Self Rankings</b>	<b>Case Study Observers' Mean Score Rankings</b>	<b>Kouzes and Posner Research Norms-Observer Rankings</b>
Enable Others to Act (53.17)	Enable Others to Act (48.7)	Enable Others to Act (51.73)	Enable Others to Act (47.8)
Encourage the Heart (50.17)	Model the Way (47.0)	Encourage the Heart (51.22)	Model the Way (47.5)
Model the Way (49.33)	Challenge the Process (43.9)	Inspire a Shared Vision (50.77)	Encourage the Heart (44.9)
Challenge the Process (49.33)	Encourage the Heart (43.8)	Model the Way (50.47)	Challenge the Process (44.4)
Inspire a Shared Vision (48.0)	Inspire a Shared Vision (40.6)	Challenge the Process (50.38)	Inspire a Shared Vision (42.0)

\* The number beneath each leadership practice indicates the combined mean of observed practices among all self and observer reports on a scale from 6 to 60 as measured by the Leadership Practices Inventory

Self and observer reports of the LPI are scored along a continuum of percentile rankings ranging from low ( $\leq 30\%$ ), moderate (30-69%), and high ( $\geq 70\%$ ), for each of the five leadership practices. Comparing individual principal scores and the average observer scores by campus to the percentile rankings established by Kouzes and Posner (2002) revealed that 46.7% of principal self-scores were reported above the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile, while 40% of self-scores fell in the moderate range (30-69%). Similarly, 46.7% of observer scores were reported above the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile, with 50% of observer scores falling in the moderate range (30-69%). Although self-scores are reported to occasionally exceed observer-scores (Kouzes & Posner, 2002), the opposite was true in this study. From



among the five leadership practices, only Enabling Others was scored higher by principals with a mean score of 53.17, compared to 51.73 for observers. In total, 13.3% of principal self-scores fell beneath the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile, while only 3.3% of observer scores fell in the low range ( $\leq 30\%$ ). The percentile rankings used in this comparison as reported by Kouzes and Posner are identified in Table 7.

**TABLE 7**  
**Leadership Practices Inventory Percentile Rankings**

Leadership Practices	$\geq 70$ th percentile (High Range)	30th-69th percentile (Moderate Range)	$< 30$ th percentile (Low Range)
Model the Way	51-60	44-50	22-43
Inspire a Shared Vision	50-60	40-49	18-39
Challenge the Process	50-60	43-49	24-42
Enable Others to Act	53-60	47-52	24-46
Encourage the Heart	52-60	43-51	22-42

Concluding the findings for question one, the following pages will report and analyze scores, percentile rankings, and the range of scores and percentile rankings for all principal self-reports, campus focus-group or observer reports, and the combined principal self-reports and observer reports for each leadership practice. When addressing individual campus scores, each school will be identified by the letter S, followed by a number value ranging from 1-6, with the corresponding number being assigned to each school (S1, S2 ... S6). Likewise, self-reports for individual principals (P) and observer-reports (FG – focus group) representing individual schools will utilize the same method of identification.

The following paragraphs provide the combined LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) findings from among each of the six schools in this study. The LPI Self and Observer scores, combined mean scores, and percentile rankings for each of the five leadership practices are displayed in Tables 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12; beginning with Model the Way (Table 8).

### **Model the Way**

By modeling personal beliefs and aligning those beliefs with actions and visions, leaders create a culture of trust, respect, and collaboration (Chasin & Levin, 1995; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Modeling the Way creates credibility, which Kouzes and Posner (2007) considered the “foundation of leadership” (p.37).

As indicated in Table 8, principal self-scores for Model the Way ranged from the 16<sup>th</sup> percentile (P6) to the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile (P2), while observer (focus group) scores fell between the 36<sup>th</sup> percentile for FG4 and the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile for FG1. Self-reports for P4 and P6 were reported in the low range with mean percentile rankings of 28% and 16% respectively. Unlike Kouzes and Posner’s (2002) findings, Model the Way was reported as the third least practiced behavior among all principals with a mean score of 49.33 (66<sup>th</sup> percentile), and the fourth least reported behavior as perceived by focus group members with a mean score of 50.47 (68 percentile).

**TABLE 8**  
**LPI Self /Observer Scores and Mean Percentile Rankings for Model the Way**

<b>LPI</b>	<b>Schools</b>	<b>S1</b>	<b>S2</b>	<b>S3</b>	<b>S4</b>	<b>S5</b>	<b>S6</b>	<b>Mean</b>
<b>Self Scores (P)</b>		56	58	52	43	47	40	49.3
<b>Percentile Ranking</b>		93	98	77	28	66	16	66
<b>Observer Scores (FG)</b>		59.2	53.4	45.6	44.4	51.4	48.8	50.47
<b>Percentile Ranking</b>		99	85	42	36	48	58	68

### **Inspire a Shared Vision**

Senge (1990) stated that learning organizations are impossible to create without a shared vision. The primary task of the principal, therefore, lies in articulating a clear and attractive future for the school and developing collaborative work structures that are aligned with and support identified goals (Creemers & Reezigt, 1998; Hipp & Huffman, 2003; Valentine et al., 2004).

As reported by Kouzes and Posner (2002), Inspire a Shared Vision is perceived as the least frequently practiced behavior with normative mean score rankings of 40.6 for self-reports and 42.0 for observers (see Table 6). Consistent with the literature, Inspire a Shared Vision had the lowest mean score ranking among principal self-reports in case study schools (48.0). Unique to this study, was the fact that although the mean self report score of 48.0 for Inspire a Shared Vision was the lowest ranking score among principals, its score of 48.0 was higher than all LPI norms (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) with the exception of the self-report norm for Enable Others to Act (48.7).

As indicated in Table 9, three principals (P1, P2, and P3) had self-report scores that fell within the high range, and three principals had scores within the moderate range,

two of which (P4 and P6) reflected moderately-low scores at the 35th percentile. Consistent with the literature (Arnold, 2007; Balcerek, 1999; Brent, 2007; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Soileau, 2007; Sheppard, 2007), Table 9 indicates that the principal self-reports and their combined mean score ranking demonstrates that principals typically perceive themselves as less visionary than their colleagues. One exception to this is the self report of P3 (51.0) who perceived herself as a moderately-high visionary leader (77<sup>th</sup> percentile) compared to her peers (FG3) who perceived her as only moderately effective (67<sup>th</sup> percentile).

**TABLE 9**  
**LPI Self /Observer Scores and Mean Percentile Rankings for Inspire a Shared Vision**

<b>LPI</b>	<b>Schools</b>	<b>S1</b>	<b>S2</b>	<b>S3</b>	<b>S4</b>	<b>S5</b>	<b>S6</b>	<b>Mean</b>
<b>Self Scores (P)</b>		53	54	51	41	48	41	48
<b>Percentile Ranking</b>		84	88	77	35	65	35	65
<b>Observer Scores (FG)</b>		58.8	54.3	48.6	43.2	54	45.7	50.77
<b>Percentile Ranking</b>		98	89	67	46	88	54	76

### **Challenge the Process**

In their research of exemplary leadership practices, Kouzes and Posner (2007) have found that leaders who Challenge the Process seek continual improvement in an effort to challenge the status quo. Such leaders challenge others to try new approaches and are “willing to search for opportunities to innovate, grow, and improve” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 18).

Table 10 indicates that principals and focus groups members perceived Challenge the Process equally across the distribution resulting in a combined mean score of 49.33

(67 percentile) for principal self-reports and 50.38 (70<sup>th</sup> percentile) for focus-group members. P1, P2, and P5 perceived themselves to Challenge the Process to a high degree ( $\geq 70\%$ ), two principals at a moderate level (P4, P6), and P3 as minimally effective, with a self-score of 41 falling at the 26<sup>th</sup> percentile. Among focus-groups, FG1, FG2, and FG6 perceived their principals to frequently Challenge the Process by reporting percentile rankings at or above the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile.

**TABLE 10**  
**LPI Self /Observer Scores and Mean Percentile Rankings for Challenge the Process**

<b>LPI</b>	<b>Schools</b>	<b>S1</b>	<b>S2</b>	<b>S3</b>	<b>S4</b>	<b>S5</b>	<b>S6</b>	<b>Mean</b>
<b>Self Scores (P)</b>		56	56	41	46	49	48	49.33
<b>Percentile Ranking</b>		95	95	26	48	76	60	67
<b>Observer Scores (FG)</b>		58.9	51.1	46.8	45.6	49.2	50.3	50.38
<b>Percentile Ranking</b>		99	76	52	55	67	70	70

### **Enable Others to Act**

Kouzes and Posner (2007) wrote that “to get extraordinary things done in organizations leaders have to enable others to act” (p. 20). Because the development of collaborative teams is a prerequisite condition of learning communities (Kruse et al., 1994; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995), enabling others becomes a “critical competency for achieving and sustaining high performance” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 242).

Similar to Kouzes and Posner’s (2002) findings, enabling was the leadership practice most frequently reported by principals and focus group members with mean score rankings of 53.17 and 51.73 respectively. Self-reports for principals as indicated in Table11, demonstrated that all principals perceived themselves to enable others on a

moderate to high level with scores ranging from the 93<sup>rd</sup> percentile (P1) to the 53<sup>rd</sup> percentile for P4. Focus group members perceived a broader degree of enabling, however, as individual focus-group scores ranged from a low of 45.2 for FG3 (25<sup>th</sup> percentile) to a high score of 59.4 as reported by FG1 (99<sup>th</sup> percentile). Overall, FG1, FG5, and FG 6 reported percentile rankings in the high zone ( $\geq 70\%$ ), while FG2 and FG 4 reported moderate scores in the 63<sup>rd</sup> and 33<sup>rd</sup> percentiles.

**TABLE 11**  
**LPI Self /Observer Scores and Mean Percentile Rankings for Enable Others to Act**

<b>LPI</b>	<b>Schools</b>	<b>S1</b>	<b>S2</b>	<b>S3</b>	<b>S4</b>	<b>S5</b>	<b>S6</b>	<b>Mean</b>
<b>Self Scores (P)</b>		57	56	52	50	51	53	53.17
<b>Percentile Ranking</b>		93	89	65	53	59	73	73
<b>Observer Scores (FG)</b>		59.4	51.5	45.2	46.8	52.8	54.7	51.73
<b>Percentile Ranking</b>		99	63	25	33	71	83	64

### **Encourage the Heart**

An important aspect of all leadership is “encouraging the hearts of constituents to carry on” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 22). In so doing, effective leaders offer encouragement by recognizing contributions, celebrating values and achievements, and offering both concrete and affective rewards (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). According to DuFour et al. (2004), encouraging the heart plays a vital role in learning communities, because learning communities at the most basic level are “designed to touch the heart” (p. 6).

Table 12 reveals that both principal and focus-group mean score rankings for Encourage the Heart are the second highest among all the leadership practices as reported by case study schools. A combined mean score for principal self-reports of 50.17 and focus-groups of 51.22 is unlike the established norms of Kouzes and Posner (2002), which report Model the Way as the second most observed practice among both self (47.0) and observer reports (47.5).

Although Encourage the Heart was perceived as the second most observable practice among principals, P5 and P6 reported self-scores of 42 and 43, placing them in the 28<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> percentile. To the contrary, FG5 and FG6 perceived their principals as highly encouraging, reporting means scores of 48.3 and 48.8, placing them in the 71<sup>st</sup> and 68<sup>th</sup> percentile respectively. Stronger self-report scores among P1, P2, P3, and P4, however, resulted in a combined mean score of 50.17, indicating that principals in this study perceived themselves as encouraging at a moderately high level (64<sup>th</sup> percentile). Focus group reports indicated that observers also considered their principals to demonstrate encouraging behaviors at a moderately-high level (68<sup>th</sup> percentile), with mean focus-group scores ranging from a low of 47.8 (FG3) to a high of 58.9 (FG1).

**TABLE 12**  
**LPI Self /Observer Scores and Mean Percentile Rankings for Encourage the Heart**

<b>LPI</b>	<b>Schools</b>	<b>S1</b>	<b>S2</b>	<b>S3</b>	<b>S4</b>	<b>S5</b>	<b>S6</b>	<b>Mean</b>
<b>Self Scores (P)</b>		53	56	56	51	42	43	50.17
<b>Percentile Ranking</b>		76	88	88	67	28	30	64
<b>Observer Scores (FG)</b>		58.9	52.2	47.8	48.3	51.3	48.8	51.22
<b>Percentile Ranking</b>		97	73	51	55	71	68	68

### *Research Question #2*

How do quantitative and qualitative data concerning principal behaviors converge?

As indicated in Figure 1 (p. 73), the findings described in this section of the chapter have been analyzed by each individual school to determine: (1) how individual case study data from principal and focus-group interviews converged, (2) how quantitative findings from the LPI Self and Observer Forms (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) converged, and (3) in what ways were quantitative findings consistent with qualitative data.

## **ANALYSIS OF LPI AND CASE STUDY DATA BY INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL**

### **Elementary School #1**

Staff members at Elementary School 1 (S1) had virtually no disagreement or conflicting perceptions regarding the sharing of leadership, the presence of a shared vision, or the supporting conditions prevalent within the school. Within S1, leadership was not only modeled by the principal, but by staff members alike. Focus-group members commented that the principal “not only says what needs to be done, she does it.” This was further demonstrated by the principal’s daily presence in the classrooms to observe, teach, coach, and model both instruction and leadership in an effort to provide support and direction.

Staff members and the principal concurred that the “biggest thing about leadership is that all the roles are intertwined.” Resulting from a focused connectedness among staff, opportunities for empowerment, and shared decision making, the



development of others was embedded within the school's culture and routine. Staff members noted that the principal constantly sought opportunities to develop leadership among staff. Similarly, the principal expressed that "leaders were a little bit of everybody" and that the way things were run, "everyone had to be involved."

Through numerous and ongoing informal discussions and weekly grade level meetings that served as staff development, time was provided to assess student work, share instructional strategies and interventions, and map out the curriculum. Focus group members noted "there was a lot of input" and that shared decision making based on data "ensured the best thing for kids would be done." Not only did staff members and the principal agree, that "Each decision is about what's best for kids," but that "decision making was based upon the school's vision." Although focus group members and the principal indicated the vision begins with the principal, they also agreed it must be shared by everyone. Focus group members highlighted this point, stating that vision was "more than what's written on paper, it's a belief that's inside us."

The power of the school's vision for improvement permeated every aspect of the school and was reflected in the mutually high expectations among staff which mirrored the school's values, press for achievement, and efforts to inform collaborative change. Focus group members agreed with the principal that "if you don't like the high expectations, you won't fit in." High expectations were especially directed towards the school's press for achievement. Emphasizing this point, staff members expressed that "We are all responsible for student learning" and that almost every child had an IEP (individualized education plan). The principal elaborated further stating, "When a student isn't learning, we have to intervene in a timely way and it's got to be an immediate

response.” She further commented that the vision focused on the “main thing, the success of every child.”

As a highly successful school, the staff agreed they were a “forward thinking school,” stating, “We have to keep getting better, even if it’s a little bit.” The quest for continual improvement not only encompassed academics, but had directly influenced the development of an exceptional fine arts program, which resulted from recommendations made by the Campus Improvement Committee. Academic success, the ongoing development of staff, and evidence of a shared vision at S1 are in large part the result of organizational structures which allowed for ongoing collaboration and staff learning. Cohesive relationships and purposeful conversations represented normative behaviors that provided the foundation for sustained achievement and provided staff members the opportunity to learn and share in a risk-free environment.

As indicated in Table 13, the principal and focus-group members at S1 demonstrated a high degree of consistency concerning perceived leadership behaviors as reported on the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) and the case study data. Self and Observer reports score each of the five leadership practices above the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile. While all focus-group reports indicate the principal demonstrated each of the five leadership practices at a level ranging between the 96<sup>th</sup>-99<sup>th</sup> percentile, the principal scored herself less favorably with regards to Inspire a Shared Vision (84<sup>th</sup> percentile) and Encouraging the Heart (76<sup>th</sup> percentile).

