TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING:
ENSURING HIGH LEVELS OF LEARNING FOR ALL STUDENTS

BY

ROBERT PAUL ALLISON

DISSertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Organization and Leadership
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2012

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Carolyn M. Shields, Chair
Professor Marilyn Johnston-Parsons
Clinical Assistant Professor Linda Sloat
Assistant Professor Anjale Welton
Abstract

Ensuring that all students are learning at high levels is an important goal for school leaders. This multiple case study examined leadership practices, beliefs, and attitudes in two high schools to describe leadership for learning at these schools. Three bodies of literature were used for this study: principal leadership literature, leadership for learning literature, and transformative leadership literature. The principal leadership literature established the link between principal leadership behaviors and student learning. The leadership for learning literature provided a framework for the study to examine leadership practices, beliefs, and attitudes that could impact student learning. Transformative leadership literature served as a conceptual lens for the study and identified leadership practices that could ensure high levels of learning for all students.

Case studies were done at two purposefully selected high schools in the Midwestern United States. Data were collected about leadership for learning practices, beliefs, and attitudes in four ways: a staff survey about leadership for learning, interviews of key administrators and teachers, observations of classrooms and teacher collaboration, and review of documents. Findings about leadership practices, beliefs, and attitudes was detailed for each school in the study.

Five major themes emerged from the study about leadership for learning. First, the role of principal is essential in providing effective leadership for learning. Second, the process of change is a critical element in effective leadership for learning. Third, context is a critical factor in effective leadership for learning. Fourth, effective leadership for learning must focus on learning, including curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices in the school. Finally, transformative leadership is key in order to ensure that all students learn at high levels. A
number of recommendations were made in three areas: recommendations for practice, recommendations for professional learning, and recommendations for future research. Recommendations included finding strategies that allow principals to focus on leadership for learning and providing principals, both pre-service and in-service, with professional learning in order to provide effective leadership for learning.
Acknowledgements

• The faculty and staff at University of Illinois for supporting my learning and guiding me through the program.

• Members of my Dissertation Committee: Dr. Hackmann, Dr. Johnston-Parsons, Dr. Sloat, and Dr. Welton for their willingness to help me through the process and complete the dissertation.

• Dr. Carolyn Shields, Dissertation Chairperson and Professor, for always stretching my thinking and supporting me through the program and dissertation process.

• Maura, Tommy, and Rachel for your patience, love, and support—I could not have done it without you!
# Table of Contents

**Chapter One Introduction** ........................................................................................................... 1  
Problem ............................................................................................................................................ 3  
Research Focus ............................................................................................................................... 5  
Purpose Statement ........................................................................................................................... 5  
Research Questions .......................................................................................................................... 6  
Definitions ......................................................................................................................................... 6  
Overview of the Literature ............................................................................................................... 6  
Overview of the Methodology ......................................................................................................... 8  
Overview of the Study ..................................................................................................................... 8  
Significance ....................................................................................................................................... 9

**Chapter Two Review of Literature** ............................................................................................ 11  
Principal Leadership and Student Learning ..................................................................................... 11  
Leadership for Learning .................................................................................................................. 33  
Transformative Leadership: A Theoretical Lens ........................................................................... 49  
Implications of the Literature for this Study ................................................................................. 55

**Chapter Three Methodology** ..................................................................................................... 56  
Purpose of the Study and Research Questions ............................................................................. 56  
Overview of the Methodology ......................................................................................................... 56  
Site and Participant Selection ......................................................................................................... 57  
Data Collection ................................................................................................................................. 61  
Data Analysis .................................................................................................................................... 66  
Standards of Validation .................................................................................................................... 70  
Limitations and Delimitations .......................................................................................................... 72  
Significance ....................................................................................................................................... 73

**Chapter Four Findings: School A** ............................................................................................ 74  
Data Collection at This School Site ................................................................................................. 75  
Basic School Information .................................................................................................................. 76  
School Culture and Environment ..................................................................................................... 77  
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment ......................................................................................... 89  
Allocation of Resources ................................................................................................................... 97  
Principal Leadership ....................................................................................................................... 100  
Summary ......................................................................................................................................... 106

**Chapter Five Findings: School B** ............................................................................................ 108  
Data Collection at This School Site ................................................................................................. 109  
Basic School Information ................................................................................................................ 109  
School Culture and Environment ................................................................................................... 111  
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment ......................................................................................... 119  
Allocation of Resources .................................................................................................................. 128  
Principal Leadership ....................................................................................................................... 131  
Summary ......................................................................................................................................... 134
## Chapter Six Discussion and Recommendations

- Review of the Study ................................................................. 137
- Discussion .................................................................................. 141
- Recommendations ...................................................................... 163
- Closing Reflections ..................................................................... 168

## References

170

## Appendix A Staff Survey

175

## Appendix B Interview Protocol: Administrators

179

## Appendix C Interview Protocol: Teachers

180
Chapter One

Introduction

Few people would argue with the essential importance of the goal that all students will learn at a high level. While high levels of learning for all students is an important and laudable goal, it is easier said than done. Ensuring that all students learn at high levels will require school leaders to recreate our educational system to meet the needs of all students. Houston (2010) wrote:

Traditional leaders spend much of their training learning how to deal with the problems that exist today. In that regard, their training is making them more effective mechanics. They are learning how to tinker with what is. But what if “what is” is irrelevant to the current needs? . . . I would suggest that if leaders want to give wings to children’s dreams they must not think like carpenters—they need to think like architects. (p. 126)

Houston pointed out that school leaders will need to look at the educational system with new eyes in order to ensure that all students are learning, and learning at high levels. The recreation of our current educational system, focused on the learning needs of our students, provides school leaders with a challenging task that requires new ways of looking at schools and the work that happens in schools.

School leaders are faced daily with two formidable responsibilities. First, school leaders must ensure that all students are learning. Second, school leaders must ensure that teachers are providing learning opportunities that meet the needs of the students and the standards that have been established in this age of accountability. While the stakes continue to rise for principals and other school leaders, the research in the field is just beginning to support this work in a way that focuses specifically on the relationship between leadership and student learning. Beyond the accountability and high stakes testing that have become part and parcel of a school leader’s work, there is a moral obligation to ensure that all students are learning, and learning at high levels.
Research in the area of school leadership has focused heavily on school management for many years, but a shift in the focus has occurred in the past few years. Leadership for learning has emerged as a body of research focused on school leaders’ efforts to positively impact student learning. In reflecting on research in the area of educational leadership, Robinson (2006) noted: “After 15 years of focus on the effective management of schools, the spotlight is now going on the leadership of teaching and learning” (p. 62). Robinson also stated that school leaders must become leaders of learning and teaching.

This new body of literature, known by such names as leadership for learning, learning-centered leadership, and learning-focused leadership, now provides school leaders with an understanding of leadership practices, beliefs, and attitudes that can impact student learning. Although studying the overall impact of school leadership on student achievement continues to be an important component for the research, the literature has begun to focus increasingly on leadership practices that can positively impact student learning. Robinson (2006) noted the importance of identifying effective leadership practices: “The question of how much impact school leaders have on student outcomes is a flawed one, because the answer surely depends on what it is that leaders do” (p. 5). The leadership for learning literature moves away from trying to quantify a leader’s impact on student learning, to providing a framework to support school leaders in selecting appropriate leadership practices that will have the biggest positive impact on student learning, based on the school context and the vision and goals of the school community.

In and of itself, the learning for leadership literature is not sufficient to support school leaders in creating a learning environment in which all students learn at high levels. Another body of literature, the literature on transformative leadership, provides a framework for understanding the lived experiences of students, particularly students who are marginalized, and
actions needed to ensure equity of opportunity for all. Taken together, the leadership for learning principles, combined with the principles of transformative leadership, have the potential to support school leaders in reaching the goal: all students learning at high levels.

This study examined leadership for learning practices in two high schools, using the leadership for learning literature as a framework and the transformative leadership literature as a lens to understand how leadership practices impact student learning. The goal of the study was to provide school leaders with a deep understanding, both theoretical and practical, of leadership for learning in order to ensure that all students are learning at high levels.

**Problem**

Given the ever-increasing demands and levels of accountability for student learning in today’s schools and society, school leaders are faced with the task of ensuring that all students are learning, and learning at high levels. In fact, the major goal in the leadership for learning literature is to provide “powerful, equitable learning among students and professionals within the system as a whole” (Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2010, p. 4). Similarly, Knapp, Copeland, and Talbert (2003) described the core goal of leadership for learning: “providing all students, regardless of the challenges they face, the means to master challenging content and skills in subject areas, develop habits of mind for further learning, and prepare for fulfilling occupational futures and citizenship in a democracy” (p. 10). The emphasis of leadership for learning shifted the focus to student learning: high levels of student learning for all students.

The goal of powerful learning for all students is an important one. However, research has shown that many students, particularly students who have been marginalized for one reason or another, are not learning at high levels (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Shields, 2004; Valencia, 1997).
Although many school leaders have the best of intentions to ensure that all students are learning at high levels, their training, background, and experiences may not provide them with the necessary knowledge base and skill sets to successfully meet this goal. Few preparation programs provide future school leaders with the background to be successful in making sure that all students learn at high levels (Theoharis, 2007).

Even when a school leader has the desire and skills to be successful, there are few models for school leaders to examine in order to enact leadership that will ensure that all students learn at high levels. Writing about leadership for learning, Knapp, Copland, Plecki, and Portin (2006) noted that school leaders needed to have a clear vision for the school that would make sure that all students learn at high levels and be able to mobilize others to attain the vision. Recognizing the lack of practical research and foundation for school leaders, Knapp et al. (2006) stated that the smaller details of learning-centered leadership and leadership support systems have neither been described nor studied in order to guide practitioners in their daily work. School leaders need support and guidance in order to be able to meet the goal of high levels of learning for all students.

