THE MOST ESSENTIAL LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES: PERCEPTIONS OF PRINCIPALS OF SUCCESSFUL MIDDLE LEVEL SCHOOLS IN TEXAS

A Dissertation

by

BEBE BARBARA CARPENTER

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 2010

Major Subject: Educational Administration

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	John Hoyle
Committee Members,	Virginia Collier
	Bryan Cole
	James Kracht
Head of Department,	Fred Nafukho

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ABSTRACT

The Most Essential Leadership Responsibilities: Perceptions of Principals of Successful Middle Level Schools in Texas. (May 2010)

Bebe Barbara Carpenter, B.S., The University of Texas at Austin;

M.Ed., Tarleton State University, Stephenville

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. John R. Hoyle

The purpose of this study was to determine what leadership responsibilities principals of successful middle level schools in Texas perceived as most essential to student achievement. The study was also intended to reveal how closely these principals' leadership responsibilities align with the literature.

The Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) data were analyzed from 2005 to 2008. From this data, middle school campuses with 500 or more students, a free and reduced lunch rate greater than 50%, and AEIS ratings of "exemplary" three of four years were identified. Thirty-nine campuses met the criteria and 15 of the principals agreed to serve as the expert panel.

Using a modified Delphi technique, panelists completed a 26-item questionnaire and an open-ended comments section. This comprised Round One of the study. Data were analyzed for mean, median, standard deviation, and inter-quartile range (IQR). Unique questionnaires were developed based on panelist responses from Round One. Panelists were to review their responses to questions falling outside of the IQR and were

able to change or maintain their responses after reviewing the data. Panelists repeated this procedure reviewing all questions with responses outside the IQR for Round Three.

The major findings of this study revealed many of the critical leadership responsibilities are supervisory and not instructional. The five leadership responsibilities (ties are denoted) perceived by panelists as most critical to student achievement were:

(1) ethical behavior,
(t2) collaborative processes,
(t2) visibility,
(t3) collective vision,
(t3) high expectations,
(t3) instructional supervision,
(4) professional development, and
(5) intellectual stimulation.

Through all three rounds, ethical behavior was identified as the most critical leadership responsibility.

The findings of this study may potentially impact hiring practices of middle level campus leaders as well as their certification programs and professional learning opportunities. It is recommended principal preparation programs require an ethics course, and school districts provide annual ethics training for leadership teams. Additional professional learning should include team and collaboration building. Finally, based on the literature, it was recommended a principal certification specifically for middle level leaders be offered and/or middle level course work be included in the principal certification program.

DEDICATION

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). All glory and honor go to my Lord and Savior through whom this and all things are possible. He closed doors and opened windows allowing me to complete this part of the journey.

Mom and Dad, while this process seemed long and unfamiliar, your unfailing love and support throughout my life's many journeys mean everything to me. Thank you for being my parents.

James and Audrey, my brother and sister, growing up I know I was the odd one of the three of us, but thanks for putting up with me and asking about the progress of my work.

Veronica, our baby girl, dream big! I am so proud of you already, but with each new milestone, I get great joy. The sky's the limit. Go for it!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While completing this project seemed never ending, without the support and assistance from several individuals, it would not have been completed, so to them I owe a tremendous debt. My words of acknowledgement are insufficient but are nonetheless sincerely and gratefully offered.

The chair of my committee, Dr. John R. Hoyle, always had faith in my ability and me. He never gave up on me and was always upbeat and encouraging. Thank you, Dr. Hoyle, for your support. I cannot tell you how much your leadership and guidance have meant to me.

From outside the department, Dr. James Kracht, I owe an extra word of thanks and appreciation. Thank you, Dr. Kracht, for your many thoughtful contributions to this project and my overall education. Your knowledge has had a tremendous influence on me in many ways. Thank you for offering to call me weekly, if it would help me to get finished.

While I know he was not sure I would ever finish, Dr. Bryan Cole, thank you for your willingness to remain on my committee. I recognize and value your seriousness regarding this process and your desire for students to have the full graduate experience.

Joining the committee late, but still making a significant contribution, thank you, Dr. Virginia Collier. I so appreciate your willingness to be part of a committee of an unknown student. While I never had one of your classes, your reputation as a superintendent was well known and positive.

Finally, two former members, Dr. Dean Corrigan and Dr. Luana (Louie) Zellner, thank you for your willingness to serve on my committee and your contributions to the final project. Louie, thank you for giving me that kickstart that I so needed to get back on track. I hope you know I value your friendship and support.

Then, there are those to whom I owe my thanks and gratitude for their friendship and support through the years. Thanks to Joyce Nelson who was always so willing to help a student. Thanks to Dr. Robert Shutes, who is no longer with us, but who has had a profound effect on my thinking about curriculum and instruction.

To the many school families along the way, Rockdale Elementary, Meadows Elementary, Montague Village Elementary, Ira Cross Elementary, Saegert Elementary, and most recently Iduma Elementary, thank you so much for your open hearts that allowed me to be a part of your family and to the many colleagues who have supported me. The professional and life lessons learned make me who I am today.

My dear friend, Kellie Cude, my words are insufficient! It is because of you, your belief in me, and your constant love and support that I have been able to complete this project. I am forever grateful, but most of all, I wish the same for you, my friend. If I can finish, it is possible for you also.

Thanks to Dr. Larry Moenhke, former assistant superintendent, for your confidence in me. Thanks to Mrs. Gladys Swindle, retired principal, who served as a role model throughout the years and took a chance on me nearly 30 years ago when she hired me as a new teacher. And, Mrs. Judy Tyson, friend, colleague, and current principal, thanks for accepting me as a member of your leadership team and being willing to share

without being threatened. Your love and support this past year and a half have lifted me up from the depths to a place in which I can hold my head up and made it possible for me to complete this project.

I am sure I have forgotten someone; to you I apologize and hope you know how much I appreciate you and the difference you make in my life. To those future educators and administrators, I offer you access to the many lessons I have learned throughout my career. I truly believe I have a professional obligation in the development of future leaders. So, feel free to write or call. I will be glad to help in any way possible.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For more than 20 years, schools have faced demands from taxpayers and the general public to improve student achievement and prepare students to be productive and contributing members of society. In more recent years, these demands have intensified resulting in standards-based curriculum and high-stakes testing. In 2001 with the passage of the federal legislation No Child Left Behind, educators across the nation could no longer ignore prior reform attempts to improve student achievement. With No Child Left Behind, schools are required to provide evidence that each and every student is making measurable progress toward achieving mastery of the state curriculum standards. This component of No Child Left Behind has forced schools to dramatically change the way they do business.

In the past, schools were considered good if the buses ran on time, the meals were served hot, the discipline was maintained, and parents were satisfied. This model of a good school is no longer sufficient. While these things are still important, the emphasis has shifted to student achievement. A consequence of the focus on student achievement is greater attention to the campus leadership, specifically the campus principal. More and more, the campus principal is being held accountable for the learning of the students on their campus (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Student achievement data are being meticulously analyzed and when the learning does not meet the required standard, the

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The style for this dissertation follows that of *The Journal of Educational Research*.

principal is scrutinized. Consequently, the importance of an effective principal appears to be significant. Intuitively, educators have believed this for a long time, but finding the evidence to support this has been difficult (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Until recently, the effect of the campus principal on student achievement has been indirect. Marzano and his colleagues argue “A highly effective school leader can have a dramatic influence on the overall academic achievement of students” (p. 3). Similarly, Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) maintain that the campus principal is second only to the classroom teacher with impacting student achievement and has the greatest impact on those campuses facing the greatest challenges. Thus, the need for effective principals has never been greater.

So, what does this effective principal look like in terms of leadership responsibilities critical to student achievement? The search for the answer to this age-old question has been long and the results inconclusive. Because leadership is a complex concept, Leithwood (n.d.) warns against creating a list of traits of successful principals for fear that important themes will be buried in the terminology and the critically important skills lost. Leithwood et al. (2004) does offer three successful leadership practices he and his colleagues have found are fundamental to high-performing organizations. These include (a) setting direction, (b) developing people, and (c) redesigning the organization.

When setting direction, the successful leader will identify and articulate a vision, foster the acceptance of group goals, and create high performance expectations. One of the key findings of research conducted by the Educational Research Service for the

National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) was the constant focus on the instructional goals of the campus by the principal, the staff and the students (Parents for Public Schools, 2000). Leithwood et al. (2004) further state the practice of setting direction appears to account for the largest share of the leader's effect on student achievement. In *The Balanced Leadership Framework: Connecting Vision With Action*, Waters and Cameron (2007) describe this responsibility as culture. Culture consists of developing a clearly defined and shared vision of their ideal school as well as creating a sense of community, cohesion, and sense of well-being among the staff. Waters and Cameron (2007) have further identified focus, or the ability to establish clear goals and maintaining attention on these goals, as one of the key leadership responsibilities of effective school leaders. Within this focus is the establishment of clearly defined high goals and expectations. Across the literature, we repeatedly find this responsibility as key to high academic performance.

Developing people includes offering intellectual stimulation, providing individualized support, and providing an appropriate role model. It is within the practice of developing people that successful principals have the opportunity to improve the quality of the teaching and learning on their campuses. From this practice comes the well-known term – instructional leadership (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). The ability to fully understand the teaching and learning process and to create an environment where adult learning is valued sets principals of high-performing campuses apart from the norm (Parents for Public Schools, 2000). The need for strong instructional leadership is further supported by research reported in *What Is Effective Leadership for Today's Schools?*

(Effective Leaders for Today's Schools, 1999). The commitment to improving teaching and learning and the development of teacher leaders on our campuses were reported as two of the key responsibilities of effective leaders in today's schools. Just as Leithwood (n.d.) identified intellectual stimulation as a key responsibility, so, too, do Waters and Cameron (2007). They use the same terminology and go on to define intellectual stimulation as the leader's ability to continually keep the staff abreast of the most current and effective research theories and practices and engage staff in the discussion of the research and its impact on school improvement and student achievement.

The third successful leadership practice Leithwood et al. (2004) identified in high-performing organizations is redesigning the organization. By this he means the principal strengthens the school culture, modifies organizational structures, and builds collaborative processes. Findings from studies done with Chicago schools found that those principals who stand out from others are those who focus on reform strategies. They tackle the highly visible, quick-fix problems first and then begin the process of long-range planning (Sebring & Bryk, 2000). One of Waters and Cameron's (2007) leadership responsibilities that closely align with building collaborative processes is the leader's ability to seek input from a variety of sources in the development of policy and the decision-making process. This buy-in by staff has generally been found to increase the level of commitment, which can lead to greater success.

Despite Leithwood's (n.d.) warnings to avoid the use of single adjectives to describe complex leadership practices, many researchers and educators have done this very thing with fairly good success. McEwan (2003) in her book, *10 Traits of Highly*

Effective Principals, uses single word adjectives to describe these traits. As you read through her book though, you realize that while she uses the single adjective to describe the leadership traits of effective principals, she identifies many specific behaviors within each trait to provide an in-depth understanding of each one. Her ten traits include communicator, educator, envisioner, facilitator, culture builder, activator, producer, character builder, and contributor.

In her extensive review of post-1985 research on principal behaviors that impact student outcomes, Cotton (2003) of the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, identified 25 leadership behaviors and traits of principals of high-performing schools. Many of these 25 behaviors could be a subsection of one of Leithwood's leadership practices. These include vision and goals focused on high levels of student learning, high expectations for student achievement, positive and supportive school climate, rituals, ceremonies, and other symbolic actions, collaboration, the importance of instructional leadership, high levels of student learning, discussion of instructional issues, professional development opportunities and resources, instructional time, role modeling, and shared leadership/decision-making and staff empowerment.

Through their meta-analysis, Marzano et al. (2005) similarly identified 21 leadership responsibilities that impact student achievement. Many of these could also be subset of Leithwood's leadership practices. These include culture, discipline, focus, ideals/beliefs, input, intellectual stimulation, and resources.

Now more than ever, the need for effective principals is great. The pressure is on to produce results. Students achieving at high levels is the mandate. Meeting this need and achieving this goal serves to benefit our entire democracy.

Statement of the Problem

For many years, educators and researchers alike have repeatedly attempted to establish a relationship between leadership responsibilities and student achievement with little success. With the groundbreaking work by Marzano et al. (2005), 21 leadership responsibilities were successfully identified as positively related to student achievement.

With the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001, the emphasis on student achievement has taken on even greater importance. The accountability system of NCLB requires evidence of annual measurable progress. Failure to show this growth has serious ramifications. Increasingly, middle schools are being targeted for improvement. Being able to apply our knowledge of the leadership responsibilities of successful middle level principals to average or low-performing middle level principals has the potential to address one component of the achievement challenge.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine what leadership responsibilities principals of successful middle level schools in Texas perceive as most essential to student achievement. Further, the study was intended to reveal how closely these principals' leadership responsibilities align with what is in the literature.

Research Questions

1. What did principals of successful middle level schools perceive as the most essential leadership responsibilities to student achievement?
2. How closely did the leadership responsibilities of principals of successful middle level campuses in Texas align with the leadership responsibilities identified with what is in the literature?

Operational Definitions

Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) – Annual report that pulls together a wide range of information on the performance of students in each school and district in Texas. Indicators tracked on these reports include student performance on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) in the areas of reading/language arts, written composition, math, science, and social studies. The AEIS report also tracks completion and dropout rates, economic status, student population, staff experience, student-teacher ratio, ethnic breakdown, and budgetary data.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) – All public school campuses, school districts, and the state evaluated for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the accountability provisions in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Districts, campuses, and the state are required to meet AYP criteria on three measures: Reading/Language Arts, Mathematics, and either Graduation Rate (for high schools and districts) or Attendance Rate (for elementary and middle/junior high schools).

Data – The set of information collected for every campus by the Texas Education Agency and reported annually in the Academic Excellence Indicator System report card.

Exemplary (E) – The AEIS rating given to campuses that meet the criteria of 90% of students passing in all subjects areas and all qualifying subgroups.

High Performing – Those campuses that have been determined to be Recognized or Exemplary by the Texas Education Agency.

Instructional Decisions – Those decisions made by campuses related to instruction, to include but not limited to program design, schedule, staffing, budgetary allocations, intervention programs, professional development, and assessments.

Leadership Responsibilities – Those skills or characteristics identified as essential or critical to success. The leadership literature includes but is not limited to vision, high expectation, instructional leader, data analysis, visibility, etc.

Middle Level School – A campus that includes any grade configuration of 5^{th} through 8^{th} grade. Using the Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System, campuses are categorized as elementary (E), middle (M), and high schools (H). District leaders make these determinations and submit the information to the Texas Education Agency.

Recognized (RE) – The AEIS rating given to campuses that meet the criteria of 70% of students passing in all subjects and all qualifying subgroups.

Student Achievement – Term referring to campuses that have earned the Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) rating of "recognized" or "exemplary" for a period of three or more years.

Successful Middle Level School – A middle level campus (see operational definition) having achieved recognized or exemplary status using the Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) for three of four years between 2005 and 2008.

Assumptions

1. The instrumentation accurately identified the perceived leadership responsibilities of successful middle level school principals.
2. The interpretation of the data accurately reflected what the responders intended.
3. Those responding to the survey answered the questions in a way that was reflective of their colleagues.
4. The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) and the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) were a reliable and valid measure of student achievement.

Limitations

This study was limited to the junior high and middle school campuses in Texas that have been identified as high performing for three consecutive years.

Methodology

Population

Junior high and middle school campuses (middle level schools) that have earned Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) ratings of recognized or exemplary for at least three years during the period of 2005-2008 were compiled. Campuses were furthered delineated using the following criteria: (a) must have a free/reduced lunch rate greater than or equal to 50% and (b) must have at least 500 students on the campus. Based on this information, identified principals were asked to participate as members of the expert panel for the Delphi study. According to Skulmoski, Hartman, and Krahn (2007), when a group is fairly homogenous, it is possible to achieve satisfactory results with a panel of 10-15 participants. Having used specific criteria to narrow the campuses for the proposed study, the campus was fairly homogenous, thereby eliminating some of the variables that may contribute to high levels of student achievement.

Procedure

District assessment offices were contacted to obtain approval to conduct the actual study on identified campuses within the district. Once this approval was granted, campus principals were notified by mail, e-mail, and by telephone requesting they participate in the study. Principals who agreed to participate had a choice to complete the survey online or receive a hard copy by mail. For those selecting the electronic survey, the instrument was made available online for a period of five days. After the initial five-day period, a second contact was made to encourage participants to complete the survey. Any non-participants to the first round to the online survey then received a hard copy of

the survey requesting their participation. For those participants selecting the hard copy version, they received the instrument and a self-addressed stamped return envelope to allow for ease of response. Respondents were asked to return the completed survey within a three-week time frame. Therefore, each round took a minimum of five days and up to four weeks to complete. This process was repeated up to five times to reach consensus, as long as needed to achieve stability in the results, or until sufficient information was exchanged (Skulmoski et al., 2007).

The Delphi Method

Originally designed for the purpose of futures forecasting, the Delphi method is a research technique that is a "structured process for collecting and distilling knowledge" and brings together the best thinking of identified experts on a particular topic and allow for true anonymity. Skulmoski et al. (2007) state the Delphi method can be "applied to problems that do not lend themselves to precise analytical techniques, but rather could benefit from the subjective judgment of individuals on a collective basis.

Delphi has the ability to be time and cost efficient without the challenges faced when attempting to bring together experts to a central location. According to Linstone and Turoff (1975), "Delphi may be characterized as a method for structuring a group communication process so that the process is effective in allowing a group of individuals, as a whole, to deal with a complex problem" (p. 3). For these reasons, the Delphi method lends itself well to the collection of the kind of data desired to answer the research questions. It is a research technique that can be used to gather the best thinking of experts without the challenge or inconvenience of leaving one's office.

Participants were selected to be part of the panel because they met the established criteria and were considered experts in the field being studied. Members of the expert panel did not know the identity of the other members of the group. The Delphi technique eliminates the influence of a strong personality or the potential for coercion. It minimizes group mentality that naturally occurs during normal group discussions and/or committee work (Skulmoski et al., 2007).

In the first round of input, participants were asked to respond to a question or a questionnaire. Based on the data from the first round, participants with responses that were considered extreme were asked to review their initial response and determine if they would like to maintain their response or change their response to be more in line with the norm. All responses to the survey instrument were given equal weight. In the second and subsequent rounds, participants responded to questions and the feedback provided from the extreme responses from the previous round. The intent of the Delphi method is to achieve consensus from a panel of expert on a specific topic, to achieve stability in the results, or until sufficient information is exchanged (Skulmoski et al., 2007).

Members of the expert panel were asked to complete no fewer than three survey instruments and no more than five instruments. They were asked to rate statements regarding principal leadership responsibilities that influence student achievement using a Likert scale from a high of 5 (critical responsibility for student success) to a low of 1 (not necessary for student success). After each survey, data analysis was completed and the results determined the questions for the next survey instrument. This process continued

until consensus was reached, results stabilized, or until sufficient information was exchanged (Skulmoski et al., 2007).

Data Analysis

Data collected for each question of the survey instrument were recorded on a spreadsheet. Descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode) were calculated for each question. The inter-quartile range (IQR) was determined for each question. Participants were then asked to review their responses to the survey questions from Round One. For any response falling outside the IQR, respondents had the opportunity to change their initial response or retain their initial response. The data collected from Round Two were then recorded on a spreadsheet and descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode) were calculated for each question reviewed in this round. The inter-quartile range was determined for each question in this round. For Round Three, participants were asked to review their responses for the questions in Round Two. For any response falling outside the IQR, respondents had the opportunity to change their response from Round Two or retain their response from Round Two. This process continued until consensus was reached.

Instrumentation

Young (2007) originally designed the instrument selected for this study for use in his dissertation, *Effective Leadership Characteristics for Student Performance as Perceived by High-Performing Texas High School Principals: A Delphi Study*. Dr. Young aligned each prompt with current research and/or educational leadership standards from agencies such as Education Leadership Constituent Council, the Texas

State Board of Educator Certification, and the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium.

Significance of the Study

With the reauthorization of ESEA and the passage of No Child Left Behind, there is greater accountability being demanded from educators at all levels. To meet this demand, educators increasingly must be more effective in their practice. Through the identification of the effective leadership responsibilities of principals of high-performing middle level campuses and which responsibilities they perceive to be most critical to positive student achievement, this study could impact the leadership responsibilities of principals on average or low-performing campuses. By focusing on the "right things," principals on these campuses have the potential to impact the teaching and learning on their campuses.