Perceived as an excellent role model who had developed a high degree of credibility with the staff, the principal at S1 also sought continual improvement by Challenging the Process. Through this process of continual improvement, staff members

were routinely engaged in collaborative opportunities and were enabled to grow on a personal and professional level. Unique to S1, was the fact that staff members not only shared a vision for improvement, but were consistently provided opportunities to collaborate within an environment which was both tightly and loosely coupled, structured but informal, and in which a balance between accountability and autonomy allowed staff and students to continually improve.

According to Kurz and Knight (2003), the tight organizational coupling as demonstrated by S1 in the area of goal consensus and shared vision, has been strongly linked to school effectiveness and student success. Cotton (2003) and Duke (2007) have also reported that teachers in high consensus schools typically share goals, values, and beliefs, which emphasize a press for achievement and high standards for student success.

**TABLE 13**  
**LPI Self / Average Observer Scores and Mean Percentile Rankings for Each of the Five Leadership Practices from Most to Least Observed for School #1**

<b>School 1</b>	<b>Enable Others</b>	<b>Model the Way</b>	<b>Challenge the Process</b>	<b>Inspire Vision</b>	<b>Encourage the Heart</b>
Self Score (P)	57	56	56	53	53
Percentile Rankings	93	93	95	84	76
	<b>Enable Others</b>	<b>Model the Way</b>	<b>Challenge the Process</b>	<b>Encourage the Heart</b>	<b>Inspire Vision</b>
Observer Scores (FG)	59.4	59.2	58.9	58.9	58.8
Percentile Rankings	99	99	98	97	97

**Elementary School #2**

The principal and staff members at S2 responded similarly throughout this study in regards to how, and to what extent the dimensions of shared leadership, shared vision, and supportive conditions impacted their school. In regards to shared leadership, the principal at S2 described the importance of modeling expected behaviors stating, “I show them I am willing to walk the talk and talk the walk.” Staff members agreed, that “She leads by example” and “sets an example for everyone.”

The principal modeled her beliefs in part by supporting and empowering staff to share in decision making and leadership within the school through well established, but traditional leadership roles. P2 expressed her dependency upon her leadership team and described how they met with teams to discuss instruction, planning, and the use of data. Reflecting on this process, staff members communicated, “It’s not any one person leading, it may be many people because everyone’s ideas are valued.” Staff members expressed, nonetheless, that “The leadership team is leveled,” and as a result, “people often times assume the leadership team is above them or gets paid more.”

Although decision making was based upon information and data shared by staff, the majority of decisions were described as centralized and made by the leadership team during their weekly meeting. Similarly, the development of others and opportunities for leadership were described as being very traditional and hierarchical. Both FG2 and P2 agreed that although skills specialists mentored and coached teachers, there was “constant training in the district and it filters down to the teachers in each school.”

An apparent strength of S2 was a united vision, which provided the impetus for decision making and student achievement. The principal described the school’s vision as

“being exemplary,” and that it required “everyone rowing in the same direction.” FG2 and P2 believed similarly that the vision has to come from the principal, but must be shared among all staff. Staff members shared that the vision was a belief that was hard to articulate, but “Without it, nothing gets done.”

The vision at S2 was perceived to be shared by all and was demonstrated in the school’s cultural values. “Students” were emphatically identified as the highest priority by P2 and FG2, noting that “student success,” “dedication to kids” and “teamwork” were normative school values. One focus group member summarized this point, stating “If it’s not in your heart then you wouldn’t come to work.” The emphasis on “students” as described by P2 and FG2 was further demonstrated through the school’s tradition of community outreach. Providing food, clothing, gifts, and making home visits, were routine examples of S2’s efforts to “help kids be successful.” As P2 stated, “Student success is our goal, our vision; it’s our mission.”

A critical piece of S2’s vision was the press for achievement. Although P2 indicated the “skills specialist live, eat, and breath in the intermediate grades,” focus group members discussed efforts to vertically align instruction across all grade levels and that the consistent “monitoring of data, use of running records, and products to help kids think at higher levels” were important aspects of ongoing assessment and planning. Both P2 and FG2 indicated that previous “low scores” brought everyone together and “forced us to create a new plan.” Staff members commented, however, that instructionally they have “... been doing the same things for the last few years.”

Organizational structures that support learning and student achievement at S2 were described as a “well oiled machine.” Focus group members indicated that

collaborative planning had been “required” during planning time in an effort to align instruction. P2 and FG2 described existing structures in traditional terms with a primary focus on student achievement. Although structures were described as conventional by P2 and FG2, both parties described the strong relational ties among the faculty, the longevity of staff, low turnover rate, and perception of a strong family atmosphere, “Where everyone helps out a lot.” Within this family unit, P2 and FG2 described conversations as generating a unity of purpose and shared understanding about student success. P2 and FG2 both cited the principal’s use of questions to engage staff in conversation about instruction, data, achievement, and the staff’s “focus on “exemplary” as critical components of S2’s success

Table 14 reveals a strong consistency among self and observer reports on the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) for S2. Although P2 perceived herself to demonstrate each of five practices more frequently than observers, all scores were reported by both P2 and FG2 at above the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile with the exception of Enabling Others to Act, which had a mean observer score of 51.5 (63<sup>rd</sup> percentile).

P2’s emphasis on communicating a vision for “exemplary” was clearly recognized by focus group members, whose mean score of 54.3 for Inspire a Shared Vision fell within the 89<sup>th</sup> percentile. Additionally, both P2 and FG2 perceived Model the Way as a strength, indicating that P2 exemplified S2’s vision by “adhering to espoused values,” “setting an example,” and “building consensus around organizational values” (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). While FG2 and P2 agreed that the five leadership practices were demonstrated to a high degree ( $\geq 70\%$ ), Enabling Others to Act was perceived less well by focus group members (63<sup>rd</sup> percentile).

Kouzes and Posner (2007) reported that focused collaboration and the development of others comprise the two essential commitments of leaders who Enable Others to Act. Historically, S2 has sustained moderately high levels of student achievement by attaining a recognized rating in each of the last three years (AEIS, 2007). The traditional structure, mindset, and focus on teaching rather than learning, however, may account for the disparity between P2 and FG2's rating of enabling others, and provides insight regarding the optimal development of organizational learning and high levels of sustained achievement.

Despite the traditional organizational setting at S2, the school's student centered values and continuous press for achievement were considered fundamental strengths by both P2 and FG2. Levine and Lezotte (1990, as cited in Creemers & Reezigt, 1998, p. 119) have indicated that although schools may use different organizational structures to assist in the attainment of goals, it is more important that "something is being done systemically and vigorously to communicate and ensure a strong academic press and a climate which promotes learning." Creemers (1997) reported similarly, that the impact of a shared vision may help explain the variance in achievement among schools.

**TABLE 14**  
**LPI Self /Average Observer Scores and Mean Percentile Rankings for Each of the Five Leadership Practices from Most to Least Observed for School #2**

<b>School 2</b>	<b>Model the Way</b>	<b>Challenge the Process</b>	<b>Enable Others</b>	<b>Encourage the Heart</b>	<b>Inspire Vision</b>
Self Score (P)	58	56	56	56	55
Percentile Rankings	98	95	89	88	91
	<b>Inspire Vision</b>	<b>Model the Way</b>	<b>Encourage the Heart</b>	<b>Enable Others</b>	<b>Challenge the Process</b>
Observer Scores (FG)	54.3	53.4	52.2	51.5	51.1
Percentile Rankings	89	85	73	63	76

### **Elementary School #3**

Staff members at Elementary School #3 reported both strong agreement and obvious discrepancies regarding the perceived impact of leadership, shared vision, and supportive conditions on organizational learning and student achievement. .

In an effort to share leadership and model expectations, the principal described herself as “collaborative” and “a servant leader.” Focus group members stated that P3’s leadership style involved a “group effort” and that she was a “good facilitator.” Although focus group members recognized P3’s ability to delegate, they commented “She had a strong hand on what you did” and that “She wanted results!” As such, the principal’s self-described efforts to “project trust” *and* “an air of authority” appeared to have a tenuous impact on the development of shared leadership among staff.

P3 indicated that her prior experience as a secondary administrator influenced her efforts to share decision making and utilize the expertise of her staff. Staff members concurred, stating that although P3 would say, “Here’s the goal, here’s what we want to do,” she empowered teams to decide how to do it. Similarly, the principal of S3 stated that she frequently “put the responsibility on them,” and that she didn’t feel “threatened by sharing the power.” Focus group members discussed, however, that P3 “left the lower grades alone” and that “different teams were treated differently.”

The press for achievement at S3 was largely developed around the goal and vision of maintaining exemplary status. Describing her vision as attainment of exemplary status, P3 commented, “We wouldn’t accept anything else.” Although FG3 recognized the “goal was exemplary,” a focus group member stated, “What we really mean by exemplary is that every child can learn – they will succeed.”



Unique to S3's vision for achievement was the description of cultural values that united the staff around a common purpose. Describing the staff's deep commitment to students, both P3 and FG3 indicated that the teachers "are the only stable factor in the kid's lives." As such, FG3 related that the "typical 7:45-3:30 day isn't enough" and "if you didn't have the values, you didn't belong here." P3 described the school's values in terms of a "mission," a "ministry" and a feeling of "excellence that permeates the building."

Supportive conditions that facilitated the collaboration of staff at S3 were centered around a focus on students and strong cohesive relationships. Traditional organizational structures included weekly team meetings, a core leadership team that met weekly, and monthly benchmark meetings to analyze student progress and instruction in the intermediate grades. While FG3 stated that the principal strategically developed relationships "with those who could help," the sense of community among teacher members was characterized by strong levels of trust, the sharing of resources and knowledge, a mutual concern for the welfare of others, high levels of support, and cooperative relationships. Focus group members shared that collaborative relationships among staff facilitated meaningful dialogue about students, instructional strategies, and cross-grade level efforts to individualize instruction, adopt TAKS buddies, and provide encouragement.

LPI scores as reflected in Table 15, reflect the consistent dissimilarities reported among FG3 and P3. From the principal's perspective, self-reports indicate that Modeling the Way and Inspiring a Shared Vision fell in the high range, both at the 77<sup>th</sup> percentile. To the contrary, observer reports indicate a mean score of 45.6 (42<sup>nd</sup> percentile) for

Model the Way and 48.6 (67<sup>th</sup> percentile) for Inspire a Shared Vision. Although FG3 perceived the principal as a moderately effective visionary, they perceived her to demonstrate the practice of Model the Way less effectively. A similar pattern emerged for the practice of Encourage the Heart, as self-reports for P3 fell in the 87<sup>th</sup> percentile, while focus group members perceived the principal to Encourage the Heart at only a moderate level (51<sup>st</sup> percentile).

Unique to S3, however, was the continued discrepancy in the perceived effectiveness of the principal to Challenge the Process and Enable Others to Act. In this case, an inverse relationship was demonstrated as P3 perceived herself to Challenge the Process at a low level (26<sup>th</sup> percentile), while focus group members reported a mean score of 46.8, placing the principal in the 52<sup>nd</sup> percentile. Likewise, FG3 considered the principal to practice the behavior of enabling others at a low level (25<sup>th</sup> percentile), while P3 perceived herself as enabling others at a moderately high degree with a self-reported score of 52 (65<sup>th</sup> percentile).

The comparison of case study data and LPI results for S3 provides evidence that a shared vision and strong cultural values positively impact student learning and staff collaboration (Huffman, 2003). Secondly, while the presence of organizational structure does not guarantee effective collaboration, the absence of collaborative relationships does diminish the effect of organizational structures (Hipp & Huffman, 2002; Kruse et al., 1998; Senge, 1990). S3 demonstrated a traditional framework of leadership and reported conflicting accounts of principal effectiveness. The influence of human supports such as a shared vision and strong cultural values - including the press for achievement, however,

suggested a positive relationship to the ability of staff to learn together and sustain high levels of student achievement when united by a common purpose.

**TABLE 15**  
**LPI Self /Average Observer Scores and Mean Percentile Rankings for Each of the Five Leadership Practices from Most to Least Observed for School #3**

<b>School 3</b>	<b>Encourage the Heart</b>	<b>Model the Way</b>	<b>Enable Others</b>	<b>Inspire Vision</b>	<b>Challenge the Process</b>
Self Score (P)	56	52	52	51	41
Percentile Rankings	87	77	65	77	26
	<b>Inspire Vision</b>	<b>Encourage the Heart</b>	<b>Challenge the Process</b>	<b>Model the Way</b>	<b>Enable Others</b>
Observer Scores (FG)	48.6	47.8	46.8	45.6	45.2
Percentile Rankings	67	51	52	42	25

#### **Elementary School #4**

The principal and staff members at Elementary School #4 described in amiable terms the relationship between the essential dimensions of learning communities and sustained student achievement. In an effort to share and develop leadership, the principal at S4 communicated a strong emphasis on “building relationships and communication.” He summarized his beliefs by indicating it was through the development of relationships that goals could be accomplished. Staff members expressed an admiration for his humility, supportive nature, and his willingness to acknowledge he “didn’t have all the answers.”

By modeling supportive behaviors, both focus group members and the principal discussed the importance of listening, and allowing “everyone to make decisions.”

Efforts to empower others and develop the capacity of staff members were acknowledged, but confined to traditional roles of leadership, including responsibility for district initiatives, school-based programs or committees, and instructional coaching or team leader positions. The principal indicated that instructional coaches were the “campus leaders” and that teachers “are leaders in their classrooms.” Focus group members communicated that “people can get involved whenever they want to” and that a “broad base of shared values allowed more people to get involved.”

The prevailing mentality at S4 was very accepting. Focus group members expressed that they were trusted to make decisions, but were “accountable for their outcomes”. Lacking a specific decision making structure or process, FG4 reported that decisions were sometimes “made on the fly” and without the input of the “people actually affected or involved.” Focus group members indicated that although decision making was shared and the principal “constantly” sought the input of staff, most decisions were limited to the “day-to-day problems” of the school.

Focus group members agreed with the principal that a primary purpose of decision making was to not only empower others, but to develop the capacity of staff. P4 commented, “One thing we need to do is develop leadership capacity. You have to ask, what will happen when you leave?” Focus group members agreed with this and identified the interview process, instructional coaching, induction year programs, and using the expertise of others as means by which capacity was developed.

Although identified as the guiding force behind most decisions, focus group members concurred that the school’s vision was vague. Conversely, the principal stated, it was “somewhat fuzzy.” As such, FG4 described the school’s vision as “the success of

the students and the shared responsibility of seeing that happen.” Elaborating further, however, focus group members described their school’s vision as “creating character and problem solvers,” “developing relationships,” “improved test scores,” and a “quality education for all students.” P4 indicated that the vision “... is where we want to be and what I want to become” and that it was mostly about “relationships.” Although P4 and focus group members recognized the school’s changing demographics, they indicated the vision had “remained the same for years.”

Critical to the school’s shared vision, both the principal and focus group members indicated that cultural values reflected a similar emphasis on relationships. Making sure children were treated fairly, “that connections were made with kids,” the “idea of family,” and “innovation and risk taking” were cited as espoused community values. In like fashion, both the principal and focus group members described the school’s press for achievement in broad generic terms citing the use of “effective practices,” “teaching kids instead of curriculum,” “cooperative learning,” and various instructional interventions as the focus of their efforts.

Both the principal and focus group members described the school’s organization in terms of a traditional, yet loosely structured system. Aside from weekly team meetings, and occasional data talks regarding district benchmarks, a traditional organizational framework provided the vehicle for collaboration. Both P4 and focus group members indicated the regularity of informal conversations and student related discussions. Systemically, however, both P4 and FG4 described decisions, processes, and grade level plans as frequently isolated and different from team to team, depending on the need.