There is an urgent need to help school leaders understand the leadership practices, behaviors, and attitudes that will ensure that all students are able to learn at high levels. It is essential to assist school leaders in moving from “quick fix” strategies to a deep understanding of how leadership can positively impact student learning. In addition, consideration must be given to how all students, regardless of the challenges they face, both inside and outside of school, can be supported to successfully learn at high levels.
Research Focus

This research study focused on leadership for learning as it is enacted in high school settings. Leadership for learning has been described as leadership which provides “all students, regardless of the challenges they face, the means to master challenging content and skills in subject areas, develop habits of mind for further learning, and prepare for fulfilling occupational futures and citizenship in a democracy” (Knapp et al., p. 10).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this multiple case study was to describe the leadership for learning at two purposefully selected high schools. Since the goal of leadership for learning is to ensure that all students are learning at high levels, and since we know that leadership is a critical component of student success in learning, this study sought to understand the leadership practices, beliefs, and attitudes that support high levels of learning for all students.

This study examined multiple aspects of leadership for learning, including those directly related to student learning and those indirectly related to student learning. In describing the major aspects of leadership for learning, Murphy, Elliott, Goldring and Porter (2007) wrote that school leaders need to focus their attention “on the right stuff—the core technology of schooling, or learning, teaching, curriculum and assessment” (p. 179). In addition, Murphy et al. (2007) stated that school leaders also must make sure that all other aspects of school leadership—budgets, schedules, etc.—must also serve the goal of student learning. It was important to examine leadership practices that influenced both the core technology of schools, specifically curriculum, instruction, assessment, and learning, as well as those aspects of schools that are not directly linked to the core technology such as budgets and schedules.
Research Questions

Two research questions were the focus for this study:

- What leadership practices, behaviors, and attitudes does a principal enact in order to provide leadership for learning at a high school?
- What leadership practices, behaviors, and attitudes support high levels of learning for all students regardless of the challenges they face?

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, leadership for learning was defined as leadership that ensures that all students are learning at high levels, including important content and skills, critical thinking and learning skills, and preparation for the work world and full participation in our democracy. Leadership for learning works to ensure that all students are able to learn at high levels, including those who have been marginalized, those who face great challenges, and those who may not have previously done well in schools.

A high level of student learning was defined for this study using a variety of indicators. First, standardized test scores were considered. While there are limitations to the usefulness of standardized test scores, a general positive trend in these scores was considered indicative of high levels of student learning. Second, participation rates in advanced level coursework, including honors courses and Advanced Placement courses, were considered to be an indicator of high levels of student learning.

Overview of the Literature

Three bodies of literature were reviewed to provide a framework for this study. First, the literature on the relationship between principal leadership and student learning was reviewed
(e.g., Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 1998; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). This literature provided evidence about the positive relationship between principal leadership and student learning. Additionally, this literature identified some leadership practices and principles that can positively impact student learning. Next, the leadership for learning literature was reviewed (e.g., Knapp, Copeland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2010; Knapp, Copeland, Ford, Markholt, McLaughlin, Milliken, & Talbert, 2003; Knapp, Copeland, Plecki, & Portin, 2006; Knapp, Copeland, & Talbert, 2003; Louis, Wahlstrom, Michlin, Gordon, Thomas, Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall, Strauss, & Moore, 2010; Murphy, Elliot, Goldring, & Porter, 2006, 2007; Portin, Knapp, Dareff, Russell, Samuelson, & Yeh, 2009; Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003). This body of literature focused school leadership on student learning. The literature provided a new way of thinking about leadership practices, focused specifically on student learning, which are designed to ensure that all students attain equitable and powerful learning. Finally, transformative leadership literature was reviewed (e.g., Astin & Astin, 2000; Kose, 2011; Shields, 2004, 2009, 2010; Theoharis, 2007). The transformative leadership literature provided a theoretical lens to bring a broader perspective about equity of opportunity to the other bodies of literature and the data in the study. Taken together, these three bodies of literature provided a framework for understanding the nature of leadership for learning in two high schools.
Overview of the Methodology

This study used a case study methodology. Merriam (2009) defined a case study as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). A case study methodology was chosen for this study in order to examine the concepts about leadership for learning presented in the literature as they are enacted in the specific context of schools. Supporting this reasoning, Merriam (1998) wrote that a case study is used to develop a deep understanding of a situation in context. A case study was an ideal methodology for this study because, as Merriam (1998) stated: “The interest is in process rather than outcome, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research” (p. 19).

In this way, a case study methodology was used in this research study to develop a deeper understanding of leadership for learning by carefully examining it in action in a specific context, two high school sites in this case. Merriam (1998) noted: “Because of its strengths, case study is a particularly appealing design for applied fields of study such as education. Educational processes, problems, and programs can be examined to bring about understanding that in turn can affect and perhaps even improve practice” (p. 41). Given that much of the literature about leadership for learning is theoretical in nature, this study sought to understand leadership for learning in practice in a school setting.

Overview of the Study

In the next chapter, the review of the literature focused on the three areas previously mentioned: the impact of principal leadership on student learning, leadership for learning principles, and transformative leadership. Next, in Chapter Three, the case study methodology
was developed for studying the leadership for learning practices at two high schools. Subsequently, Chapters Four and Five present the results of the two case studies. Finally, Chapter Six present a discussion of the findings as well as recommendations based on the findings of the case studies and the literature in the field.

**Significance**

Leadership is a critical factor in ensuring that student learning is maximized in schools for all students (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Hallinger & Heck, 1998, 1996; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Leithwood, Patten & Jantzi, 2010). A connection can be drawn between the leadership in a school and student learning.

In my own work with instructional coaches, it has become clear to me that even the most effective and skillful instructional coach will be challenged in working with teachers to make an impact on student learning if the school leadership is weak or missing or not focused on student learning. Even the most well meaning principal may be inadvertently placing barriers in place for students and teachers if a strong understanding of leadership for learning principles and practices are not in place. Unfortunately, many school leaders have not been prepared for the challenge of ensuring that all students learn at high levels (e.g., Theoharis, 2007).

Ensuring that every school has an effective leader, who is knowledgeable and skilled in implementing leadership for learning, is essential if all students are to learn at high levels. This study helps to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks, especially the literature on leadership for learning and transformative leadership, and emphasize improved and inclusive
leadership practices. The study will help school leaders understand the leadership practices, beliefs, and attitudes that will ensure that all students are able to learn at high levels.
Chapter Two

Review of Literature

This review of literature examined three bodies of literature. First, the role of the principal and its relationship to student learning was explored. This literature established the primary importance of school leadership in relation to student learning. Second, the emerging body of literature on leadership for learning was examined. The leadership for learning literature refocused thinking about school leadership from previous ideas about instructional leadership, which focused heavily on teaching and teacher behaviors, to school leadership that has a direct and positive impact on student learning. Third, literature on transformative leadership was examined as a theoretical lens for this study. Transformative leadership provided a lens for examining the literature and data in the context of providing equity for all students, regardless of the challenges they face and ensuring that all students have the opportunity to learn at high levels.

Principal Leadership and Student Learning

The principal of a school has considerable impact on the learning of the students. While conventional wisdom supports the notion that a principal has an effect on the learning of students in his or her school, researchers have worked to establish a clear connection between principal leadership and student learning. In general, research has shown that principals and other school leaders are able to have significant positive effects on student learning (Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010). However, while demonstrating the general positive effect of principal leadership on student learning has been accomplished, researchers have worked for many years to understand how principals impact student learning and describe the effects of principal leadership on student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Understanding the nature of principal
leadership and the specific leadership actions that positively affect student learning has proven to be a challenge. As Hallinger and Heck (1996) noted: “While there is little disagreement concerning the belief that principals have an impact on the lives of teachers and students, both the nature and degree of this effect continues to be open to debate” (p. 5). Despite the debate over degree the degree of impact, research has shown that principal leadership is an important factor in student learning.

This section of the literature review will first examine the research in the area of principal leadership and its impact on student learning. Next, some of the challenges in this body of research will also be examined. Finally, principal leadership behaviors and actions that have been shown to have a positive impact on student learning will be explored.

**Overview of the Research**

Research on the relationship of principal leadership to student learning has evolved over approximately the past 40 years, moving from a basic effort to understand the relevance of principal leadership to developing a deeper understanding of the leadership practices that have the potential to most positively influence student learning. Specifically, this body of literature has evolved from the purpose of defining and describing the importance of principal leadership, to identifying the relationship between principal leadership and student learning, to understanding the specific leadership behaviors which impact student learning.

In working to define and describe the characteristics of successful schools, a body of literature emerged in the 1970s called effective schools research. Researchers such as Brookover, Edmonds, and Lezotte studied effective and ineffective schools in order to identify correlates that impact student learning. One of the correlates of effective schools identified by Brookover and Lezotte (1979) was strong instructional leadership by the principal.
In reviewing the definition of a strong instructional leader in the effective schools literature, “the studies indicate that the principals in these successful schools are perceived to be strong programmatic leaders who know the learning problems in the classrooms and allocate resources effectively” (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982, p. 35). In describing the role of the principal as instructional leader in a school that was improving, Brookover and Lezotte (1979) concluded that the principal was most likely an assertive instructional leader, spent more time ensuring that student discipline is managed, and assessed the progress toward school objectives. In contrast, principals in declining schools, where student achievement was falling, appeared to be permissive and to emphasized informal and collegial relationships with the teachers. They put more emphasis on general public relations and less emphasis on evaluation of the school’s effectiveness in providing a basic education for the students.

In terms of principal actions, the effective schools literature noted that strong instructional leaders were identified by “providing coherence to their schools’ instructional programs, conceptualizing instructional goals, setting high academic standards, staying informed of policies and teachers’ problems, making frequent classroom visits, creating incentives for learning, and maintaining student discipline” (Bossert et al., 1982, p. 35). For example, in a review of studies of four effective urban schools, Edmonds (1979) noted that all the schools had strong principal leadership, setting the tone of the school, supporting instructional decisions, and allocating the schools’ resources. In summarizing the elements which are essential for improving student learning, Edmonds (1979) wrote: “They have strong administrative leadership without which the disparate elements of good schooling can neither be brought together nor kept together” (p. 22).
Caution must be used in interpreting the results of the effective schools studies; a number of issues arise when using the effective schools research to understand the impact of principal leadership. One issue is that the research was not specifically designed to understand principal leadership. Hallinger, Bickman, and Davis (1996) noted: “The effective schools studies conducted during the 1970s and 1980s were not designed as investigations of leadership. Thus, they often yielded ambiguous findings concerning the nature of the principal’s leadership role in school improvement” (p. 529). Another issue with this body of research is the conceptual framework used in framing the effective schools research. Bossert et al. (1982) noted that the research failed to pay attention to the causal ordering of the variables studied. Bossert and his colleagues identified a key methodological challenge in the literature that calls into question some of the conclusions about school leadership.