District personnel offices could also benefit from the outcomes found in the study. By selecting principals who have demonstrated the effective leadership responsibilities perceived as essential, the neediest campuses have a greater chance of meeting the accountability demands of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS).

Finally, administrative preparation programs might also benefit from the study. When selecting candidates for admission, those with belief systems and practices that can be developed to align with the most important leadership responsibilities would be given more serious consideration than others. Additionally, the program design could

incorporate the development of the identified leadership responsibilities into the course work and the internship.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a summary of existing literature related to school leadership and student achievement. Within this framework, the components of developing a vision; establishing high academic standards/expectations; focusing on teaching and learning; using data to guide instructional decisions; providing professional development opportunities; promoting shared leadership; considering the impact of personal relationships; and the role the family, school, and community partnership plays in student achievement will also be discussed. Within each of these components, application to the middle school setting is discussed. The next portion of the review will briefly explore two other leadership models – the models of Kenneth Leithwood and Phillip Hallinger. The review will then turn to an examination of the unique challenges faced by educators at the middle and junior high school level and the alarming achievement gap frequently found at this level. Those components unique to the middle school model and successful middle school not previously discussed will be reviewed. The final section of the review will focus on the Delphi method of data collection. From this review, it is the hope of the researcher that the leadership framework developed will serve as an model of leadership derived from high-performing Texas middle and junior high school principals to be replicated by other middle level administrators as a successful framework to incorporate in their practice.

Leadership

The concept of leadership has historically intrigued many while at the same time has been equally as baffling. To prescribe a list of personal traits or characteristics fails to give adequate justice to a highly complex process. Others would say simple models and imprecise definitions only serve to muddy the waters further. Because of the lack of an authoritative definition of leadership, it makes it very difficult to compare research findings. Attempting to clarify the concept of leadership would lead to a better understanding of the leadership practices of effective and successful schools. It is those behaviors and practices of leaders in high-performing schools that provides the greatest interest and opportunity to impact current and future leaders. According to Dr. Vincent Ferrandino, Executive Director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP, 2001), "You cannot have a first-rate school without first-rate school leadership" (p. v) This sentiment has been repeatedly echoed throughout the literature. In fact, there are no documented cases of low-performing schools reversing the trend of poor student performance without a strong leader guiding the helm. Other factors may also contribute to this reversal, but a strong leader appears to be the catalyst (Leithwood et al., 2004).

These same claims reverberate throughout the middle school literature. In a study conducted of Memphis, Tennessee middle schools, local educators point to strong leadership as the key to their success (Cassellius, 2006). She writes of the success of the Memphis middle school turnaround, "Show me a great school, and you will find a great leader leading great teachers who inspire students to greater achievement" (Cassellius,

2006, p. 8). Further, in their seminal work, *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century*, Jackson and Davis (2000) state "No single individual is more important to initiating and sustaining improvement in middle grades school students' performance than the school principal" (p. 157). The esteemed accounting firm of Arthur Anderson identified a dedicated and dynamic principal as the primary difference in low-performing and high-performing schools (Parents for Public Schools, 2000). Over and over again, the research supports this belief. Kenneth Leithwood and his associates at the University of Toronto and more recently at the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in the United Kingdom would assert "leadership not only matters: it is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning" (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 3).

Student learning has gained greater importance in recent years. In the 1980's, the movement for strong instructional leadership began to take on increasing importance, but with the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001, instructional leadership and its relationship to student academic success have raised accountability to a new level. According to Lashway (2002),

> The instructional leader of the 80's was presented as an efficient, task-oriented, top-down manager, albeit one who was focused on curriculum and instruction rather than buildings and budgets. Today's ideal instructional leader is portrayed as a democratic, community-minded leader who builds consensus around a vision rooted in agreed upon standards for student learning, with a commitment to be accountable for results. (p. 3)

This mandate for accountability is no longer just a pretense, but is law according to the accountability requirements of No Child Left Behind and Adequate Yearly Progress. It is

this leadership and student achievement relationship that has gained heightened interest. Intuitively, we would like to claim a strong linkage, but statistically it is difficult to verify. Second only to the classroom teacher, leadership contributes to student learning. At the middle school level, this focus on student achievement has taken on similar importance due to the accountability of No Child Left Behind. Between 2002-2003 and 2004-2005, the number of middle schools identified for improvement more than doubled (Center on Education Policy, 2005). Therefore, the need for an effective principal to lead the middle school through efforts, which leads to "improved student academic performance," is now greater than ever before (Brown & Anfara, 2003, p. 30).

As evidenced by the impact leadership has on student achievement, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins (2006a) report a 5-7% difference in pupil learning and achievement due to principal leadership. While this appears small, in reality this 5-7% accounts for a much larger portion of the overall effects. The total direct and indirect effect on student learning accounts for one-fourth of the contributing factors and would be deemed educationally significant (Leithwood et al., 2006a). In an extensive study, Marzano et al. (2005) found a significant difference in the passing rate of students from effective schools on standardized tests compared to students from ineffective schools. Others have reported similar results. Krug (1993) found the "relationship between leadership and student achievement was consistently positive at (grades 3, 6, and 8). That is, as leadership scores rose, student achievement scores rose; as leadership scores fell, student achievement scores fell" (p. 243).

The importance of leadership is greatest where the need is the greatest. As reported by Leithwood and Riehl (2003), the work of Hallinger and Heck found the leadership effects appear to be strongest in low socio-economic schools as opposed to high socio-economic schools. Thus, the role and significance of leadership appears to make a difference in schools and in the achievement of students. Leaders have the ability to strengthen teaching and to create the conditions that promote student learning. With the intense federal performance requirements, the need for quality leaders and knowledge of the practices they utilize to realize the level of student achievement required to meet Adequate Yearly Progress is greater than ever before.

According to Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) description of the ideal instructional leader, the leader must be able to articulate a mutually agreed upon vision incorporating academic standards of learning and a commitment to high levels of student learning. Brown and Anfara (2003) state "Visionary leadership refers to the capacity to create and communicate a view of a desired state of affairs that clarifies the current situation and induces commitment to an even better future. The visionary leader inspires, challenges, guides and empowers" (p. 16). It is this focused mission on student achievement, curriculum, and instruction that makes higher levels of student achievement possible (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001). A strong instructional leader ensures the vision is reflective of the school community's values and beliefs; is clearly, consistently, and constantly articulated; and gains high levels of commitment from all stakeholders, both inside and outside of the school building. With this commitment from all stakeholders, the learning

community is able to move toward a "collective sense of 'we' in efforts to improve student performance" (NAESP, 2001, p. 25)

Therefore, everyone in the learning community has a clear understanding of the goals to which they are accountable; alignment is found in policies, practices, and the distribution of resources (Lashway, 2003). Through this clear understanding of the goals, stakeholders are motivated to work hard to achieve the goals. In her article, "Common Elements of High Performing, High Poverty Middle Schools," Trimble (2002) reports high-performing middle schools with large populations of economically disadvantaged students found success with "well-articulated goals and maintained programs and practices that target those goals" (p. 12). Ensuring these goals are written in measurable terms and frequently monitoring progress toward the goals, guarantees high student achievement.

A clear, well-written, representative vision is like a good road map, it provides the directions needed to reach one's destination and you know it when you have arrived. Creating a culture of high academic and performance standards and a strong belief that all students can learn at high levels appear to be at the core of this vision. It is the role of the instructional leader to create and implement structures and systems that will promote achievement of the school's vision (Hallinger, 2005). The effective instructional leader will also articulate the vision through personal modeling and the alignment of structures for students and learning with the vision. The importance of having a vision and mission is consistent with the Effective Schools research of the 1980's. Even today, this research has relevance. Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003) confirm Hallinger and Heck's

statement that “defining and communicating mission thus seems to be the most relevant leadership behavior in terms of improving student outcomes” and “is one of the most important aspects of school leadership” (p. 410). While a clearly articulated vision is not limited to the field of education and has been well documented in other fields, its significance should not be understated.

The focus on high academic standards is a significant part of the vision required of leaders to achieve high performance standards. Driven by the accountability standards, high academic and performance standards have risen to the top as a major focus for today’s learner-centered leader. Time and again, the research on successful middle level learning emphasizes the need for rigorous, challenging, relevant, and integrated curriculum based on high academic and performance standards positioned to prepare students for high school and beyond. The curriculum should be written as interdisciplinary units lasting several weeks to advance the understanding of essential questions, to promote critical thinking and problem solving, to include the completion of complex tasks, and to encourage habits of mind. Over and over, setting high expectations for both the educator and the learner are emphasized as a critical component of the middle grades model and at the root of the success of many middle schools.

As reported in their research, Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, and Sobel (2004) found “staff at the seven school in the study hold high expectations for their students and believe that all student can learn and deserve to learn” (p. 5). The learner-centered leader must not only demand high academic and performance standards, but must create an environment in which students are expected to be taught at higher levels, using the most

current, research-based instructional strategies, and assessed using a variety of modalities both formal and informal. These leaders must be able to “recognize whether lessons are aligned with standards, develop classroom assessments consistent with standards, and evaluate student work for evidence that standards have been achieved” (Lashway, 2003, p. 4). They are also able to use the student work samples and assessment data to drive future instructional decisions. It is this emphasis on outcomes that has pushed instructional leaders to seek to identify those leadership practices that positively impact teaching and learning. Instructional leaders now more than ever before are directly involved in curriculum and instruction. These leaders must be strong instructionally. They must have a real understanding of what effective teaching looks like and can determine when learning has occurred. They recognize and value effective instructional practice and encourage the use of innovative proven strategies that increase student achievement. They promote the teaching of challenging curriculum to all students once reserved for only the best. It is this emphasis on high academic and performance standards supported by a quality curriculum that challenges all students and a belief and expectation that every student can learn at high levels that serves as a core tenet of the research of successful middle schools.

These instructional leaders are relentless in their focus on teaching and learning. Barends (2004) stated, “supervision in the successful schools was decidedly different from that in unsuccessful schools” (p. 5). Other researchers have found that principals in successful schools insisted that every teacher was well-prepared every day with interesting and engaging lessons and activities, ensured that the strongest teachers were

working with the students needing them the most, and invested time in classrooms every day. In Terry's (1996) research, teachers identified the visibility of the principal in the building as the most important factor to the principalship followed by the principal's vision for the school. Further, Brewster and Klump (2005) in their work, *Leadership Practices of Successful Principals*, emphasized the critical importance of the principal's time in the classroom talking with students, reviewing student work, and being a meaningful participant. They found that 88% of those principals identified as strong instructional leaders visited classrooms daily or almost daily.

In addition to classroom visits, the National Association of Elementary School Principals standards state effective instructional leaders provide detailed feedback about how teachers can improve their instruction, which ultimately leads to improved student achievement. Other factors related to the emphasis on teaching and learning included protecting and maximizing instructional learning time, ensuring teachers have the opportunity to plan and work together regarding curriculum and instruction, gathering and using data to drive instructional decisions, delivering high-quality, aligned professional learning, and viewing the principal as being a learning-centered leader.

As the accountability movement has taken on greater importance in the past few years, instructional leaders are increasingly turning to the collection and analysis of data to make decisions and improve student performance (Wisconsin State Department of Public Instruction [WSDPI], 2000). In planning for school improvement, instructional leaders involve their stakeholders to establish priorities, set goals, plan for changes in the instructional program, dedicate the necessary resources, provide aligned professional

learning, regularly assess and monitor student and staff performance throughout the year, and make adjustments to ensure student success at year's end (Eric Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education [ECDGE], 2002; NCSL, 2007; Nettles & Herrington, 2007; School Improvement in Maryland, n.d.; Terry, 1996). They believe, as do their staff, that every student regardless of birthright, ability, or disability, is entitled to quality instruction using proven practices where students receive the necessary support from caring adults capitalizing on students' diversity and enabling them to achieve at high levels (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001; ECDGE, 2002; NAESP, 2001). According to Jackson and Davis (2000), in their work *Turning Points* developing a challenging middle school curriculum based on high academic and performance standards "is not enough: it is a beginning, not an end" (p. 34). They believe these standards are the link between excellence and equity. They further state

> Enormous differences in the family and social circumstances of America's young adolescents substantially influence their readiness to master rigorous academic content. However, as one principal told us, "We trip over our own hearts when we let these differences become excuses for not expecting that all students can achieve at very high levels." (p. 13)

In this era of accountability, the effective instructional leader recognizes the need to utilize a variety of data sources to make informed decisions to ensure student academic achievement (King, 2002). Whether it is the use of hard data such as test scores on norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessments, attendance rates, and discipline records (Crouch, 2002; WSDPI, 2000) or soft data such as student work samples, portfolios, observations, and grades, the effective instructional leader is constantly pouring over data and asking difficult questions of their faculty as they seek to

monitor student progress, determine program effectiveness, assess classroom practices, and gauge the quality of teaching and learning (NAESP, 2001).

As communities and governmental agencies demand greater accountability and fund sources become more limited, this emphasis on data use must not be limited to the campus instructional leader, but must also become common practice for everyone on a campus and in a district (Leithwood et al., 2004; Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, & Potter, 2006). According to successful middle school research from schools that "beat-the-odds," using data to monitor students' progress was everyone's responsibility; it included every student in every classroom and was done monthly, weekly, or even daily to ensure students were making the necessary progress. It is not "blindly doing the same thing over and over" (Waits et al., 2006, p. 7). Instead using the data becomes so much a part of the instructional program, it can best be described as embedded, and it is used to make informed curriculum decisions to increase student achievement.

As data are analyzed, program effectiveness evaluated and teaching and learning reviewed, the effective instructional leader identifies professional learning opportunities to address the needs revealed by the data that will make a difference in student achievement. As effective instructional leaders work to build learning communities, student and adult learning becomes a priority (Lashway, 2003; Parents for Public Schools, 2000) with their own learning serving as a model for others (King, 2002). The particular format for professional learning must coincide with the day-to-day work of the staff, must target improving teaching and learning, must align and attempt to achieve the

campus instructional goals, must be ongoing and focused, and must have a collaborative, problem-solving approach (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001; ECDGE, 2002; Mazzeo, 2003).

Similarly, the middle school research strongly supports the need to build the capacity of staff members through professional development that is high-quality, substantive, sustained, and ongoing with extensive follow-up. In those high-performing, high-poverty middle schools, there was a substantial commitment (time and resources) to building the staff's capacity. To support this, Stephens (1990) states, "Staff development is at the heart of school improvement – and it has far reaching implications for the professional development of teachers and the success of academic reforms" (p. 24).

Further, King (2002) states "The new generation of instructional leaders actively create conditions that encourage professional learning communities. Current research findings show that schools that function as learning communities produce higher level of student learning" (p. 63). It is apparent, the effective instructional leader is one that is committed to and creates a culture in which continuous adult learning is meaningful, encouraged, and worthwhile and subsequently, results in improved teaching, learning, and achievement.

Among improving campuses, Glickman (as cited in Leithwood et al., 2006b) identified shared leadership at the top of the list of contributing factors to school improvement. Similarly, Leithwood et al. (2006b) found a positive relationship for certain student outcomes resulting from teacher involvement in leadership activities. Highly successful instructional leaders who are not threatened willingly share leadership and seek out and promote involvement from faculty, staff, and parents in the decision-

making process (Gates, Ross, & Brewer, 2006). Brown and Anfara (2003) state "exemplary middle schools and their visionary leaders involve all stakeholders" (p. 23). They further state those closest to the students will make the best instructional decisions.

Recognizing the talents of others and endeavoring to build a culture of trust and collaboration in their school, leaders of high-performing schools strive to create a community of shared leadership (Mednick, 2003) and provide genuine opportunities for staff to participate in meaningful decision-making. Often, future leaders emerge and positive school and student performance is realized when shared leadership and decision making is utilized. School effectiveness and student learning is increased due to higher levels of commitment and greater responsiveness to student needs result when staff members are involved in decision-making. In their work, *Turning Points 2000*, Jackson and Davis (2000) describe this process as democratic governance and define it as "democratic governance is better thought of as a school-wide system for communication, planning, evaluation and accountability" (p. 146). No matter the name or the particular approach, the intent to involve more staff members has the same desired result – higher student achievement.

Not only do these successful instructional leaders realize the importance of including their staff in the decision-making process, they also recognize the importance of developing a partnership with parents and the larger community. This involvement of a student's first and most important teacher is critical to engaging and motivating students to learn (Leithwood et al., 2004). The leadership must create structures that promote collaboration among staff, parents, and the community. Just as they did when

creating an inclusive learning environment for diverse student populations, the learner-centered leader must “recognize and utilize the cultural, racial, and economic diversity of the school community to meet the needs of all leaders and to maximize the performance of students” (Murphy et al., 2006, p. 28). This is especially true when parents have not experienced positive and supportive relationships with schools and educators. It would be foolish for educators to view the home as a separate entity disconnected from the school especially since the best predictor of a student’s achievement depends on the family’s ability to create an environment that values learning. Schools must seek to find ways to increase the connection between the home and school. In doing so, children perform better and the school becomes a better place for everyone (WSDPI, 2000).

Traditionally, parent involvement begins to decline as students enter the middle school level. Yet, the need for continued parent involvement remains. Communication with parents is especially important at this level. Building a trusting relationship between families and the school says to the middle school student they are liked and respected. This sense of belonging enhances the middle grades students’ learning, increases their motivation and reduces dropout and delinquency (Jackson & Davis, 2000; National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2006). The National Middle School Association (2006) found parent expectations and involvement impacted student achievement to the degree that “children from low-income families and diverse cultural backgrounds approach the grades and test scores expected for middle class children” (p. 27). Keeping parents informed of their child’s academic progress is crucial, but even more importantly are the discussions between parent and child regarding future academic and career goals.

The effective learner-centered leader recognizes the importance of family, school, and community partnerships. They work to keep parents informed and build positive relationships knowing the influence this will have on student achievement.

Creating an environment that is a positive place for both adults and students is as challenging as achieving high-performance standards, but is equally important in helping students ”become healthy, caring and productive citizens” (WSDPI, 2000, p. 5). Schools that teach a core set of values such as respect, caring, and tolerance are said to be more successful than others with this setting the tone for “student and staff behavior in the classroom, at school sponsored events and across the community” (WSDPI, 2000, p. 5). At the middle school level, developing positive, caring relationships with students is profoundly important. In their groundbreaking work, *Turning Points 2000*, Jackson and Davis (2000) discuss at length the critical importance of relationships in the middle grades. They state “for young adolescents, relationships with adults form the critical pathways for their learning: education ‘happens’ through relationships” (p. 121). Repeatedly, Jackson and Davis stress the role of relationships in the middle grades. They state middle school students’ level of engagement and motivation depends on the relationships they experience. Expectations are expressed through these relationships. When students recognize their teachers’ care about them and they understand the expectations, students do work to meet these expectations.

The National Middle School Association (2003) in their work, *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* states, “academic success and personal growth increase markedly when young adolescents’ affective needs are met” (p. 16). Others have

reported gains in reading and math due to the amount of social support students receive and poor and minority students appear to benefit the most from these positive, caring relationships. It is the responsibility of the learner-center leader at the middle school level to create system and structures to ensure students are able to develop the kinds of relationships that promote high student achievement.

When applying this thinking to the work environment, the leaders in high-performing schools were said to pay close attention to their most valuable resource – staff members. Haycock (2007), President of Education Trust, said it well: "Good leaders don't just mouth the mantra – 'teachers are the most important thing, teachers matter a lot.' They actually ACT like teachers matter" (p. 31). The job of being a school leader is highly interpersonal. It requires the successful school leader to possess emotional intelligence. These leaders are said to have high levels of respect and concern for their colleagues, show empathy and sensitivity toward others, and work to establish trust and caring for and among their staff and students. By addressing these emotional needs and creating a positive work environment, the leaders' behaviors serve as an indirect positive influence on student learning (Leithwood et al., 2004; 2006a).

Similarly, at the middle school level, Styron and Nyman (2008) believe "a healthy school environment for students begins by supporting healthy relationships among the staff" (p. 2). This belief is supported by the National Middle School Association's (2003) position paper, *This We Believe*, when stating, "The relationship established within the middle school affect both the quality of student learning and the quality of teaching" (p. 122). Student achievement is, therefore, affected by the

relationships students develop with teachers and by the relationships teachers have with colleagues. It is then safe to say, relationships matter.