LPI results for Elementary School #4 reflect a direct alignment of principal self-report and mean observer report scores for all five of the leadership practices. As indicated in Table 16, both P4 and FG4 reported Encouraging the Heart as the practice most frequently demonstrated with scores of 51 and 48.3 respectively, followed by Enable Others to Act, Challenge the Process, Model the Way, and Inspire a Shared Vision.

Although mean observer scores of 46.8 and a principal self report of 50, identified Enable Others to Act as the second most practiced behavior, the mean observer score of 46.8 fell at the 33<sup>rd</sup> percentile, ranking it the lowest among all five leadership practices as perceived by FG4. By contrast, P4's self-report score of 50 for Enable Others to Act fell at the 53<sup>rd</sup> percentile, second only to Encourage the Heart, reported at the 67<sup>th</sup> percentile.

LPI data provided in Table 16, as well as case study data, suggests a strong familiarity and openness among staff members at S4. The ranking of LPI self-report and mean observer scores further demonstrated this relationship in that both P4 and FG4 identified the same sequence of perceived leadership practices from greatest to least. As demonstrated, the strong relational focus at S4 can have a positive effect on achievement and collaboration. Without a clear unifying vision, however, efforts to collaborate often become fragmented, lacking the consistency and coherence of shared values (Collins, 2001; Hoyle, 2007). When groups are guided by shared values as opposed to many individual values, collaboration becomes focused, processes are more easily aligned, and a cohesiveness of purpose directs the organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). This finding adds weight to the notion that optimal learning and achievement results from a focus on both people *and* a clear collective purpose (Brown, 2004; Collins, 2001).

As indicated in Table 16 and the case study data, the importance of developing a strong organizational culture established upon collective values, a clear unified vision, and opportunities to collaborate in conjunction with those beliefs, suggest a powerful influence on the ability to develop professional community and create high levels of sustained academic achievement.

**TABLE 16**  
**LPI Self /Average Observer Scores and Mean Percentile Rankings for Each of the Five Leadership Practices from Most to Least Observed for School #4**

<b>School 4</b>	<b>Encourage the Heart</b>	<b>Enable Others</b>	<b>Challenge the Process</b>	<b>Model the Way</b>	<b>Inspire Vision</b>
Self Score (P)	51	50	46	43	41
Percentile Rankings	67	53	48	28	35
	<b>Encourage the Heart</b>	<b>Enable Others</b>	<b>Challenge the Process</b>	<b>Model the Way</b>	<b>Inspire Vision</b>
Observer Scores (FG)	48.3	46.8	45.6	44.4	43.2
Percentile Rankings	55	33	46	35	46

### **Elementary School #5**

Due to the opening of several new schools, Elementary School #5 had experienced three consecutive years of extensive turnover. The principal and focus group members of S5 demonstrated, nonetheless, a considerable consistency concerning the role of share leadership, shared vision, and supportive conditions with regards to student achievement and organizational learning.

As the lead instructional leader, the principal at S5 considered shared leadership to be a primary catalyst in school improvement and had developed a coherent vision for

instructional improvement. The principal at S5 commented, “The way we model things allows others to step up to the plate and take the lead.” Focus group members commented that although this had been an area of growth for their principal, she trusted others to assume leadership roles and “allowed leadership to happen.”

Staff members at S5 were empowered through a traditional organizational framework that included a core leadership team consisting of administrators, counselors and instructional specialists. Grade level team leaders and classroom teachers comprised the remaining portion of what focus group members described as a “designed hierarchy.”

Through efforts to empower staff, both P5 and FG5 agreed that people were involved in decision making. Focus group members indicated that they were “empowered to correct deficiencies” and determine how to resolve problems. An example of this included a campus-wide evaluation of math instruction and alignment of instructional strategies, as well as a campus-wide effort to strengthen cohesiveness, which was identified by P5 and FG5 as an area of weakness.

At S5, the school’s vision provided the foundation for the majority of improvement efforts. As the principal expressed, “Vision is the purpose of everything you are doing, and that at [S5] our vision is to be an exemplary school.” Similarly, focus group members unanimously identified the goal of becoming an exemplary campus as their primary vision. FG and P5 concurred, however, that exemplary also implied “components of excellence, like support, staff development, interventions” and a “commitment to the whole child.”

Aside from exemplary instruction, the staff at S5 indicated that teachers must “love what they are doing,” “must be dedicated and willing to give of themselves,” and



that “working together, family, and a commitment to children” were essential cultural values. One focus group member stated, “We are professionals,” and that the concept of continuous improvement and the press for achievement comprised the focal point of the school’s vision.

Conditions allowing for the development of community and student achievement at S5 were viewed as somewhat traditional and “hierarchical” by focus group members. Although relationships and a common vision were recognized as strengths by P5 and focus group members alike, supporting structures were considered at times to be somewhat fragmented. P5 indicated that using time productively was a challenge and that teachers were tired. Cohesiveness had also been reported to be a challenge by both P5 and FG5, resulting in part from a 75% turn over in staff over the last three years.

Relationships at S5 were considered by the principal and focus group members as a critical component of improvement and allowed the “ability to say what needs to be said.” Cooperation was also cited as a common strength by P5 and FG5. As such, formal and informal conversations among staff members frequently addressed the needs of students. Teachers at S5 were “empowered to express complaints,” to “disagree,” and to question existing practices in an effort to improve.

LPI data as reflected in Table 17, clearly demonstrates that observers routinely scored their principal’s performance more highly than the principal did of herself. Three of the five leadership practices were scored in the high range as reported by focus group members with mean observer scores of 54 (88<sup>th</sup> percentile) for Inspires a Shared Vision, 52.8 (71<sup>st</sup> percentile) for enables others, and 51.4 (74<sup>th</sup> percentile) for Model the Way.

Compared to LPI norms as established by Kouzes and Posner (2002), P5 perceived herself slightly more effective at enabling others than most leaders, with a self-report score of 51; compared to the LPI norm of 48.7. Although observers perceived P5 to Challenge the Process to a lesser degree than the other LPI practices, Challenge the Process was perceived as the second most practiced behavior by P5, with a self report score of 49 (66<sup>th</sup> percentile).

As a developing learning community, P5 discussed her school's desire to become an effective learning organization, but shared how staff cohesiveness had been a challenge. Although both FG5 and P5 believed that staff members were involved and shared a common vision, LPI and case study data suggest that continued clarification and alignment of values with organizational structures may help develop conditions for learning and achievement. As indicated in Table 17, both observer reports and the principal self report indicated that Inspiring a Shared Vision and Enabling Others to Act were demonstrated at moderately high levels. When school members share a compelling vision, are empowered to work collaboratively, and are provided opportunities to practice together, organizational learning can result in sustained student achievement (DuFour et al., 2004; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Schmoker, 2006; Valentine et al., 2004).

**TABLE 17**  
**LPI Self /Average Observer Scores and Mean Percentile Rankings for Each of the Five Leadership Practices from Most to Least Observed for School #5**

<b>School 5</b>	<b>Enable Others</b>	<b>Challenge the Process</b>	<b>Inspire Vision</b>	<b>Model the Way</b>	<b>Encourage the Heart</b>
Self Score (P)	51	49	48	47	42
Percentile Rankings	59	66	65	49	27
	<b>Inspire Vision</b>	<b>Enable Others</b>	<b>Model the Way</b>	<b>Encourage the Heart</b>	<b>Challenge the Process</b>
Observer Scores (FG)	54	52.8	51.4	51.3	49.2
Percentile Rankings	88	71	74	68	67

### **Elementary School #6**

As a low sustainability school, Elementary School #6 was a school that despite efforts to improve, was involved in a District curriculum audit and ongoing intervention plan. In spite of the obvious frustrations, however, there remained an underlying consensus among staff in terms of the relationship between leadership, shared vision, supportive conditions, and their impact on learning and achievement. As such, obvious differences were communicated not in terms of meaning, but how these organizational factors were or were not applied throughout the school.

The principal of S6 held a deep conviction regarding the professionalism of staff. Her efforts to model support reflected this belief in regards to the high levels of autonomy afforded staff members. P6 Indicated that shared leadership “was a process where you should be able to influence others to accomplish goals.” Focus group members agreed, but identified two conflicting views; “She did everything herself ... because she didn’t delegate,” and another, “She trusted people to step up, but they didn’t.”

Focus group members had a high regard for their principal and acknowledged, “She applied what she said by doing the things she thought you should do.” According to focus group members, however, “A failure to provide feedback and hold others accountable” for not following through proved counterproductive.

Attempting to empower staff members, P6 indicated that curriculum planning meetings, after school planning, and collaboration with a local university, provided opportunities for involvement and professional growth. She also described how the elimination of the traditional team leader position was intended to “encourage collaboration and involvement” in hopes that staff members would assume responsibility. Reflecting on the results of this decision, focus group members expressed that leadership roles had been diminished and although “she felt we were empowered – and in theory we were; few people took the initiative.”

Describing the school’s framework for leadership, the principal shared that she attempted to train instructional leaders how to resolve issues with teams, and then she would allow them to “execute their plans.” When combined with the tendency to confine decision making to a small group of individuals, however, focus group members indicated that isolation among staff members only increased, having a negative affect on the school. The principal’s efforts to develop capacity among staff members and empower teachers, according to FG6, included her belief that staff members with proper support, “could figure things out for themselves.” Despite the efforts of P6, focus group members acknowledged that the “ideas and knowledge were there, but the application and professionalism among staff members was not.”

Describing the school's culture, focus group members discussed the importance of a shared vision, stating "unless you have a common vision to follow, you won't be cohesive." Ironically, the principal when asked what vision implied to her, replied, "Cohesiveness." Consequently, focus group members agreed that the vision at S6 remained vague, and that the only people who shared the vision, were members of the committee which wrote it.

Underlying the attempts to create a collaborative culture, focus group members described a disparity between school goals and the vision because the staff had never clarified their values. Changing demographics, the required District curriculum audit, and pressures to address accountability ratings had angered staff. Additionally, a campus survey had revealed that "a majority of teachers didn't believe their students could be successful." Although the principal and FG6 agreed that cooperation and kids were valued, there was "lots of isolation," "things were being done, but not together," and "teachers thought the kids were too difficult."

Focus group members concurred that an "environment had been set up where you could do your job, but nobody followed through." Both the principal and FG6 indicated that organizational structures were in place but a lack of cohesive relationships prevented their effectiveness. FG6 identified the "lack of feedback," "a failure to hold people accountable and confront people who weren't engaged," and a tendency to "give in to the pressure from teachers," as reasons for the fragmented environment.

Table 18 provides insight into the culture at S6, and revealed that although observers reported P6 to have demonstrated the five practices at a moderate and high level, a lack of cohesiveness among the staff hindered improvement efforts. As indicated

in Table 18, both the mean score of observers (54.7) and the principal's self report score of 53, show that P6 enabled others to a high degree, with a self report ranking at the 72<sup>nd</sup> percentile and an observer mean score ranking at the 83<sup>rd</sup><sup>th</sup> percentile. The observers' mean score of 50.3 (71<sup>st</sup> percentile) for Challenge the Process, suggests that focus group members perceived P6 to practice this behavior to a high degree as she sought to improve existing conditions. Further analysis of both the case study data and LPI scores, suggested that although the principal and focus group members at S6 enjoyed a high degree of autonomy and were encouraged to develop professionally, the development of shared values, a cohesive vision, accountability measures, and provisions for constructive feedback, were not adequately realized.

Effective leaders according to Kouzes and Posner (2007) empower others and challenge the status quo. Strong communities of learners, however, are defined in part by their collective vision for improvement, shared values which guide the behaviors of staff (Huffman, 2003), and the leader's assurance that espoused values are adhered to (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

**TABLE 18**  
**LPI Self / Average Observer Scores and Mean Percentile Rankings for Each of the Five Leadership Practices from Most to Least Observed for School # 6**

<b>School 6</b>	<b>Enable Others</b>	<b>Challenge the Process</b>	<b>Encourage the Heart</b>	<b>Inspire Vision</b>	<b>Model the Way</b>
Self Score (P)	53	48	43	41	40
Percentile Rankings	72	60	30	34	16
	<b>Enable Others</b>	<b>Challenge the Process</b>	<b>Encourage the Heart</b>	<b>Model the Way</b>	<b>Inspire Vision</b>
Observer Scores (FG)	54.7	50.3	48.8	48.8	45.7
Percentile Rankings	83	71	57	58	54

*Research Question #3*

In what ways do the behaviors and practices of principals distinguish themselves between schools which have and have not demonstrated sustained academic achievement?

The findings for question three provided an interpretation of the qualitative and quantitative data and be presented as follows: (1) a analysis of LPI data concerning the five leadership practices of principals in high and low sustainability schools, (2) a discussion of qualitative data highlighting the practices of principals in high sustainability schools, and (3) a discussion of the relationship between LPI practices and case study data that differentiates between the leadership practices of principals in high and low sustainability schools.

Schools which have and have not sustained academic achievement for three consecutive years have been identified through the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) 2004-2006 Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS). As indicated in Table 19, schools which have sustained academic achievement are referred to as S1, S2, and S3. Schools which have not sustained academic achievement are referred to as schools S4, S5, and S6. Identification of low and high sustainability schools has been based upon the following accountability ratings.

**TABLE 19**  
**TAKS Achievement by School and Year as Indicated in the State AEIS Report for**  
**the Years 2004-2006**

<b>Case Study Schools</b>	<b>TAKS Achievement</b>		
	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
S1	Exem.	Exem.	Exem.
S2	Rec.	Rec.	Rec.
S3	Exem.	Exem.	Rec.
S4	Rec.	Rec.	AA
S5	AA	AA	Reg.
S6	AA	AA	AA

\* Exemplary (Exem.), Recognized (Rec.), Academically Acceptable (AA)

#### **ANALYSIS OF LPI DATA: HIGH AND LOW SUSTAINABILITY SCHOOLS**

The distribution of principal self report scores as reported in Table 20 indicates that principals in high sustainability schools (HSS) perceived themselves to demonstrate the LPI practices at a high level 86.6% of the time. The mean self-rankings of principals from HSS is considerably stronger than the perceptions of principals from low sustainability schools (LSS) who considered themselves to practice LPI behaviors at a high level only 6.7% of the time. Conversely, principals in LSS perceived themselves to moderately demonstrate the LPI practices 73.3% of the time and at a low level 20% of the time. Principals in HSS by comparison, perceived themselves as moderately effective and ineffective only 6.7% of the time respectively.

Similarly, focus group (FG) members from HSS reported their principals to demonstrate the LPI practices at a high level 60% of the time, moderately 33.3% of the time, and ineffectively only 6.7% of the time. Demonstrating a near inverse relationship, FG members from LSS schools perceived their principals as demonstrating the LPI



practices at a high level only 33.3% of the time and moderately 66.7% of the time. These findings are consistent with the findings of Kouzes and Posner (2002) who have reported that the LPI discriminates between high and low performing leaders in various organizations and schools.

**TABLE 20**  
**Distribution of the Combined Mean Principal Self-Reports and Observer Report Rankings for the Five Leadership Practices by School Group**

Percentile Ranking		Mean Principal Self Report Rankings		Mean Observer Report Rankings	
		HSS	LSS	HSS	LSS
High	$\geq 70\%$	86.6	6.7	60.0	33.3
Moderate	30-69%	6.7	73.3	33.3	66.7
Low	$\leq 30\%$	6.7	20.0	6.7	0

\* High Sustainability Schools (HSS), Low Sustainability Schools (LSS)

Table 21 provides the individual and combined self report and observer report scores and percentile rankings for each of the five leadership practices by school group (HSS/LSS). Principals of HSS perceived themselves to demonstrate the five LPI practices at a high level 86.6% of the time. Two of the HSS principals (P1, P2) reported themselves to practice each of the five leadership practices at a high level ( $\geq 70\%$ ). P3, however, reported herself to demonstrate only three practices at a high level, Enable Others to Act at a moderate level (65<sup>th</sup> percentile), and Challenge the Process at a low level with a self report score of 41 (26<sup>th</sup> percentile). The combined self report scores of P1, P2 and P3, resulted in a mean group score ranking above the 70th percentile for each of the five leadership practices. Focus group members of HSS schools reported similarly, scoring four of the five leadership practices above the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile, with the exception

of Enable Others to Act, which had a mean observer group score of 52.03 (65<sup>th</sup> percentile).