Although the effective schools research indicates the importance of strong principal leadership as a correlate of successful schools, the literature did not provide an understanding of the causal relationship between principal leadership and student learning or how specific principal actions might impact student learning. In analyzing the effective school research, Hallinger et al. (1996) cautioned: “The paucity of well-designed studies of principal effects, however, forced researchers and policy makers to draw conclusions from studies that were never designed to address the issue” (p. 528).

In response to some of the missing features and critiques of the effective schools literature, Bossert et al. (1982) conducted a study and created a conceptual framework to better understand the “instructional management” role of the school principal. Bossert et al. (1982) noted that very little was actually known about the impact of principal leadership on the school experience of the students. In summarizing their work in this research study, Bossert et al. (1982)
wrote: “The instructional management role of the principal is exceedingly complex. One must consider the nature of the instructional organization, school climate, management actions, and context” (p. 55).

In addition to identifying these critical areas of instructional management, Bossert et al. concluded that a principal’s management behaviors can have both direct and indirect effects on student learning. In looking at indirect effects, Bossert et al. (1982) wrote: “Principals can affect student learning indirectly by making decisions at the school level that either constrain teachers’ decisions at the classroom level or ‘buffer’ classrooms so that they run smoothly” (p. 55). In terms of direct effects, Bossert et al. stated that some school level decision making, for example about school wide instructional programming, could have direct effects on student learning.

Bossert et al. reaffirm the importance of a contingency approach to principal instructional leadership in this study. They write: “no single style of management seems appropriate for all schools” (p. 38). This statement reflected the importance that context plays in school leadership.

Research on principal leadership has evolved and begun to examine some important facets of school leadership in a more sophisticated way in order to respond to some of the critiques and limitations of prior research in school leadership. For example, in order to better understand the causal relationship between the leadership behaviors of principals and student learning, Heck, Larsen, and Marcoulides (1990) conducted a study that theorized that there are three variables within principal instructional leadership which have an effect on student learning: school governance, instructional organization, and school climate. At the core of this inquiry was the fact that “researchers have not really identified what instructional leadership is, nor have they provided empirical evidence to suggest that principals who increase the amount of time they devote to instructional leadership will cause higher academic performance in their schools”
Heck et al. (1990) concluded “that through the frequency and effectiveness of implementing instructional leadership behaviors identified, principals can have direct effects on the achievement levels of their schools” (p. 120).

This research study was significant in several ways. First, it concluded that principal leadership has a direct effect on student learning. Some prior studies were able to identify an indirect effect, and a weak one in some instances. Second, this study began to identify specific areas of behaviors and actions of the school principal which will influence student learning. Heck et al. (1990) identified several leadership behaviors and actions, including clarifying, coordinating, and communicating a shared school educational purpose as well as building a sense of teamwork in the school environment. Heck and his colleagues also questioned the popular conception that principals need to spend a large amount of time in clinical supervision in order to be effective instructional leaders, noting that: “many of the important instructional leadership variables influencing school achievement are not related to the regular clinical supervision of teachers” (p. 121).

Another area of concern for researchers was the importance of context, particularly in terms of school level, in the instructional leadership of principals. The context for school leadership was not directly addressed in effective schools literature. Bossert et al. (1982) identified the issue of the generalizability of leadership behaviors and actions across contexts in terms of the effective schools research that had been conducted. In order to examine the question of generalizability of leadership practices across various school contexts, research by Heck and Marcoulides (1990) concluded “the organizational level of the school does not significantly affect the type of instructional leadership principals provide or the strength of those leadership effects on school outcomes” (p. 261). In addition, the study confirmed earlier studies that there is
a causal relationship between principal instructional leadership and student learning. Heck and Marcoulides (1990) write: “Thus, the principal in the elementary and high school contexts must be considered as one ‘school effects’ variable that directly influences student achievement” (p. 261).

Researchers worked to pinpoint specific leadership practices which would positively impact student learning and in specific contexts and content areas. Responding to concerns about previous research in school leadership, Hallinger, Bickman, and Davis (1996) developed and studied a multidimensional model of principal leadership on student learning in the area of reading. This model was based on the conceptual framework proposed by Bossert et al. (1982) and included “(1) contextual and personal antecedents of principal leadership, (2) a principal leadership construct, (3) in-school factors related to teaching and learning, and (4) student achievement outcomes” (Hallinger et al., 1996, p. 531).

The results of this study did not identify direct effects of principal leadership on reading achievement, although it supported the conclusions of earlier studies, noting that a principals leadership has an indirect effect on a school’s effectiveness, largely through shaping a school’s “learning climate” (Hallinger et al., 1996, p. 527). In addition, Hallinger et al. found that both personal and contextual variables, such as socioeconomic status, degree of parental involvement, and gender, had an impact on principal leadership. In terms of the significance of this study, Hallinger et al. (1996) wrote: “Do principals make a difference? Yes, they do. Can researchers definitively measure that difference in terms of direct effects on student test scores? Probably not. Does that matter? Definitely not” (p. 545).

The need to synthesize the research on school leadership was addressed by Hallinger and Heck (1998) who published a study examining the literature on principal leadership and student
learning between the years 1980 and 1995. Specifically, this study examined the substantive findings from the body of literature. Acknowledging a number of limitations of this work, Hallinger and Heck (1998) summarized their findings: “principals exercise a measurable, though indirect effect on school effectiveness and student achievement. While this indirect effect is relatively small, it is statistically significant, and we assert, meaningful” (p. 186). This finding synthesized from the literature confirmed an important conclusion: a connection between school leadership and student learning.

Hallinger and Heck (1998) also acknowledge the limitations in the available literature. They concluded that the group of studies in the meta-analysis did not identify how a principal supports a school’s effectiveness and how context affected the leadership choices a principal needs to make. Defining the actions and behaviors that a principal can employ to positively impact student learning was identified as a critical area for research.

Research on principal leadership has evolved further in the past decade in order to better understand specific leadership practices of principals that would positively impact student learning. Several studies in this decade have focused on the analysis and evaluation of the research in the field. A close examination of the types of research projects in the area of instructional leadership and the quality of that research has provided insights into the body of literature and the need for future research. For example, Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) compared the results of qualitative research in the field to results of quantitative research in the field. Noting that qualitative research often supported the relationship between school leadership and student learning, Robinson et al. (2008) stated: “However, the picture one gains from the qualitative evidence for the impact of leadership is very different from that gained from quantitative analyses of direct and indirect effects of leadership on students’ academic and social
outcomes” (p. 636). Robinson et al. reported that quantitative research studies tend to find weak to little correlation between school leadership and student learning. They also noted the limitation of design of many of the quantitative studies.

Examining the various types of research in the field, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins (2006) described five types of research in school leadership. Leithwood et al. (2006) noted: “it is important to ask whether the value typically attributed to educational leadership is actually warranted by the evidence” (p. 12). They described the five types of empirical evidence available in the school leadership literature: qualitative case study evidence, large-scale quantitative studies of overall leadership effects, large-scale quantitative studies of specific leadership practices, quantitative studies of school leadership on student engagement, and leadership succession research. Based on the evidence from the five types of empirical evidence outlined above, Leithwood et al. (2006) concluded:

Leadership has very significant effects on the quality of the school organization and on pupil learning. As far as we are aware, there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership. One explanation for this is that leadership serves as a catalyst for unleashing the potential capacities that already exist in the organization. Those in leadership roles have a tremendous responsibility to “get it right.” Fortunately, we know a great deal about what getting it right means. (p. 14-15)

This conclusion, that there is a great responsibility on the part of school leaders to provide effective leadership in order for students to learn, again confirmed an important finding from the literature: school leaders must seek and enact leadership practices that support the learning of all students.

School leadership studies in approximately the past 10 years have continued to study the overall impact of school leadership practices on student learning. In seeking to understand and answer important questions about school leadership, such as how leadership makes a difference,
how important leadership is in increasing student learning, and the essential elements of effective school leadership, M. Christine DeVita, president of The Wallace Foundation, wrote: “Lacking solid evidence to answer these questions, those who have sought to make the case for greater attention and investment in leadership as a pathway for large-scale education improvement have had to rely more on faith than fact” (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 2). In response to the need for empirical evidence, Leithwood et al. undertook a series of studies in order to provide the needed evidence.

In examining the effect of school leadership on student learning, Leithwood et al. (2004) reviewed the current research to answer five key questions about school leadership. They cited the need to understand what effective leadership looks like and how it works if school reforms were to be effective. One key finding from this study described the role of school leadership and its relationship to student learning. Leithwood et al. wrote: “Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” (p. 5). Leithwood et al. stated that the research findings about school leadership may be challenging to understand and put in context, but also likely underestimates the effect of school leadership on student learning.

In their examination of the relationship between school leadership and student learning, Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) published a meta-analysis of research on educational leadership conducted over the previous 30 years. In summarizing their findings, Walters et al. (2003) stated: “The data from our meta-analysis demonstrates that there is, in fact, a substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement. We found that the average effect size (expressed as a correlation) between leadership and student achievement is .25” (p. 3). In the
discussion of their results, Waters et al. pointed out another finding that they suggest is of equal concern: principal leadership can have a positive or negative effect on student learning.

Another area of focus for school leadership research this decade has been on change leadership in schools. For example, Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) determined that there are two primary variables that impact student achievement negatively or positively in terms of change leadership. One primary variable is the focus of change on which the leader decides “whether the leaders properly identify and focus on improving the school and classroom practices that are most likely to have a positive impact on student achievement in their school” (p. 5). The other primary variable is understanding the magnitude of the change and adjusting leadership practices to match the magnitude of the change. In their work, Waters et al. identify characteristics of first order change, such as an extension of the past, linear, and problem-and solution-oriented, and second order change, such as outside existing paradigms, unbounded, and a disturbance to every element of the system.