Through the research, a number of behaviors have been identified as contributing to effective, learner-centered leadership. These include developing a common vision that creates a clear road map of where the organization is going and when it has arrived and establishing high academic standards and expectations that are shared by all stakeholders and benefits from the diversity of these stakeholders. The effective, learner-centered leader focuses on teaching and learning with an in-depth knowledge and understanding of curriculum and instruction. These leaders can be found in classrooms interacting with students. The effective, learner-centered leader uses multiple sources of data as they constantly monitor classroom instruction, program effectiveness, and student progress. These data guide decision-making, which is a collaborative, inclusive progress. The learner-centered leader recognizes the importance of including stakeholders in decision-making is not fearful of sharing their leadership and understands that future leaders will often be developed through sharing leadership. Data will often drive the professional learning for the campus and individuals. Professional learning is deemed a top priority, will be in a variety of formats, and improves the instruction and student learning. Finally, effective, learner-centered leaders are aware of the emotional needs of their staff and works to build positive, caring relationships. They understand that by meeting these needs, the quality of campus life will be more positive and thus teaching and learning are impacted. This same emotional intelligence needed by staff members is also an important factor when building partnerships with family and community members.

Including parents and community members in campus decision-making and creating a welcoming environment will positively affect student achievement. To be an effective, learner-center leader typically requires long hours and hard work, but the rewards cannot be measured.

Other Models

Throughout the literature, researchers have proposed a list of behaviors identified as essential to successful leadership practice. Several of these behaviors have been discussed previously. Along with his colleagues, Leithwood et al. (2006a), a leading researcher in school leadership, proposes a similar list of qualities and practices, but condenses the list into three major categories. These core practices include setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization.

Research indicates setting direction accounts for the bulk of the leader's influence on the organization and more specifically student learning (Leithwood et al., 2006a). Setting direction involves developing and articulating a collaborative, widely accepted vision with high performance goals and expectations. By having a clear understanding of the organization's direction and purpose, staff will work toward challenging, yet attainable goals. As with other research, Leithwood et al. (2006a) have identified the close monitoring of staff and student performance as a critical practice to successful leadership and student learning.

The second leadership practice identified as important to a leader's success and student learning is the development of people. Within this practice are capacity building, providing intellectual stimulation, and serving as an appropriate role model for future

leaders. King (2002) believes a significant amount of time should be devoted to building the capacity of others since these individuals will be our future school leaders. When developing future leaders, a successful leader serves as a mentor providing support and encouragement. The successful leaders assist neophytes with shaping their thinking, reflecting on practice, and challenging them to assess their values, beliefs, and work to ensure alignment with the best practices to improve teaching and learning. The successful leader listens to the ideas of the protégés, takes an interest in them personally and professionally, acknowledges and rewards quality work, and provides feedback to encourage protégés to constantly reassess their practice as part of the improvement cycle (Leithwood et al., 2006a).

According to Leithwood et al. (2006a), final core practice is redesigning the organization. They identify three major practices within redesigning the organization needed to develop successful leaders and organizations. With the advent of site-based management, some of these practices may currently be in use. Assessing the school's culture to determine if the beliefs, values, attitudes, and actions align and are practiced in an environment of trust, caring, and respect is a primary consideration when redesigning the organization. Additionally, collaboration, open communication, and participation in decision-making regarding issues considered personally important to staff is closely linked to the school's culture. It is also important to note, the need for a more collaborative culture is not solely for those who work in the organization, but is for the purpose of being more inclusive for family and community partners. Finally, Leithwood et al. (2006a) recommend creating or modifying organizational systems and structures

such that they promote teaching and learning and improve student achievement. This may include the assignment of tasks, the development of schedules, the creation of and updating of routines or procedures to be more effective, and the use of human and material resources (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Much of the previous research reviewed can be readily embedded in Leithwood's three successful leadership practices. Within setting direction, we find developing a vision, establishing high academic standards and expectations, and focusing on teaching and learning. Developing people includes providing professional development opportunities and the importance of personal relationships. Leithwood includes in redesigning the organization the practice of promoting shared leadership and decision-making and involving family and community partners in the school. Easily, some of the individual practices discussed in the first part of the review could overlap one or more of Leithwood's practices.

One of the most researched leadership models, Phillip Hallinger's Three Dimensions of Instructional Management, contains many of the same leadership behaviors identified by Leithwood and encompasses much of the previous research. Hallinger's three dimensions of instructional management include (a) defining the school's mission, (b) managing the instructional program, and (c) promoting a positive school-learning climate. Much like Leithwood, Hallinger has clarified each dimension with specific leadership behaviors. In his Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale, Hallinger further defines each of the ten specific leaders' behaviors. When defining the school's mission, Hallinger includes framing the school's goals and

communicating the goals. Using data to develop goals and discussing goals with staff are included within this dimension. These leadership behaviors were discussed in previous research and in Leithwood's leadership practices of successful principals.

Managing the instructional program is the second dimension of Hallinger's instructional management. He includes supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring student progress as specific leader behaviors. Not only does Hallinger's model include using data to develop campus goals, but his model is also used to make instructional decisions. His model also includes the campus leader visiting classrooms for formal and informal observations, providing specific feedback to staff to improve instruction, reviewing student work, and being actively involved in the review and selection of curriculum resources. Many of these practices were discussed in the earlier review of the literature.

Hallinger's third dimension, promoting a positive school learning climate, includes protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, and providing incentives for teachers and students. More specifically, these behaviors include a focus on teaching and learning, frequent classroom visits, and interactions with students in a variety of settings, acknowledging superior performance by staff members both privately and publicly with non-monetary incentives and aligning professional development with the school's goals. Again, some of Hallinger's specific behaviors are similar to Leithwood's practices, but tend to be more specific and to a greater degree correspond with the earlier research.

Why Middle Schools and the Middle School Model

In the previous section, we discussed effective leadership practices including developing a vision; establishing high academic standards/expectations; focusing on teaching and learning; using data to guide instructional decisions; providing professional development opportunities; promoting shared leadership; considering the impact of personal relationships; and the role the family, school, and community partnership plays in student achievement. Woven throughout each practice was a brief discussion of the significance of the practice as it applies to the middle school level. There are recommendations and practices unique to the middle school to which we will now focus. Before we discuss these practices, we must determine the need for our emphasis on the middle school level.

As our nation increasingly serves as a leader in a global economy, our nation's schools must work diligently to keep pace and produce a technologically astute work force capable of thinking critically and solving problems. Research shows we fall short of meeting our own needs. Twenty years ago, the Carnegie Task Force on the Education of Young Adolescents (as cited in Jackson & Davis, 2000) reported "we produce young men and women who are semi-literate or functionally illiterate, unable to think critically and untrained in technical skills, hampered by high-risk lifestyles, and alienated from the social mainstream" (p. 29). The pattern continues. With the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001, schools are required to prove gains in student achievement or face serious sanctions up to and including closure. Middle schools are not meeting this requirement. Historically, student achievement lags when a student transitions from one

level to the next – elementary school to middle school and middle school to high school, but recent statistics are not promising. As recently as 2006, the National Middle School Association (2006) reported “only 29% of U.S. eighth graders demonstrated competence with challenging subject matter, one-fifth scored below basic level and 25% of eighth graders lack fundamental reading skills” (p. 2). Additionally, over half of all students being tested for the Adequate Year Progress component of No Child Left Behind are in fifth through eighth grades, yet less than 15% of Title I funding is allocated for the middle and high schools. Yet another sobering statistic that validates this claim is over one-third of all Title I schools targeted for improvement are middle schools.

Some have gone so far as to say the middle school student because of rapid physiological development is incapable of critical thinking (Cooney, 2001). When in fact what has been found is a disconnect between the organizational structure of middle schools, the format and quality of the curriculum used in middle schools and the preparation and quality of those who teach and lead in middle schools. The middle school cannot be designed as a “junior” high school, but must address the unique intellectual, social, emotional, and physical needs of the young adolescent. The middle grades curriculum has been found to be less coherent, less focused, and less rigorous than our international counterparts when what is needed is an integrated curriculum that provides many and varied learning opportunities. Finally, because of the grade level configuration of teaching certificates, most middle school students do not have a teacher or a school leader who has received special training in working with and teaching the middle level learner. Sadly, in those schools needing high quality teachers, those of poor

and minority students, they are the least likely to have an experienced, certified, and prepared teacher.

Without a doubt, the need to improve our middle schools is critical. There are many leadership practices that contribute to successful middle schools. Those were discussed in the section on leadership. In the following section, we will discuss those practices that are somewhat unique to the middle school and have been found to promote high student achievement. These include educators with specialized training of teachers, a safe environment, relevant and rigorous curriculum taught using engaging instructional strategies, and organizational structures to promote success.

The importance of highly trained middle school teachers cannot be understated. One of the key recommendations made in the seminal works *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century* (Jackson & Davis, 2000) and *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* (NMSA, 2003) is the need to hire teachers who value working with the young adolescent and who have received specialized training in both content and instruction of middle school students. The research on student achievement confirms the importance of having a highly trained middle school teacher in every classroom. Heller, Calderon, and Medrich (2003) found "teacher preparation and certification are by far the strongest correlates of student achievement in reading and math, both before and after controlling for student poverty and language status" (p. 11).

Similar findings were reported by Cooney and Bottoms (2003) in their research on making middle grades work. They found middle school students outperformed their

peers in reading, math, and science when their teachers had college majors in English literature, math, and science. Teacher expertise appears to be a critical factor in student achievement. Specialized content-area training corresponds to teachers asking higher-level questions, more challenging content, and more student-centered activities. Students reported teachers asking more “how” and “why” questions as well as requiring students to compare and contrast concepts. Overall, those teachers with specialized middle school training more frequently used best practices in their classroom, which affects student achievement. The need for highly qualified teachers is critical at every level, but it appears to be especially significant to the middle school level.

While it may be obvious, the need for a safe and orderly school environment has been identified as an important factor to student achievement at the middle school level. Waits et al. (2006) recount that in one study of turnaround middle schools conducted by the Charles A. Dana Center, creating a safe and orderly school environment was a major contributor to the success of one Texas middle school that continues to experience success. Jackson and Davis (2000) state, “A healthy school is one that provides its students and teachers with a secure and supportive environment, free of violence and discord; that promotes intergroup understanding and respect for those who differ in race, culture, gender, or religion” (p. 168). While this addresses the building level environment, a natural offshoot would be the need for effective classroom management. In successful middle school classrooms, students understood the expectations and consequences for their actions. These expectations were clear and evident and were viewed as the responsibility of every staff member for maintaining and improving

student discipline (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Therefore, it is the job of everyone at the middle school level to ensure students have a safe and orderly environment at the school level and at the classroom level.

At the very core of an effective middle school and a priority of the middle school model is a challenging curriculum, effective teaching, varied instructional strategies, and authentic assessment. The National Middle School Association (2006) recommends the development of a rigorous, challenging, relevant multidisciplinary curriculum that promotes higher-order thinking and problem solving. It would have real-world applications and would engage students on topics of interest to them. The curriculum would allow students to make multiple connections to their interest and their world and would tap into the way their brain functions. Students are said to enjoy school more resulting in fewer discipline problems (NMSA, 2006). In the best of all worlds, this idealistic curriculum would not be solely limited to use at the middle school level, but at all levels. While this may be considered the most effective curriculum to use at the middle school level, research has found that most middle schools do not use this format, not even the successful middle schools.

Related to a rigorous, challenging, relevant multidisciplinary curriculum is the use of many varied instructional strategies in inclusive classrooms. These instructional strategies should involve collaboration, cooperative learning, and community building that draw upon the learning style of many middle grades students. It is the belief of the National Middle School Association that reading be taught across the curriculum. Every teacher is a reading teacher. It is also the recommendation of the Making Middle Grades

Work program that suggests students at the middle level read no less than 25 books per year. Finally, assessment is a key piece of the curriculum and instruction program of any school. At the middle school level, formative and summative assessment should be viewed as relevant, connecting real-world skills, and interests (Heller et al., 2003) requiring hands-on, complex tasks to "produce solutions or other products that demonstrate their learning" (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 56). Preparing students to be lifelong learners (Jackson & Davis, 2000) who are good, caring individuals with democratic values and moral sensitivity (NMSA, 2006) is the goal of middle level curriculum and instruction.

Several organizational structures at the middle school level are noted for their contribution to the successful middle school and gains in student achievement. These structures include interdisciplinary teaming, block scheduling, collaborative planning, advisory, interventions, and transitions. By far the most significant organizational structure to impact middle school success is interdisciplinary teaming. The interdisciplinary team consists of a core group of teachers, usually two to five teachers, working with a common group of students. They are able to build positive and caring relationships with students while solving problems and meeting the needs of individual students. Students are able to receive the individual attention of a group of caring and concerned adults that is of critical importance to the success of middle school students. According to the National Middle School Association (2003), interdisciplinary teaming "is the signature component of high-performing schools, literally the heart of the school from which all other desirable programs and experiences evolve" (p. 29). The

collaborative nature of interdisciplinary teams models for students the desired in-class behaviors of inclusion, collaboration, and cooperative learning. The research is mixed regarding the effect teaming has on student achievement. Trimble (2002) found high-performing middle schools had school-wide teams that work. The National Middle School Association (2006) and Brown and Anfara (2003) also report higher achievement scores for middle schools utilizing effective teaming practices and common planning periods. Heller et al. (2003) report merely an association between teaming and student achievement. No matter the outcome, “Teaming is the starting place for building a strong learning community with its sense of family, where students and teachers know one another well, feel safe and supported, and are encouraged to take intellectual risks” (NMSA, 2003, p. 29).

As part of the design of interdisciplinary teams, middle schools with large student populations will oftentimes create a “school-within-a-school” or “houses.” The school-within-a-school or house format is designed to create the feeling of a small school. Small schools are known to be safer, have better student attendance, and high participation rates in co-curricular and extracurricular activities. Student achievement, attitudes, behavior, interpersonal relationships, self-esteem, and sense of belonging are all benefits of the small school. In creating the school-within-a-school or house design, middle schools seek to achieve these same benefits. The use of interdisciplinary teaming appears to be the place to begin as we plan to build successful middle schools.

Block scheduling and interdisciplinary teaming are two organizational structures that go hand-in-hand, mutually supportive of each other. While it is possible to

implement one without the other, together they make sense. When developing multidisciplinary curriculum to be taught by interdisciplinary teams, block scheduling allows for extended teaching time for high levels of understanding and learning. There are a number of versions of block schedules, and while it has said to be controversial with the right training and support, block scheduling can benefit school climate, student attendance, and student achievement (Rettig & Canady, 1999). Block scheduling gives teachers and students greater flexibility and allows more time for instruction.

The third organizational structure like block scheduling and interdisciplinary teaming that is recommended by the National Middle School Association as a critical component of middle school success is a common planning period. While this may be an obvious consequence of block scheduling, secondary teachers have little experience with working as a team, let alone with teachers from other content areas. A common planning period allows teachers to collaborate, develop integrated curriculum, collect and analyze data, create assessments, seek solutions to problems, share effective instructional strategies, and discuss individual student's needs. When focused on instruction and students, the common planning period can be a powerful tool for the middle school teacher.

In the previous section, the importance of relationships is critical at the middle school level. One means of developing a close and trusting relationship with a caring adult at the middle school level is through the advisory period. Typically, this is a 15-20 minute block of time designated for a small group of students to meet with an adult to discuss concerns. The advisory period can be just that – a period where an adult can

advise and guide students regarding career options, selecting future coursework, and outlining high school graduation plans. Advisory periods encourage positive relationships between students and adults and promote the student's self-esteem and sense of belonging. In *This We Believe*, the National Middle School Association (2003) states "all adults in developmentally responsive middle schools are advocates, advisors, and mentors" (p. 16).

Setting high expectations is one of the hallmarks of the works *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century* (Jackson & Davis, 2000) and *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* (NMSA, 2003). Additionally, high expectations have a long history in the effective schools research of the 1980's. Surely, this is what we want for all students? The question then is how do we help students reach the expectations we establish. Successful middle schools have found they must focus on the individual student and tailor the interventions to meet that student's needs. The Beat-the-Odds middle schools were systematic about the interventions. They intervene early, they use the available data, they provide quality, targeted instruction, they use assessment as a diagnostic tool, they provide interventions aligned with the data, and repeat the cycle to ensure students meet the high standards. This type of intervention ensures success for every student no matter his or her economic status, race, ethnicity, dominant language, ability, or disability. Students performing below the basic level are required to participate in after-school, before-school, and summer programs to help them with the rigorous curriculum. Key to providing the necessary intervention is the allocation of funding. Allocating money is unequivocal evidence of the value of interventions. High-

performing middle schools have found ways to provide social and academic support for students to ensure students successfully achieve the high standards that have been established.

In this section, we have discussed a number of practices identified that promote success at the middle school level. These practices include (a) developing a vision, (b) establishing high academic standards/expectations, (c) focusing on teaching and learning, (d) using data to guide instructional decisions, (e) providing professional development opportunities, (f) promoting shared leadership; considering the impact of personal relationships, and (g) understanding the role of the family, school, and community partnership. Further, there are some practices very specific to the middle school level that also contribute to the making of a success middle school. These practices include specialized training of teachers, a safe environment, relevant and rigorous curriculum taught using engaging instructional strategies, and organizational structures.

The Delphi Method

In this last section, we will turn our attention to a discussion of the Delphi Method. The Delphi Method is a structured, group communication process, iterative in nature, that allows for the solicitation, collection, and distillation of the knowledge and judgments from a panel of experts who are geographically dispersed making face-to-face committee work challenging, and in some cases, impossible. The Delphi Method allows for the exploration of a single question or idea or through a series of questionnaires, generally for the purpose of decision-making, problem solving, or futures forecasting. Ziglio (1996) states:

> The method can be applied to problems that do not lend themselves to precise analytical techniques but rather could benefit from the subjective judgments of individuals on a collective basis and to focus their collective human intelligence on the problem at hand. (p. 2)

Delphi allows for "meaningful group communication" (Turoff, 1971, p. 317) without some of the negative aspects commonly associated with committee work (Rowe & Wright, 1999). Additionally, a Delphi can be administered from a distance and does not require the face-to-face interaction of the traditional committee work (Bourgeois, Pugmire, Stevenson, Swanson, & Swanson, n.d.). In the case where decisions are based on informed judgment, the Delphi method is an appropriate application (Yousuf, 2007). While the Delphi Method is not seeking to gain a quick group compromise, it does promote the value of individual contributions to producing a common group perspective.

The Delphi method is also able to use both quantitative and qualitative research methods to capture data and does not require major statistical analysis. Dalkey and Rourke (1971) stated, "that for subject matters where the best available information is the judgments of knowledgeable individuals, a systematic and controlled process of querying and aggregating the judgments of members of a group has distinct advantages over the traditional group discussion" (p. 1). The data collected from a Delphi study have been found to be fairly reliable and significant. According to Dalkey and Rourke (1971), "the overall group judgments were 45 percent more accurate than individual judgments" (p. 45). Further, Rowe and Wright (1999) found "Delphi groups outperform statistical groups" (p. 353). The statistical measures used in a Delphi study are the measure of central tendency, standard deviation and interquartile range (Hsu & Sandford, 2007a).

Therefore, the statistical average of a group of experts derived through the use of the Delphi method appears to be a useful research tool when the topic being considered does not lend itself well to other statistical measures.

One of the distinct features of the Delphi Method is the feedback provided to panel members between each round of data collection. It appears to be especially critical that members of the expert panel believe they are genuinely exchanging information with peers. This apparently increases panel members' sustained participation in the exercise (Turoff, 1972). According to Bourgeois et al. (n.d.), "The Delphi Method is a combination of qualitative and quantitative processes that draws mainly upon the opinions of identified experts to develop theories and projections for the future" (p. 1). The Delphi Method "is not a procedure intended to challenge statistical or model-based procedures" (Rowe & Wright, 1999, p. 354), but rather recognizes the value of expert opinions.

One of the unique characteristics of the Delphi method is the use of a panel of experts. One of the earliest researchers to utilize the Delphi method, Bernice Brown of the RAND Corporation stated, "The key to a successful Delphi study lies in the selection of participants" (Brown, 1968, p. 6). The quality of the results achieved appears to be directly linked to the initial selection of members of the expert panel of participants. The panelists' degree of knowledge and level of competence impacts the caliber of the ideas generated and responses given. A simple random sampling or simply choosing knowledgeable individuals is considered an ineffective method for selecting an expert panel (Bourgeois et al., n.d.; Hsu & Sandford, 2007a). Rather, the selection of genuine

experts who are highly trained with specialized knowledge (Hsu & Sandford, 2007a) are deemed the most optimal panel members who will ensure more accurate responses are provided. Determining expertness raises some important questions – by whose standard are the potential panelists considered an expert? By his/her peers? By his/her own determination? By years in the profession? By level of success? By number of publications? Prior to soliciting potential panel members, the researcher must determine a list of criteria required for individuals to be considered as possible members of the expert panel (Brown, 1968).