The most notable difference between HSS and LSS schools (Table 21) is the near inverse relationship in the distribution of mean percentile rankings among principals and focus group members. Mean principal self report scores between HSS and LSS groups for Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, and Encourage the Heart reflect a range in scores of 12, 9.7, and 9.7 points respectively, resulting in differences in percentile rankings of 62%, 38%, and 44%. Although smaller, the range of mean observer report scores between HSS and LSS (Enable, 0.6; Encourage, 3.6; Challenge, 3.9; Model, 4.5; Inspire, 6.3) suggest a similar pattern, revealing a difference in percentile rankings of 27% for Model the Way, and 21% for Inspire a Shared Vision.

**TABLE 21**  
**LPI Scores and Mean Percentile Rankings by School Group for Each**  
**of the Five Leadership Practices**

<b>High Sustainability Schools</b>										
Schools	<b>Modeling</b>		<b>Inspiring</b>		<b>Challenge</b>		<b>Enabling</b>		<b>Encourage</b>	
	P	FG	P	FG	P	FG	P	FG	P	FG
School 1	56	59.2	53	58.8	56	58.9	57	59.4	53	58.9
School 2	58	53.4	55	54.3	56	51.1	56	51.5	56	52.2
School 3	52	45.6	51	48.6	41	46.8	52	45.2	56	47.8
Mean Score	55.3	52.7	53	53.9	51	52.3	55	52	55	53
Percentile	91	82	84	84	75	83	84	65	85	77
<b>Low Sustainability Schools</b>										
School 4	43	44.4	41	43.2	46	45.6	50	46.8	51	48.3
School 5	47	51.4	48	54	49	49.2	51	52.8	42	51.3
School 6	40	48.8	41	45.7	48	50.3	53	54.7	43	48.8
Mean Score	43.3	48.2	43.3	47.6	47.6	48.4	51.3	51.4	45.3	49.4
Percentile	29	55	46	63	57	63	60	60	41	61

\* Principal (P), Focus Group (FG)

Each of the 30 LPI statements are scored on a scale from 1 to 10, which represents the frequency of perceived leadership behaviors as reported by leaders and their constituents. Further analysis of the statements, six for each of the five LPI practices, provides insight into the specific actions or behaviors which characterize the principal's leadership tendencies as demonstrated and perceived at each campus.

Analysis of LPI statements and mean score rankings among self and observer reports suggest significant differences between the perceived leadership behaviors of principals from high and low sustainability schools, specifically in regards to Model the Way and Inspire a Shared Vision.

As indicated in Table 22 (see also Table 21), LPI findings reveal that principals of LSS perceive themselves to Model the Way less effectively as demonstrated by the mean self report score of 43.3 (28<sup>th</sup> percentile). FG members of LSS considered Model the Way as the fourth least observed practice, scoring it 27% lower than their counterparts from HSS, with a mean observer score of 48.2 (55<sup>th</sup> percentile). By contrast, principals and focus group members from HSS perceived Model the Way as a frequently practiced behavior reporting a mean self-report score for principals of 55.3 (91<sup>st</sup> percentile) and a mean FG score of 52.7 (82<sup>nd</sup> percentile).

In similar fashion, principals and focus group members from LSS reported the practice of Inspiring a Shared Vision as the least observed behavior with a mean self-report of 43.3 (46<sup>th</sup> percentile) and mean observer score of 47.6 (63<sup>rd</sup> percentile). In an opposing point of view, FG members of HSS reported Inspire a Shared Vision as the most frequently demonstrated practice with a mean observer score of 53.9 (87<sup>th</sup> percentile). Principals of HSS reported Inspire a Shared Vision as the fourth least

practiced behavior. The mean self-report score of 53 (Inspire a Shared Vision), however, exceeded the scores and percentile rankings of all five LPI practices as reported among principals and focus group members of low sustainability schools (LSS).

Principals and FG members of LSS perceived their leaders to Model the Way and Inspire a Shared Vision significantly less frequently than their counterparts from HSS, but reported enable others as the most observed practice with mean self report and observer score of 51.3 and 51.4 (60<sup>th</sup> percentile) respectively. FG members of HSS perceived enable others as the least practiced behavior among principals, but scored it slightly higher than LSS with a reported mean observer score of 52 (65<sup>th</sup> percentile).

Although both HSS and LSS groups reported similar scores for Enable Others to Act, LSS mean scores clearly identify enable others as the most frequently observed behavior among principals and focus group members. By contrast, similar scores among observers in HSS rank Enable Others to Act as the least frequently observed behavior. This finding suggests that although the practice of enabling others was an important cultural aspect of among HSS, it was not the most significant of leadership behaviors in terms of high performance.

As indicated in Table 22, Enable Others to Act is identified by LSS as the most frequently observed practice among both principals and focus group members. Enable others according to Kouzes and Posner (2007), includes the specific skills of developing cooperative relationships, listening to diverse points of view, treating others with dignity and respect, supporting other's decisions, giving choices, and ensuring the growth of others. Although members of LSS emphasized a consistent effort to share leadership and decision making, LPI results indicate these efforts lacked the consistency, coherence, and

clarity of clearly established group values, consistently modeled behaviors, and the benefit of a clear collective vision to guide both leading and learning among LSS schools.

This finding is substantiated by the Vaill's (1989) research of high performing systems. Highlighting the importance of finding and promoting purpose, Vaill (1989) defined this process as the "continuous stream of actions by an organization's formal leadership which has the affect of inducing clarity, consensus and commitment regarding the organization's basic purposes." Vaill (1989) continued that members of high performing organizations "know why they exist and what they are trying to do" and that "Members have pictures in their head which are strikingly congruent" (p. 86).

**TABLE 22**  
**Principal Leadership Practices in High and Low Sustainability Schools Compared by Group and Ranked from Most to Least Observed**

<b>HSS Principal Mean Score Rankings</b>	<b>LSS Principal Mean Score Rankings</b>	<b>HSS Focus Group Mean Score Rankings</b>	<b>LSS Focus Group Mean Score Rankings</b>
Model the Way 55.3	Enable Others to Act 51.3	Inspire a Shared Vision 53.9	Enable Others to Act 51.4
Enable Others to Act 55	Challenge the Process 47.6	Encourage the Heart 53	Encourage the Heart 49.4
Encourage the Heart 55	Encourage the Heart 45.3	Model the Way 52.7	Challenge the Process 48.4
Inspire a Shared Vision 53	Inspire a Shared Vision 43.3	Challenge the Process 52.3	Model the Way 48.2
Challenge the Process 51	Model the Way 43.3	Enable Others to Act 52	Inspire a Shared Vision 47.6

\* High Sustainability School (HSS), Low Sustainability School (LSS)

## **DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF HIGH SUSTAINABILITY SCHOOLS**

The following paragraphs provide a discussion of the distinguishing features of high sustainability schools in terms of the eleven themes that emerged from the case study data. Huffman and Hipp (2000) have indicated that the distinguishing difference among effective and ineffective learning communities is found in the “emerging integration of shared leadership, shared vision, and a supportive school culture” (p. 10). As evidenced in the case study data, this “emerging integration” was supported through an alignment of structural and human conditions, resulting in what Fullan (2001a) describes as coherence – “the extent to which the school’s programs for students and staff are coordinated, focused on learning goals, and sustained over a period of time” (p. 64).

### **Shared Leadership**

Bryk et al. (1998) indicated that although principal leadership is a key factor in improving schools, it is the collective impact of shared leadership and resources that facilitates improvement. In higher achieving schools, the concept of shared leadership was evidenced in the collaborative relationships and cohesive efforts of staff to increase learning and achievement among all students (Liebman et al., 2005; Stropkaj, 2002; Valentine et al., 2004).

### *Modeled Support*

This aspect of shared leadership concerns the behaviors of principals that consistently exemplified the espoused values of the organization. Staff members in these schools routinely indicated that their principals modeled expectations, held others

accountable for those expectations, and supported staff members' efforts to fulfill expectations by providing collaborative work structures and timely feedback (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). The consistent modeling of espoused values developed a sense of consistency among these faculties that fostered trust and a sense of collective credibility, which in turn, motivated staff to towards the accomplishment of group goals.

### *Opportunities for Empowerment*

In HSS the efforts of principals to model collaboration and team learning was deliberate, strategic, and reflected in the schools' organizational structures. Consistent with the research of Darling-Hammond (1997), the collaborative efforts of staff fostered a shared responsibility for leading and student learning. By modeling values that encouraged shared responsibility and expecting that espoused values were adhered to, principals in HSS were able to develop flatter organizational structures that distributed leadership among staff (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Leadership as a result, was less hierarchical, provided numerous opportunities for formal and informal sharing, and encouraged autonomous decision making.

Reflecting the findings of Eaker et al. (2002, p. 22), focus group members and principals alike in HSS considered leadership to be "intertwined" and "involving everyone." The shared responsibility for leading and learning espoused by principals and staff members alike in HSS reflected a consistency of purpose and a coherence of values centered on student learning. This finding also mirrors the implications for practice among highly successful middle schools as reported by Valentine et al. (2004, p. 113).

### *Shared Decision Making*

Principals in HSS explicitly communicated that decision making was based upon their school's vision for improvement. Consequently, the nature and quality of decisions appeared proportionate to the clarity and collective acceptance of the school's vision. The emphatic alignment of decision making to the school's vision created a consistency of purpose and shared understanding in HSS. Resulting from the shared understandings among staff (Senge, 1990), flatter organizational structures became possible, which in turn, allowed broader decision making power among staff (Hoyle, 2007; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

This finding is consistent with the research of Bryk et al. (1998), who reported that principals in restructuring and strong democratic schools empowered staff to share in decision making rather than consolidate power among an isolated group. Because principals in HSS instituted a less traditional approach to decision making, increased collaboration, participation, and influence among staff was perceived to perpetuate the process of collective sharing and learning.

Compared to LSS, shared decision making in HSS resulted in a greater openness to suggestions, a freedom to make decisions and take risks, the ability to disagree and express points of view, and the creation of relational trust. An especially significant finding, however, was the clear alignment between vision and decision making in high sustainability schools. Similar to McLaughlin and Talbert's (2006) description of learning communities, decision making in HSS was routinely based upon the community's shared values, was driven by data, impacted learning and classroom instruction, and occurred informally throughout the buildings at various times and places.



*Development of Others*

In high sustainability schools the development of others was perceived more as a normative expectation than a specific strategic effort. In HSS, flatter organizational frameworks created the perception that capacity developed naturally through collaborative processes and high expectations for involvement. Subsequently, the organizational frameworks in HSS were more distributive, somewhat less hierarchical than in LSS schools, and generated more opportunities for the development of capacity. This observation supports the research of Sergiovanni (1992), who wrote that principals in effective schools serve as “leaders of leaders, who work hard to build the capacity of others, so that direct leadership will not longer be needed” (p. 123).

In HSS, principals and focus group members indicated that the development of others was a product of the school’s vision for improvement. Nearly all case study principals expressed a desire to develop others, but leaders in HSS appeared more adept at communicating a genuine belief in others, establishing relational trust, and developing collaborative relationships. By providing strong human supports and inclusive practices, principals in HSS were frequently more effective at both sharing and developing leadership among staff.

Similar to the findings of Newmann et al. (2000), the ability of HSS to develop capacity among staff had a positive impact on student achievement, the collective development of teacher’s knowledge and skills, and the strengthening of professional community. In HSS, the cultural expectations regarding shared responsibility deepened the staff’s overall capacity to lead and learn, as well as the capacity of specific individuals to occupy future leadership positions.

## **Shared Vision**

Collins (2001) indicated that effective organizations “simplify a complex world into a single organizing idea ... that unifies and guides everything” (p. 91). As effective leaders, principals in high sustainability schools were able to identify and translate important values into a concise vision for improvement. As demonstrated in these schools, the resulting visions became shared, rallied staff around a common purpose, and generated an organizational coherence that guided efforts to improve.

### *The Main Thing*

Principals in HSS demonstrated an uncompromised focus on student learning and achievement. These deeply held beliefs and convictions were communicated as values and modeled through both words and actions. By articulating and modeling espoused values, principals in high sustainability schools enlisted support, generated a shared understanding, and created a consistency of purpose (*The Main Thing*). As described by various researchers, the sense of coherence in HSS was reflected in the alignment of decisions, structural supports, staff development opportunities, student interventions, and conversations among staff (Creemers & Reezigt, 1998; Hipp & Huffman, 2003; Valentine et al., 2004). Although principals and focus group members in high sustainability schools agreed that establishing the vision was the principal’s responsibility, they concurred that the vision must be shared by everyone.

### *Cultural Values*

A distinguishing difference among LSS and HSS, was the articulation of shared cultural values that supported the school's vision for improvement. The collective understanding among staff created a normative framework of shared expectations that was modeled and reflected through collaborative practices. High sustainability schools shared a common conviction that "all students would be successful." This commitment to students was reflected in the staff's shared expectations for professional practices, teacher attitudes, and generalizations about the way things were done at each school. Through the internalization of these beliefs, staff members at each school communicated a deep conviction and purpose regarding the nature of their work (Vaill, 1989). A powerful finding in this study was the role of shared corporate values that generated deep personal change, a shared commitment, and mutually high expectations for personal and professional behavior among staff members.

### *Press for Achievement*

In HSS, the press for achievement was considered as the primary day-to-day business that principals continuously spoke about in an effort to enlist commitment among staff and to transmit the vision of student success. In HSS the press for achievement motivated the contextual framework for the development of cross grade level efforts and collaborative teams. In turn, the emergence and preservation of shared understandings and a responsibility for student learning were established as the school's primary focus. This finding is consistent with the work of Oliver, Cowan, and Pankake (2000), who indicated that despite a tendency to focus on less important matters, effective

learning communities are able to identify and focus on student learning as their primary purpose.

Unique to high sustainability schools, was the reciprocal relationship between the degree to which staff were held accountable for fulfilling expectations and the perceived credibility of the principal. In high sustainability schools, principals were perceived as highly credible, shared values were consistently modeled, and staff were held accountable for adherence to espoused values. The unrelenting focus on student achievement in HSS created an organizational coherence reflected in the alignment between shared values, goals, organizational structures, and decision making processes among staff. In HSS, the continuous emphasis on student achievement fostered the development of intentional collaborative activity and team learning that perpetuated the shared responsibility for student achievement.

### *Collaborative Change*

Principals in HSS were more adept in recognizing and managing the need for change as a means of continuous improvement. Principals in HSS were more clearly focused on the “main thing” and as a result, considered change as an opportunity for growth, saw problems as opportunities to learn, and used the context of existing cultures as springboards for meaningful improvement. This finding is supported by the work of Darling-Hammond (1996), Leithwood et al. (1999), and Hord (1997), who indicated that lasting change can only be accomplished when staff members direct their learning towards the unique needs of their school and learn how to solve problems within the context of their surroundings.