Finally, school leadership research in this decade continued to identify leadership practices and models to support the work of school leaders. Understanding how school leaders enact instructional leadership is an issue for a number of reasons. For instance, Leithwood et al. (2004) conducted a study in which they recognize that school leaders at all levels, district, school, and classroom, are directed to be instructional leaders without clear direction or definition of what it means to be instructional leaders. Leithwood et al. (2004) noted that the phrase instructional leader “is often more a slogan than a well-defined set of leadership practices” (p. 6). The study did recognize a few well-developed models of instructional leadership, including one framed by Hallinger. Leithwood et al. (2004) wrote: “Displacing the sloganistic use of the term
‘instructional leadership’ with the more precise leadership practices specified by well-developed leadership models is much to be desired” (p. 7).

A number of models have been developed to identify leadership practices that may support the work of school leaders in impacting student learning. For example, Waters et al. (2003) identified 21 principal leadership responsibilities and the effect size of each. For example, the identified leadership responsibilities included the following: culture (effect size .29), curriculum, instruction, and assessment (effect size .16) and situational awareness (effect size .33). These identified leadership responsibilities were used as a basis for their Balanced Leadership framework.

A new model for understanding school leadership, “The Four Paths,” was developed by Leithwood, Patten, and Jantzi (2010) based on empirical evidence found in recent studies. This model described four dimensions, or paths, of school leadership: the rational path, the emotions path, the organizational path, and the family path. The rational path included the knowledge and skills about learning, instruction, and curriculum needed by educators. The emotions path examined the feelings, dispositions, and affect of educators, including the efficacy of the educators. The organizational path focused on the interactions and relationships among members of the organization and includes culture, policies, procedures, and structures. The family path included two variables: unalterable factors over which the school has not influence or control and alterable factors which reflect the educational culture of the family and may be influenced by the school.

In terms of the results of this study, Leithwood et al. found that the four paths model accounts for 43% of differences in student achievement outcomes in schools. The rational, emotions, and family paths were most closely associated with the variances in student learning;
the organizational path had little association with the variances in student learning. Ironically, school leaders generally had the highest levels of influence over factors in the organizational path, which held the least variance factor in student learning.

In terms of implications of this study, Leithwood et al. wrote: “School leaders and leadership researchers should be guided much more directly by existing evidence about school, classroom, and family variables with powerful effects on student learning as they make their school improvement and research design decisions” (p. 672). In drawing conclusions from this study, Leithwood et al. noted “the dominant narrative in much contemporary leadership literature, as well as in policy, is saturated with the language of instruction” (p. 697). This study provided school leaders with an opportunity to consider a paradoxical challenge: a call to provide strong school leadership, even though the areas over which you have the most influence may not provide the most direct results.

The research in the area of principal leadership and its impact on student learning is significant in two key ways. First, it shows that school leadership has an influence on student learning. Although studies may disagree on the relative strength of this relationship or the direct or indirect nature of the relationship, it is clear that there is a relationship between school leadership and student learning. Second, the research has begun to provide a conceptual framework for principal leadership and define some of the leadership practices which impact student learning. Some of these findings provided school leaders with guidance on which leadership practices might be most helpful in supporting student learning.

**Challenges in the Research**

There have been a number of challenges for researchers who are investigating the relationship between principal leadership and student learning. In general, the complexity of the
principal role and its relationship to student learning is complex and challenging to both conceptualize and measure. These challenges include establishing a direct effect of principal leadership on student learning, developing a conceptual framework for leadership that is reflective of the work of principals, and understanding the role of context in the leadership work of principals.

Many of the studies of principal leadership have been able to establish an indirect relationship between principal leadership and student learning. Establishing a direct effect between principal leadership and student learning has been more challenging. Hallinger and Heck (1998) reviewed research on principal leadership and concluded that principal have a measurable impact on student learning. They noted that the effect is indirect, it is significant statistically. Hallinger and Heck (1998) also analyzed the methodology and conceptual frameworks used in the studies. They concluded that discrepancies in the results of the research could be attributed to the methodology and conceptual frames used by the researchers.

Another challenge with research in the area of principal leadership and its impact on student learning is the complexity of the principal role and the relationship to other variables in the school environment. Researchers have attempted to construct conceptual frameworks for the principal role, but the nature and complexity of the role make it difficult to understand and define. In discussing the limitations of the conceptual frameworks in the reviewed research, Hallinger and Heck (1998) noted: “Even taken as a group they do not resolve the most important theoretical and practical issues concerning the means by which principals achieve an impact on school outcomes and how contextual forces influence the exercise of leadership in the schoolhouse” (p. 157). Additionally, then, developing an appropriate research methodology to provide empirical evidence for the conceptual framework will be a challenge for researchers.
Finding a conceptual framework and methodology to better understand the role of principal in strengthening student achievement will be important.

In their review of principal leadership literature, Hallinger and Heck (1998) categorized principal leadership research into three models: direct-effects models, mediated-effects models, and reciprocal-effects models. The relative strengths and weaknesses of each model were explored.

The direct-effects model used the understanding that a principal’s practices can impact student learning and that the impact can be measured accurately without regard to other potential variables. Researchers employing the direct-effects model generally do not attempt to control for the effects of other variables such as school environment, teacher attitudes, or instructional patterns.” Of the direct-effects model, Hallinger and Heck (1998) noted: “In such studies, the process by which administrators achieve an impact on school effectiveness is hidden in a so-called black box. A relationship is empirically tested, but the findings reveal little about how leadership operates” (p. 166). They concluded that studies of this type have little usefulness in understanding principal leadership and its relationship to student learning, because of conceptual limitations, despite the use of complex statistical models.

Mediated-effects models operate under the premise that principals are able to impact student learning through indirect means. Hallinger and Heck (1998) noted that mediated-effects models employ the premise that leaders are able to impact student learning mostly through other people. Use of this model has led to greater consistency of results and takes into account a more complex conceptualization of the work of principals. Hallinger and Heck (1998) noted that this type of research combined the conceptual framework with strong methodology to study the impact of leadership on student learning. In analyzing the results from studies in this category,
Hallinger and Heck (1996) conclude: “These studies yielded more frequent instances of positive findings concerning the role of the principal in school effectiveness. In fact, this was somewhat unexpected given the more rigorous methods inherent in these studies” (p. 37).

The reciprocal-effects model assumed that the work of the principal is interactive with the school and its environment. “A reciprocal-effects framework implies that administrators adapt to the organization in which they work, changing their thinking and behavior over time” (Hallinger & Heck, 1998, pp. 167-168). Few studies could be categorized under this model, but Hallinger and Heck (1998) note that framing research questions under this model, along with newer statistical methods to analyze the results, would provide stronger findings and new conceptual models.

A final challenge for researchers has been to understand the role that context plays in principal leadership practices. Wahlstrom (2008) noted the critical relationship between context and understanding leadership practices, stating: “It is no wonder that because the school context is where teachers ‘live,’ it is also the context which is most malleable (unlike either he state or district context) and responsive to the direct actions of a leader” (p. 594). Including this variable of context into the study of principal leadership continues to challenge researchers as they seek to understand the relationship between principal leadership and student learning.

In their study of leadership influences on student learning, Leithwood et al. (2004) explored the concept of context in relationship to principal leadership. They wrote:

Indeed, impressive evidence suggests that individual leaders actually behave quite differently (and productively) depending on the circumstances they are facing and the people with whom they work. This calls into question the common belief in habitual leadership “styles” and in the search for the single best model or style. We need to be developing leaders with large repertoires as needed, not leaders trained in the delivery of one “ideal” set of practices. (p. 10)
Robinson et al. (2008) also noted the importance of context in the development of their framework of the five dimensions of school leadership. Robinson et al. develop a model outlining five leadership dimensions that provide a framework for understanding leadership practices that may impact student learning. Robinson et al. emphasized that the dimensions are overlapping and that a leader must consider the context of the school and community in choosing leadership practices to emphasize.

**Principal Leadership Behaviors and Actions**

Based on the literature about principal leadership and student achievement, this section of the literature review will categorize principal leadership behaviors and actions that may have an impact on student learning. Drawn from the research, four broad categories of principal leadership behaviors and actions were developed: influence on teachers and instruction, influence on school climate and culture, commitment to vision and goals, and agent of change. These categories are useful in understanding the types of actions and behaviors that principals may employ to have a positive impact on student learning.

**Influence on instruction and teachers.** Research has suggested that principal leadership that includes influencing teachers and instruction has an impact on student learning (e.g., Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Hallinger, Beckman, & Davis, 1996; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006). In beginning to define instructional leadership, Bossert et al. (1982) wrote that effective instructional leadership is identifiable by principals who are “providing coherence to their schools’ instructional programs, conceptualizing instructional goals, setting high academic standards, staying informed of policies and teachers’ problems, making frequent classroom visits, creating incentives for learning, and maintaining student discipline” (p. 35). Leithwood et al. (2006) noted that in order for principal
leadership to have a positive effect on student learning, it “must exercise some form of positive influence on the work of other colleagues, especially teachers, as well as on the key conditions or characteristics of the organization” (p. 85). Two specific areas of influence will be explored: influence on instruction and influence on teachers.

**Influence on instruction.** Studies have identified a number of key principal leadership behaviors and actions related to instruction and instructional programs in schools that influence student learning. Principals in elementary and high schools with stronger student achievement spent more time supervising and supporting teachers, coordinating the instructional program, collaborating on instructional problems, securing and allocating resources, and providing professional learning opportunities than principals in schools with lower student achievement. (Hallinger & Heck, 1998) In another study, Heck et al. (1990) identified a number of principal leadership behaviors and actions and provided evidence that a principal’s instructional leadership efforts can be directly linked to student performance. In that study, Heck et al. described principal instructional leadership behaviors and actions including: coordinating the instructional program across grade levels, observing instructional strategies in classrooms, supporting regular monitoring of student progress, attaining resources, and providing professional learning support for teachers based on data.