Determining the size of the panel is another consideration with little consensus being reached in the literature (Hsu & Sandford, 2007a). Norman Dalkey, a RAND Corporation researcher and an early proponent of the Delphi method who is generally considered the founder, stated the more homogeneous the population, the smaller the panel could be with between 10-15 individuals (Dalkey, 1967). Similarly, Osborne Collins, Ratcliffe, Millar, and Duschl (2001) report the minimum size of an expert panel as 10 with a maximum size of 30. Likewise, Bourgeois et al. (n.d.) in their work "The Delphi Method: A Qualitative Means to a Better Future" believe the needs of the research study and the budget drive the size of the expert panel, but ultimately state that panels should consist of between 10 and 18 members" (p. 2).

A key strength of the expert panel in the Delphi method is the anonymity of its members. Because no member of the panel knows the identity of the other members, true consensus or not can be generated and those problems associated with traditional committee work are eliminated. While the goal may be to achieve consensus, the Delphi

method with anonymity allows extreme positions and viewpoints to be voiced again without the negative pressures generally associated with traditional committee work attempting to achieve consensus (Gordon, 2003). There are a number of reasons panelists would find the anonymity afforded in the Delphi method a positive for participation. These reasons include: (a) concepts, ideas, viewpoints, and opinions all have equal value because the identify of who introduced is unknown; (b) decisions are based on merit, not on who proposed the concept (Custer, Scarcella, & Stewart, 1999); (c) the status of individual members is unknown; therefore, it does not positively or negatively influence other panelists (Turoff, 1971); and (d) dominant panel members' influence is eliminated. Therefore, the anonymity of panelists can be viewed as a positive reason for participation in a Delphi study.

As with any research, the development of a high quality, well-written questionnaire is of critical importance (Gordon, 2003). In its earliest form, the Delphi method was a single, open-ended question to which panelists would respond offering opinions and often providing supporting evidence from their area of expertise. Since those earliest Delphi, a variety of alternative versions have been developed. The modified Delphi method begins with a structured questionnaire that serves as a springboard for future iterations (Hsu & Sandford, 2007a; Rowe & Wright, 1999). This structured questionnaire is viewed as a methodological improvement from the single, open-ended question that was often misunderstood by those unfamiliar with the Delphi method.

A major feature of the Delphi method is the sharing of results following each iteration. During the controlled feedback phase of the Delphi method, participants are given the opportunity to review their own personal responses and a summary of the panel results. They may then provide clarifying statements, add additional insights, change their initial response/views, or maintain their initial input. Rowe and Wright (1999) state, "by limiting feedback, one must also limit the scope for improving panelists aggregate accuracy" (p. 369).

By design, the Delphi method will have a number of rounds of data collection with controlled feedback. As with determining the number of panelists needed to sufficiently generate valid, reliable data, the number of rounds needed to gather this data is equally elusive. Many consider two to three rounds adequate. The quality of responses and the number of panelists begin to greatly diminish after three rounds. Generally, the more homogeneous the panel, the fewer the rounds and conversely, the more heterogeneous the panel, a greater number of rounds may be needed to achieve consensus. Additionally, "there is little guidance in the literature to inform decision about the minimum percentage of panel response for any item that might constitute consensus" (Osborne et al., 2001, p. 16). Like any research study of multiple iterations, maintaining participation is critical. Hsu and Sandford (2007b) offer a number of recommendations to gaining and maintaining response rates that are especially critical to the success of a Delphi study. These include an endorsement from a well-known individual at the onset, multiple follow-ups to include additional mailings, postcard reminders, telephone or e-mail reminders, or a modest monetary or material incentive.

Each strategy has the potential to impact the response rate, but it appears to only increase response rates by 12-15%. Personal motivation as well as panelists knowing they will receive a complete summary of the study results has been found to positively influence response rates. According to Hsu and Sandford (2007b), “the ability to achieve and maintain an ideal response rate can either ensure or jeopardize the validity of a Delphi study” (p. 1).

From its earliest beginnings, the Delphi method was intended to be a tool for predicting futures. One of its first uses was in 1964 when six expert panels were selected and each was asked to forecast the state of the world in 25 and 50 years in the areas of scientific breakthroughs, population growth, automation, space progress, war prevention, and future weapon systems (Brown, 1968). Prior to 1964, the RAND Corporation applied the methodology as it attempted to determine the number of atomic bombs needed to “reduce the muntion ouput by a prescribe amount” (Dalkey & Helmer, 1962, p. 1). The range on the first iteration was a low of 50 to a high of 5000 with a ratio of 100 to 1. When given the opportunity to review their responses, panelists adjusted their estimations with a range of 167 to 360 and a ratio of 2 to 1. This example represents the strength of the iterative process in the Delphi method.

The Delphi method takes its name from the legend of the Oracle at Delphi in Greece. The legend describes an eerie scene in a special chamber located deep in a temple dedicated to the Greek god Apollo in the town of Delphi. Those seeking a glimpse of their future would gather in the chamber eager to hear the utterances of the entranced Pythia. Her messages were channeled through the temple’s priests and

interpreted for the masses (Zigilo, 1996). In ancient times, this may have been considered an effective method of futures forecasting, but Dalkey and Helmer, the founders of the Delphi method expressed disquiet that their methodology would be viewed in the same light as the Pythia's unintelligible utterance of Greek times with mystical influences. To the contrary, Dalkey considered the Delphi an effective predictive, forecasting methodology well suited for topics in which scientific laws had not been developed and the opinion of experts acceptable (Linstone & Turoff, 1975).

While Delphi is a tool for prediction and it possesses many strengths, there are those who believe the methodology is filled with faults. Those weaknesses include an overly simplistic methodology, imprecise or inaccurate interpretation of results and/or responses, time-consuming process (Gordon, 2003; Yousuf, 2007), other more appropriate methodologies, identification and selection of participants, lack of participant accountability, and inability to generalize results to a larger population, just to name a few. Critics believe the statistics produced in a Delphi study are not as rigorous as those of other studies that could better answer the research question(s) and achieve more reliable responses (Turoff, 1971). Sachman (1974) states "Delphi has been characterized by isolation from the mainstream of scientific questionnaire development and behavioral experimentation, and has set an undesirable precedent for interdisciplinary science" (p. 68). Another noted weakness of the Delphi method occurs when questions or written responses are superficial, unclear, or misunderstood by the participant or researcher (Collier & Gamarra, 2002; Lindstone & Turoff, 1975; Rowe & Wright, 1999). Researchers exert control over potential responses because of the way in

which questions are worded. Additionally, responses may artificially move toward the mean due to extreme views or those with a genuine understanding of the problem are ignored or unexplored. In a nominal group technique or more traditional committee work, these views present both positives and negatives. These extreme views do serve to represent a broader range of thoughts that could be overlooked through the Delphi method. Woudenberg (as cited in Gordon, 2003) found "Delphi does not produce more accurate answers than other methods, and that consensus occurs as a result of pressure brought on participants that have extreme opinions" (p. 10). Additionally, those individuals with extreme views have a tendency to drop out of a Delphi study because their view is overlooked; therefore, the mean achieved does not truly represent a consensus (Collier & Gamarra, 2002; Rowe & Wright, 1999; Turoff, 1972; Yousuf, 2007).

Sachman (1974) challenged the legitimacy of expert panel members. He questioned the merit of their opinions stating they did not have scientific value and their worth was overstated. He further challenged the value of the group consensus reached when using the Delphi method over the value of individual opinions.

Other faults closely linked to the use of expert panel members is the lack of accountability afforded participants of the Delphi study and misuse of or misunderstanding by expert panel members. One of the strengths of the Delphi method to be discussed later in this section is the anonymity granted to participants. Some suggest this anonymity "reinforces unaccountability in method and findings" (Sachman, 1974, p. 68). Others believe the value of expert panel members is often overlooked or

neglected. Panel members are considered experts in their field and should be treated thusly. They should be viewed as consultants and their time valued accordingly. Some panel members are unsure of the overall vision for the research project or lack of information about the intent of the project. Additionally, expert panel members often question the authenticity of the other panel members (Turoff, 1971, 1972; Yousuf, 2007). Combined, these factors contribute to panel members dropping out thus diluting the data collected.

While the weaknesses identified with the Delphi method must be considered, likewise, the strengths of the Delphi method similarly present a case for its use. These strengths include ease of use, flexible time frame, cost limitations, minimized group pressure, accuracy of responses, size of expert panel, and the research question does not lend itself well to other research techniques. By design, the Delphi method is easy to design and implement and does not require advanced statistical skills. Because of this, Linstone and Turoff (1975) contend it encourages researchers to use it as an effective research methodology. When using the Delphi method, the time required of panel members is flexible. They are able to respond to questionnaires within the parameters of their own schedule. Whereas, if they were to participate in more traditional, face-to-face committee work, time and distance create a dilemma. Further, the cost of such face-to-face interactions can be costly, while in today's world of technology, participants can respond electronically or by using the more old-fashioned method of paper, pencil, and mailing questionnaires. When using an electronic medium, panelists' responses are not altered due to transcription and their accuracy is not in question. Finally, in using the

Delphi method, the size of the expert panel can range from 10 to 20 members. While this may not seem to be an extraordinarily large group, when gathering experts in a field, this can present a problem. With the Delphi, this size panel of experts is considered appropriate.

One of the foremost strengths of the Delphi method is the anonymity granted expert panel members that typically results in lessened group pressure and more accurate responses. Built into the design of the Delphi method is the anonymity of the expert panel members. Due to this, panel members are free to express their views without being pressured by dominant panel members. This dominance may be a more experienced panelist or one with a domineering personality. Whatever the case in using the Delphi method, this type bias is reduced, the research topic can be more objectively explored, and a more objective consensus can be achieved. Dalkey (1969) stated, “The results indicated that, more often than not, face-to-face discussions tended to make the group estimates, less accurate, whereas, more often than not, the anonymous controlled feedback procedure made the group estimates more accurate” (p. vi).

The Delphi method is generally deemed an appropriate research tool when judgmental data are being collected. Dalkey and Rourke (1971) state, “Delphi procedures are appropriate for processing value material as well as factual material” (p. viii). Lindqvist and Nordanger (2007) state an advantage of Delphi is the researcher is able to isolate the content, thereby removing the environmental factors that may impact panelists’ opinions. Delphi is also noted for being an appropriate research methodology when “the problem does not lend itself to precise analytical techniques, but can benefit

from subjective judgments on a collective basis" (Yousuf, 2007, p. 4). It is also an appropriate tool when there is a complex issue to consider and the panelists have no pre-established relationship or communication system.

Ultimately, the strengths and weaknesses of the Delphi method appear very similar. When using any research methodology, the researcher has an obligation to consider all aspects of the study and make an informed decision about the most appropriate technique to use to achieve the best data. In this section, we have discussed what is the Delphi method, what are the characteristics of the methodology, what is its early history, and the strengths and weaknesses of the technique.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the research methodology used in this study of the perceptions that principals of high-performing middle schools found as essential leadership practices. The chapter also includes a discussion of the research design used in the study, a description of the population selected to participate in the study, and the procedures used throughout the course of the study.

Research Design

The Delphi method is a research tool designed to take advantage of the knowledge and judgment of an expert panel when traditional committee work is challenging or impossible. Strengths of the Delphi method include eliminating some of the detractors of traditional committee work (strong personalities, vocal members, group think, influential panelist), anonymity, and feedback provided between rounds.

In its original form, the Delphi method would ask panelists to respond to a single question or idea on a global issue for the purpose of making predictions or forecasting futures. This presented problems and misunderstanding in some cases to expert panelists, as they were unsure of the expectations. Thus, many researchers choosing to use the Delphi method have moved to a modified technique. For this study, the modified-Delphi method was used. In Round One, expert panelists were presented a series of research based leadership practices to rate using a Likert scale. Additionally, panelists were asked to share any other leadership practices they believed were critical to student success and

were not shared in the previous section. Descriptive statistics of mean, median, and mode were calculated as well as the inter-quartile range for this study. The IQR is calculated by determining which ratings for each item fall between the 25th and 75th percentile of responses for the entire panel.

In Round Two of this modified-Delphi study, expert panel members were provided with those questions in which their responses fell outside the inter-quartile range (IQR). Some panel members only needed to respond to one question, while two panelists were asked to respond to five and six questions, respectively. To prevent individual panelists from being influenced by the responses of others, they only had access to their responses. As reported throughout the research on the Delphi technique, one of its strengths is anonymity, which allows extreme opinions to be voiced without the pressure of other panel members. Panelists did receive the entire list of responses to the open-ended question regarding leadership practices they believed were critical to student success. In responding to their unique Round Two surveys, expert panel members were able to change their initial response to the question or maintain the response. If they maintained their response, they were asked to provide justification. This procedure is repeated until consensus is reached or there is a saturation of information and new ideas are not surfacing.

Research Population

The population selected for this study was principals of high-performing Texas middle school campuses. The criteria used to select the campuses included the Texas accountability system ratings, campus size, and the percentage of economically

disadvantaged students on the campus. These criteria were applied to the entire population of schools in Texas. Campuses not meeting the criteria were eliminated. The principals of those remaining campuses meeting the criteria composed the list of potential expert panel members.

Long before the provisions of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of the federal law No Child Left Behind, the State of Texas had developed and utilized the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) to rate campuses on a number of criteria. Campuses are rated as Exemplary, Recognized, Academically Acceptable, or Academically Unacceptable. These ratings are primarily based on student achievement on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Student achievement data are disaggregated by various sub-groups and each sub-group must meet an established standard in order for a campus to attain a particular rating. During the phase-in stage of a new state assessment (TAKS is the fourth such iteration), the standards change from year-to-year until full implementation with the exception of Exemplary. For example, during the first year of implementation, to achieve recognized status, a campus must achieve a passing standard in reading and math of 50%, but to earn exemplary status, campuses must achieve a passing standard of 90% in those same content areas. In each of the subsequent years, to earn recognized status, the passing rate increases until a ceiling of 80% is reached. At the same time, the passing standard for exemplary status remains stable at 90%. For a campus to achieve this rating, there must be a 90% passing rate in all subgroups. For the purpose of this study, middle school campuses that had achieved Exemplary or Recognized for three out of four years during the period of 2005,

2006, 2007, and 2008 were considered. The rationale for the three of four years is it has been found that a campus can drop into a lower AEIS rating because of one student in one subgroup not passing one of the TAKS tests; yet, this campus may have a long history of high student achievement. During a one-year period, special circumstances may occur resulting in the campus dropping into a lower AEIS rating category. The following year, the campus makes corrections and once again is able to return to their historically high level of student achievement.

Campus size was another selection criteria. Based on small schools research, campus student populations of less than 500 are generally considered a small school. Small schools possess many advantages; consequently, a school with a student population of over 500 students would have overcome the obstacle of being a large school and despite its size have high student achievement. Therefore, for the purposes of this study the principal of any middle school campus (any configuration of 5^{th} through 8^{th} grade) with a student population of greater than 500 was also considered a potential expert panel member. It should also be noted when considering subgroups for AEIS ratings, some subgroups would be excluded because they did not meet a minimum size (30). For small schools, this might be considered as an advantage, while on larger campuses, all subgroups would be included in their AEIS rating. Essentially, small schools are less likely to have enough students in several subgroups. Because of this, these groups are not included in the overall campus rating. It is typically that these subgroups fall below the required passing standard and prevent campuses from earning a particular rating. By excluding these subgroups, a small school is more likely to earn a

high rating. One the other hand, large campuses generally have enough students in most subgroups that these subgroups are included and can prevent a campus from earning a high rating.

The final selection criteria applied to middle schools was the percentage of identified economically disadvantaged students. There is much research that discusses the influence a family's economic status has on a child's academic achievement. High-performing schools that have overcome the challenge of a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students are beating the odds. These schools are earning AEIS ratings of Exemplary or Recognized over a period of several years despite having students from economically disadvantaged homes. For the purpose of this student, the principal of campuses with a free or reduced lunch rate of 50% or greater were considered potential participants. To be eligible for school-wide Title I funding, a campus must have a free or reduced lunch rate of 50% or greater. This served as the rationale and cutoff for campuses being considered for this study.

By applying the criteria of campus size, campus configuration (any configuration of 5^{th} through 8^{th} grades), and AEIS ratings of Exemplary or Recognized for three of four years (2005-2008) to all Texas public schools, a total of 164 campuses were identified. When the final criteria, percentage of economically disadvantaged students (50% or greater) was applied to the pool of 164, a final list of 39 principals was developed. Due to the small population, it was determined all 39 principals would be invited to served as expert panel members. After receiving positive communication from 15 potential panelists, it was determined the study would proceed. While 100% participation from all

39 principals was preferable, the Delphi method research indicated a panel of between 10 and 20 was acceptable. Therefore, it is believed the 15 panelists who had agreed to participate would be representative of other principals of high-performing middle schools in Texas.

Procedures

In preparation for the Institutional Review Board protocol, a preliminary list of potential expert panel members was developed. This list was based on a Public Information Request (PIR) submitted to the Texas Education Agency (TEA). After sorting through the data provided by TEA, the list had 24 potential panelists. The actual AEIS report cards were downloaded from the TEA website for each of the 24 identified campuses. As the report cards were reviewed, discrepancies began to be noted. Data from the spreadsheet received as part of the Public Information Request did not coincide with the data on the AEIS report cards. The major discrepancy noted was a variation in the ratings campuses had received during the original three-year period (2005-2007) being considered. As an example, the PIR data would indicate a campus had received a rating of Recognized, yet the campus AEIS report card would indicate the campus was rated Academically Acceptable. This kind of discrepancy was found throughout the data. In an attempt to determine the cause or clarify the irregularity, an outside source was consulted to review the data. Possible reasons for the discrepancies were considered and attempts to validate the reasons were made. After reviewing the data, it was determined the list developed from the Public Information Request was not accurate and could not be used to serve as members of the expert panel.

In September of 2008, a second Public Information Request was made to the Texas Education Agency. The request asked for the names of middle schools that had earned Exemplary or Recognized rating for the years 2005, 2006, and 2007 with student populations over 500 and a free/reduced lunch rate of 50% or greater. At the same time, a request was sent to the Executive Director of the Texas Middle School Association (TMSA) for a letter of endorsement to be attached to the survey documents. After waiting for a month with no response from TEA or the Executive Director of TMSA, a follow-up for both was made. Once again, no response was received from either the Public Information Request or the Executive Director of TMSA. In December 2008, it was determined other avenues would need to be used to develop an accurate list of campuses meeting the criteria for the study, and the study would need to proceed without the endorsement from the Executive Director of the Texas Middle School Association.

A careful and thorough exploration of the Texas Education Agency Accountability website was launched. From the TEA Accountability website, it was possible to download all the necessary data except percentage of economically disadvantaged students for each year for all the schools in the State of Texas. Once downloaded into a spreadsheet, the data could then be sorted by each of the established criteria. Any campus not meeting the criteria was eliminated. This process was done for the original three years – 2005, 2006, and 2007. Since the 2008 accountability information was also available, the 2008 data was also downloaded into a spreadsheet and became a part of the study. Once campuses had been eliminated from all four years of data, the four separate documents were merged into one large spreadsheet. There were

now over 1400 entries on the spreadsheet. The spreadsheet was reviewed to determine the campuses that met the criteria of campus size, configuration, and accountability rating (minimum of 3 years of Exemplary or Recognized ratings). A list of these campuses was compiled. In total there were 363 possible campuses. At this point, the free/reduced lunch rate for each of the 363 campuses was determined by looking the information up on the TEA website. The 2008 AEIS report card for each of the 363 campuses was located, opened, and the data taken from the report card. Once this process was completed, a total of 39 campuses were identified as meeting all four criteria.