Although principals in LSS schools attempted to address change, they frequently were “stuck in tradition,” perplexed over existing problems, or had difficulties creating a coherent purpose. By contrast, principals in HSS were able to (1) effectively assess existing organizational conditions, (2) formulate coherent plans for change, (3) articulate their vision for improvement through words and actions, and (4) enlist the support of others. As such, the proactive behavior of principals and staff in HSS was evidenced as a prerequisite to positive change. Similar to the research of Senge (1990), principals in HSS recognized the need of being a learner, and consistently stated that change must be a product of others. Although the vision for improvement frequently originated with principals, members of high sustainability schools indicated that a vision for change must become the shared responsibility of everyone.

### **Supportive Conditions**

Senge (1990) indicated that although teams may possess a shared vision, learning communities are difficult to establish if intentions and structures are not aligned and mutually supportive. As stated in the literature, supportive conditions in terms of human and physical supports provide the organizational framework through which the essential components of learning communities are supported and evolve (DuFour et al., 2004; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Kruse et al., 1998; Stropkaj, 2002; Valentine et al., 2004). Although principals in high sustainability schools did not convey an intentional “systems” approach to leading as described by (Senge, 1990), they were more successful than principals in LSS at aligning human and structural supports with the fundamental beliefs and goals of their school.

### *Organizational Structures*

While efforts to align systems and intentions in LSS schools appeared fragmented, principals in HSS ensured that structural supports and processes were aligned with their vision for achievement. Subsequently, collaborative processes in HSS fostered cohesive relationships, minimized isolation among staff, and strengthened efforts to sustain student achievement. As such, grade-level and team meetings, collaborative planning sessions, the focused use of student data, and cross grade level efforts to improve learning reflected an alignment between visions and supportive conditions (Hord, 1997).

The extent to which principals in HSS engaged and involved staff members in collaborative processes further suggested a direct relationship to the overall effects of improvement efforts, and reflects the opinion of Huffman and Hipp (2003), that the collaborative efforts in learning communities to “achieve shared goals becomes focused, intentional, and urgent” (p. 79). By contrast, patterns of teacher isolation, fragmented structures and purposes, and a lack of cohesion among teams in LSS hindered efforts to improve.

Similar to Stropkaj’s (2002) findings, the extent to which principals in HSS involved others as opposed to confining involvement to small groups directly impacted the effectiveness of collaborative practices and student learning. Although most schools utilized somewhat traditional frameworks, HSS were both tightly and loosely coupled (Kurz & Knight, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2001). Ensuring a balance between autonomy and control, principals in HSS maintained a commitment to their vision, empowered others to decide and choose, and maintained both formal and informal aspects of teaming. As a

result, HSS benefited from the alignment of collaborative structures that had a consistent focus on collective sharing and learning.

### *Cohesive Relationships*

In HSS the impact of clearly defined values fostered cohesive relationships and engaged staff around a common unifying purpose. Furthermore, the effectiveness of organizational structures in HSS was commensurate to the formation of cohesive relationships (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Similar to Sergiovanni's (1992) description of learning communities, principals and focus group members in HSS consistently reported that their schools resembled families where cooperation and cohesiveness were considered important aspects of the school's culture. By contrast, staff in LSS reported that patterns of teacher isolation and a lack of cohesion among staff hindered efforts to collaborate and improve.

In HSS, cohesive relationships permeated existing work structures and enabled effective collaboration and meaningful conversation in both formal and informal settings. As such, principals in HSS frequently described the importance of the human element and the necessity of modeling behaviors which exemplified this value. Within these cohesive cultures, staff routinely described a level of relational trust which fostered both shared and autonomous decision making, honest feedback and input, freedom of choice, an openness to change, and an ethic of cooperation based upon a shared responsibility for student achievement. Louis and Kruse (1995) indicated that a prominent characteristic of learning communities is the understanding of shared values about student learning and expectations for staff and student behavior.

### *Purposeful Conversations*

Compared to their counterparts in lower achieving schools, principals in HSS engaged staff more frequently in conversations about instruction that were prompted by deliberate questions. Effective principals not only modeled this practice, but encouraged staff members to dialogue about classroom instruction, student achievement, and school conditions affecting learning.

Because principals in HSS had developed a clearer vision for improvement, they were able to refer to their vision when appealing to staff and prompting conversations about school conditions and learning. As conversations became generative in HSS (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Senge, 1990), they served to (1) develop and refine shared beliefs and expectations, (2) ensure that staff members understood the principal was both “listening and hearing what was being said,” (3) maintain a focus on instruction and learning, (4) foster a climate of caring and trust, (5) empower shared decision making, and (6) encourage dissent and make “connections for sharing.” In HSS, the fundamental benefit of generative and purposeful conversations was an uncompromised focus on student learning, which according to Hord (1997), is a fundamental concept of learning communities.

### **Campus Improvement Plans**

Although each of the six case study schools developed campus improvement plans, principals in HSS ensured that work plans were shared among staff, adhered to, and were flexible enough to reflect the changing needs of their campus. Although the procedures and processes used to monitor and adjust CIPs differed among each of the



high sustainability schools, the goal of continuous and focused improvement became a distinguishing factor between LSS and HSS.

As demonstrated in HSS, effective improvement plans were characterized by their usefulness as flexible guides for improvement rather than static, prescriptive plans for action (Schmoker, 2004). In HSS schools, the regular monitoring and adjustment of campus improvement plans encouraged continuous learning and experimentation among staff. By comparing instructional progress against identified goals, HSS were able to analyze student data to identify effective instructional practices. Through this process, a commitment to the school's vision for learning guided efforts to modify and adjust plans by creating a focus on student achievement. The pattern of collaborative sharing and decision making and the constant monitoring and adjusting of work plans, reflected each school's vision for continuous improvement.

In HSS, CIP teams met three to four times a year to review and revise their plans and indicated they would discontinue instructional practices that were ineffective. This view reflects the belief of Talbert and McLaughlin (2006) who identified the use of outdated and ineffective instructional practices as characteristics of weak teacher communities. The discipline of monitoring and adjusting CIP's in high sustainability schools not only implied the notion of continuous learning, but provided opportunities for team sharing, learning, data driven decision making, and individual reflection. While LSS discussed the need to monitor and adjust CIP's, they also described their lack of commitment towards this process, resulting in improvement plans that were perceived as static and ineffective.

## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LPI FINDINGS AND CASE STUDY DATA**

The relationship between LPI practices and case study data reveals significant differences between the leadership practices of principals in high and low sustainability schools. Specifically, this relationship suggests important differences regarding the practices of Modeling the Way, Inspiring a Shared Vision, and the subsequent impact of these practices on organizational coherence. Secondly, the perceived affects of Model the Way and Inspire a Shared Vision suggest a reciprocal effect on staff members' perceptions of Enabling Others to Act. An analysis of the LPI practices of Challenge the Way and Encourage the Heart suggested no significant differences.

### **Model the Way**

An analysis of LPI findings and case study data demonstrates a relationship between the practice of Model the Way and the development of shared leadership and shared vision. Modeling desired practice is identified as an important component of transformational leadership (Liethwood, 1994), and is referred to by Thompson (1995, as cited in DuFour et al., 2004, p. 95) as the "single most powerful mechanism for creating learning communities." Additional support for this finding is found in Table 23, which provides the percentage of case study responses by theme within the category of shared leadership and the mean LPI percentile rankings for Model the Way.

Principal self reports among HSS identified Model the Way as the most frequently practiced behavior and was considered by staff members as an important prerequisite in developing conditions for learning and leading. Kouzes and Posner (2007) reported that Model the Way involves six specific skills: (1) setting a personal example of

what's expected, (2) assuring that agreed upon values are adhered to, (3) following through on commitments and promises, (4) seeking feedback on actions affect others, (5) building consensus around organizational values, and (6) developing a clear philosophy of leadership.

According to Kouzes and Posner (2007), personal and organizational clarity begins with the leader's voice, and extends to others in the organization through the development of agreed upon values. As demonstrated in HSS, developing consensus around articulated values provided opportunities for principals and staff to effectively model espoused beliefs and support important priorities. This consistency of focus created coherence and a sense of cohesiveness among staff, helped clarify expectations, fostered trust, and ultimately resulted in the establishment of credibility; the foundation of effective leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

Comparing these findings to the case study data of LSS (S4, S5, S6), it is clear that important issues surrounding the development of shared values, personal leadership philosophies, and cohesiveness among staff, hindered efforts to create conditions leading to organizational learning and high levels of sustained student achievement. Consistent with the literature, this finding suggests that principal leadership is a primary factor in effective school improvement (Huffman, 2003; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005). Unless principals successfully find their voice by identifying and modeling personal and shared values, and develop consensus around those beliefs, it becomes difficult to sustain and build upon a clear, cohesive, and consistent purpose (Hoyle, 2007; Sergiovanni, 2001).

Table 23 suggests qualitative support of the LPI data that indicates perceived differences for Model the Way as reported among HSS and LSS. HSS spoke more frequently, more clearly, and more emphatically about the importance of cultural values, modeling expectations, holding staff accountable for expectations, and aligning opportunities for leadership and learning with those values. Although LSS communicated a strong emphasis on developing others, sharing leadership, and decision making, HSS indicated these qualities were embedded in the normative expectations of their school's culture. As such, a conviction of shared responsibility for leading and learning resulted in system-wide effects that permeated the cultures of HSS (Hipp & Huffman, 2003; Hoyle, 2007). These beliefs in turn, allowed greater staff autonomy and increased opportunities for empowerment (Eaker et al., 2002).

**TABLE 23**  
**Percentage of Case Study Responses by Themes within the Category of Shared Leadership and Mean LPI Percentile Rankings for Model the Way**

Schools	<b>Shared Leadership</b>				<b>Model the Way</b>	
	<b>Modeled Support</b>	<b>Oppor for Empower.</b>	<b>Shared D. Making</b>	<b>Develop. Others</b>	<b>(LPI Percentile)</b>	
					(P)	(FG)
S1	30.9	30.9	22.3	15.9	93	99
S2	29.4	41.2	18.8	10.6	98	85
S3	48	21.3	25.4	5.3	77	42
<b>HSS</b>	<b>35.4</b>	<b>31.5</b>	22.1	11	<b>91</b>	<b>82</b>
S4	20.6	26.8	41.3	11.3	28	34
S5	40	15.2	28.6	16.2	48	71
S6	34	25.8	22.3	17.9	16	54
<b>LSS</b>	31.8	22.7	<b>30.2</b>	<b>15.3</b>	29	55

\* Principal (P), Focus Group (FG)

In general, HSS communities were perceived to be less hierarchical than low sustainability schools. The flatter organizational cultures evidenced in HSS communities allowed for an increased distribution of leadership, informal collaboration, and autonomous decision making (Blankstein, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Hipp & Huffman, 2003). Because principals in HSS had clearly defined and articulated their beliefs, they were also perceived to more frequently model agreed upon values. Conversations and dialogue among staff members reflected these beliefs, resulting in a shared understanding and responsibility for leading and learning (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Mitchell et al., 1996). In HSS communities, opportunities for leadership were embedded within the normative school culture. Staff members were not only expected to be involved, but were held accountable for their participation. The alignment between school visions, decision making processes, and organizational structures in HSS enhanced collaboration and positively impacted the ability to learn and sustain high levels of student achievement.

### **Inspire a Shared Vision**

Development of a shared vision was described by each of the six case study schools in terms of identified beliefs and how these beliefs served to accomplish their schools' picture of an envisioned future. How principals developed, interpreted, and utilized their visions, however, differed widely between high sustainability and low sustainability schools.

Table 24 provides the frequency of participants' responses in regards to the four case study themes (The Main Thing, Cultural Values, Press for Achievement,

Collaborative Change) that emerged from within the category of Inspire a Shared Vision. These comparisons suggests a significant relationship to LPI findings (Table 24) that further differentiates between the leadership practices of principals in high and low sustainability schools.

Hoyle (2007) and Kouzes and Posner (2007) believed that inspiring a shared vision involves not only the act of envisioning the future, but enlistment of others in that vision. An analysis of case study responses within the category of Inspire a Shared Vision (Table 24) reveals that LSS schools provided a greater percentage of responses than did HSS schools in terms of describing their vision for the future (The Main Thing). HSS by contrast, provided a greater percentage of responses in terms of how cultural values (31.4%) and the press for achievement (23.3%) shaped and exemplified their vision.

**TABLE 24**  
**Percentage of Case Study Responses by Theme within the Category of Shared Vision and Mean LPI Percentile Rankings for Inspire a Shared Vision**

<b>Shared Vision</b>						
<b>Schools</b>	<b>The Main Thing</b>	<b>Cultural Values</b>	<b>Press for Achievement</b>	<b>Collaborative Change</b>	<b>Inspire Vision (LPI Percentile)</b>	
					(P)	(FG)
S1	31.4	21	25.7	21.9	84	97
S2	30.1	43.8	17.8	8.3	88	91
S3	20.2	33	24.8	22.0	77	68
<b>HSS</b>	<b>26.8</b>	<b>31.4</b>	<b>23.3</b>	<b>18.5</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>84</b>
S4	41.1	21.9	26	11	35	44
S5	30.5	27.8	16.7	25	64	88
S6	38	26	17	19	34	55
<b>LSS</b>	<b>36.7</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>19.6</b>	<b>18.4</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>63</b>

\* Principal (P), Focus Group (FG)

This finding supports the research of Vaill (1989), who stated that the effect of a clearly defined organizational purpose creates “clarity, consensus, and commitment,” among members (p. 148). While the near majority of LSS case study responses focused on the spoken vision (36.7%), the majority of HSS case study responses highlighted the beliefs and actions which comprised their visions and were embedded in the hearts of followers (DuFour et al., 2004; Sergiovanni, 2001).

This finding, along with LPI data, is consistent with the findings of Leithwood et al. (1998) and supports the belief that effective visions must not only be verbalized, but modeled and internalized among staff through actions that reinforce the agreed upon values of the organization. As such, the perceived effects of shared vision transcend the mere articulation of a vision, and become more contingent upon staff members’ perceptions of school conditions which foster the vision.

Illustrating this point, LPI data indicates that principals of HSS identified Model the Way as their most frequently practiced behavior. Focus group members of HSS, however, perceived Inspire a Shared Vision as the most frequently perceived leadership practice. This finding reiterates the notion that modeling beliefs and expectations has a powerful effect on the creation of a shared vision. Similarly, this finding suggests that staff member perceptions are more strongly influenced by the leader’s behaviors, than through his or her efforts to articulate a vision not yet internalized by staff members (Leithwood et al., 1998; Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

Kouzes and Posner (2007) reported that constituents are inspired by the actions of their leaders. HSS focus group members indicated likewise, that their enlistment in, and commitment to the school’s vision, resulted not only from the articulation of the school’s

vision, but was largely inspired through the actions, conversations, values, and commitments modeled by their leaders.

Case study data for HSS, combined with the same schools' mean observer (FG) score of 53.9 (84<sup>th</sup> percentile) for Inspire a Shared Vision, further demonstrates this relationship. Principals who model the vision are perceived more inspirational than leaders who talk the vision. Principals who have identified and aligned values and goals create clarity, and are more able as a result, to model, support, and enlist commitment around agreed upon behaviors and expectations. By modeling, effective principals are able to develop expectations and keep others accountable for fulfilling those expectations.

A clearly distinguishable difference between and LSS and HSS was the emphatic emphasis on high levels of learning for all students. The relationship between case study data and LPI findings clearly demonstrates that principals in HSS were perceived to inspire an uncompromised commitment to excellence and exemplary student outcomes (Oliver et al., 2000; Valentine et al., 2004).

In HSS, shared cultural values were clearly reflected in the staffs' shared responsibility for student learning. As indicated in case study findings, principals in HSS were reported to spend more time in classrooms, discuss achievement and data more frequently, and encourage teams to discuss student work samples and instructional strategies on a regular basis. Opportunities for collaboration, team sharing, and group learning were as a result, more consistently aligned with the school's vision for continued improvement.