In a slightly different perspective on principal instructional leadership, Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, and Bryk (2001) identified key principal leadership behaviors and actions that could positively influence student learning based on the concept of instructional program coherence. Newmann et al. (2001) defined instructional program coherence as: “a set of interrelated programs for students and staff that are guided by a common framework for curriculum instruction, assessment, and learning climate that are pursued over a sustained period”
The authors suggested that principals need to provide focused professional learning, improvement goals, and materials based on this common framework. In addition, principals needed to find time for common planning and learning for staff members. In addition, Newmann et al. (2001) recommended that teacher hiring needs to be based on the instructional coherence framework. The hiring of teachers is not often mentioned among principal instructional leadership actions, yet it has a great impact on the instructional organization of a school.

**Influence on teachers.** In considering principal leadership in regard to influence on teachers, collaboration among colleagues was an important construct in the literature. Three concepts are important to consider in examining principal influence on teachers: the voluntary nature of influence, shared instructional leadership, and professional learning for teachers.

Principals need to win the support of teachers and staff members in order for leadership actions to be successful. In considering the voluntary nature of the leader/follower relationship, Leithwood et al. (2006) wrote: “Leaders can only be influential if their colleagues allow them to be. This is the case particularly in teaching, since for much of the time teachers’ work is still carried out in the privacy of their classrooms” (p. 86). The authors went on to acknowledge the voluntary nature of influence, noting: “People volunteer to be followers in relationships with other to whom they attribute leadership; this voluntary act may be only for short periods of time or for particular tasks” (pp. 86-87). The voluntary nature of influence, following, and leading is an important consideration in principal leadership.

Although the principal assumes the role of instructional leader for the school, it is important that the instructional leadership be shared with other staff members. A number of studies have pointed out the value of shared instructional leadership in schools (e.g., Marks & Printy, 2003; Reitzug, West, & Angel, 2008). For example, Marks and Printy (2003) noted:
“Unlike the conventional notion of instructional leadership, shared instructional leadership is an inclusive concept, compatible with competent and empowered teachers. The principal invests teachers with resources and instructional support and maintains congruency and consistency of the educational program” (p. 374). In considering the role that shared leadership plays in effective principal leadership, Heck et al. (1990) found that “principals in high achieving schools involve teachers to a much greater extent in instructional decision making” (p. 118). Sharing instructional leadership with teachers and other staff members was identified as an important factor in successful schools.

A final key aspect for principal leadership in considering influence on teachers is in the area of professional learning for educators. The area of professional learning works well with the concept of shared instructional leadership. In schools with high levels of student achievement, for example, Marks and Printy (2003) noted: “Teachers assume responsibility for their professional growth and instructional improvement. The principal becomes less of an inspector of teacher competence and more of a facilitator of teacher growth” (p. 376). Similarly, Reitzug et al. (2008) cited the importance of such professional learning opportunities as collaborative inquiry, reflection, discourse, and communities of learners. Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, and Porter (2006) captured the essence of professional learning for teachers. In talking about effective principal leaders, Murphy et al. (2006) write: “They provide intellectual stimulation and make certain that teachers have a high-quality stream of job-embedded opportunities to expand, enhance, and refine their repertoires of instructional skills” (p. 12). Principals need to provide high-quality, engaging, and meaningful professional learning opportunities for teachers.

**Influence on school climate and culture.** Principal influence on the climate and culture of a school is an important factor in student achievement. Although principal leadership actions
that directly influence teachers and instruction are important, there are other areas of influence that have been shown to have an important impact on student learning. For example, Heck et al. (1990) noted that, although monitoring and evaluating instruction is a critical element of a principal’s work, “our results show that principal’s time and attention are focused on a variety of additional activities. Many behaviors which are more informal and strategic cluster into constructs of instructional organization and school climate and impact student achievement as well” (pp. 121-122). A number of key areas of principal influence in the area of school climate and culture that have a positive impact on student learning were identified by Heck et al. (1990), including: creating and sustaining high expectations for student success, recognizing student achievement, communicating goals, encouraging conversation among staff members about instructional strategies, communicating progress to the wider community, and maintaining a high level of staff morale. Reflecting on the work of principal in the area of climate and culture, Heck et al. (1990) concluded that these leadership behaviors and actions “are predictive of school student achievement” (p. 119).

**Commitment to vision and goals.** A number of studies cited creating and sustaining a clear and compelling vision and related goals as an essential leadership action of principals in positively influencing student learning (e.g., Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson et al., 2008). In examining a large body of research on principal leadership, Hallinger and Heck (1996) wrote: “The most consistent findings among the studies support the view that principals’ involvement in framing, conveying and sustaining the schools purposes and goals represent an important domain of indirect influence on school outcomes” (p. 171). In examining the effect of a clear and compelling vision on a school community, Leithwood et al. (2004)
noted: “People are motivated by goals which they find personally compelling, as well as challenging but achievable. Having such goals helps people make sense of their work and enables them to find a sense of identity for themselves within their work context” (p. 8).

Specific principal leadership actions which support a clear and compelling vision and goals included creating and articulating a vision and goals, working to develop consensus around the vision and goals, maintaining high expectations for attaining the vision and goals, assessing progress toward vision and goals, and communicating the progress to all members of the school community (Leithwood et al., 2004). The focus of the vision and goals, however, must be firmly rooted in learning and teaching (Robinson et al., 2008).

Agent of change. Another principal leadership area that is important for student learning is the ability to effect change as needed in the school. Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, and Gundlach (2003) stated that a core job for a principal is being a “master diagnostician” (p. 13), noting: “The core of the principal’s job is diagnosing his or her particular school’s needs and, given the resources and talents available, deciding how to meet them” (p. 1). Portin et al. described the importance of connecting the diagnosis of a school’s needs and the implementation of changes needed to meet those needs to the school’s vision, mission, and goals. Principals need to take a long-range view of the needs of the schools and ensure that change is consistent with the vision and goals of the school (Portin et al., 2003).

In their framework for effective school leadership, Waters et al. (2003), principal as change agent plays a key role in having an impact on student learning. They identified two variables that have the greatest impact on student learning: focus of change and order of change. In describing focus of change, Waters et al. (2003) noted that it is critical “whether leaders properly identify and focus on improving the school and classroom practices that are most likely
to have a positive impact on student achievement” (p. 5). In addition, the second variable—order of change—is important for principals to consider in the process of implementing change. Waters et al. (2003) noted that principals need to “properly understand the magnitude or ‘order’ of change they are leading and adjust their leadership practices accordingly” (p. 5).

In acting as an agent of change for a school, a principal needs to diagnose the issues in the school, lead the choice of change initiatives that will benefit students in their learning, and choose leadership behaviors and actions that will support, assess and sustain the change. As Stoll, Fink & Earl (2003) write of schools: “little changes unless the principal is fully on board” (p. 104).

**Summary: Principal Leadership and Student Learning**

This body of literature on principal leadership and student learning was significant in establishing the importance of school leadership, specifically the principal, in the learning of students. Although there have been challenges in the research, principals have been clearly identified as an important factor in student learning. The literature established a foundation for putting the work of school leaders in context and developing an understanding for the critical aspects of the work of school leaders. Four critical areas of principal leadership were identified in the literature: influence on teachers and instruction, influence on school climate and culture, commitment to vision and goals, and agent of change. Similar critical leadership practices will also be found in the leadership for learning literature and the transformative leadership literature.

**Leadership for Learning**

The literature reviewed in the previous section established a firm relationship between principal leadership and student learning. A newer body of literature has emerged over the past
several years that sought to understand effective school leadership in terms of student learning. Called by various names such as leadership for learning, learning-focused leadership, and learning-centered leadership, this literature focused on two main principles. First, it supported leaders focusing on “the core technology of schooling, or learning, teaching, curriculum, and assessment” (Murphy et al., 2007, p. 179). Second, it supported leaders in ensuring that “all the other dimensions of schooling (e.g. administration, organization, finance) work in the service of a more robust core technology and improved student learning” (Murphy et al., 2007, p. 179). Generally speaking, the leadership for learning literature focused all aspects of the work of schools and school leaders on learning.

The goal of leadership for learning is to ensure high levels of learning. Adding staff members to the group of learners, Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, and Portin (2010) stated the purpose of leadership for learning is to provide “powerful, equitable learning among students and professionals within the system as a whole” (p. 4). Similarly, Knapp, Copeland, and Talbert (2003) describe the core purpose of leadership for learning as: “providing all students, regardless of the challenges they face, the means to master challenging content and skills in subject areas, develop habits of mind for further learning, and prepare for fulfilling occupational futures and citizenship in a democracy” (p. 10). Knapp et al. added the dimension of all students learning, irrespective of any challenges they may be facing. Thus, the goal of leadership for learning is to ensure that all members of the school community learn, and learn at high levels.

The leadership for learning literature also described leadership practices that can positively impact student learning. Describing the challenges faced by school leaders, Knapp, Copland, Plecki, and Portin (2006) noted: “The biggest challenge lies in visualizing how to connect leadership practice with student learning, and then mobilizing others’ energies and
The leadership for learning literature, then, seeks to support the work of school leaders in improving student learning by focusing on learning and describing leadership practices that will help in this work.

The leadership for learning literature moved away from the traditional model of instructional leadership, which emphasized the work of school leaders as supervisors and monitors of instructional practices (Knapp, Copland, Ford, Markholt, McLaughlin, Milikin & Talbert, 2003). Previous conceptions of school leadership were based on bureaucratic models, largely drawn from business, which routinized the work of teachers, students, and principals (Knapp et al., 2006). The leadership for learning literature, on the other hand, emphasized collaborative work among professionals that ultimately strengthens student learning. Knapp et al. (2006) state that the leadership for learning studies sought to “understand in detail how leaders and leadership teams bring effective influence to bear on teaching and learning issues while developing coherent conditions of support for leadership practices that takes improvement of learning as its central goal” (p. 12). The leadership for literature identified and studied leadership practices, beliefs, and attitudes that would have a positive impact on student learning.

**Leadership for Learning: Critical Leadership Practices**

While the literature on the relationship between principal leadership and student learning presented in the first section of this chapter began to identify leadership practices that would support high levels of student learning, the leadership for learning literature sought to identify specific leadership practices that would focus the work of school leaders on learning. These leadership practices identified in the literature are closely interrelated and overlapping in their scope. For the purpose of this literature review, the leadership practices will be examined independently in order to develop clarity. This section of this literature review will explore some
critical leadership practices identified in the leadership for learning literature: setting the vision, focus and goals; creating the environment; developing teacher capacity; leading curriculum, instruction, and assessment; sharing leadership; and attaining and allocating resources.