On Thursday, March 5, 2009, the Round One materials (Appendix A) for the Delphi study were mailed to the 39 potential expert panel members at their official school addresses. They also received an e-mail that evening to their school's e-mail account explaining the study, its purpose, the forthcoming manila envelope, and its contents. The Round One materials included a cover letter describing the survey and the Delphi method, a survey preference form allowing participants to note their preferred form of communication or for potential panelists to opt out of the study, the Round One survey instrument, a self-addressed stamped envelope for the return of documents, and a small, monetary incentive in hopes of increasing participation. In the next four weeks, 23 responses were received. Of those 23 responses, 6 had indicated they would not be interested in participating, 1 respondent sent an e-mail indicating he/she would be able to participate in June, and 1 respondent returned an incomplete survey that was invalidated. This formed an expert panel consisting of 15 members. While it would have been

preferable to have all 39 potential panelists as members, an expert panel of 15 is an acceptable size. According to the research on the Delphi method, panels between 10-20 are acceptable. The research also expressed concern from panels larger than 30.

On Tuesday, April 7, 2009, two follow-up e-mails were sent. An e-mail was sent to the 15 panelists who had returned the survey thanking them for their prompt response and for their willingness to participate in the study. A second e-mail was sent to the 17 potential panelists that had not responded to the initial mailing. This e-mail again elicited their participation emphasizing the brevity of the survey and the benefits to be gained through participation. For ease of participation, the survey instrument was embedded in the body of the e-mail. In doing this, the potential participants needed only to reply and scroll down the page and enter their rating in the box provided for each of the questions. Additionally, a cover letter and the survey instrument were attached to the e-mail should the participant be more comfortable completing the survey using this format.

Several weeks were allowed to elapse waiting for the non-responders to reply to the e-mail of April 7, 2009. This permitted principals sufficient time to respond since April is an especially busy time of year in Texas public schools as staff and students make preparation for the high-stakes TAKS testing. On May 13, 2009, a preliminary review and analysis of the data were completed. Alternatives were considered to determine if further attempts to contact the 17 non-responders would be productive. Based on the best information available, it was decided Round One should conclude.

Preparations began to develop the Round Two surveys (Appendix B) for the 15 panel members. On May 31, 2009, e-mails were sent to the 9 panelists indicating a

preference for electronic communication. The e-mail included two attachments – a cover letter describing the current status of the study, an explanation of the inter-quartile rating (IQR), the specific question(s) in which their response was outside the IQR for the group, and the open-ended questions. The e-mail also included the individual survey for the panelist.

A packet (Appendix B) was mailed to each of the three panel members who had opted for a hard copy version of the survey. The packets contained the same materials as those sent electronically including a self-addressed stamped envelope. Again, the Round Two survey instrument was unique to each panelist based on his/her responses to the Round One survey.

An individual e-mail was sent to each of the three panelists whose responses fell within the inter-quartile rating on each question. It was explained their responses were all within the IQR. These panelists would be kept informed of the status of the study and would be included in any further surveys resulting from the study.

Over the next two weeks, very few surveys were returned. On June 14, 2009, a follow-up e-mail was sent to the eight panelists who had not responded to the Round Two survey. On June 21, 2009, another Round Two follow-up e-mail was sent. Almost immediately, two more surveys were returned. On Monday, June 22, 2009, a phone call was made to the final two panelists. Two more weeks passed with no response from either panelist. On July 8, 2009, a hard copy of their survey was mailed to their school address. The rationale for this step was if the panelists were overwhelmed by e-mail, perhaps as they worked their way through the correspondence received when they were

off contract, when they came across the survey, they would complete it on the spot and return it in the self-addressed envelope. Calls were made on July 23, 2009 to the last two panelists. At one campus, the secretary indicated the panelist was no longer the principal at the campus. Because this panelist was no longer available, this principal would not be included in the Round Three survey. The other panelist did not return her Round Two survey, but it was determined to proceed to Round Three.

The Round Three survey instrument (Appendix C) was developed. There were 12 questions with responses falling outside the inter-quartile range (IQR). Only one question had two panelists with responses outside the IQR. On Friday, July 24, 2009, an e-mail was sent to 13 principals with the Round Three survey instrument attached. Additionally, 14 survey packets were mailed to each panelist at his/her school address. These packets included a cover letter explaining the current status of the research, an individual survey instrument, and a self-addressed stamped envelope. Panelists were asked to complete and return the survey no later than August 8, 2009. As of the August 8 deadline, 7 of the 13 panelists had communicated via e-mail the status of their Round Three survey. One week later on Saturday, August 15, 2009, an e-mail was sent to the remaining 6 panelists with an attachment of their Round Three survey.

Additionally, each panelist was also mailed a second hard copy of his or her survey with a cover letter, a self-addressed envelope, and a small monetary incentive. Two weeks passed before any communication occurred between the panelists and the researcher. On Thursday, August 27, 2009, an e-mail was sent to the remaining 4 panelists informing them of a forthcoming phone call from the researcher. On Monday,

August 31, 2009, calls were made to all four campuses in an attempt to speak with the principal with no success. One principal had resigned his position and was no longer at the campus. In this case, the principal was located and an e-mail was sent with the survey. After a brief delay, he did respond to the survey. Follow-up phone calls were made the following day. As of August 27, only 2 of the panelists needed to respond to the survey to complete Round Three. A follow-up phone call was made to the final panelist who still needed to respond to the Round Three survey. The researcher was able to speak with her personally and was also able to obtain the necessary information.

In all, three rounds of surveys were completed over a six-month period beginning with the initial survey being mailed to 39 panelists on March 5, 2009, and the final response to the Round Three survey being received on September 5, 2009.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine what leadership responsibilities principals of successful middle level schools in Texas perceived as most essential to student achievement. Further, the study was intended to reveal how closely these principals' leadership responsibilities align with what is in the literature. Data were collected over a six-month period from March of 2009 to August of 2009 using a modified Delphi method. Fifteen principals of high-performing middle level campuses served as members of the expert panel. This chapter describes the data gathered through three rounds of the Delphi study and as it relates to the following research questions:

1. What did principals of successful middle level schools perceive as the most essential leadership responsibilities to student achievement?
2. How closely did the leadership responsibilities of principals of successful middle level campuses in Texas align with the leadership responsibilities identified with what is in the literature?

Through attempting to answer these questions, the implications and benefits included focusing on those leadership responsibilities and practices that principals of high-performing middle level campuses perceive as critical to student success, guiding personnel decision-makers in the selection of new administrators, and assisting administration preparation programs as they develop course work to align with the

responsibilities, selection of candidates to the program, and the emphasis of the internship.

The chapter will be divided into the following sections: (a) an overview of the data received in each round of the Delphi study, (b) a discussion of the data related to each research question, and (c) a closing summary that will discuss the data as a whole and how it changed over the course of three rounds.

Raw Data Overview

Thirty-nine middle level campuses were identified as meeting the criteria for consideration in the Delphi study. These campuses had achieved “recognized” or “exemplary” ratings on the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) for three of four years between 2005 and 2008, had student populations over 500, and had a free/reduced lunch rate of 50% or greater. The principal for each of these campuses was invited to be an expert panel member. Fifteen principals responded positively to the invitation, completed, and returned the survey instrument and agreed to participate understanding there would be multiple rounds of participation. A traditional Delphi study would utilize an open-ended questionnaire, generally one question in which panel members would respond by sharing their thoughts and ideas in a narrative format. With the modified Delphi study, a structured survey instrument is used in Round One. For this research study, the survey instrument developed by Dr. David Young (2007) for his dissertation, *Effective Leadership for Student Performance* (p. 179), was used. The 26-item instrument was aligned with the research from the Education Leadership Constituent Council, the Texas State Board of Educator Certification and the Interstate

School Leaders Licensure Consortium. Panel members rated each item using a Likert scale from 1-5 with 1 being “Not Necessary for Student Success” to 5 being “Critical Importance for Student Success.” In section two of the survey instrument, panel members were asked to provide any additional campus-level leadership characteristics not presented in the survey they felt were of critical importance to student success.

Because some of the prompts were lengthy, Young (2007) developed a summary phrase or descriptor to be used in the data analysis and summary. The summary phrase for each item can be seen in Table 1. A complete copy of the Round One questionnaire can be viewed in Appendix A.

Table 1. Round One Questionnaire Items and Corresponding Item Summary Phrases

Item	Complete Prompt	Item Summary
1	The campus principal develops a collective vision of the future that focuses, inspires, and sustains goal achievement efforts over time.	Collective Vision Development
2	The campus principal endorses visions of exemplary instructional practices.	Exemplary Instructional Vision
3	The campus principal develops people through intellectual stimulation, promotion, and support of those engaged in meaningful change.	People Development
4	The campus principal views the school as a professional learning community embedded within a local context.	Learning Community
5	The campus principal develops and strengthens school culture.	Culture Development
6	The campus principal modifies organizational structures (assignments, allocation of resources, and procedures) to create optimal conditions for learning and teaching.	Structure Modification
7	The campus principal builds collaborative processes.	Collaboration Building
8	The campus principal manages the environment.	Environmental Management
9	The campus principal responds proactively to challenges and opportunities created by the accountability-oriented policy context in which they work.	Proactive Response

Table 1 (continued)

Item	Complete Prompt	Item Summary
10	The campus principal responds productively to the opportunities and challenges of educating diverse groups of students.	Productive Response
11	The campus principal builds powerful forms of teaching and learning.	Form Building
12	The campus principal creates strong communities in schools.	School Community
13	The campus principal expands students' social capital valued by schools.	Social Capital Expansion
14	The campus principal nurtures the development of families' educational cultures.	Family Culture Development
15	The campus principal influences student learning by supporting teacher efforts to achieve high expectations for student learning.	High Expectations
16	The campus principal devotes a great deal of time and energy to the school improvement process.	School Improvement
17	The campus principal promotes student achievement through the effect management of the school's human, financial, and physical resources.	Resource Management
18	The campus principal continuously seeks out new available resources for the enhancement of student learning.	New Resources
19	The campus principal interacts with the entire community within which his or her organization is located by becoming knowledgeable of, responsive to, engaged in the larger social, economic, legal and cultural contexts of the community.	Community Interactions
20	The campus principal models integrity, fairness, and ethical behavior in all situations.	Ethical Behavior
21	The campus principal consistently supervises instructional practices throughout the entire school and is knowledgeable enough regarding curriculum and instruction to provide meaningful feedback to teachers.	Instructional Supervision
22	The campus principal's top priority is protecting instructional time.	Instructional Time
23	The campus principal supports teachers and regularly provides them with incentives.	Teacher Support
24	The campus principal chooses meaningful professional development activities for his or her staff and participates in them when they are presented.	Professional Development
25	The campus principal maintains a high degree of visibility to staff, students, parents, and other members of the community.	Principal Visibility
26	The campus principal strives to build the leadership capacity of those around them (teachers, students, parents, etc.).	Leadership Capacity

Fifteen responses were returned of the original survey instrument. Round One of the modified Delphi study ended in May of 2009. Descriptive statistics were generated. The mean, median, mode, and standard deviation were calculated for each of the 26 items of the questionnaire. These statistics are presented in Table 2. The inter-quartile range (IQR) and the number of responses that fell outside the IQR were calculated and are shown in Table 3.

Table 2. Round One Descriptive Statistics

Item	Item Summary Phrase	Mean	Median	Mode
1	Collective Vision Development	4.87	5	5
2	Exemplary Instructional Vision	4.73	5	5
3	People Development	4.80	5	5
4	Learning Community	4.53	5	5
5	Culture Development	4.80	5	5
6	Structure Modification	4.73	5	5
7	Collaboration Building	4.93	5	5
8	Environmental Management	4.40	4	4, 5
9	Proactive Response	4.67	5	5
10	Productive Response	4.67	5	5
11	Form Building	4.67	5	5
12	School Community	4.27	4	5
13	Social Capital Expansion	3.87	4	4
14	Family Culture Development	3.73	4	4
15	High Expectations	4.87	5	5
16	School Improvement	4.73	5	5
17	Resource Management	4.73	5	5
18	New Resources	4.67	5	5
19	Community Interaction	4.20	4	4
20	Ethical Behavior	5.00	5	5
21	Instructional Supervision	4.87	5	5
22	Instructional Time	4.60	5	5
23	Teacher Support	4.07	4	4
24	Professional Development	4.73	5	5
25	Principal Visibility	4.93	5	5
26	Leadership Capacity	4.60	5	5

Table 3. Round One Inter-Quartile Range (IQR)

Item	Item Summary Phrase	IQR	Number of Responses Outside IQR
1	Collective Vision Development	5 - 5	2
2	Exemplary Instructional Vision	4 - 5	0
3	People Development	5 - 5	3
4	Learning Community	4 - 5	1
5	Culture Development	5 - 5	3
6	Structure Modification	4 - 5	0
7	Collaboration Building	5 - 5	1
8	Environmental Management	4 - 5	1
9	Proactive Response	4 - 5	1
10	Productive Response	4 - 5	0
11	Form Building	4 - 5	0
12	School Community	4 - 5	3
13	Social Capital Expansion	3 - 4	3
14	Family Culture Development	3 - 4	2
15	High Expectations	5 - 5	2
16	School Improvement	4 - 5	0
17	Resource Management	4 - 5	0
18	New Resources	4 - 5	1
19	Community Interaction	4 - 5	2
20	Ethical Behavior	5 - 5	0
21	Instructional Supervision	5 - 5	2
22	Instructional Time	4 - 5	0
23	Teacher Support	3 - 5	0
24	Professional Development	4 - 5	0
25	Principal Visibility	5 - 5	1
26	Leadership Capacity	4 - 5	1

Responses to section two of Round One are presented in Table 4. These include comments panel members provided regarding any additional campus-level leadership characteristics not presented in the survey they felt were of critical importance to student success.

Table 4. Section Two Comments From Round One Questionnaire

Respondent	Comments Regarding Additional Leadership Practices
1	Hire best people available, then train and help set high expectations.
	Our teaming process is critical.
	Master schedule – time on task is extremely important
	Curriculum alignment
2	Campus principal teaches and reteaches expectations for students and staff.
3	I feel that it is imperative when making decisions that a campus principal stop to consider the impact the decision will have on students. Students should be considered when decisions are made that will impact a campus.
5	Development of effective Academic Teams and PLC's
	Master schedule developed to ensure PLC time for alike grade and subject area teachers to plan instruction together.
	Monitoring and having critical conversations about data – student achievement.
	Monitoring closely failure rate.
	Setting up time for student to make up work not completed or work that was difficult.
	Expectations that <u>all</u> assignments are turned in by <u>all</u> students.
	Don't complain – come to the desk with a solution.
	Building a culture of teachers that will do whatever it takes to help a child be successful.
7	The campus principal teaches *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and believes failure is not an option.
9	Top three priorities:
	Safe environment
	Building relationships and connecting with students
	Challenging and engaging curriculum and lessons
10	The campus principal must have a strong administrative team that demonstrates qualities such as: loyalty, a unified vision, open communication, commitment, belief that all students can become learners for life, "fire in their eyes," perseverance, and dedication. The support staff (counselors, librarian, social worker, nurse, etc.) must also posses the above-mentioned qualities.
	I am a firm believer that there is no "I" in team. Team effort is a must to ensure a successful school.
14	The principal's primary goals must be achievement and safety. The principal must be response to create and maintain school wide systems to manage the school climate/ environment and to set and support students and staff expectations!

Round Two of this modified Delphi study began in late May 2009 and concluded in July of 2009. In Round Two each member of the expert panel was provided with a unique, individualized survey instrument. Any of their responses, which fell outside of the IQR, composed their new survey instrument. Panelists were asked to review the prompt, their response, and determine if they would like to change their response or maintain their original response. If panelists maintained their original response, they were asked to provide a justification for maintaining their response. All of the responses from three panelists fell within the IQR for every question while some panel members had only one question to review and others had as many as six questions to review. The survey was streamlined as much as possible to alleviate any possibility of confusion and to reduce the amount of time each panelist was asked to give.

Thirteen of the original 15 panelists responded to the Round Two survey. Descriptive statistics were generated. The mean, median, and mode were calculated for each of the items of the questionnaire under consideration. Of the original 26 items, 10 were not re-calculated as the responses from Round One all fell within the IQR. The Round Two descriptive statistics are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Round Two Questionnaire

Item	Summary Phrase	Mean	Median	Mode
1	Collective Vision Development	4.93	5	5
2	Exemplary Instructional Vision	4.73	5	5
3	People Development	4.87	5	5
4	Learning Community	4.67	5	5
5	Culture Development	4.87	5	5
6	Structure Modification	4.73	5	5
7	Collaboration Building	5.00	5	5
8	Environmental Management	4.40	4	4, 5
9	Proactive Response	4.73	5	5
10	Productive Response	4.67	5	5
11	Form Building	4.67	5	5
12	School Community	4.67	5	5
13	Social Capital Expansion	3.67	4	4
14	Family Culture Development	3.60	4	4
15	High Expectations	4.93	5	5
16	School Improvement	4.73	5	5
17	Resource Management	4.73	5	5
18	New Resources	4.67	5	5
19	Community Interactions	4.27	4	4
20	Ethical Behavior	5.00	5	5
21	Instructional Supervision	4.93	5	5
22	Instructional Time	4.07	4	4
23	Teacher Support	4.73	5	5
24	Professional Development	4.93	5	5
25	Principal Visibility	5.00	5	5
26	Leadership Capacity	4.60	5	5

Using the inter-quartile range (IQR) established in Round One as the standard, the number of responses falling outside the IQR from Round One to Round Two is shown in Table 6. In Round Two, the number of responses falling outside the IQR fell significantly. Potentially, 5 of the 13 questions with responses outside of the IQR could have changed had just one of the two non-responders returned their survey. An attempt was made to retrieve this survey, but the panelist had moved to a neighboring school

district and the latest information had not been posted on the website to be able to contact them. With only a 55.2% change in the number of responses falling outside the IQR from Round One to Round Two, it would appear the expert panel members were fairly like-minded from the onset.

Table 6. Changes in Number of Questions Falling Outside the Inter-Quartile Range (IQR) From Round One to Round Two

Item	Item Summary Phrase	Number of Responses Outside IQR after Round One	Number of Responses Outside IQR after Round Two
1	Collective Vision Development	2	1
2	Exemplary Instructional Vision	0	0
3	People Development	3	1
4	Learning Community	1	0
5	Culture Development	3	2
6	Structure Modification	0	0
7	Collaboration Building	1	0
8	Environmental Management	1	1
9	Proactive Response	1	0
10	Productive Response	0	0
11	Form Building	0	0
12	School Community	3	1
13	Social Capital Expansion	3	1
14	Family Culture Development	2	1
15	High Expectations	2	1
16	School Improvement	0	0
17	Resource Management	0	0
18	New Resources	1	1
19	Community Interaction	2	1
20	Ethical Behavior	0	0
21	Instructional Supervision	2	1
22	Instructional Time	0	0
23	Teacher Support	0	0
24	Professional Development	0	0
25	Principal Visibility	1	0
26	Leadership Capacity	1	1
	Total	29	13

Just as in Round One, panel members were provided the opportunity to share any additional campus-level leadership characteristics not presented in the survey they felt were of critical importance to student success in Section Two. Panelists could also respond to any of the comments shared from Round One. No panelist opted to add further comments or respond to previous comments.