The strong press for achievement in HSS represented the normative expectation for achievement that was frequently reported by staff. Statements such as, "If you don't



like the high expectations you wouldn't fit in," "The regular 7:45 –3:30 day wasn't enough," and "We wouldn't accept anything other than exemplary" were described as cultural expectations by staff members. As indicated in the LPI statements describing the practice of Inspiring a Shared Vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2002), principals perceived as highly visionary spoke frequently about the future, appealed to others to share dreams of the future, and spoke with conviction about the meaning of work. Staffs in HSS indicated likewise, that their principals routinely engaged in such conversations and demonstrated an ability to align visions with school conditions resulting in high levels of sustained student achievement. This finding is also consistent with that reported by Creemers (1997) who believed vision may account for the variance in achievement between schools.

## **CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The findings presented in this chapter provided a practical understanding of how principals created conditions for organizational learning in schools and how these conditions served to influence sustained academic improvement. A mixed methods design was employed in an effort to compare qualitative and quantitative data from both the principals' and teachers' point of view to better understand the problem.

The first research question, How do principals share leadership, inspire responsibility for a shared vision, and create supportive conditions?, was answered through an elaboration of the eleven case study themes which emerged throughout the investigation. As such, a narrative overview addressing how principal behaviors influenced the development of conditions for organization learning and sustained

achievement was presented. From a quantitative stand point, a descriptive analysis of the combined LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) findings among the six case study schools was utilized to identify and describe the five leadership practices of principals and how they impacted the development of organization learning and sustained achievement.

Secondly, this study was designed to determine how qualitative and quantitative data collected throughout the investigation converged or disagreed. The analysis of data for each individual school was presented through a narrative description of the case study data and a descriptive analysis of the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) findings to make this determination. The analysis of each school's data concluded with a discussion regarding how the qualitative and quantitative data converged.

The third research question helped explain how the behaviors and practices of principals distinguished themselves between schools which had and had not sustained academic achievement. To answer this question, an analysis of LPI data concerning the five leadership practices of principals in high and low achieving schools was provided. Secondly, a qualitative analysis highlighting the practices of principals in high sustainability schools was provided. Thirdly, a discussion of the relationship between LPI findings and case study data that differentiated between leadership practices of principals in high and low sustainability schools was presented.

In summary, the findings presented in this chapter described (1) how principals were perceived to develop conditions for organizational learning, (2) if those findings were internally consistent among individual schools as reported by principals and focus group members, and (3) what were the distinguishing factors among principal behaviors in high and low sustainability schools.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### SUMMARY

The primary purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of how principal behaviors influence conditions for organizational learning. The reason for using a mixed methods study was to analyze quantitative and qualitative data from both the principals' and teachers' perspectives to better understand this problem.

The Leadership Practices Inventory Self and Observer Form (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) was used to identify and describe perceived principal behaviors. Concurrently, case study data from principal and focus-group interviews provided insights into practice that further clarified how principal behaviors influenced conditions for organizational learning. The *Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement Research Protocol* as developed by Hord (1997) provided the basis for case study interviews.

The secondary purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between principal behaviors, conditions for organizational learning, and sustained academic achievement. Specifically, this study addressed the following questions:

1. How do principals share leadership, inspire responsibility for a shared vision, and create supportive conditions?
2. How do qualitative and quantitative data concerning principal behaviors converge?

3. In what ways do the behaviors and practices of principals distinguish themselves between schools which have and have not demonstrated sustained academic achievement?

The remainder of this chapter will provide a discussion of findings for each of the three research questions based upon the analysis of principal and focus group interviews and the Leadership Practices Inventory Self and Observer Forms data (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). The discussion of findings will be followed by several recommendations for future research as well as suggestions concerning principal preparation and professional development.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### ***Research Question #1***

How do principals share leadership, inspire responsibility for a shared vision, and create supportive conditions?

#### *Modeling and Aligning Values with Stated Beliefs About Leadership*

Principals in this study who were perceived to have effectively shared leadership appeared to model values that aligned with their leadership behaviors. These same principals (P1, P2, P3, & P5), indicated they had clearly identified and communicated their beliefs about shared leadership with staff members. Subsequently, a direct relationship appeared evident between the principal's ability to align behaviors with their stated beliefs about shared leadership and the extent to which the sharing of leadership occurred on each campus.

This finding is consistent with Senge's (1990) research on the first discipline of learning organizations - personal mastery, which involves the process of "continually clarifying and deepening one's personal vision," "seeing reality objectively," and "committing one's self to lifelong learning." As a result of "continually clarifying" personal beliefs, leaders in learning organizations are, according to Senge (1990), better able to model the organization's values. Senge's (1990) findings are echoed by the research of Sergiovanni (2001) who indicated that effective principals articulate and model their espoused values and are authentically committed to the principles and actions which consistently reflect their beliefs .

These findings relate to the development of shared leadership and align with the findings of Kouzes and Posner (2007) who reported that personal and organizational clarity begins with the leader's voice, and extends to others in the organization through the development of agreed upon values. Among schools in this study, the modeling of agreed upon values appeared to generate consistency and trust among staff members that resulted in a willingness to participate in and assume the risks of leadership. Hord (1997), Hipp and Huffman (2003), have found that shared values comprise an essential aspect of learning organizations, that according to Hoyle (2007) and Sergiovanni (2001) result in a clear, cohesive, and consistent purpose.

#### *Gaining Credibility Through Effective Modeling*

The findings of this study indicated that principals who were perceived as effective models generated a strong degree of credibility among staff, and as a result, appeared more successful at sharing and distributing leadership. In schools where

principals were considered effective models, focus group members routinely commented that their principal “walked the talk” (S2), “served as a strong role model” (S1), and “always did what they said” (S3).

This finding is further supported by the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) mean percentile rankings for both self and observer reports for Model the Way. In this study, both the principal self reports and observer reports of high sustainability schools (S1, S2, & S3) indicated that P1, P2, and P3 were perceived to effectively Model the Way, with percentile rankings falling above the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile.

The finding in this study that principals who were perceived as effective models earned a high degree of credibility is consistent with the research of Kouzes and Posner (2007) who reported that a consistency of purpose fosters trust, and ultimately results in the establishment of credibility - the foundation of effective leadership. This finding corresponds to the research of Chasin and Levin (1995), who have reported that organizational commitment and high achievement result in part from the modeling of behaviors that leaders expect of others. McLaughlin and Talbert (2006, p. 11) have also found that because learning communities function at “multiple levels within a school,” leaders must consistently model established norms for behavior and be sensitive to the “shared language and standards of practice” that define the school’s culture.

#### *Flatter Organizational Frameworks Distribute Decision Making and Develop Capacity*

Schools in this study provided evidence that the formation of capacity among staff was largely dependent upon the organizational frameworks utilized by principals and the extent to which these frameworks distributed decision making among staff. Four

principals in this study (P2, P4, P5, & P6) operated from a traditional, hierarchical framework in which team leaders, instructional coaches, administrators, and skills specialist formed the nucleus of school leadership. Two principals (P1, P3), however, developed a flatter systemic approach to leadership which more evenly distributed decision making and empowered staff to act autonomously. The collective activity and sharing of personal practice in these schools allowed for the continuous development of the staffs' professional capacity resulting from the distribution of leadership and the freedom to exercise autonomous decision making.

This finding is consistent with the research of Bryk et al. (1998), who have reported that principals in restructuring and strong democratic schools empowered staff to share in decision making rather than consolidate power among isolated groups. According to Leithwood and Riehl (2003), as flatter team based structures replace traditional hierarchal organizations, initiatives aimed at developing teams as learning communities place an increased emphasis on the sharing or distributing of leadership. The findings of Senge (1990), Leithwood and Riehl (2003), and Hoyle (2007), suggest similarly, that shared understandings among staff allow flatter organizational structures to become possible, which in turn, allow broader decision making power among staff. This finding also aligns with the research of Eaker et al. (2002) who stated that "one of the most fundamental cultural shifts that take place as schools become professional learning communities involves how teachers are viewed." Rather than seeing teachers as mere "implementers" or "followers," principals in learning organizations become "leaders of leaders" (p. 22).

*Identifying and Sharing a Consistency of Purpose*

Schools in this study that demonstrated a clear and collective purpose appeared to exhibit a higher readiness for organizational learning and had sustained higher levels of student achievement. Unique to these three schools (S1, S2, & S3), was a clear, collective vision that was shared among staff and expressed as an uncompromised commitment to the success of every student. As such, the shared vision in S1, S2, and S3, served to create a sense of clarity among staff that aligned decision making with intended purposes. Exemplifying this finding, one principal (P1) explained that the “success of every child” was her school’s vision. She continued that, “student success was the main thing” and that every decision and activity was “guided by seeing this happen.”

Staff members in high achieving schools consistently expressed their visions in terms of student success. When asked to describe their school’s vision, focus group members described their school’s visions in terms of “being exemplary” (S2), “the success of every student” (S1), and by maintaining an “atmosphere of excellence” (S3). By contrast, members of less effective schools routinely described their visions as “vague,” “focused on relationships,” “ambiguous,” and “somewhat unclear” (S4). One principal (P6) shared their vision was about “being cohesive.” Focus group members (FG6) of the same school indicated, “We have a vision, but no one knows it” (S6). This finding reflects the research of Oliver et al. (2000) who indicated that despite a tendency to focus on less important matters, effective learning communities are able to identify and focus on student learning as their primary purpose.

Similar to the findings of McLaughlin and Talbert (2006), Hord (1997), and DuFour and Eaker (1998), a shared vision focused on the success of every student is what



separates a learning organization from a typical school. According to Senge (1990, p. 209), it is “impossible to have a learning organization with out a shared vision.” This finding is consistent with the research of Collins (2001), who indicated that effective organizations share a common underlying principle, they “simplify a complex world into a single organizing idea ... that unifies and guides everything” (p. 91).

#### *Cultural Norms Influence Expectations for Staff Commitment*

Among schools in this study, there appeared to be a strong relationship between the clarity of shared visions and the normative expectation for commitment among staff. In schools where an uncompromised focus on student achievement was expressed as a shared vision (S1, S2, S3 & S5), cultural norms appeared to influence expectations for commitment. In schools where a strong collective purpose was not evident (S4 & S6), the normative expectation for commitment appeared less pronounced and fragmented.

In S1, S2, and S3, values which were translated into school visions were clearly presented as normative behaviors, attitudes, and generalizations about the way things were done on each campus. One teacher described the impact of shared values on her school's (S3) culture by explaining that, “The typical 7:45-3:30 day isn't enough – you have to buy into it or agree. If you don't have those values you go somewhere else quickly. Hard work from everyone is expected. If you didn't buy into it, it would be difficult to stay.” The most commonly held value among participants – a commitment to students, was elaborated upon by FG2, who stated, “We are here for one reason – whatever it takes for kids. Teachers are very dedicated here and kids are the most important thing. Anything we can do to help kids, we will do.”

The dedication to students described in these schools appeared to originate from the principals' persistent commitment to their school's vision and mission. When the school's vision and purpose were consistently modeled and supported by opportunities for collaborative practices, staff members were able to formulate and internalize cultural values which gave both meaning and purpose to work.

These findings are consistent with the research of Lambert (2003) and DuFour and Eaker (1998) who indicated that shared vision represents a mental image of what is important to the individual, the organization, and one which connects people in the organization by a common aspiration. The impact of shared vision on the normative expectations of staff also reflects the research of Senge (1990, p. 9), who has written that shared visions are a combination of many personal visions, and suggest "genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance." This is consistent with the research of Vaill (1989), who has reported that the effect of a clearly defined organizational purpose creates "clarity, consensus, and commitment," among members (p. 148).

### *Individual Learning Inspires Change*

Principals in this study routinely considered change as an opportunity for growth and considered problems as opportunities for improvement. Among principals in this study, learning was seen as a catalyst for change that influenced leadership behaviors. Conversely, principals who appeared the most effective at implementing change (P1, P2, P3, & P5), were able to assess existing conditions, formulate plans, articulate their vision through words and actions, and enlist the support of others.

In this study, four of the six principals (P1, P3, P4, & P5) expressed the need of being a learner as a result of the changes they experienced. This finding is consistent with the findings of Kouzes and Posner (2007, p. 18) who have written that in order to create positive change, leaders challenge others to try new approaches and are “willing to search for opportunities to innovate, grow, and improve.” Senge (1990, p. 3), has stated similarly, that the creation of meaningful change requires that staff members “learn how to learn together.”

This finding reflects the research of McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) who reported that strong teacher learning communities differ from typical schools based upon their “strong commitment to serving all their student well, innovation in subject matter instruction to improve student learning, and success in obtaining resources to support their collaborative work” (p. 17). The notion of continuous learning has also been described by DuFour et al. (2004) and Fullan (2001a) as a critical aspect of learning organizations that is demonstrated through the collaborative actions of staff who seek to learn and improve as they depart from the status quo. Kruse et al. (1994) have reported that the shift in thinking that typifies learning organizations is characterized by an emphasis on sharing and team learning. The importance of principals serving as lead learners is consistent with the findings of Senge (2000), Leithwood and Riehl (2003), and Hoyle (2007), who reported that principals along with staff members must learn together as they adapt to changing organizational conditions.

*The Principal's Ability to Align Collaborative Processes with Shared Visions*

The findings of this study indicated that the principal's ability to align collaborative processes with the school's organizational vision had a positive effect on student achievement. A distinguishing factor within this finding was the extent to which collaborative structures enhanced cohesive relationships or, by contrast, heightened teacher isolation.

While several schools in this study appeared to demonstrate either loose or rigid organizational structures, high achieving schools (S1, S2, & S3) demonstrated what Kurz and Knight (2003) described as structures that are both tightly and loosely coupled. Principals in these schools appeared to maintain a balance between the formal and informal aspects of governance, demonstrated a strong consensus around goals, and worked to increase staff collaboration and learning by encouraging participation in both formal and informal processes.

Similar to the high achieving schools studied by Duke (2007), Strahan (2003), and DuFour et al. (2004), schools in this study (S1, S2, & S3) that had sustained high levels of achievement utilized grade level meetings, collaborative planning sessions, the focused use of student data, and cross grade level initiatives in an effort to ensure the alignment of the schools' vision and collaborative processes. These views echo the findings of Senge (1990) and McLaughlin and Talbert (2006), who have indicated that although teams may possess a shared vision, learning communities are difficult to establish if intentions and structures are not aligned and mutually supportive.

*Development of Cohesive Relationships Optimizes Collaborative Processes*

The degree to which collaborative processes benefited schools in this study suggested a proportionate relationship to the presence of cohesive relationships. Although the presence of both collaborative structures and relationships was optimal, the formation of cohesive relationships was found to demonstrate a greater utility than the implementation of collaborative processes alone.

In this study, the presence of cohesive relationships permeated the work structures of effective schools. Subsequently, effective principals worked to create and sustain achievement by developing shared understandings, cohesive efforts, and effective work structures through conversations with and among staff members. In high sustainability schools, cohesive relationships fostered conversations about student progress and encouraged team sharing and learning.

Consistent with the findings of Newmann and Wehlage (1995), the collaborative relationships as demonstrated in this study suggested a level of cohesiveness proportionate to the principal's ability to lead and create an atmosphere where informal conversation became a typical mode of communication and decision making. Louis and Kruse (1995) have indicated that a prominent characteristic of learning communities is the understanding of shared values about student learning and expectations for staff and student behavior. Highlighting the relationship between cohesive relationships and organizational trust, Kruse et al. (1994) have reported that shared norms and values, reflective dialogue, deprivitization of practice, and a collective focus on student learning are essential attributes of learning communities in schools.

### **Leadership Practices Inventory**

Consistent with the findings of Huffman (2003) and Leithwood and Riehl (2003), schools in this study demonstrated that the development of organizational learning was primarily dependent upon the principal's ability to set direction and inspire a shared vision for learning. Because each of the five practices of the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) are consistent with the dimensions of learning organizations (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Kruse et al., 1994; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Senge, 1990), the LPI was useful for identifying principal behaviors and how they influenced conditions for organizational learning. The following paragraphs illustrate these findings.