Although these leadership practices outlined in the leadership for learning literature will provide guidance for principals, they are not meant to be a checklist or road map. As Stoll et al. (2003) noted: “Leadership for learning isn’t a destination with fixed coordinates on a compass, but a journey with plenty of detours and some dead ends. Effective educational leaders are continuously open to new learning because the journey keeps changing” (p. 103). These leadership practices, then, provide a guide for school leaders to consider in the context of their schools.

**Setting the vision, focus and goals.** A critical leadership practice identified in the leadership for learning literature notes the importance of clear vision, focus, and goals for a school. Although previous bodies of literature identified a clear and compelling vision as an important component of effective school leadership, the leadership for learning literature focused the vision and goals directly and solely on student learning. The principal has primary responsibility for developing, articulating, implementing, and stewarding the vision, focus and goals for a school (Murphy et al., 2006, 2007; Knapp et al., 2003).

Shared vision, focus, and goals provide a school community with consensus on the work and mission of the school. In considering the core values that are the foundation of leadership for learning principles, Knapp et al. (2003) wrote: “Leading for learning rests on a set of shared values that embrace ambitious standards, belief in human capacity, equity, inquiry, and professional support” (p. 15). In a recent study of leadership practices that impact student learning, Louis et al. (2010) concluded that both teachers and principals concurred that one of the
most effective leadership practices was developing a focus for the school on the goals and expectations for student achievement. Considering today’s environment of high stakes accountability, Knapp et al. (2010) pointed out that a clear and compelling vision will help move a school away from simple compliance with accountability regulations toward a professional commitment to students and their learning.

Leadership for learning principles are clear in that the vision, focus and goals of a school must center on students and their learning. The vision, goals, and focus of a school must reflect the core beliefs and core values of the school community: all students learning at high levels. Noting the importance of learning for all students, Murphy et al. (2007) wrote: “Effective leaders facilitate the creation of a school vision that reflects high and appropriate standards of learning, a belief in the educability of all students, and high levels of personal and organizational performance” (pp. 181-182). Exploring the nature of a school’s vision relative to the learning of all students, Resnick and Glennan (2002) noted: “District staff should act in the belief that all students can reach demanding standards, provided they are enabled to do so and are willing to work. Staff should view enabling students to reach these standards as their core function” (p. 166). In a study of effective schools, Beck and Murphy (1996) noted: “It appeared to us that the commitment to good teaching and powerful learning served as a kind of lens to focus and concentrate the attention and energies of decision makers at this site” (p. 120). So, too, should the vision, focus and goals of a school: focus the energies of all around students and powerful student learning.

In developing the vision, focus, and goals for a school, two key elements are essential: including all stakeholder groups—students, parents, educators, and community members—and using a variety of data sources. (Knapp et al., 2003; Murphy et al., 2006). In addition, Murphy et
al. (2006) stated that effective vision, focus and goals “are focused on students, feature student learning and achievement, and are clearly defined” (p. 9). While the development of shared vision, focus and goals may derive from the vision of the principal, it is essential that the principal employ processes to build consensus for a shared vision and goals. Knapp et al. (2003) suggested: “Although often springing from a leader’s vision, a system-wide focus on student learning goals usually results from a long process of research, discussion, debate, and perhaps conflict” (p. 15). This dialogue, around the core beliefs and vision for the school, can provide a focus on learning for a school.

Articulating the vision, focus and goals involves both communicating them clearly to the school community and ensuring that the school’s vision, focus and goals become a critical aspect of all of the principal’s work (Knapp et al., 2003; Murphy et al., 2006). In describing the importance of this second point, Murphy et al. (2006) wrote of principals: “On the first front, they are adept at making the school vision central to their own daily work” (p. 9). In terms of communicating the vision, focus and goals, a principal needs to ensure that they are clearly communicated to all stakeholders in the school community and “consistently communicating that student learning is the shared mission of students, teachers, administrators, and the community” (Knapp et al., 2003, p. 14). In addition, Knapp et al. (2003) emphasize the importance of “articulating core values that support a focus on powerful, equitable learning” (p. 14).

In effectively implementing a school’s vision, focus and goals, a principal needs to be skilled at “translating vision into operation” (Murphy et al., 2006, p. 10). A number of critical leadership practices important to the implementation of a school’s vision, focus and goals, including: attaining needed resources, building consensus among stakeholder groups, supervising staff members and ensuring accountability to the vision and goals, assessing progress regularly
toward the vision and goals, and refining practices and procedures as needed to reach the vision and goals (Murphy et al., 2006).

Finally, principals need to be stewards of the school’s vision, goals, and focus. In developing the concept of stewarding the school’s vision, focus and goals, Murphy et al. (2006) noted: “Leaders act as keepers and promoters of the vision; maintain enthusiasm and a sense of optimism, especially in periods of waning energy; and inspire others to break through barriers to make the school vision a reality” (p. 11). There are a number of important leadership practices associated with the stewardship of the school vision, focus and goals, including recognizing and celebrating progress toward the vision and goals, being realistic about challenges and setbacks in attaining the vision and goals, and monitoring the tone and progress toward the vision and goals (Murphy et al., 2006).

**Creating the environment.** School leaders need to create a productive and positive school environment, involving the shaping and sustaining of school climate and culture. Previous bodies of literature also identified the environment as an essential component of schools, however, the leadership for learning literature focuses on students and student learning: creating an environment that supports high levels of learning for all students. Murphy et al. (2007) detailed elements of an ideal school environment, which includes an ethic of care, respect, fairness, and dignity. Describing the net effect of a positive school environment, Murphy et al. (2007) wrote: “In the process of doing all this, these leaders form the glue that holds the community together, i.e. trust, and builds the foundation that support the three key pillars of community—shared direction, cooperative work and mutual accountability” (p. 189). In looking at a variety of areas of leadership practices of school leaders relative to school environment, Heck et al. (1990) noted that many informal strategic leadership practices fall into the category
of instructional organization and school climate which has an impact on student learning. Two key areas related to the school environment: creating a safe and orderly learning environment and nurturing a learning community.

The concept of a safe and orderly learning environment was identified as a correlate of effective schools in the effective schools research by researchers such as Edmonds (1979) and Brookover and Lezotte (1979). Principals need to ensure that procedures, policies, disciplinary guidelines, and expectations are clearly communicated to all members of the school community and monitored to ensure that they do indeed enhance student learning (Murphy et al., 2006; Waters & Cameron, 2007). For instance, Waters and Cameron (2007) noted the importance of structures and disciplinary procedures that “protects instructional time from interruptions” (p. 4). A related aspect is creating and maintaining an attractive and neat school environment (Murphy et al., 2007). In addition, principals need to ensure that school environments embrace diversity, provide a personalized experience, and recognize achievement and contributions (Murphy et al., 2007).

A second key aspect of the school environment is the development of a community of learners. Communities of learners move a school from a hierarchical structure to embrace the principles of community, including shared leadership, overlapping work, and a clearly articulated shared vision (Murphy et al., 2007). Louis et al. (2010) noted that successful professional communities of learners include common goals, a shared commitment to student learning, shared responsibility for developing curriculum and instruction, and sharing successful instructional practices. Further describing a community of learners, Knapp et al. (2003) added: “A strong learning-focused community offers professional support, renewed commitment, a setting for managing conflicts, and help with problems of professional practice” (p. 18). In addition,
professional communities of learners place an emphasis, and an expectation, on the continuous learning of all: student, staff and parents (Murphy et al., 2006).

A number of studies concluded that the formation of a professional community of learners is essential to improving student learning (Louis et al., 2010; Heck et al., 1990; Knapp et al., 2003). For example, in their study of leadership practices linked to strong student learning, Louis et al. (2010) concluded that the positive relationship between a collaborative community and student learning may be reflective of a culture that goes beyond classroom walls and supports all students in achieving at high levels.

Principal leadership is key in creating and sustaining a robust community of learners (Louis et al., 2010; Murphy et al., 2006, 2007). For example, Murphy et al. (2007) noted that school leaders “understand, and help others understand, that communities of professional practice offer the most appropriate vessels for professional learning and the forging of new instructional skills” (p. 188). In order to be successful in creating and sustaining a professional community of learners, Knapp et al. (2003) indicated that a principal needs to ensure that trusting relationships are sustained over time, that shared values provide a focus for the work, and that there is a clear and compelling reason for professionals to work together.

Developing teacher capacity. It is of critical importance that school leaders provide teachers with meaningful professional learning in order to meet the goals of improved student learning in a school. School leaders must offer a robust system of professional learning opportunities that are based on “the principles of learning theory and models of best practice” (Murphy et al., 2007, p. 188). In addition, professional learning must stem from the student learning data, align with district and school goals, be consistent with the school culture and climate, and center on student learning (Murphy et al., 2007).
Although the principal needs to ensure that meaningful professional learning opportunities are available to the professionals, it is also important that the professionals have responsibility for their own professional learning (Marks & Printy, 2003). Elmore (2000) stated that our current system does not hold an “expectation that individuals or groups are obliged to pursue knowledge as both an individual and a collective good” (p. 20). Citing the need for school leaders to create a culture of individual responsibility for professional learning, Elmore added that school leaders “must create environments in which individuals expect to have their personal ideas and practices subjected to the scrutiny of their colleagues, and in which groups expect to have their shared conceptions of practice subjected to the scrutiny of individuals” (p. 20). Ideally, principals need to develop a culture that values professional learning and where teachers assume the majority of responsibility for their own professional learning. Marks and Printy (2003) suggested that when teachers assume responsibility for their own professional learning, “the principal becomes less of an inspector of teacher competence and more of a facilitator of teacher growth” (p. 374). Developing a community of learners among staff members, where individuals and groups seek and value professional learning, is a key aspect of a principal’s work.