Round Three began in mid-July 2009 at about the time principals were returning to campus following their vacation. For most, the Round Three survey document was waiting in their mail both hard copy and digitally. The design of the Round Three survey instrument included all 13 questions in which responses fell outside the IQR. Panelists were provided with the prompt, inter-quartile range, the mean response, their response, and the number of responses outside the IQR. Panelists were asked if they would like to change their response or to keep their response from Round Two. Retrieving these surveys proved to be a challenge. Fourteen of the original 15 panel members responded to the survey either by submitting a completed survey instrument or by stating verbally or in writing the changes they did or did not wish to make. Ultimately, no changes were made between Round Two and Round Three. The descriptive statistics for Round Three are illustrated in Table 7 with Table 8 showing the number of responses falling outside the IQR in Round Two and Round Three. With no change in responses between Round Two and Round Three, it was determined consensus had been achieved and a fourth round would not be necessary.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for Round Three Questionnaire

Item	Item Summary Phrase	Mean	Median	Mode
1	Collective Vision Development	4.93	5	5
2	Exemplary Instructional Vision	4.73	5	5
3	People Development	4.87	5	5
4	Learning Community	4.67	5	5
5	Culture Development	4.87	5	5
6	Structure Modification	4.73	5	5
7	Collaboration Building	5.00	5	5
8	Environmental Management	4.40	4	4, 5
9	Proactive Response	4.73	5	5
10	Productive Response	4.67	5	5
11	Form Building	4.67	5	5
12	School Community	4.67	5	5
13	Social Capital Expansion	3.67	4	4
14	Family Culture Development	3.60	4	4
15	High Expectations	4.93	5	5
16	School Improvement	4.73	5	5
17	Resource Management	4.73	5	5
18	New Resources	4.67	5	5
19	Community Interactions	4.27	4	4
20	Ethical Behavior	5.00	5	5
21	Instructional Supervision	4.93	5	5
22	Instructional Time	4.07	4	4
23	Teacher Support	4.73	5	5
24	Professional Development	4.93	5	5
25	Principal Visibility	5.00	5	5
26	Leadership Capacity	4.60	5	5

Table 8. Changes in Number of Questions Falling Outside the Inter-Quartile Range (IQR) From Round Two to Round Three

Item	Item Summary Phrase	Number of Responses	Number of Responses
1	Collective Vision	1	1
2	Exemplary Instructional	0	0
3	People Development	1	1
4	Learning Community	0	0
5	Culture Development	2	2
6	Structure Modification	0	0
7	Collaboration Building	0	0
8	Environmental	1	1
9	Proactive Response	0	0
10	Productive Response	0	0
11	Form Building	0	0
12	School Community	1	1
13	Social Capital Expansion	1	1
14	Family Culture	1	1
15	High Expectations	1	1
16	School Improvement	0	0
17	Resource Management	0	0
18	New Resources	1	1
19	Community Interaction	1	1
20	Ethical Behavior	0	0
21	Instructional Supervision	1	1
22	Instructional Time	0	0
23	Teacher Support	0	0
24	Professional Development	0	0
25	Principal Visibility	0	0
26	Leadership Capacity	1	1
	Total	13	13

In this next section of the chapter, we will use the relevant data to respond to each of the research questions.

Research Question One

What did principals of successful middle level schools perceive as the most essential leadership responsibilities to student achievement?

Using the available descriptive statistics, the mean and the median for each survey question, provides us with some insight regarding what middle level principals perceive to be the most essential leadership responsibilities contributing to student achievement. Of the 26 questions on the survey instrument, middle level principals identified 20 practices critical to student success. These 20 practices received a median rating of five and may be referenced in Table 7. Further, when rank ordering the 20 responsibilities across three rounds of the Delphi study reveal interesting data. For each of these 20 questions, we find middle level principals perceive some responsibilities critical to student success supervisory in nature and not directly related to curriculum and instruction and ultimately, less directly related to student achievement. This is illustrated in Table 9. The descriptive statistics for each of the 20 questions may be viewed in Appendix D.

Similarly, when rank-ordering items by the overall mean, little changes among the perceptions considered most critical to student success by middle level principals. Again, the responsibility receiving the highest priority is not directly related to student achievement. Table 10 illustrates the rankings for each item by overall mean.

Table 9. Prioritized Leadership Characteristics

Item	Prompt	Round One	Round Two	Round Three
20	The campus principal models integrity, fairness, and ethical behavior in all situations.	1	1	1
7	The campus principal builds collaborative processes.	2	2	2
25	The campus principal maintains a high degree of visibility to staff, students, parents, and other members of the community.	3	3	3
1	The campus principal develops a collective vision of the future that focuses inspires, and sustains goal achievement efforts over time.	4	4	4
15	The campus principal influences student learning by supporting teacher efforts to achieve high expectations for student learning.	5	5	5
21	The campus principal consistently supervises instructional practices throughout the entire school and is knowledgeable enough regarding curriculum and instruction to provide meaningful feedback to teachers.	6	6	6
3	The campus principal develops people through intellectual stimulation, promotion, and support of those engaged in meaningful change.	7	8	8
5	The campus principal develops and strengthens school culture.	8	9	9
2	The campus principal endorses visions of exemplary instructional practices.	9	10	10
6	The campus principal modifies organizational structures (assignments, allocation of resources, and procedures) to create optimal conditions for learning and teaching.	10	11	11
16	The campus principal devotes a great deal of time and energy to the school improvement process.	11	12	12
17	The campus principal promotes student achievement through the effect management of the school's human, financial, and physical resources.	12	13	13

Table 9 (continued)

Item	Prompt	Round One	Round Two	Round Three
24	The campus principal chooses meaningful professional development activities for his or her staff and participates in them when they are presented.	13	7	7
9	The campus principal responds proactively to challenges and opportunities created by the accountability-oriented policy context in which they work.	14	14	14
10	The campus principal responds productively to the opportunities and challenges of educating diverse groups of students.	15	16	16
11	The campus principal builds powerful forms of teaching and learning.	16	17	17
18	The campus principal continuously seeks out new available resources for the enhancement of student learning.	17	18	18
22	The campus principal's top priority is protecting instructional time.	18	21	21
26	The campus principal strives to build the leadership capacity of those around them (teachers, students, parents, etc.).	19	22	22
4	The campus principal views the school as a professional learning community embedded within a local context.	20	19	19
8	The campus principal manages the environment.	21	23	23
12	The campus principal creates strong communities in schools.	22	20	20
19	The campus principal interacts with the entire community within which his or her organization is located by becoming knowledgeable of, responsive to, engage in the larger social, economic, legal and cultural contexts of the community.	23	24	24
23	The campus principal supports teachers and regularly provides them with incentives.	24	15	15
13	The campus principal expands students' social capital valued by schools.	25	25	25
14	The campus principal nurtures the development of families' educational cultures.	26	26	26

Table 10. Final Prioritized Leadership Characteristics With Individual Means

Rank	Item	Prompt	Mean
1	20	The campus principal models integrity, fairness, and ethical behavior in all situations.	5.000
t2	7	The campus principal builds collaborative processes.	4.977
t2	25	The campus principal maintains a high degree of visibility to staff, students, parents, and other members of the community.	4.977
t3	1	The campus principal develops a collective vision of the future that focuses inspires, and sustains goal achievement efforts over time.	4.910
t3	15	The campus principal influences student learning by supporting teacher efforts to achieve high expectations for student learning.	4.910
t3	21	The campus principal consistently supervises instructional practices throughout the entire school and is knowledgeable enough regarding curriculum and instruction to provide meaningful feedback to teachers.	4.910
4	24	The campus principal chooses meaningful professional development activities for his or her staff and participates in them when they are presented.	4.863
t5	3	The campus principal develops people through intellectual stimulation, promotion, and support of those engaged in meaningful change.	4.847
t5	5	The campus principal develops and strengthens school culture.	4.847
t6	2	The campus principal endorses visions of exemplary instructional practices.	4.730
t6	6	The campus principal modifies organizational structures (assignments, allocation of resources, and procedures) to create optimal conditions for learning and teaching.	4.730
t6	16	The campus principal devotes a great deal of time and energy to the school improvement process.	4.730
t6	17	The campus principal promotes student achievement through the effect management of the school's human, financial, and physical resources.	4.730
7	9	The campus principal responds proactively to challenges and opportunities created by the accountability-oriented policy context in which they work.	4.710
t8	10	The campus principal responds productively to the opportunities and challenges of educating diverse groups of students.	4.670
t8	11	The campus principal builds powerful forms of teaching and learning.	4.670
t8	18	The campus principal continuously seeks out new available resources for the enhancement of student learning.	4.670
9	4	The campus principal views the school as a professional learning community embedded within a local context.	4.623
t10	22	The campus principal's top priority is protecting instructional time.	4.600
t10	26	The campus principal strives to build the leadership capacity of those around them (teachers, students, parents, etc.).	4.600

Items 7 and 25 tied for second as perceived by middle level principals as the leadership responsibilities most critical to student success. Building collaborative process, which is the focus of item 7, is a key middle level practice as found repeatedly throughout the literature. Visibility, which is the focus of item 25, was the other leadership responsibility perceived as the second most critical to student success. This, too, was found to rank high as key to success in the literature.

It was not until those items tied for third that curriculum and instruction began to emerge more directly as critical to student success. Item 1, collective vision; 15, high expectation; and 21, instructional supervision, were tied for the third most critical leadership responsibilities perceived by principals of successful middle level schools needed for student success. Both visionary leadership and high expectations were found in the literature to be important to student success.

Concluding the top ten leadership responsibilities critical to student success, the expert panel members perceived these to be professional development standing alone in fourth place, and tied for fifth place were people development, culture development, and exemplary instructional vision, respectively.

Research Question Two

How closely did the leadership responsibilities of principals of successful middle level campuses in Texas align with the leadership responsibilities identified with what is in the literature?

When conducting a review of the literature on educational leadership and the middle school concept, several common themes begin to emerge. These commonalities

include the development of a shared, well-articulated vision that includes a commitment to high levels of student learning, the selection of meaningful professional development to align with campus needs and goals, an inclusive form of shared leadership in which all stakeholders are involved in the decision-making process, the perceptive use of data to develop campus goals and to serve as evidence of student success, and a effective partnership between the family, school, and community.

As these themes are compared with the perceptions of principals of successful middle level campuses, the leadership responsibility of developing a sustaining vision received the highest ranking of the commonly shared practices. On the survey instrument, item 1 deals with collective vision development. Through three rounds of the Delphi study, it consistently was ranked fourth and tied for third with the responsibilities of high expectations and instructional supervision as being perceived critical to student success. Along with collective vision development, item 15, high expectations, tied for third as perceived by the expert panel members. Interestingly, these items were separated and dispersed on the survey, yet they are connected and were perceived by principals as one of the top three responsibilities contributing to student success. This can be viewed in Table 11.

Table 11. Top Three Leadership Responsibilities

Rank	Item	Prompt	Round One	Round Two	Round Thee
1	20	The campus principal models integrity, fairness, and ethical behavior in all situations.	1	1	1
t2	7	The campus principal builds collaborative processes.	2	2	2
t2	25	The campus principal maintains a high degree of visibility to staff, students, parents, and other members of the community.	3	3	3
t3	1	The campus principal develops a collective vision of the future that focuses inspires, and sustains goal achievement efforts over time.	4	4	4
t3	15	The campus principal influences student learning by supporting teacher efforts to achieve high expectations for student learning.	5	5	5
t3	21	The campus principal consistently supervises instructional practices throughout the entire school and is knowledgeable enough regarding curriculum and instruction to provide meaningful feedback to teachers.	6	6	6

Professional development was identified as another common practice in the literature on leadership and the middle school concept. Item 24 on the survey states the campus principal selects and participates in meaningful professional development. Following Round One, this item was ranked thirteenth in priority, but after Round Two and Round Three, it was the seventh priority. When the final prioritized list of leadership responsibilities was developed based on the mean from Round Three, professional development was perceived to be the fourth highest priority critical to student success. In

Texas, one of the responsibilities of the site-based decision-making team is the selection of professional development aligned with campus needs based on data derived from multiple assessments. Being mindful of this, the selection of professional development would not solely be the responsibility of the campus principal, but would include the principal and other members of the campus leadership as elected by the faculty of the campus.

The use of data to develop campus goals, guide instructional decisions, select professional development and serve as evidence of student success, was perceived to be of high importance. While item 16 does not specifically identify the practice of using data in the prompt, it can be derived from knowledge of the school improvement process as part of the overall process. When comparing the mean independently through each round, school improvement was ranked eleventh following Round One and twelfth following Round Two and Round Three. In the final rankings based on the overall mean, school improvement, which involves the use of data, was tied for the sixth position as perceived by principals of successful middle schools in Texas. So, in the case of school improvement and the use of data, it was found to be important in the educational leadership and middle school concept literature and perceived to be critical to student success by the expert panel. One of the panel members specifically mentioned the need for having critical conversations about data in Section Two of Round One.

Not included in the top ten leadership responsibilities perceived to be critical to student success were the three survey items related to building family, school, and community partnerships. These three items were questions 12, 14, and 19 with summary

phrases of school community, family culture development, and community interaction. Of the three questions, item 12, school community, had the highest ranking of the three using mean after Round Two in which it earned the twentieth position. Through all other rounds, these three items were in the bottom third of all items on the questionnaire. Therefore, while the development of family, school, and community partnerships is a common responsibility in both the educational leadership and middle school concept literature, the members of the expert panel of this modified Delphi study did not perceive family, school, and community partnerships critical to student success. This can be seen in Table 12.

Table 12. Bottom Third Items

Rank	Item	Prompt	Round One Priority	Round Two Priority	Round Thee Priority
13	12	The campus principal creates strong communities in schools	22	20	20
14	19	The campus principal interacts with the entire community within which his or her organization is located by becoming knowledgeable of, responsive to, engaged in the larger social, economic, legal and cultural contexts of the community.	23	24	24
15	23	The campus principal supports teachers and regularly provides them with incentives.	24	15	15
16	13	The campus principal expands students' social capital valued by schools.	25	25	25
17	14	The campus principal nurtures the development of families' educational cultures.	26	26	26

The importance of shared leadership that involves all the stakeholders was noted in both the educational leadership literature and the middle school concept, but no questions on the survey instrument dealt specifically with this practice. Two of the expert panel members did address the need for a strong leadership team. Thus, while it was deemed important in the literature, it was not perceived as critical to student success based on the survey instrument.

Other prominent practices found in the educational leadership literature include instructional leadership and visibility. Both practices were perceived to be critical to student success by the principals of this expert panel. When uncovering the questions in the survey relating to instructional leadership, we find items 2, 11, 21, and 22. Respectively, the summary phrase for each is item 2, exemplary instructional vision; item 11, form building; item 21, instructional supervision; and item 22, instructional time. Instructional supervision when ranked by the overall mean was tied for third with collective vision and high expectations. Of the four instructional leadership prompts, it earned the highest ranking. This can be seen in Table 13.

Not far behind tied for sixth, was exemplary instructional vision. The two other practices tied for sixth were structure modification (redesigning organizational structures to optimize teaching and learning) and school improvement. School improvement was included in the prior discussion of the use of data.

Table 13. Instructional Leadership by Item Number

Rank	Item	Prompt	Round One Priority	Round Two Priority	Round Three Priority
t3	21	The campus principal consistently supervises instructional practices throughout the entire school and is knowledgeable enough regarding curriculum and instruction to provide meaningful feedback to teachers.	6	6	6
t6	2	The campus principal endorses visions of exemplary instructional practices.	9	10	10
t8	11	The campus principal builds powerful forms of teaching and learning.	16	17	17
t10	22	The campus principal's top priority is protecting instructional time.	18	21	21

The final two instructional leadership responsibilities identified as critical to student success were form building and protecting instructional time. Form building, item 11, states "The campus principal builds powerful forms of teaching and learning." Using the overall mean, form building, was tied for eighth with items 10 and 18. Item 10 relates to responding productively to the opportunity of educating diverse populations, and item 18 relates to the acquisition of new resources to enhance student learning. The final instructional leadership practice perceived critical to student success was the protection of instructional time. While ranked tied for tenth, protecting and maximizing instructional time has long been considered critical to student achievement. The prompt earning the same overall mean was related to developing the leadership potential of others.

Ranking in the top ten based on the overall mean, the instructional leadership practices of exemplary instructional vision, form building, instructional supervision, and

protecting instructional time were all deemed critical to student success by principals of successful middle level campuses, which comprised the expert panel.

Perceived as one of the most important leadership responsibilities critical to student success and identified in the educational leadership literature is principal visibility, item 25. Principal visibility earned a priority of second only to ethical behavior as perceived by principals of successful middle schools. Building collaborative process was of equal importance, and it was noted in the middle school concept literature.

Through the middle school literature, there are four additional practices identified as important. These include (a) creating an integrated curriculum that is meaningful and challenging, (b) developing trusting relationships, (c) building collaborative structures, and (d) creating a safe environment. Of these four middle school practices, one was included in the survey and two were noted by two panel members as being critical to student success in Section Two of Round One. Building collaborative structures as seen in Table 14 includes item 4 dealing with professional learning communities and item 7 related to collaborative processes. Both of these were deemed a high priority as perceived by the expert panel members. Collaboration building was considered the second highest priority, with only ethical behavior being perceived as more critical to student success. It was also considered equally critical as principal visibility. In the middle school literature, it is also noted as an importance practice.

Table 14. Specific Middle School Practices

Rank	Item	Prompt	Round One Priority	Round Two Priority	Round Three Priority
t2	7	The campus principal builds collaborative processes.	2	2	2
9	4	The campus principal views the school as a professional learning community embedded within a local context.	20	19	19

The two other leadership responsibilities perceived to be critical to student success, identified in the middle school literature and noted in the comments by principals of successful middle schools, were building trusting relationships and creating a safe environment. Two panelists wrote specific comments about the need for a safe environment. Related to a safe environment is the importance of trusting relationships. In the middle school literature, the two are interrelated. Seemingly, principal visibility from the instructional leadership literature would also appear to be related to a safe environment. One panelist noted the importance of trusting relationships. Throughout the middle school literature, this practice is repeatedly mentioned. Similarly, building trusting relationships is found in the literature on classroom management and effective discipline.

The final practice found in the middle school literature not addressed in the survey instrument was a meaningful, challenging integrated curriculum. This concept is particularly unique to middle schools, is highly recommended by the work of the National Middle School Association (2003) in *This We Believe*, primarily because of the way the adolescent brain functions; but even in turnaround middle schools, it is not frequently utilized. With no specific mention in the survey or in the comments, it would be difficult

to know if an integrated curriculum has been critical to the success of the middle schools under consideration.

Based on the responses from panel members to the survey, there is fairly good alignment to the instructional leadership literature and the middle school concept literature with many practices being in the top ten responsibilities perceived by principals of successful middle level campuses.

Summary

The data presented in this chapter were gathered over a six-month period through three rounds of a modified Delphi study. The purpose of this study was to determine what leadership responsibilities principals of successful middle level schools in Texas perceived as most essential to student achievement. Further, the study was intended to reveal how closely these principals' leadership responsibilities align with what is in the literature. Thirty-nine campuses were identified as meeting the pre-established criteria. The principal from each of these campuses was invited to be a member of the expert panel. Fifteen accepted the invitation with one dropping out after the first round. Three major findings were uncovered in this study. First, many of the leadership responsibilities perceived to be critical to student success are supervisory, in nature, as opposed to more instructionally related. Second, there was fairly good alignment between the instructional leadership literature and the middle school literature and the perception of the principals serving as expert panel members. Finally and interestingly, the one behavior deemed the highest priority, ethical behavior, was not specifically addressed in the literature. In the Texas Principal Certificate Standards, ethical behavior is the first standard; whereas, in

the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium standards, it is the fifth standard. This then raises the question was the order of the standards deliberate and what was the authors' thinking. The next chapter will further analyze the data collected and present any additional implications from the study.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of this study and conclusions drawn from the data presented in Chapter IV. There are five sections to this chapter: (a) a summary of the study, (b) a presentation of the major findings, (c) conclusions, (d) implications for further study, and (e) recommendations.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine what principals of successful middle schools perceive to be the most important leadership practices critical to student success. For this study, successful middle school were identified as campuses that had earned "recognized" or "exemplary" three of the last four years between 2005 and 2008. Additionally, the grade configuration for middle school varied. The Texas Education Agency groups campuses as elementary, middle and high school for the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS). Any campus that TEA considered a middle school was considered to be included in the study. Thus, the grade configuration could have been 5-6, 5-7, 5-8, 6-8, and 7-8 or any other configuration that might classify a campus as a middle school. Campuses were further delineated by size and the free/reduced lunch rate. Campuses of 500 or more students were included as well as any campus with a free/reduced lunch rate of 50% or greater. Five hundred is generally considered the point at which a campus becomes a medium or large campus, while 50% is generally the percentage of students on free/reduced lunch that a campus can be considered for school-

wide Title I funds which can be critical to funding special initiatives, interventions, additional professional learning and even teaching positions.

This study replicated to a large extent the study conducted by Dr. David Young in 2007. Dr. Young's study involved high school principals and used some of the same criteria. When reviewing the literature and analyzing test results statewide, there is a discrepancy at the middle school level. The literature on middle schools, let alone successful middle schools, is limited. Some of the research makes note of the limited amount of available research. For a number of years, Texas has had an accountability system in place. This system served as the foundation for the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) component of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). By far, elementary campuses have adapted to the accountability system and are generally fairly successful. This cannot be said of secondary campuses. High school campuses were somewhat more successful because their students recognized the importance of doing well on the state-mandated test. It was a requirement to graduate. Middle school students saw little reason to perform well. For these two reasons, limited available research and mediocre test results, it was determined research was needed at the middle school level. The implications of the research included (a) changing the daily practices of middle school principals to focus on the "right things," (b) involving district personnel in the selection of campus administrators to focus on those candidates whose beliefs and practice align with proven leadership responsibilities, and (c) creating university administrator preparation programs to design curriculum and coursework to support these practices.