### **Mean Score Rankings of Principals and Focus Group Members**

The LPI mean scores and mean score rankings of principals and focus group members in this study suggest that the perceived leadership behaviors of principals served to influence conditions for organizational learning. In this study the mean scores of both principals and focus group members indicated that LPI practices were perceived to be demonstrated at a high degree ( $\geq 70\%$ ) 46.7% of the time. Principals perceived themselves to practice LPI behaviors at a moderate level (30-69%) 40% of the time, while focus group members considered their leaders to practice LPI behaviors at a moderate level 50% of the time. Most notably, however, was the fact that principals considered themselves to ineffectively ( $\leq 30\%$ ) demonstrate LPI behaviors 13.3% of the time, compared to focus group members who considered principals ineffective only 3.3% of the time.

Overall, principals in this study perceived themselves less favorably than did staff members regarding each of the LPI practices (Table 25). The one exception to this finding was the principals' mean score of 53.17 for Enable Others to Act, which was slightly higher than the observers' mean score of 51.73. Similar to the normative mean score rankings established by Kouzes and Posner (2002), principals and observers in this study also considered Enable Others to Act to be most frequently practiced behavior.

**Table 25**  
**Mean Score Rankings Among Principals and Focus Group Members**

<b>Region IV Principal Mean Score Rankings</b>	<b>Region IV Observer Mean Score Rankings</b>
Enable Others to Act (53.17)	Enable Others to Act (51.73)
Encourage the Heart (50.17)	Encourage the Heart (51.22)
Model the Way (49.33)	Inspire a Shared Vision (50.77)
Challenge the Process (49.33)	Model the Way (50.47)
Inspire a Shared Vision (48.0)	Challenge the Process (50.38)

\* The number beneath each leadership practice indicates the combined mean of observed practices among self and observer reports on a scale from 6 to 60 as measured by the Leadership Practices Inventory

Kouzes and Posner (2002) reported Model the Way to be the second most observed practice among self and observer reports. The second most observed behavior according to principals and focus group members in this study, however, was Encourage the Heart, with mean scores of 50.17 and 51.22 respectively.

Focus group members in this study reported Inspire a Shared Vision as the third most practiced behavior with a mean score of 50.77. Principals on the other hand, perceived Inspire a Shared Vision as the least practiced behavior with a mean score of 48.0, which is consistent with the findings of Kouzes and Posner (2002) among self-reports.

The principals' mean score of 48.0 for Inspire a Shared Vision was the lowest among the five mean self-report scores of principals, yet it remained higher than each of the five established mean score rankings among self and observers as reported by Kouzes and Posner (2002). The one exception to this finding was the normative self-report score of 48.7 for Enable Others to Act (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

The third most reported behavior among principals was Model the Way and Challenge the Process, each having a mean score of 49.33. Focus group members reported Model the Way as the fourth least practiced behavior among principals with a mean score of 50.47. This finding deviates somewhat from the research based norms of Kouzes and Posner (2002), which indicate Model the Way is generally reported as the second most observed behavior among both self and observers with mean scores of 47.0 and 47.5 respectively.

### ***Research Question #2***

How do qualitative and quantitative data concerning principal behaviors converge?

When analyzed on a school-by-school basis, both the case study data and LPI findings reported in this study suggested a strong level of agreement among participants



in each individual school. When analyzed collectively, however, case study data and LPI reports revealed three specific differences in regards to the perceived leadership practices of principals from high and low sustainability schools: (1) principals from high sustainability schools were perceived to be significantly more effective at leading, setting direction, and inspiring a shared vision, (2) the leadership practices of Model the Way and Inspire a Shared Vision suggested a positive relationship to the development of organizational coherence in high sustainability schools, and (3) the principal's ability to Model the Way and Inspire a Shared Vision appeared to have a reciprocal relationship to staff member's perceptions of Enable Others to Act. An analysis of the LPI practices of Challenge the Way and Encourage the Heart suggested no significant differences.

### **Differences in Principal Behaviors Among High and Low Sustainability Schools**

In this study, principals from high sustainability schools (HSS) perceived themselves more favorably than did observers and their principal counterparts from low sustainability schools (LSS). Similarly, the mean scores among focus group members of HSS were more favorable than the mean scores among observers and principals from LSS. On average, principals from HSS scored themselves 7.4 points higher per LPI behavior than principals from LSS. Focus group members from HSS scored their principals 3.78 points higher per LPI behavior than did focus group members from LSS. This finding is consistent with the research of Kouzes and Posner (2002) who claimed the LPI discriminates among leaders from high and low performing organizations. The development of organizational learning has also been cited by Hipp and Huffman (2003)

and DuFour et al. (2004), as being primarily dependent upon the principal's ability to set direction and establish a shared vision for learning.

### **Modeling the Way and Inspiring a Shared Vision Promotes Organizational Coherence**

An analysis of LPI findings and case study data in this study demonstrated a positive relationship between the practices of Model the Way, Inspiring a Shared Vision, and the development of organizational coherence in HSS. Similar to the findings of this study, modeling desired practice has been identified as an important component of transformational leadership (Liethwood, 1994), and referred to by Thompson (1995, as cited in DuFour et al., (2004, p. 95) as the “single most powerful mechanism for creating learning communities.”

In this study, principal self-reports among HSS identified Model the Way as the most frequently practiced behavior and was considered by staff members as an important prerequisite in developing conditions for learning and leading. Principals in this study who perceived themselves to effectively Model the Way, however, did not necessarily perceive themselves to be equally visionary. By contrast, focus group members of schools in which the principal perceived themselves to effectively model, consistently considered their principal to be highly visionary. This finding reflects the work of Kouzes and Posner (2007) and Leithwood et al. (1998), who have indicated that staff member perceptions are more strongly influenced by the leader's behaviors, than through his or her efforts to articulate a vision not yet internalized by staff members.

Comparing these findings to the case study data of LSS (S4, S5, S6), it is clear that important issues surrounding the development of shared leadership, shared values

and vision, and staff cohesiveness, hindered efforts to create conditions leading to organizational learning and high levels of sustained student achievement. According to Chasin and Levin (1995, p. 134), schools with strong supportive conditions are not simply “conventional schools with new principles or programs,” but reflect “dynamic environments in which the entire school and its operations are transformed” through a unity of purpose, the empowerment of staff, and a focus on identified strengths. Together, these attributes are believed to provide the foundation of organizational learning by creating what Creemers (1997) and Fullan (2001a, p. 64) described as coherence – “the extent to which a school’s program for students and staff is coordinated, focused on learning goals, and sustained over a period of time.”

### **The Perceived Relationship Between Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, and Enable Others to Act**

Although Enable Others to Act was perceived to be the most commonly practiced behavior among principals and focus group members in this study, it was found to have a weak relationship to student achievement if the principal was not also perceived to effectively Model the Way and Inspire a Shared Vision. This finding demonstrates the significant impact of modeling and inspiring vision on creating a sustained purpose, developing capacity, and sharing leadership among staff.

The role of enabling is reflected in the research of Kruse et al. (1994), who stated that “merely granting teachers greater responsibility doesn’t guarantee that instruction will improve” or that it will “translate into an increased focus on teacher professional competence” (p. 6). According to Kruse et al. (1994, p. 6), effective leadership must also

include the “development of standards, expectations, and the formulation of plans for action; all of which are hallmarks of well developed professional communities.”

In this study, HSS spoke more frequently, more clearly, and more emphatically about the importance of cultural values, modeling expectations, holding staff accountable for expectations, and aligning opportunities for leadership and learning with those values. Although LSS communicated a strong emphasis on developing others, sharing leadership, and decision making, HSS indicated these qualities were embedded in the normative expectations of their school’s culture. As indicated by Fullan (2001b) and Hipp and Huffman (2003), the conviction of shared responsibility for leading and learning produces system-wide effects that are demonstrated in the cultures of effective schools. This finding reflects the research of Eaker et al. (2002) who reported that a shared responsibility for leading and learning allows greater staff autonomy and increased opportunities for empowerment.

### ***Research Question #3***

In what ways do the behaviors and practices of principals distinguish themselves between schools which have and have not demonstrated sustained academic achievement?

### **Demonstration of Flexible Leadership Practices**

In this study, principal leadership among high sustainability schools (S1, S2, & S3) appeared to have a positive relationship to high levels of student achievement. Research by Fullan (2002), Cotton (2003), and Marzano et al. (2005), has indicated likewise, that school effectiveness and high student achievement is closely linked to

principal leadership. Similar to the findings of Leithwood and Riehl (2003), this study concurred that the most effective principals utilized a contingency of leadership skills and appeared to adjust their leadership styles to meet the changing needs and circumstances of their schools (Lashway, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003).

In this study, principals of HSS demonstrated transformational skills that impacted second order change by encouraging a shift in thinking among staff that differed significantly from typical schools. Consistent with the findings of Senge (2000), DuFour and Eaker (1998), faculties that engage in the sharing of personal practice and experiences, reflect a shift in thinking indicative of learning organizations. Faculties that value and support collaborative practices, demonstrate a change in culture that in the words of McLaughlin and Talbert (2006, p. 11), “cannot be mandated into existence” and is “difficult to establish in any profession - especially the isolated, individualistic world of teachers.”

By creating flatter, collaborative communities that spread leadership responsibility among staff, principals of high achieving schools in this study demonstrated what Lashway (2003) referred to as a distributive style of leadership. By sharing responsibility and leadership with staff, these principals served as what Eaker et al. (2002, p. 22) referred to as “leaders of leaders,” and worked to optimize the capacities of others. By incorporating a blend of transformative, instructional, and distributive leadership behaviors, principals of HSS were able to create and sustain effective school cultures by adopting what Marks and Printy (2003) described as an integrated style of leadership. Principals in this study (P1, P2, & P3) that utilized a contingency of leadership skills provided evidence which aligns with the findings of Leithwood and

Riehl (2003, p. 9), that effective leadership practices “cannot be prespecified, but are dependent upon the setting, nature of the organization, and the goals being pursued.”

### **Utilization of Non-traditional Leadership Frameworks**

Principals in this study who utilized a contingency of leadership skills, demonstrated what Senge (1990) considered a systems orientation to leading. As such, principals in effective schools were able to develop flatter, non-traditional environments that facilitated what Hipp and Huffman (2003) referred to as the “emerging integration of shared leadership, vision, and supportive conditions” (p. 10)

Principals in this study who utilized less traditional leadership frameworks incorporated collaborative structures based upon a holistic perspective of their school. Principals in these schools (S1, S2, & S3) were as a result, able to see problems and goals “not as isolated events but as components of a larger structure” (Senge et al., 2000, p. 78). By understanding organizational problems from a holistic point of view, a systems orientation helped generate the leadership behaviors, behavioral norms, and organizational structures that according Fullan (2001b) and Hipp and Huffman (2003), reinforce system-wide collaboration and improvement.

Schools in this study that favored a systems orientation to governance (S1, S2, & S3), appeared to be more effective at ensuring structural conditions and human supports were aligned with and supported the school’s vision for achievement. This finding is consistent with the research of Hipp and Huffman (2002), who have “found supportive conditions to be the glue that is critical” in maintaining the effectiveness of learning organizations (p. 38).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Based upon the findings of this study, it is recommended that additional quantitative and case study research investigate the reciprocal relationship between the LPI practices of Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, and Enable Others to Act (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Research of this nature would prove useful in understanding and determining the impact of modeling and visions on the effects of distributive leadership practices and the alignment of school conditions with those practices.

Secondly, it is recommended that future mixed methods studies be designed to examine principal understandings of LPI behaviors and the extent to which these interpretations impede or improve leadership practices. Developing a more thorough knowledge of the extent to which principals understand the meaning and application of LPI practices may provide additional insight regarding the continued professional development of principals as it pertains to school improvement.

In lieu of this study's findings, it is recommended that research similar to the design of this study be conducted that includes larger quantitative samplings utilizing both the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) and a learning organization survey similar to the Professional Learning Communities Assessment (Hipp & Huffman, 2003). The broader range of quantitative results would help provide a more specific and intentional qualitative inquiry aimed at further understanding how principal leadership influences the development of organizational learning.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF PRINCIPALS**

The complexities of school leadership and the innate challenges of developing schools as learning organizations suggests the need for professional development that broadens the awareness and ability of principals to practice a contingency of leadership skills. Equipping principals with both the theoretical and practical knowledge of contemporary leadership models, which suggest the need to apply an integrated form of leadership, would assist principals in understanding the complexity of change and the need to utilize various forms of leadership based upon changing organizational conditions.

Continued professional development designed to help principals understand and apply leadership behaviors as indicated in the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) may serve to provide a simple yet effective skills base. Understanding the effects of Modeling, Inspiring, Challenging, Enabling, and Encouraging in the context of a practical leadership model would assist in providing a well rounded, flexible, and research based approach to school leadership.

Given the importance of learning communities, principal preparation programs and continued professional development initiatives would benefit school leaders through exposure to systems thinking, current concepts and models of learning communities, and an understanding of the essential dimensions of learning communities. In an effort to create meaningful reform and sustained academic improvement, future and current school leaders should be provided the tools through which they may create and sustain effective learning organizations.



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**APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A**  
**RESPONDENT LETTER**

Date

Dear Campus Improvement Team Member,

As a member of your school's Campus Improvement Team, you are invited to participate in a dissertation research study through Texas A & M University. The purpose of this study is to better understand how principal leadership impacts conditions for organizational learning and school achievement.

In the event you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete one thirty item survey and take part in one teacher focus group discussion lasting approximately sixty minutes.

Your participation is voluntary, and will in no way affect your standing with your school, school district, or Texas A& M University, should you choose not to participate.

If you choose to participate, please attend a brief orientation meeting on (date, time, location). At this time I will address any concerns or questions you may have regarding this study, ask you to sign an information sheet indicating your voluntary participation, set a date for the teacher focus-group interview, and distribute the thirty item questionnaire. All information obtained during, and as a result of this study, will remain confidential. No identifiers or data obtained as a result of your participation will be linked to you or your school in any published material or reports.

In the event you would like to participate, but cannot attend the brief orientation meeting, please contact me via e-mail at [Lennyh@springisd.org](mailto:Lennyh@springisd.org), or call me at 832-764-8273 to confirm your participation. At that time I will forward any additional or pertinent information.

I appreciate your response, and look forward to working with you. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Lenny J. Hardoin



## **APPENDIX B**

### **PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

#### **The Relationship of Principal Leadership to Organizational Learning and Sustained Academic Improvement**

##### **Introduction**

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. If you decide to participate in this study, this form will also be used to record your consent.

You have been asked to participate in a research project which seeks to understand how principal behaviors influence conditions for organizational learning. In this study, survey data will be used to identify and describe principal behaviors. Concurrently, case study interviews and focus-groups will provide practical knowledge to help clarify how principal behaviors influence conditions for organizational learning. The secondary purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between sustained academic improvement, conditions for organizational learning, and principal behaviors, in hopes of better informing school improvement efforts. You were selected to be a possible focus-group participant because you are a member of your school's Campus Improvement Plan Committee.

##### **What will I be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a short leadership survey. Teacher participants will also be asked to participate in one focus-group session comprised of School Improvement Plan Committee members, and facilitated by the researcher. The focus-group interview will require about sixty minutes and will occur on a mutually agreed upon date. Data which is gathered from the survey and teacher focus-group interview will remain anonymous and confidential. Each participant will have the opportunity to review a summary of the focus-group interview for accuracy and thoroughness prior to publication. Any portion of the teacher focus-group which is tape recorded will remain secure and be destroyed within one calendar year of the recording date. This study will require about ninety minutes of your time. The amount of time a participant spends reviewing written summaries of their focus-group session will be determined by the participant.