Professional learning needs to focus on student learning and can take a number of forms which support instructional improvement, including “interacting with other professionals who offer ideas, critique, inspiration, and moral support in the renewal process” (Knapp et al., 2003, p. 10). A number of researchers have suggested that principals need to provide intellectual stimulation for teachers in order to help develop their capacity and improve student learning. Commenting on the importance of intellectual stimulation, Murphy et al. (2006) wrote that learning-centered leaders “provide intellectual stimulation and make sure that teachers have a high-quality stream of job-embedded opportunities to expand, enhance, and refine their
repertoire of instructional skills” (p. 12). In order to accomplish the goal of intellectual stimulation, principals need to keep themselves current on research and best practices, engage staff in discussions about research, best practices, and theory, and support staff in reading about best practices (Waters & Cameron, 2007). In addition, Louis et al. (2010) concluded that teachers and principals find a high degree of value in school leaders who understand and keep track of the professional learning needs of teachers. Principals must take an active role in the planning and evaluation of professional learning provided for the teachers (Murphy et al., 2007).

**Leading curriculum, instruction, and assessment.** Leaders for learning must provide leadership for curriculum, instruction, and assessment in schools. In considering leadership practices that support student learning, Louis et al. (2010) noted that principals in high achieving schools “actively engaged in providing direct instructional support to teachers” (p. 85). These instructional actions included having a deep understanding of learning and teaching in the building, interacting with teachers often about instruction and learning, providing teachers with regular formative assessment of teaching and learning, and supporting continuous professional learning and growth in teachers (Louis et al., 2010). In their study, Louis et al. (2010) distinguished between random and deliberate leadership, noting that deliberate leadership in curriculum, instruction, and assessment is necessary in order to impact student learning. They wrote:

> It is a distinction between principals who support teachers by ‘popping in’ and ‘being visible’ as compared with principals who were very intentional about each classroom visit and conversation, with the explicit purpose of engaging with teachers about well-defined instructional ideas and issues. (pp. 90-91)

Thus, deliberate, focused instructional support is an important aspect of instructional leadership.

In order to provide this leadership, principals “need to have a deep, current and critical understanding of the learning process” (Stoll et al., 2003, p. 104). Principals need to be
knowledgeable and continuously involved in core technologies of the school: curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Murphy et al., 2006). In addition, school leaders must have a certain level of content area knowledge in order to provide effective leadership for learning (Robinson et al., 2006; Stein & Nelson, 2003). Robinson et al. (2006) suggested that limited or missing content area knowledge puts school leaders at a disadvantage. Strong content area knowledge is necessary in order to provide effective leadership for instructional improvements. The generic leadership literature, which is not grounded in deep content or pedagogical knowledge, does not provide school leaders with the background needed for successful school improvement.

Commenting on the importance of school leaders developing a deep knowledge about learning, Robinson et al. (2006) wrote: “It is the research base on student and teacher learning, and on effective teaching in particular, that can give content to otherwise abstract leadership processes” (p. 63). While generic knowledge about leadership and leadership practices has some value for school leaders, they must develop a deep knowledge base on teaching and learning in order to effect meaningful change that supports high levels of student learning.

School leaders must also have knowledge in content areas of the curriculum. In considering the important relationship between content knowledge and school leadership, Stein and Nelson (2003) concluded: that school leaders must “have solid mastery of at least one subject (and the learning and teaching of it)” (p. 423). In considering the multiple areas of instruction and content for which a school leader is responsible, Stein and Nelson (2003) suggested that school leaders “develop expertise in other subject areas by ‘postholing,’” that is conducting in-depth explorations of an important but bounded slice of the subject, how it is learned, and how it is taught” (p. 423). In this way, school leaders will develop content knowledge that will support their work on instructional improvement.
In terms of curriculum, school leaders must ensure that the curriculum is aligned, monitored, and evaluated. It also means ensuring that high standards and expectations are delivered through the curriculum (Murphy et al., 2007).

In terms of instruction, principals need to be “knowledgeable about and deeply involved in the instructional program of the school and heavily invested in instruction, spending considerable time on the teaching function” (Murphy et al., 2006, p. 11). Leadership practices important in this area include visiting classrooms frequently, working with teachers on instructional issues, and modeling the importance of instruction by spending a great deal of time with it. In considering the leadership practices related to instruction, Elmore (2000) noted that school leaders need to be “routinely engaged in direct observation of practice in schools and classrooms; they have mastered ways of talking about practice that that allows for non-threatening support, criticism, and judgment” (p. 32).

In terms of assessment, in addition to being knowledgeable and involved, principals need to ensure that the assessment system is comprehensive, aligned, and that data are disaggregated and triangulated (Murphy et al., 2007, p. 186). Also, the principal needs to ensure that a variety of data sources are considered and used. Multiple assessments are essential, as Knapp et al. (2003) wrote: “Because no single measure can effectively capture the full range of what students are expected to learn, educational leaders wishing to focus attention on a richer picture of what students know and know how to do will likely consider and promote the use of other kinds of measures” (p. 15).

**Sharing leadership.** A number of studies in the leadership for learning literature point to the importance of sharing leadership in the school community (Louis et al., 2010; Marks & Printy, 2003; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008; Murphy et al., 2007). For example, a study by Heck et
al. (1990) concluded that school leaders in high-achieving schools have a much higher level of involvement of teachers in decisions related to instruction. Similarly, in a study of urban school development, Bryk, Rollow, & Pinnell (1996) found that in schools that had been successfully restructured, the principals were “fostering the norms of an inclusive and educative workplace where professionals respect each other’s distinctive expertise, where new skills develop as a result of engagement with meaningful tasks, and where trust builds as people learn to work together” (p. 175). As a result of continued shared leadership, Bryk et al. noted: “Over time, decision making in these schools became more participative and leadership was collectivized” (p. 175). One study, however, could not show a correlation between organic management and student learning (Miller & Rowan, 2006). In summarizing their understanding of shared leadership, Portin, Schneider, DeArmond and Gundlach (2003) concluded that in high performing schools, leadership becomes a “distributed capability in an environment that helps sustain changes that enhance student learning, improve instruction, maximize participation in decision making, and align resources to the school’s vision and purpose” (p. 25).

Practically speaking, Portin et al. (2003) noted that while the principal is ultimately responsible for providing effective leadership, he or she does not, and should not, do it alone. In considering shared leadership and the role of principals, Murphy et al. (2007) suggested: “They empower others and provide faculty with voice—both formal and informal—in running the school, not simply their own classrooms” (p. 189). Instructional leadership may be shared with a variety of professionals, including teachers, lead teachers, instructional coaches, data specialists, and others (Knapp et al., 2010). In addition to contributing to the school’s vision and goals, these professionals might provide coaching for teachers on instructional practices, work with the
leadership team to examine data and develop improvement plans, and managing the operations of the school as they relate to teaching and learning (Knapp et al., 2010; Murphy et al., 2007).

Beside providing professional staff with opportunities for shared leadership, principals also need to share leadership with parents and community members. High performing schools had leaders who connected with parents and other community members (Murphy et al., 2006). In a study of successful schools, Beck and Murphy (1996) found that parents could have a significant positive effect on student learning when offered leadership opportunities. They wrote: “Parents are contributing to the academic success of students by actively and enthusiastically supporting the work of educators. Their leadership can be seen in their work with other parents—not in efforts to influence instruction or classroom structures” (p. 79).

Attaining and allocating resources. School leaders seeking to provide leadership for learning also need to be skilled at attaining and allocating resources in order to support student learning. In addition, principals need to ensure that resource allocation is carefully aligned with the vision and goals of the school resource deployment and use to the mission and goals of the school (Murphy et al., 2007; Robinson, et al., 2008). Robinson et al. (2008) refer to this leadership practice as “resourcing strategically” (p. 661). Two areas of resources will be considered: material resources and human resources.

In terms of material resources, principals need to ensure that teachers have the materials needed to appropriately work with students (Murphy et al., 2006). Principals sometimes need to be creative and persistent in order to attain additional resources for their schools, using both formal and informal means. Research has shown that “high-performing school leaders are more successful than their peers in locating and securing additional resources for their schools” (Murphy et al., 2006, p. 21).
Sometimes overlooked in a discussion of resources in schools is the most important resource: people. As Stoll et al. (2003) noted: “Since schools are labour-intensive organizations, strategies to recruit, induct and develop staff are crucial parts of futures thinking” (p. 106). In addition, Knapp et al. (2003) suggested that it is important to hire teachers who share the core values and beliefs of the school culture that matches the school’s vision.

In addition to recruiting, inducting, and developing high quality teachers, principals must consider the best way to assign teachers to maximize student learning. Learning-centered leaders “allocate teachers based on educational criteria, especially student needs, rather than on less appropriate foundations such as staff seniority and school politics” (Murphy et al., 2006, p. 12). In considering the importance of teacher assignment decisions, Portin et al. (2009) stated that principals, particularly in urban schools, need to be “actively adjusting teaching assignments to give teachers the best chance to match their skills with their responsibilities, and at the same time, weeding out individuals who do not show the capacity to grow” (p. 52). Another part of the human resources work at a school is supervising for learning and counseling ineffective teachers out of the profession. Principal need to develop a number of strategies for dealing with incompetent teachers (Portin et al., 2009).

**Summary: Leadership for Learning**

The leadership for learning literature focuses the work of school leaders squarely on student learning. The literature identifies the primary goal as ensuring that all students learn at high levels. Six core leadership practices are identified which are essential for school leaders as they work to ensure that all students are learning at high levels: setting the vision, focus and goals; creating the environment; developing teacher capacity; leading curriculum, instruction, and assessment; sharing leadership; and attaining and allocating resources. Although there are
similarities between the principal leadership literature and leadership for learning literature, such as the impact of the principal in student learning and some key leadership practices such as effectively allocating resources, managing the vision, and providing leadership for curriculum and instruction, there are differences in the bodies of literature. The most significant difference in the bodies of literature is the focus of the leadership for learning literature on the learning of all students and the leadership practices that improve student learning. The leadership for learning literature provides school leaders with direction and guidance on how to focus the work of the school on ensuring that students will have the opportunity to learn at high levels.