For this study, two questions served as the focus. The first question dealt with the perceptions of principals of successful middle schools. What did these principals perceive to be the most important leadership responsibilities or practices critical to student success? Secondly, did these perceptions align with the literature on educational leadership and the middle school concept as carefully and thoroughly outlined in the National Middle School Association (2003) seminal work, *This We Believe.*

From the review of the literature, several themes emerge as critical to leadership practice and to the middle school concept. Throughout the educational leadership literature, the responsibilities or practices articulated as critical include the development of a shared vision with high expectations woven throughout that vision; the benefits of an inclusive, shared leadership with the involvement of all stakeholders; the selection of timely, meaningful, research-based professional learning in which the leadership is an active participant; the use of both hard and soft data to make instructional decisions; and the creation of a partnership between the family, school, and community. Two additional practices surface in the educational leadership literature. They include instructional leadership that has long been viewed as the core of all other leadership practice and principal visibility. Then we find in the middle school literature, four additional practices that are unique to middle schools. These include (a) creating a meaningful, challenging integrated curriculum, which generally requires some form of block scheduling and common planning periods for core content area teachers; (b) developing trusting relationships; (c) creating a safe learning environment; and (d) building collaborative

structures that allow educators to plan and discuss students, curriculum, instruction, and assessment through processes, such as professional learning communities.

After culling through four years of AEIS reports available on the TEA website, 39 middle school campuses were identified as meeting the established criteria. The principals of each of these campuses were invited to participate as members of an expert panel of this modified Delphi study. Fifteen responded positively, completing the first round of the survey (see Appendix A). The instrument used was developed by Dr. David Young (2007) as part of his research. Dr. Young reviewed the Principal Standards for the Texas State Board of Education, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium standards and the Educational Leadership Constituent Council standards to develop the instrument. The size of the panel varies, as the research provides no definitive ideal size, but a panel of between 10-15 members is generally considered appropriate. Panelists respond to a question or concept or as in a modified Delphi study, a survey instrument. The intent of a Delphi study is to reach consensus or until there is saturation and no further new information is being contributed. A typical Delphi study requires three rounds of input and feedback. The dropout rate rises greatly after three rounds.

For this study, expert panel members were asked to participate in three rounds. The initial information they received advised there might possibly be five rounds; but it was found after two rounds that panelists had reached consensus. Round One of the study began in March of 2009 and concluded in May of 2009. Descriptive statistics were calculated including the inter-quartile range (IQR) for each question and the number of responses falling outside of the IQR (see Appendix D). Ten of the 26 questions on the

survey instrument had no outliers and the responses of three of the panelists all fell within the IQR of all questions. For Round Two, an individualized survey was developed for each of the 12 panelists who had anywhere from one to six questions with responses falling outside the IQR.

The survey instrument was streamlined considerably so panelists only needed to respond to the questions pertinent to them. Principals were also given the opportunity to respond the to comments from Round One or add any new comments they believed needed to be included. The Round Two survey shared with panelists the questions in which their response fell outside the IQR. They were asked to review their response from Round One and either change their response or maintain their response. If panelists opted to maintain their response, they were asked to provide a justification. Panelists were provided both hard and digital copies of the instrument.

These surveys were sent out in late May of 2009 (Appendix B). It was hoped panel members would complete the Round Two survey before going off contract in the summer. By mid-July, all but two of the panelists had returned their survey. Attempts were made to retrieve these surveys. One principal had moved to another district and the other principal did not respond to attempts to get the survey. While waiting for these surveys to be returned, descriptive statistics had been calculated for the Round Two results without the data for the two missing surveys.

By mid-July, it was determined Round Two should conclude. Virtually immediately, Round Three surveys were developed and distributed. At this time, 13 questions from the original survey still had one or more response outside of the IQR. The

Round Three survey included all 13 questions, the IQR, the mean, and the individual panel member's response (Appendix C). Principals were asked to review the information and determine if they would like to change their response or keep their previous response. Panelists received both a hard copy and a digital copy. A few panelists returned their surveys promptly. With encouragement, a few more returned their survey. In early September of 2009, the final responses were returned. These last four required multiple phone calls and follow-up e-mails to obtain the necessary information, even if it only involved a statement that they did not wish to make any changes. In Round Three, no panelists changed any response from Round Two. Based on this, it was determined no further rounds were needed.

Major Findings

Three major findings were revealed in this study. First, many of the leadership responsibilities perceived to be critical to student success are supervisory, in nature, as opposed to more instructionally related. Second, there is fairly good alignment between the instructional leadership literature and the middle school literature and the perception of the principals serving as expert panel members. Finally and interestingly, the one behavior deemed the highest priority, ethical behavior, is not specifically addressed in the literature.

When rank ordering leadership responsibilities by the overall mean, 20 responsibilities comprise the top 10 responsibilities. Ethical behavior was the highest-ranking leadership behavior earning a perfect five, critical importance to student success, through all three rounds of the study. Understandably, ethical behavior should be rated a

five, but it does raise questions about why principals of successful middle schools perceive it as important to student success. Further, when you review the principal standards adopted by the Texas State Board of Education, ethical behavior is the first standard addressed. Certainly, the order of the standards was considered during the adoption process and the State Board of Education believed strongly enough to place ethical behavior as the first standard. However, while ethical behavior should be viewed as an important leadership behavior, is it of critical importance to student academic success? This could serve as a good follow-up question for further study.

Two behaviors tied for the second most important rated as critical importance to student success, yet one is a leadership behavior and the other would be viewed as a supervisory behavior. These are building collaborative processes and principal visibility. At the middle school level, the building of collaborative processes is critical. It is virtually at the cornerstone of the middle school concept, embedded throughout the middle school literature, and serves as the basis for many middle school practices including the use of block scheduling that supports the use of an integrated curriculum, holding advisory periods, building trusting relationships, and providing interventions. At the middle school level, it is apparent why building collaborative processes was rated this high among principals. Principal visibility was considered equally important as building collaborative processes. Through each round of the study, these two practices were rated the same by principals and tied for the same spot in each round. Presumably, this stability would indicate the importance of these two practices as perceived by expert panel members. Principal visibility is found in the instructional leadership literature, but

not specifically addressed in the middle school literature, but an obviously important leadership responsibility.

Developing a collective vision, establishing high expectations, and supervising the instructional program were the three leadership responsibilities rated as the third most critical to student success. The leadership literature and middle school literature both identify vision as important to successful leadership. Extensive research supports this leadership practice. According to Leithwood's (2004) description of the ideal instructional leader, the leader must be able to articulate a mutually agreed upon vision incorporating academic standards of learning and a commitment to high levels of student learning. In the middle school literature, Brown and Anfara (2003) state "Visionary leaderships refers to the capacity to create and communicate a view of a desired state of affairs that clarifies the current situation and induces commitment to an even better future. The visionary leader inspires, challenges, guides and empowers" (p. 16). Therefore, it is no surprise the importance of a having a vision or being a visionary leader is to student success.

For well over 20 years, because of the early Effective Schools research, we have known the importance of having high expectations as critical to student success. Principals of successful middle schools perceive it as important, also. While the expert panel of this study was small, more than 10,000 students were represented, on average over 68% of the students were minority, possible second language learners, and in every case, the campus had a free-reduced lunch rate of over 50%. Over and over, setting high expectations for both the educator and the learner are emphasized as a critical component

of the middle grades model and at the root of the success of many middle schools. As reported in their research, Picucci et al. (2004) found “staff at the seven schools in the study hold high expectations for their students and believe that all students can learn and deserve to learn” (p. 5).

The third leadership responsibility in this group, instructional supervision, is a combination of supervisory and instructional leadership behaviors. This behavior is supervisory, in nature, but also requires the principal to have an understanding of curriculum, instruction, and assessment in order to provide meaningful feedback to staff. In the instructional leadership literature, we find time in classrooms an important practice. In order to determine if quality instruction and assessment is being utilized in classrooms, principals must be in classrooms. They must be monitoring student work and having discussions with staff about the work and the assessments. Brewster and Klump (2005) in their work, *Leadership Practices of Successful Principals*, emphasized the critical importance of the principal’s time in the classroom talking with students, reviewing student work, and being a meaningful participant. They found that 88% of those principals identified as strong instructional leaders visited classrooms daily or almost daily. Without this time in classrooms, principals would not be able to supervise the instructional program at their school and make quality decisions based on the data and their observations. These instructional leaders are relentless in their focus on teaching and learning. Barends (2004) stated “Supervision in the successful schools was decidedly different from that in unsuccessful schools” (p. 5). Just as principals of successful middle schools serving as expert panel members perceived, these three

practices: (a) developing a collective vision, (b) establishing high expectations, and (c) providing instructional supervision, are critical to student success.

Alone in the fourth position, professional development, is found in both the literature on leadership and on the middle school concept and is critical to student success. It is also closely tied to the previously discussed instructional supervision process. Related to a principal's knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment is professional development. The effective instructional leader identifies professional learning opportunities to address the needs revealed by the data, and that will make a difference in student achievement. As effective instructional leaders work to build learning communities, student and adult learning becomes a priority (Lashway, 2003; Parents for Public Schools, 2000) with their own learning serving as a model for others (King, 2002). No matter the format, professional development is critical to student success with the findings from this study confirmed in the literature.

While there are two additional leadership responsibilities that had overall means in the top 25% (ratings of 4.75 or greater), they were not specifically addressed in the literature. Developing people and developing and strengthening the school culture are both important leadership behaviors. The presumption could be that through shared leadership, one is developing people; but is there a strong enough link and is it critical to student success? Similarly, developing and strengthening the school culture as it relates to student success should be an integral piece of high expectations. For these reasons, these two leadership responsibilities will not be included in this discussion.

In closing, there were seven leadership responsibilities rated in the top four positions as perceived by principals of successful middle schools as critical to student success. These behaviors include ethical behavior, building collaborative processes, principal visibility, developing a collective vision, establishing high expectations, instructional supervision, and professional development.

Conclusions

This study of the perceptions of principals of successful middle school campuses in Texas examined the leadership responsibilities these expert panel members believe to be critical to student success. Based on the data collected and the analysis completed, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The perceptions of the principals that composed the expert panel for this study align with the literature on effective leadership and on the implementation of the middle school concept.
2. There are seven leadership responsibilities that were perceived by panelists as critical to student success. They compose the top quartile and include ethical behavior, building collaborative processes, principal visibility, developing a collective vision, establishing high expectations, instructional supervision, and professional development.
3. There are some practices deemed critical to student success that were found in the literature, yet not rated in the top quartile. These were primarily identified in the middle school literature, but could easily be included at any grade configuration. They include building trusting relationships and creating

a safe learning environment. Panel members included these in Section Two, comments, in Round One of the survey.

These conclusions are clear after analyzing the data. Using the Delphi technique served as an effective methodology for achieving consensus and prevented the traditional shortcomings of consensus building from interfering with panelist's responses.

Implications for Further Study

The data obtained from this modified Delphi research study provide insight into the leadership practices and responsibilities principals of academically successful middle level school perceive to be critical to student success. As a result of this data, the following recommendations for further study are offered:

1. *Comparative Analysis* – Using the data obtained in this study and the data from Dr. David Young's study of high school principals using the same instrument, it would be interesting to compare the results from the two studies. How closely do the perceptions align? Is there a significant difference in the perceptions of middle level principals and high school principal? What can be learned from the two groups?
2. *Different Grade Configuration* – Conducting a study of principals' perceptions using successful elementary schools while applying similar criteria for identification purposes could prove to be very insightful and perhaps significant. This data could then be compared to the data collected during this study and Young's (2007) study. A comparison of the data collected at each level would be most interesting.

3. *Qualitative Study* – A qualitative study of the actual behaviors of the expert panel members could be useful. How closely do the expert panel members' behaviors align with their perceptions? Conduct face-to-face interviews with principals to get their thoughts and comments regarding particular questions, responses, or behaviors. Interviewing or surveying the faculty of the identified campuses to determine if the faculty values the same behaviors as the principal does.
4. *Localized Study* – Six middle school campuses from the same district were identified as meeting the criteria to participate in the study. It would be intriguing to carefully study what this particular district has done to achieve these results on a long-term basis. How have they selected the leadership for the campuses? What differentiates these campuses from others in the state? To what do they attribute their success? What does teaching and learning look like on these campuses? How are these campuses able to achieve at these high levels over several years? What are they doing that other middle schools are not? To what extent have they implemented the middle school concept?
5. *Turnaround Study* – Studying campuses that have made improvements in the AEIS ratings under new leadership could be valuable. One of the campuses identified for this study was highlighted in some of the research about campuses that had beat the odds despite a large population of Hispanic students. It would be valuable to identify other campuses that had made

similar progress. What made the difference? How long did the improvement take? Has the improvement been sustained?

6. *Middle School Concept* – A statewide study of the extent of implementation of the middle school concept and associated practices would be constructive. The information gained could be used to design professional learning opportunities for educators working at the middle school level.

Recommendations

Based on the significance mentioned, the researcher would like to make the following recommendations:

1. Administrative preparation programs must incorporate an ethics course as part of their certification program. Many post-graduate programs (i.e., MBA) include an ethics course as part of their degree requirements. Our status as professionals is frequently questioned, including an ethics course as part of our certification has the potential to restore some of this lost respect.
2. District leaders should also include annual professional learning on ethical behavior for all campus leaders. Many districts include legal updates annually; ethical behavior should have the same degree of priority.
3. Developing the team building and collaboration skills of district and campus leaders as well as those of middle level educators is also critical to future successes of campuses.
4. District and campus leadership need to ensure many professional learning opportunities are provided for middle school campuses. The professional

learning should be geared toward the implementation of effective middle school practices and assist those working on middle school campuses understand more fully the why and how of these practices.

While the perceptions and effective leadership practices of principals of successful middle schools in Texas are closely aligned, the research tells us the role of the principal is secondary to an effective teacher in the classroom and the economic and social background of the student have the strongest impact on student success.

Generally, the comments from panelists are a function of questions included in the survey instrument. The following recommendation is made from the comments not incorporated in the survey instrument:

1. Ensure campus operations and practices promote a safe and orderly learning environment. This should not be limited to disciplinary procedures, but should also include schedules, traffic flow through the building, supervision during transitions, etc.

From the literature, the following recommendations could be made:

1. The State Board of Educator Certification should consider establishing a principal certification specifically for the middle grades. After reviewing the literature on the middle school concept, key to a successful middle school are teachers with specific trainings and commitment to middle school. Similarly, middle school principals should have training regarding best practices at the middle school level and the implementation of these practices.

2. Along with a principal certification for the middle school level, administrator preparation programs should offer coursework specifically about the middle school concept and the middle school student. Many educators, teachers, and administrators alike, view the middle school as a mini-high school. It is not and practices that are used at the high school level cannot necessary transfer successfully to the middle school level. Having a clear understanding of the middle school concept, how to implement these practices, and the middle school student and the kind of teaching he or she needs to be successful would encourage the use of best practices at the middle school level.

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APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER, ROUND ONE QUESTIONNAIRE, SURVEY PARTICIPATION PREFERENCE FORM, AND INFORMATION SHEET

P. O. Box 10843
Killeen, Texas 76547
February 17, 2009

Selected Middle School
Principal
Street Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Principal,

I would ask for just a few minutes of your time to share with you information about an exciting opportunity. I would invite you to participate in a research study about middle level principals' perceptions of the most important leadership practices that impact student achievement.

Your campus, Selected Middle School, has found some of the answers to the challenges middle level schools face. The students on your campus are achieving at high levels and I would like to know what you, the campus leader, believe you do to promote this high level of student achievement. I believe this information will help all of us to improve our practices and ultimately students will benefit.

Intuitively, we would like to believe that the things principals do impact student achievement. Until recently, the research did not prove this to be true. But in the past five years, there has been research that does indicate that principal's behaviors do influence student achievement.

I am inviting you to be a participant in a study that will use the Delphi technique. With this process, an expert panel (you and fellow middle level principals) arrives at a consensus without having to leave your office. During the first round, you will be asked to complete a survey instrument. Based on the responses, a second survey will be developed and distributed to the participants. This process will continue until we reach consensus. There may be a total of five rounds of surveys, but none of the surveys should take more than 20 minutes to complete. The data should prove to outweigh the time you are being asked to give. I sincerely hope you will agree to participate in this study.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the following: Barbara.Carpenter@Killeenisd.org or (254) 501-2592 (work) or (254) 680-3218 (home).

Sincerely,

Barbara Carpenter
Principal Investigator

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP FOR STUDENT PERFORMANCE
Delphi Study – Round One

Part 1: Leadership has an impact on the performance of students in any school. Please respond to the following statements regarding leadership practices and their importance to positive student performance by placing the number corresponding to your belief in the answer blank. Use the following scale as a basis for your answer to each question:

5 = Critical importance for student success
4 = Above average importance for student success
3 = Average importance for student success
2 = Moderate importance for student success
1 = Not necessary for student success

____ 1. The campus principal develops a collective vision of the future that focuses inspires, and sustains goal achievement efforts over time.

____ 2. The campus principal endorses visions of exemplary instructional practices.

____ 3. The campus principal develops people through intellectual stimulation, promotion, and support of those engaged in meaningful change.

____ 4. The campus principal views the school as a professional learning community embedded within a local context.

____ 5. The campus principal develops and strengthens school culture.

____ 6. The campus principal modifies organizational structures (assignments, allocation of resources, and procedures) to create optimal conditions for learning and teaching.

____ 7. The campus principal builds collaborative processes.

____ 8. The campus principal manages the environment.

____ 9. The campus principal responds proactively to challenges and opportunities created by the accountability-oriented policy context in which they work.

____ 10. The campus principal responds productively to the opportunities and challenges of educating diverse groups of students.

____ 11. The campus principal builds powerful forms of teaching and learning.

____ 12. The campus principal creates strong communities in schools.

____ 13. The campus principal expands students' social capital valued by schools.

____ 14. The campus principal nurtures the development of families' educational cultures.

____ 15. The campus principal influences student learning by supporting teacher efforts to achieve high expectations for student learning.

____ 16. The campus principal devotes a great deal of time and energy to the school improvement process.

____ 17. The campus principal promotes student achievement through the effect management of the school's human, financial, and physical resources.

____ 18. The campus principal continuously seeks out new available resources for the enhancement of student learning.

____ 19. The campus principal interacts with the entire community within which his or her organization is located by becoming knowledgeable of, responsive to, engaged in the larger social, economic, legal and cultural contexts of the community.

____ 20. The campus principal models integrity, fairness, and ethical behavior in all situations.

____ 21. The campus principal consistently supervises instructional practices throughout the entire school and is knowledgeable enough regarding curriculum and instruction to provide meaningful feedback to teachers.

____ 22. The campus principal's top priority is protecting instructional time.

____ 23. The campus principal supports teachers and regularly provides them with incentives.

____ 24. The campus principal chooses meaningful professional development activities for his or her staff and participates in them when they are presented.

____ 25. The campus principal maintains a high degree of visibility to staff, students, parents, and other members of the community.

____ 26. The campus principal strives to build the leadership capacity of those around them (teachers, students, parents, etc.)

Part 2: Please use the space below to provide any additional campus-level leadership characteristics not presented in the questions above that you feel are of critical importance to student success.

_____

_____

_____

_____

SURVEY PARTICIPATION PREFERENCE FORM

It is my goal for participation in this study to be as effortless as possible. There are two means in which you may complete your surveys: 1) hard copy sent back and forth with self-addressed stamped envelopes; and 2) electronically through e-mail. Please indicate your preference:

_____ I would like to participate electronically. Please send all future correspondence to me at the following email address: _____.

_____ I would like to participate via hard copy through the mail.

_____ I do not wish to participate in the research study at this time.

Please return this form in the enclosed stamped self-addressed envelope along with **your completed Round 1 survey instrument.**

If you would like to complete Round 1electronically, please email me at Barbara.Carpenter@Killeenisd.org and I will forward you an electronic version of the survey.

INFORMATION SHEET

Title of the study: THE MOST ESSENTIAL LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES: PERCEPTIONS OF PRINCIPALS OF SUCCESSFUL MIDDLE LEVEL SCHOOLS IN TEXAS

As a selected participant for this study, please understand the following conditions:

Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of middle level principals about the most important leadership responsibilities needed for successful student achievement.