Your participation may be audio recorded in an effort to ensure accuracy and truthfulness in reporting. All audio recordings will be destroyed one year from the date of recording.

##### **What are the risks involved in this study?**

The risks associated in this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life.

##### **What are the possible benefits of this study?**

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, information obtained through this study will add to the existing body of knowledge regarding school improvement efforts.

**Do I have to participate?**

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University, your school, or school district being affected.

**Who will know about my participation in this research study?**

This study is confidential and all records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Lenny J. Hardoin and his Committee Chairperson, Dr. John R. Hoyle of Texas A & M University will have access to the records.

If you choose to participate in this study, you may be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and only Lenny J. Hardoin and Dr. John R. Hoyle will have access to the recordings. Any recordings will be kept for one calendar year and then erased

**Whom do I contact with questions about the research?**

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Lenny J. Hardoin at (832) 764-8273 or (281) 682-7764. You may also send questions or comments to Lennyh@springisd.org.

**Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?**

This research study has been reviewed by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979)458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu.

**Signature**

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX C**

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM**

#### **The Relationship of Principal Leadership to Organizational Learning and Sustained Academic Improvement**

##### **Introduction**

The purpose of this form is to provide you (as a prospective research study participant) information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research and to record the consent of those who agree to be involved in this study.

You have been asked to participate in a research study which seeks to understand how principal behaviors influence conditions for organizational learning. In this study, survey data will be used to identify and describe principal behaviors. Concurrently, case study interviews and focus-groups will provide practical knowledge and further clarify how principal behaviors influence conditions for organizational learning. The secondary purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between sustained academic improvement, conditions for organizational learning, and principal behaviors, in hopes of better informing school improvement efforts. You were selected to be a possible participant because you are either the principal of your school, or you are a member of your school's Campus Improvement Plan Committee.

##### **What will I be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a short leadership survey. Teacher participants will also be asked to participate in one focus-group session comprised of School Improvement Plan Committee members and facilitated by the researcher. Principal participants will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. Both the principal interview and the teacher focus-group will require about sixty minutes and will occur on a mutually agreed upon date. Data which is gathered from the surveys, principal interview, and teacher focus- group interview will remain anonymous and confidential. Each participant will have the opportunity to review a summary of either their principal interview or teacher focus-group interview for accuracy prior to submission. Any portion of the principal interview or teacher focus-group interview which is tape-recorded will remain secure and be destroyed within one calendar year of the recording date. This study will require about ninety minutes of your time. The amount of time participants spend reviewing summaries of either principal interviews or focus-group interviews will be determined by the participant.

Principal interviews and teacher focus-group interviews may be audio recorded in an effort to ensure accuracy and truthfulness. All audio recordings will be destroyed one year from the date of recording.

##### **What are the risks involved in this study?**

The risks associated with this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life.

**What are the possible benefits of this study?**

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, information obtained through this study will add to the existing body of knowledge regarding school improvement efforts.

**Do I have to participate?**

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University, your school, or school district being affected.

**Who will know about my participation in this research study?**

This study is anonymous and all records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Lenny J. Hardoin and his Committee Chairperson, Dr. John R. Hoyle of Texas A&M University will have access to this data.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and only Lenny J. Hardoin and Dr. John R. Hoyle will have access to recordings. Any recordings will be kept for one calendar year and then erased.

**Whom do I contact with questions about the research?**

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Lenny J. Hardoin at (832) 764-8273 or (281)682-6674. You may also send questions or comments to [Lennyh@springisd.org](mailto:Lennyh@springisd.org) or [hardoinl@roadrunnerhouston.com](mailto:hardoinl@roadrunnerhouston.com).

**Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?**

This research study has been reviewed by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979)458-4067 or [irb@tamu.edu](mailto:irb@tamu.edu).

**Participation**

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction.

## APPENDIX D

### PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### Shared Leadership

1. Discuss your view of leadership.
2. How does this compare with what you actually find yourself doing most of the time?
3. Tell me about leadership in this school. Who are the leaders and what do they do that makes them a leader?
4. In what types of ways is leadership shared?
5. Discuss how decisions get made. What are they typically about and who makes them?
6. How did this decision making process come about? By whom and why?
7. In what ways is your school improvement plan related to, or reflected in this process?
8. Give me an example of how a decision was made recently.
9. Is this different than in the past? If so, who or what has made it different?

#### Shared Vision

1. One word that would describe your school's vision
2. How would you define the term "vision"?
3. In your opinion why is it important in terms of what is going on at your school?
4. In terms of what is valued?
5. What process did the school use to create a vision? (Who decided? How does your staff feel about it?)
6. How is the vision communicated? To whom and how often?
7. What would the staff say is important about the work they do here and how is this reflected throughout the school? What about in the classrooms and with the students?
8. In what ways does your school improvement plan support your school's vision?
9. How are these things different than in the past? If so, who or what made them different?

#### Supportive Conditions

1. Tell me about conditions in the school that support teachers' working together.
2. What structures support collective learning and sharing? How do staff members communicate with each other?
3. When do teachers have time to collaborate?
4. Are there resources available to support teachers learning together?
5. What role does your school improvement plan play in this process? Explain why it is, or is not, a significant document in terms of guiding decisions and impacting student learning.
6. How do staff members work with each other? Cooperate? Support?
7. Would you say this is different than in the past? If so, who or what has made it different?

## APPENDIX E

### FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### Shared Leadership

1. Discuss what you believe is your principal's view of leadership.
2. How does this compare with what he/she actually does most of the time?
3. Tell me about leadership in this school.
4. Who are the leaders in this school and what do they do that makes them a leader?
5. In what types of ways is leadership shared?
6. Discuss how decisions get made. What are they typically about and who makes them?
7. How did this decision making process come about? By whom and why?
8. In what ways is your school improvement plan related to, or reflected in this process?
9. Give me an example of how a decision was made recently.
10. Is this different than in the past? If so, who or what has made it different?

#### Shared Vision

- 1 In one word describe your school's vision.
- 2 How would you define the term "vision"?
- 3 In your opinion why is it important in terms of what is going on at your school?
- 4 In terms of what is valued?
- 5 What process did the school use to create a vision? Who decided? How does your staff feel about it?
- 6 How is the vision communicated? To whom and how often?
- 7 What would the staff say is important about the work they do here and how is this reflected throughout the school? What about in the classrooms and with students?
- 8 In what ways does your school improvement plan support your school's vision?
- 9 How are these things different than in the past?. If so, who or what made them different?

#### Supportive Conditions

1. Tell me about conditions in the school that support teachers' working together.
2. What structures support collective learning and sharing? How do staff members communicate with each other?
3. When do teachers have time to collaborate?
4. Are there resources available to support teachers learning together?
5. What role does your school improvement plan play in this process? Explain why it is, or is not, a significant document in terms of guiding decisions and impacting student learning.
6. How do staff members work with each other? Cooperate? Support?
7. Would you say this is different than in the past? If so, who or what has made it different?

## APPENDIX F

### LPI SELF FORM

*Leadership Practices Inventory*

**Your Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

To what extent do you typically engage in the following behaviors? Choose the response number that best applies to each statement and record it in the box to the right of that statement.

- |     |  |                      |
|-----|--|----------------------|
| 1.  | I set a personal example of what I expect of others.   | <input type="text"/> |
| 2.  | I talk about future trends that will influence how our work gets done.   | <input type="text"/> |
| 3.  | I seek out challenging opportunities that test my own skills and abilities.  | <input type="text"/> |
| 4.  | I develop cooperative relationships among the people I work with.  | <input type="text"/> |
| 5.  | I praise people for a job well done.   | <input type="text"/> |
| 6.  | I spend time and energy making certain that the people I work with adhere to the principles and standards we have agreed on.                         | <input type="text"/> |
| 7.  | I describe a compelling image of what our future could be like.  | <input type="text"/> |
| 8.  | I challenge people to try out new and innovative ways to do their work.  | <input type="text"/> |
| 9.  | I actively listen to diverse points of view.   | <input type="text"/> |
| 10. | I make it a point to let people know about my confidence in their abilities.   | <input type="text"/> |
| 11. | I follow through on the promises and commitments that I make.  | <input type="text"/> |
| 12. | I appeal to others to share an exciting dream of the future.   | <input type="text"/> |
| 13. | I search outside the formal boundaries of my organization for innovative ways to improve what we do.   | <input type="text"/> |
| 14. | I treat others with dignity and respect.   | <input type="text"/> |
| 15. | I make sure that people are creatively rewarded for their contributions to the success of our projects.  | <input type="text"/> |
| 16. | I ask for feedback on how my actions affect other people's performance.  | <input type="text"/> |
| 17. | I show others how their long-term interests can be realized by enlisting in a common vision.   | <input type="text"/> |
| 18. | I ask "What can we learn?" when things don't go as expected.   | <input type="text"/> |
| 19. | I support the decisions that people make on their own.   | <input type="text"/> |
| 20. | I publicly recognize people who exemplify commitment to shared values.   | <input type="text"/> |
| 21. | I build consensus around a common set of values for running our organization.  | <input type="text"/> |
| 22. | I paint the "big picture" of what we aspire to accomplish.   | <input type="text"/> |
| 23. | I make certain that we set achievable goals, make concrete plans, and establish measurable milestones for the projects and programs that we work on. | <input type="text"/> |
| 24. | I give people a great deal of freedom and choice in deciding how to do their work.   | <input type="text"/> |
| 25. | I find ways to celebrate accomplishments.  | <input type="text"/> |
| 26. | I am clear about my philosophy of leadership.  | <input type="text"/> |
| 27. | I speak with genuine conviction about the higher meaning and purpose of our work.  | <input type="text"/> |
| 28. | I experiment and take risks, even when there is a chance of failure.   | <input type="text"/> |
| 29. | I ensure that people grow in their jobs by learning new skills and developing themselves.  | <input type="text"/> |
| 30. | I give the members of the team lots of appreciation and support for their contributions.   | <input type="text"/> |

## APPENDIX G

### LPI OBSERVER FORM

*Leadership Practices Inventory*

Name of Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

I (the Observer) am This Leader's (Check one):  Manager  Direct Report  Co-Worker  Other

To what extent does this leader typically engage in the following behaviors? Choose the response number that best applies to each statement and record it in the box to the right of that statement.

He or She:

1.	Sets a personal example of what he/she expects of others.	<input type="text"/>
2.	Talks about future trends that will influence how our work gets done.	<input type="text"/>
3.	Seeks out challenging opportunities that test his/her own skills and abilities.	<input type="text"/>
4.	Develops cooperative relationships among the people he/she works with.	<input type="text"/>
5.	Praises people for a job well done.	<input type="text"/>
6.	Spends time and energy making certain that the people he/she works with adhere to the principles and standards that we have agreed on.	<input type="text"/>
7.	Describes a compelling image of what our future could be like.	<input type="text"/>
8.	Challenges people to try out new and innovative ways to do their work.	<input type="text"/>
9.	Actively listens to diverse points of view.	<input type="text"/>
10.	Makes it a point to let people know about his/her confidence in their abilities.	<input type="text"/>
11.	Follows through on promises and commitments he/she makes.	<input type="text"/>
12.	Appeals to others to share an exciting dream of the future.	<input type="text"/>
13.	Searches outside the formal boundaries of his/her organization for innovative ways to improve what we do.	<input type="text"/>
14.	Treats others with dignity and respect.	<input type="text"/>
15.	Makes sure that people are creatively rewarded for their contributions to the success of projects.	<input type="text"/>
16.	Asks for feedback on how his/her actions affect other people's performance.	<input type="text"/>
17.	Shows others how their long-term interests can be realized by enlisting in a common vision.	<input type="text"/>
18.	Asks "What can we learn?" when things don't go as expected.	<input type="text"/>
19.	Supports the decisions that people make on their own.	<input type="text"/>
20.	Publicly recognizes people who exemplify commitment to shared values.	<input type="text"/>
21.	Builds consensus around a common set of values for running our organization.	<input type="text"/>
22.	Paints the "big picture" of what we aspire to accomplish.	<input type="text"/>
23.	Makes certain that we set achievable goals, make concrete plans, and establish measurable milestones for the projects and programs that we work on.	<input type="text"/>
24.	Gives people a great deal of freedom and choice in deciding how to do their work.	<input type="text"/>
25.	Finds ways to celebrate accomplishments.	<input type="text"/>
26.	Is clear about his/her philosophy of leadership.	<input type="text"/>
27.	Speaks with genuine conviction about the higher meaning and purpose of our work.	<input type="text"/>
28.	Experiments and takes risks, even when there is a chance of failure.	<input type="text"/>
29.	Ensures that people grow in their jobs by learning new skills and developing themselves.	<input type="text"/>
30.	Gives the members of the team lots of appreciation and support for their contributions.	<input type="text"/>



## APPENDIX H

## LPI AGREEMENT OF USE LETTER

## KOUZES POSNER INTERNATIONAL

15419 Banyan Lane  
 Monte Sereno, California 95030  
 FAX: (408) 354-9170

January 8, 2006

Mr. Lenny Hardoin  
 3314 Wild Candle  
 Spring, Texas 77388

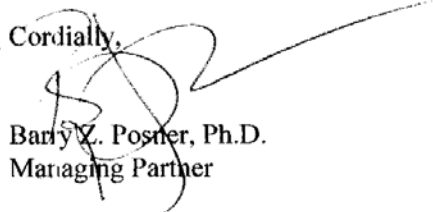
Dear Lenny:

Thank you for your request to use the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) in your dissertation. We are willing to allow you to *reproduce* the instrument as outlined in your letter, at no charge, with the following understandings:

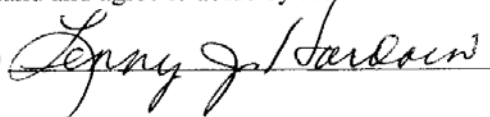
- (1) That the LPI is used only for research purposes and is not sold or used in conjunction with any compensated management development activities;
- (2) That copyright of the LPI, or any derivation of the instrument, is retained by Kouzes Posner International, and that the following copyright statement is included on all copies of the instrument: "Copyright © 2003 James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner. All rights reserved. Used with permission.";
- (3) That one (1) **electronic** copy of your dissertation and one (1) copy of **all** papers, reports, articles, and the like which make use of the LPI data be sent **promptly** to our attention; and,
- (4) That you agree to allow us to include an abstract of your study and any other published papers utilizing the LPI on our various websites.

If the terms outlined above are acceptable, would you indicate so by signing one (1) copy of this letter and returning it to us. Best wishes for every success with your research project.

Cordially,

  
 Barry Z. Posner, Ph.D.  
 Managing Partner

I understand and agree to abide by these conditions:

(Signed)  Date: 1-12-07

## VITA

**Leonard James Hardoin**  
**16717 Ella Blvd.**  
**Houston, Texas 77090**  
**[lennyh@springisd.org](mailto:lennyh@springisd.org)**

### EDUCATION

1981            B.A., Education and Communications, Olivet College,  
 Olivet, Michigan  
 1989            M.A., Educational Leadership, Sam Houston State University,  
 Huntsville, Texas  
 2009            Ph.D., Educational Administration, Texas A&M University,  
 College Station, Texas

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2008            Spring (Texas) Independent School District  
 Director of Accountability and Instructional Systems

1991- 2008     Spring (Texas) Independent School District  
 Principal, Meyer Elementary

1991            Spring (Texas) Independent School District  
 Assistant Principal, Beneke Elementary

1989-1990     Fort Bend (Texas) Independent School District  
 Assistant Principal, Ridgemont Elementary

1987-1989     Klein (Texas) Independent School District  
 Physical Education Instructor, Epps Island Elementary

1984-1987     Spring First Assembly, Spring, Texas  
 Youth Pastor

1982-1984     Klein (Texas) Independent School District  
 Physical Education Instructor, Athletic Coach, Strack Intermediate