Selection:
You were selected to participate because your campus has been identified as having high student achievement (recognized or exemplary) for the past three years.

Participation:
Your participation is voluntary. You may decide to drop out of the study at any time once the study has begun.

Participant information is confidential. Records will be stored in a locked file cabinet and will be destroyed once the study is completed. Participants will not know the identity of any other participants.

You will be asked to complete a survey instrument that will take approximately 20 minutes. There will be no less than two subsequent follow-up surveys that will each take approximately 20 minutes each to complete.

The first surveys will be distributed in August 2008 and the final survey should be completed no later than March 2009.

Risks/Benefits:
The risks you may experience through participation in this study are minimal and are not greater than any risks you would encounter in your daily life.

Participants will be provided with an executive summary of the results. The data results may be used to guide future leadership practice.

Compensation:
A modest monetary incentive ($1 to $5) will be included with the initial survey instrument and each subsequent round.

Supervision:
This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas A&M University. For research-related questions or problems about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB office at (979)458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu.

Questions:
If you have any questions regarding participation in the study, the research instrument or any other aspects of the study, please direct them to:

Barbara Carpenter
Principal Investigator
(254) 200-6660
Barbara.Carpenter@killeenisd.org

Dr. John Hoyle
Doctoral Committee Co-Chair
(979) 845-2748
jhoyle@tamu.edu

Dr. Luana Zellner
Doctoral Committee Co-Chair
(979) 86201296
l-zellner@neo.tamu.edu

APPENDIX B

COVER LETTER AND ROUND TWO QUESTIONNAIRE

P. O. Box 10843
Killeen, Texas 76547
May 28, 2009

Selected Middle School
Principal
Street Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Principal,

Near the end of February you received a letter inviting you to participate in a research study about middle level principals' perceptions of the most important leadership practices that impact student achievement.

Thank you for agreeing to be a member of the expert panel and taking the time to respond to the survey. As I shared with you in our previous communication, we are using the Delphi method to develop consensus. As part of this process, there are generally two to three rounds of surveys. We have had 15 middle school principals who have agreed to participate and we are now ready to begin Round Two of the study.

The mean, the standard deviation and the inter-quartile range (responses falling between the 25^{th} and 75^{th} percentiles for the entire data set) have been determined for each question.

Your responses have been compared to the inter-quartile range (IQR) for each question. Your responses to the questions that fall outside the IQR are on the form attached (below in e-mail). For those responses please take one of the following actions:

1. Revise your original response based on the group feedback of the entire panel. If you choose this option, please enter your new response in the column entitled "Change."

OR

2. Maintain your original response and provide written justification for why you believe it to be an appropriate response for that item in the space provided. Your written justification will be made available anonymously to the group in Round Three for their review.

At the end of the survey, you will find a listing of all the responses to the open-ended portion of the original survey. Please take a few minutes to review those and provide any feedback on those items in the space provided. If those responses do not fall under the umbrella for that question, please indicate that also in the space provided.

I believe this round will take less time than the previous round. Your input is incredibly important and crucial to the final product. I believe this information will help all of us to improve our practices and ultimately students will benefit.

If you have any questions or I can be of any assistance, please feel free to contact me at (254) 501-2592. Once again, thank you for agreeing to be part of the expert panel and for your participation.

Sincerely,

Barbara Carpenter
Principal Investigator
Barbara.Carpenter@killeenisd.org

The following scale was your basis for your response to each question:

5 = Critical importance for student success
4 = Above average importance for student success
3 = Average importance for student success
2 = Moderate importance for student success
1 = Not necessary for student success

The number is the box was your response to the statement.

4	15. The campus principal influences student learning by supporting teacher efforts to achieve high expectations for student learning.

	Change

	Maintain
	Justification:

Below are the responses to the Part 2 question. Please respond to any that you do not believe fall under the umbrella of the question.

Part 2. Please use the space below to provide any additional campus-level leadership characteristics not presented in the questions above that you feel are of critical importance to student success.

- The challenge is to do all these practices simultaneously with an eclectic group of adults and students!

- The campus principal teaches *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and believes failure is not an option.

- Campus principal teaches and reteaches expectations for students and staff.

- The principal's primary goals must be achievement and safety. The principal must be response to create and maintain school wide systems to manage the school climate/environment and to set and support students and staff expectations!

- The campus principal must have a strong administrative team that demonstrates qualities such as: loyalty, a unified vision, open communication, commitment, belief that all students can become learners for life, "fire in their eyes," perseverance, and dedication. The support staff (counselors, librarian, social worker, nurse, etc.) must also posses the above-mentioned qualities.

  I am a firm believer that there is no "I" in team. Team effort is a must to ensure a successful school.

- Hire best people available, then train and help set high expectations.
  Our teaming process is critical.
  Master schedule – time on task is extremely important
  Curriculum alignment

- Development of effective Academic Teams and PLC's
  Master schedule developed to ensure PLC time for alike grade and subject area teachers to plan instruction together.
  Monitoring and having critical conversations about data – student achievement.
  Monitoring closely failure rate.
  Setting up time for student to make up work not completed or work that was difficult.
  Expectations that <u>all</u> assignments are turned in by <u>all</u> students.
  Don't complain – come to the desk with a solution.
  Building a culture of teachers that will do whatever it takes to help a child be successful.

- Top three priorities:
  1. Safe environment
  2. Building relationships and connecting with students
  3. Challenging and engaging curriculum and lessons

- I feel that it is imperative when making decisions that a campus principal stop to consider the impact the decision will have on students. Students should be considered when decisions are made that will impact a campus.

APPENDIX C

COVER LETTER AND ROUND THREE QUESTIONNAIRE

P. O. Box 10843
Killeen, Texas 76547
July 24, 2009

Principal
Selected Middle School
Street Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Principal,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the research study associated with my dissertation on successful leadership practices. Enclosed you will find the Round Three questionnaire.

With two rounds already completed, we are very near to reaching consensus on all of the items. In fact, 14 of the 26 Round One items now all have responses falling within the inter-quartile range. The enclosed questionnaire presents the remaining 12 items around which there is still some minor discussion.

You have been presented all 12 items for final consideration whether your response was within the inter-quartile range (IQR) or not. The reason is you need to "hear" the reasoning from those who have chosen to remain outside the IQR before you make your final decision.

Please read each question, reflect on the related statistics and review the justifications given for the questions. **If you wish for your answer to remain the same, please place an "X" in the appropriate box and proceed to the next item. If you wish to change your answer, select yes and enter your new rating in the appropriate box.**

This should be the final round of the study. Before things get too busy, now would be a great time to complete the survey and return it to me. There is both a hard copy and an e-mail copy with an attachment being sent. In the fall, once the data have been analyzed, an executive summary of the study will be sent to each panel members. Thank you again for your participation.

Please complete the questionnaire and return it to me by mail (self-addressed stamped envelope will be enclosed) or e-mail (Barbara.Carpenter@killeenisd.org).

Sincerely,

Barbara Carpenter
Principal Investigator

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP for STUDENT PERFORMANCE
Delphi Study – Round Three

Directions: Presented below is a list of the 12 questions from the original leadership survey as well as the information associated with your responses from Rounds One and Two regarding these items. After reading the prompt and the justification for answers outside the inter-quartile range (IQR) given by members of the expert panel.

The following scale was used as the basis for the answers to each question.

5 = Critical importance for student success
4 = Above average importance for student success
3 = Average importance for student success
2 = Moderate importance for student success
1 = Not necessary for student success

1. The campus principal develops a collective vision of the future that focuses, inspires, and sustains goal achievement efforts over time.					
Inter-quartile range	5 to 5	Mean Response	4.93	Your Response	
In Round Two, 1 of the 15 principals remained outside the IQR on this question. They provided the following justifications for their answer: • None provided.					
Based on the information above, do you wish to change your response to this item?					
Yes		New Response:		No	

3. The campus principal develops people through intellectual stimulation, promotion, and support of those engaged in meaningful change.					
Inter-quartile range	5 to 5	Mean Response	4.87	Your Response	
In Round Two, 1 of the 15 principals remained outside the IQR on this question. They provided the following justifications for their answer: • None provided.					
Based on the information above, do you wish to change your response to this item?					

5. The campus principal develops and strengthens school culture.					
Inter-quartile range	5 to 5	Mean Response	4.87	Your Response	
In Round Two, 2 of the 15 principals remained outside the IQR on this question. They provided the following justifications for their answer: • Although the principal is the primary driving the strength and success of school culture, strong academic traditions and master teacher input are vital to success.					
Based on the information above, do you wish to change your response to this item?					
Yes		New Response:		No	

8. The campus principal manages the environment.					
Inter-quartile range	4 to 5	Mean Response	4.40	Your Response	
In Round Two, 1 of the 15 principals remained outside the IQR on this question. They provided the following justifications for their answer: • None provided.					
Based on the information above, do you wish to change your response to this item?					
Yes		New Response:		No	

12. The campus principal creates strong communities in schools.					
Inter-quartile range	4 to 5	Mean Response	4.47	Your Response	
In Round Two, 1 of the 15 principals remained outside the IQR on this question. They provided the following justifications for their answer: • None provided.					
Based on the information above, do you wish to change your response to this item?					
Yes		New Response:		No	

13. The campus principal expands students' social capital valued by schools.					
Inter-quartile range	3 to 4	Mean Response	3.67	Your Response	
In Round Two, 1 of the 15 principals remained outside the IQR on this question. They provided the following justifications for their answer: • None provided.					
Based on the information above, do you wish to change your response to this item?					
Yes		New Response:		No	

14. The campus principal nurtures the development of families' educational cultures.					
Inter-quartile range	3 to 4	Mean Response	3.60	Your Response	
In Round Two, 1 of the 15 principals remained outside the IQR on this question. They provided the following justifications for their answer: • None provided.					
Based on the information above, do you wish to change your response to this item?					
Yes		New Response:		No	

15. The campus principal influences student learning by supporting teacher efforts to achieve high expectations for student learning.					
Inter-quartile range	5 to 5	Mean Response	4.93	Your Response	
In Round Two, 1 of the 15 principals remained outside the IQR on this question. They provided the following justifications for their answer: • I feel it is essential for teachers to feel supported by their administrators. This support allows teacher to flourish thus impacting student learning. This support can come in many ways: innovative programs requested by teachers, disciplinary support, emotional support, guidance in instructional approaches.					
Based on the information above, do you wish to change your response to this item?					
Yes		New Response:		No	

18. The campus principal continuously seeks out new available resources for the enhancement of student learning.					
Inter-quartile range	4 to 5	Mean Response	4.67	Your Response	
In Round Two, 1 of the 15 principals remained outside the IQR on this question. They provided the following justifications for their answer: • None provided.					
Based on the information above, do you wish to change your response to this item?					
Yes		New Response:		No	

19. The campus principal interacts with the entire community within which his or her organization is located by becoming knowledgeable of, responsive to, engaged in the larger social, economic, legal and cultural contexts of the community.					
Inter-quartile range	4 to 5	Mean Response	4.27	Your Response	
In Round Two, 1 of the 15 principals remained outside the IQR on this question. They provided the following justifications for their answer: • None provided.					
Based on the information above, do you wish to change your response to this item?					
Yes		New Response:		No	

21. The campus principal consistently supervises instructional practices throughout the entire school and is knowledgeable enough regarding curriculum and instruction to provide meaningful feedback to teachers.					
Inter-quartile range	5 to 5	Mean Response	4.93	Your Response	
In Round Two, 1 of the 15 principals remained outside the IQR on this question. They provided the following justifications for their answer: • I think the principal does have to be knowledgeable of curriculum practices on campus, but on our campus I am fortunate enough to have an instructional specialist who assists me with issues and concerns. My I.S. helps supervise and make sure we are using the most effective strategies for effectively teaching all of our students. We work together on all curriculum issues and problems.					

Based on the information above, do you wish to change your response to this item?					
Yes		New Response:		No	
26. The campus principal strives to build the leadership capacity of those around them (teachers, students, parents, etc.).					
Inter-quartile range	4 to 5	Mean Response	4.60	Your Response	
In Round Two, 1 of the 15 principals remained outside the IQR on this question. They provided the following justifications for their answer: • I think the campus principal does strive to make all stakeholders assume a leadership role, but not everyone is interested in being a leader. Most teachers want to teach their students and not be bothered with anything else. They want to be good soldiers and be told what to do. For the stakeholders who want to be leaders, I do try to prove opportunities for growth, for example, team leaders, fund raising activities for the campus, technology liaisons, etc.					
Based on the information above, do you wish to change your response to this item?					
Yes		New Response:		No	

APPENDIX D

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

APPENDIX D1. Descriptive Statistics by Delphi Round for Item #20: The campus principal models integrity, fairness, and ethical behavior in all situations

	Round One N=15	Round Two N=14	Round Three N=14
Mean	5	5	5
Median	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	5
IQR	5 - 5	5 - 5	5 - 5
# of Responses Outside IQR	0	0	0
Priority (out of 26)	1	1	1

APPENDIX D2. Descriptive Statistics by Delphi Round for Item #7: The campus principal builds collaborative processes

	Round One N=15	Round Two N=14	Round Three N=14
Mean	4.93	5	5
Median	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	5
IQR	5 - 5	5 - 5	5 - 5
# of Responses Outside IQR	1	0	0
Priority (out of 26)	2	2	2

APPENDIX D3. Descriptive Statistics by Delphi Round for Item #25: The campus principal maintains a high degree of visibility to staff, students, parents, and other members of the community

	Round One N=15	Round Two N=14	Round Three N=14
Mean	4.93	5	5
Median	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	5
IQR	5 - 5	5 - 5	5 - 5
# of Responses Outside IQR	1	0	0
Priority (out of 26)	3	3	3

APPENDIX D4. Descriptive Statistics by Delphi Round for Item #1: The campus principal develops a collective vision of the future that focuses inspires, and sustains goal achievement efforts over time

	Round One N=15	Round Two N=14	Round Three N=14
Mean	4.87	4.93	4.93
Median	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	5
IQR	5 - 5		
# of Responses Outside IQR	2	1	1
Priority (out of 26)	4	4	4

APPENDIX D5. Descriptive Statistics by Delphi Round for Item #15: The campus principal influences student learning by supporting teacher efforts to achieve high expectations for student learning

	Round One N=15	Round Two N=14	Round Three N=14
Mean	4.87	4.93	4.93
Median	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	5
IQR	5 - 5	5 - 5	5 - 5
# of Responses Outside IQR	2	1	1
Priority (out of 26)	5	5	5

APPENDIX D6. Descriptive Statistics by Delphi Round for Item #21: The campus principal consistently supervises instructional practices throughout the entire school and is knowledgeable enough regarding curriculum and instruction to provide meaningful feedback to teachers

	Round One N=15	Round Two N=14	Round Three N=14
Mean	4.87	4.93	4.97
Median	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	5
IQR	5 - 5	5 - 5	5 - 5
# of Responses Outside IQR	2	1	1
Priority (out of 26)	6	6	6

APPENDIX D7. Descriptive Statistics by Delphi Round for Item #17: The campus principal promotes student achievement through the effective management of the school's human, financial, and physical resources

	Round One N=15	Round Two N=14	Round Three N=14
Mean	4.73	4.73	4.73
Median	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	5
IQR	4 - 5	4 - 5	4 - 5
# of Responses Outside IQR	0	0	0
Priority (out of 26)	13	7	7

APPENDIX D8. Descriptive Statistics by Delphi Round for Item #24: The campus principal chooses meaningful professional development activities for his or her staff and participates in them when they are presented

	Round One N=15	Round Two N=14	Round Three N=14
Mean	4.73	4.93	4.93
Median	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	5
IQR	4 - 5	4 - 5	4 - 5
# of Responses Outside IQR	0	0	0
Priority (out of 26)	7	8	8

APPENDIX D9. Descriptive Statistics by Delphi Round for Item #3: The campus principal develops people through intellectual stimulation, promotion, and support of those engaged in meaningful change

	Round One N=15	Round Two N=14	Round Three N=14
Mean	4.8	4.87	4.87
Median	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	5
IQR	5 - 5	5 - 5	5 - 5
# of Responses Outside IQR	3	1	1
Priority (out of 26)	8	9	9

APPENDIX D10. Descriptive Statistics by Delphi Round for Item #5: The campus principal develops and strengthens school culture

	Round One N=15	Round Two N=14	Round Three N=14
Mean	4.8	4.87	4.87
Median	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	5
IQR	5 - 5	5 - 5	5 - 5
# of Responses Outside IQR	3	2	2
Priority (out of 26)	9	10	10

APPENDIX D11. Descriptive Statistics by Delphi Round for Item #2: The campus principal endorses visions of exemplary instructional practices

	Round One N=15	Round Two N=14	Round Three N=14
Mean	4.73	4.73	4.73
Median	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	5
IQR	4 - 5	4 - 5	4 - 5
# of Responses Outside IQR	0	0	0
Priority (out of 26)	10	11	11

APPENDIX D12. Descriptive Statistics by Delphi Round for Item #6: The campus principal modifies organizational structures (assignments, allocation of resources, and procedures) to create optimal conditions for learning and teaching

	Round One N=15	Round Two N=14	Round Three N=14
Mean	4.73	4.73	4.73
Median	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	5
IQR	4 - 5	4 - 5	4 - 5
# of Responses Outside IQR	0	0	0
Priority (out of 26)	11	12	12

APPENDIX D13. Descriptive Statistics by Delphi Round for Item #16: The campus principal devotes a great deal of time and energy to the school improvement process

	Round One N=15	Round Two N=14	Round Three N=14
Mean	4.73	4.73	4.73
Median	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	5
IQR	4 - 5	4 - 5	4 - 5
# of Responses Outside IQR	0	0	0
Priority (out of 26)	12	13	13

APPENDIX D14. Descriptive Statistics by Delphi Round for Item #9: The campus principal responds proactively to challenges and opportunities created by the accountability-oriented policy context in which they work

	Round One N=15	Round Two N=14	Round Three N=14
Mean	4.67	4.73	4.73
Median	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	5
IQR	4 - 5	4 - 5	4 - 5
# of Responses Outside IQR	1	0	0
Priority (out of 26)	14	14	14

APPENDIX D15. Descriptive Statistics by Delphi Round for Item #10: The campus principal responds productively to the opportunities and challenges of educating diverse groups of students

	Round One N=15	Round Two N=14	Round Three N=14
Mean	4.67	4.67	4.67
Median	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	5
IQR	4 - 5	4 - 5	4 - 5
# of Responses Outside IQR	0	0	0
Priority (out of 26)	15	16	16

APPENDIX D16. Descriptive Statistics by Delphi Round for Item #11: The campus principal builds powerful forms of teaching and learning

	Round One N=15	Round Two N=14	Round Three N=14
Mean	4.67	4.67	4.67
Median	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	5
IQR	4 - 5	4 - 5	4 - 5
# of Responses Outside IQR	0	0	0
Priority (out of 26)	16	17	17

APPENDIX D17. Descriptive Statistics by Delphi Round for Item #18: The campus principal continuously seeks out new available resources for the enhancement of student learning

	Round One N=15	Round Two N=14	Round Three N=14
Mean	4.67	4.73	4.73
Median	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	5
IQR	4 - 5	4 - 5	4 - 5
# of Responses Outside IQR	1	0	0
Priority (out of 26)	17	18	18

APPENDIX D18. Descriptive Statistics by Delphi Round for Item #4: The campus principal views the school as a professional learning community embedded within a local context

	Round One N=15	Round Two N=14	Round Three N=14
Mean	4.623	4.67	4.67
Median	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	5
IQR	4 - 5	4 - 5	4 - 5
# of Responses Outside IQR	1	0	0
Priority (out of 26)	20	19	19

APPENDIX D19. Descriptive Statistics by Delphi Round for Item# 22: The campus principal's top priority is protecting instructional time

	Round One N=15	Round Two N=14	Round Three N=14
Mean	4.6	4.07	4.07
Median	5	4	4
Mode	5	4	4
IQR	4 - 5	4 - 5	4 - 5
# of Responses Outside IQR	0	0	0
Priority (out of 26)	18	21	21

APPENDIX D.20. Descriptive Statistics by Delphi Round for Item #26: The campus principal strives to build the leadership capacity of those around them (teachers, students, parents, etc.)

	Round One N=15	Round Two N=14	Round Three N=14
Mean	4.6	4.6	4.6
Median	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	5
IQR	4 - 5	4 - 5	4 - 5
# of Responses Outside IQR	1	1	1
Priority (out of 26)	19	22	22

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