**Transformative Leadership: A Theoretical Lens**

Although the leadership for learning literature provides a framework for thinking about leadership practices which may positively impact student learning, the literature on transformative leadership focuses more specifically on equity of opportunity for all students and providing a context where all students have the opportunity to be successful. The transformative leadership literature provides a useful lens to examine the leadership for learning principles in order to attain the goal of providing “powerful, equitable learning among students and professionals within the system as a whole” (Knapp et al., 2010, p. 4). Ensuring that all students have equity of opportunity in their learning is an issue of social justice. Thus, the transformative leadership literature provides insights into how school leaders create school organizations that ensure that all students will have the opportunity to learn at high levels.

The literature on transformative leadership focuses on addressing issues of social justice, equity, diversity, and oppression (Kose, 2011; Shields 2004b, 2010). The literature guides school leaders to acknowledge inequities and problems in the system, bring those inequities to the
Summarizing the desired outcomes of transformative leadership literature, Astin and Astin (2000) wrote:

We believe that the value ends of leadership should be to enhance equity, social justice, and the quality of life; to expand access and opportunity; to encourage respect for difference and diversity; to strengthen democracy, civic life, and civic responsibility; and to promote cultural enrichment, creative expression, intellectual honesty, the advancement of knowledge, and personal freedom coupled with social responsibility.

(p. 11)

These authors argue that a specific values emphasis is necessary to address the issues of equity, social justice, diversity, and oppression, and is essential for school leaders in order to provide a learning environment in which all students can learn at high levels. In assisting educators understand the basic tenets of transformational leadership, Shields (2010) wrote: “educators must do what they can to challenge unjust practices, to overcome inequality, and to create conditions under which all children can learn” (p. 582). Transformative leadership provides a framework for school leaders to create a school context in which all students have the opportunity to learn at high levels.

Transformative leadership calls on school leaders to actively intervene in the school culture and initiate actions that will ensure equitable opportunities for all. In defining leadership that leads to equity for all learners, Theoharis (2007) stated: “Principals make issue of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision. This definition centers on addressing and eliminating marginalization in schools” (p. 223).

Broadening this definition, Shields (2010) wrote:

It is not simply the task of the educational leader to ensure that all students succeed in tasks associated with learning the formal curriculum and demonstrating that learning on standardized tests; it is the essential work of the educational leader to create learning
contexts or communities in which the social, political, and cultural capital is enhanced in such a way as to provide equity of opportunity for students as they take their place as contributing members of society. (p. 572)

Interestingly, there are a number of overlapping and similar principles in the leadership for learning literature and the transformative leadership literature. For example, setting and stewarding a clear vision focused on student learning is a theme in much of the leadership for learning literature (Murphy et al., 2006, 2007; Knapp et al., 2003). Similarly, in a recent study of transformative leadership, Kose (2011) examined the importance of a clear vision in transformative schools. In terms of the leadership practices of school leaders, Kose (2011) noted that, during the development of the vision for the schools, the principals in the study included “(a) explicit discussion of transformative ideas during the vision statement development and (b) intentional inclusion of traditionally marginalized groups” (p. 131). This process of developing a shared vision focused on transformation of the school was an important element for success in the schools studied.

Another example of overlapping principles between these two bodies of literature involved allocation of resources. The leadership for learning literature noted the importance of school leaders “resourcing strategically” (Robinson et al., 2008). Similarly, the transformative leadership literature cites the importance of equitable resources to meet the needs of the students to ensure equity of opportunity. In a recent article on transformative leadership, Shields (2010), in studying two school leaders, noted that these leaders were strategic in their use of resources by working collaboratively with staff members to understand the issues and seek solutions. Shields cited two examples of strategic resourcing in this article: ensuring that student needs providing smaller groups for students who were experiencing academic challenges and acquiring the resources for level and language appropriate resources to meet the needs of students. The two
leaders studied in the article worked with staff members to identify needs and attain and allocate resources to meet those needs in equitable ways.

While similarities exist between leadership for learning literature and transformative leadership literature, there are differences. One major difference is the essential importance of school leaders attending to issues of equity, diversity, social justice, and oppression. Shields (2009) posited that some leadership theories, such as transformational leadership, “focus on changing what goes on in schools without necessarily attending to how the disparities in the wider social context affect schools” (p. 182). For example, Shields (2009) offered: “One can develop a vision, emphasize intellectual stimulation, and create a productive climate without ever asking questions about who is well served by the present practices and who might be excluded” (p. 182). Thus, considering the lens of transformative leadership, in conjunction with the framework of leadership for learning, is important to ensure that the ultimate goal is met: all students learning at high levels.

The transformative leadership literature provides school leaders with a number of potential actions that address the core issues of social justice. In simple terms, a school leader interested in transformative leadership would need to “ground yourself in the bedrock moral principles of social justice and academic excellence for students and pay careful attention to relationships, understanding, and dialogue” (Shields, 2004a, p. 38). Moral courage and activism are important for leaders wishing to enact transformative leadership (Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2007). In developing a framework for transformative leadership actions, Shields (2010) suggested: “Transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and democracy; it critiques inequitable practices and offers the promise not only of greater individual achievement but of a better life lived in common with others” (p. 559).
In terms of providing specific actions for school leaders to consider, Shields (2010) identified seven areas of action for transformative school leaders: balancing critique and promise; effecting deep and equitable change; deconstruction and reconstruction of social and cultural knowledge frameworks that generate inequality; acknowledging power and privilege; emphasizing both private and public good; focusing on liberation, emancipation, democracy, equity, justice; and demonstrating moral courage and activism (p. 574). In this study of two principals who enact transformative leadership practices, Shields (2010) provided examples for each category of action based on her data from the study in order to demonstrate that these actions are practicable in today’s schools. She notes that both principals in the study were “convinced that being a leader is not about popularity but about doing what they believed was right and just for students. It is not simply about raising test scores but about creating a rich and inclusive learning environment for all” (p. 581).

Taking a somewhat different perspective, Theoharis (2007) conducted a study of seven principals who enacted social justice leadership in their buildings. Theoharis found that principals enacted this leadership by raising student achievement, improving school structures, re-centering and enhancing staff capacity, and strengthening school culture and community. In discussing these findings relative to raising student achievement, Theoharis noted that “all of the principals felt that they had a duty and a ‘moral obligation’ to raise achievement for marginalized students” (p. 232). In examining how principals built the capacity of staff to address core issues, Theoharis noted that the staff engaged in professional learning and dialogue around issues such as race, social justice, and equity. Theoharis described the story of one principal who initiated important dialogue among staff members. He quoted the principal: “We have open and candid discussions about race. We spent considerable time learning and investigating Whiteness . . .
through book groups, professional development about White privilege, sharing our personal racial autobiographies . . . since most of my staff is White” (p. 235).

A number of common threads appear through these, and other, examples of transformative leadership: the importance of true dialogue, the focus on relationships, the need to expand knowledge and understanding about the core issues of social justice, and the moral courage to enact meaningful changes that lead to equity. These leadership actions, then, become the crux of transformative leadership that has the potential to create a learning context in which all students will have the opportunity to learn, and learn at high levels.

Summary: Transformative Leadership

The transformative leadership literature guides school leaders into thinking more broadly about how to meet the goal of powerful learning for all students. With its focus on equity, social justice, diversity, and oppression, the principles in this body of literature provide school leaders with actions to transform schools, creating learning contexts where all students can learn at high levels and equitable opportunities are available for all students, regardless of their backgrounds or challenges they face. Through leadership actions such as creating true dialogue, focusing on relationships, expanding knowledge and understanding about the core issues of social justice, and having the moral courage to enact meaningful changes that lead to equity, school leaders can create the context where all students can learn and thrive. Taken together with the leadership for learning literature, this body of literature provides a powerful framework for reaching the goal: equitable and powerful learning for all students.
Implications of the Literature for this Study

The goal to ensure high levels of learning for all students is a challenging one faced by school leaders today. This literature review provides key understandings for school leaders who are seeking to attain this goal.

The body of literature on the relationship between principal leadership and student learning shows a connection between school leadership and student learning. In addition, this literature begins, in a cursory way, to explore a conceptual framework for school leadership and to identify leadership practices that have an impact on student learning. The leadership for learning literature and transformative leadership literature begin to provide a framework for understanding how school leaders can impact student learning and work toward the goal of high levels of learning for all students. The leadership for learning literature frames leadership actions in schools designed to support high levels of learning. The transformative leadership literature outlines ways of thinking about the lived experiences of students and how school leaders can begin to bring about equity of opportunity for all students. Connecting the leadership for learning literature with the transformative leadership literature will provide a strong foundation for understanding leadership practices which support all students to learn at high levels.

In the case studies, I will be seeking to understand how two high school leaders provide leadership that moves toward the goal of high levels of learning for all students. The three bodies of literature reviewed in this chapter will provide a framework for understanding these leadership practices and how these practices might support the work of all school leaders.
Chapter Three

Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology that will be used in the study. The purpose of the study and research questions will be reviewed, an overview of the methodology presented, and the details of the study processes and procedures explained.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this multiple case study was to describe the leadership for learning at two high schools. Since the goal of leadership for learning is to ensure that all students are learning at high levels, and that leadership is a critical component of student success in learning, this study sought to understand the leadership practices, beliefs, and attitudes that support high levels of learning for all students.

Two research questions were the focus for this study:

- What leadership practices, behaviors, and attitudes does a principal enact in order to provide leadership for learning at a high school?
- What leadership practices, behaviors, and attitudes support high levels of learning for all students regardless of the challenges they face?

Overview of the Methodology

This study used a case study methodology. Merriam (2009) defined a case study as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). Similarly, Creswell (2007) defined case study research as “the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system” (p. 73). Merriam defined a bounded system as “a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (p. 40).
A case study methodology was chosen for this study in order to examine the concepts about leadership for learning presented in the literature in the specific context of a school. Of case study research, Merriam (1998) wrote:

A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcome, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research. (p. 19)

In this way, a case study methodology was used in this research study to develop a deeper understanding of leadership for learning by carefully examining the leadership practices, attitudes, and beliefs in action in a specific context, two high school sites for this study. Two sites were studied in order to be able to spend prolonged time in each site, allowing the researcher to inquire and understand the leadership practices, attitudes, and beliefs at each site. Merriam (1998) noted: “Because of its strengths, case study is a particularly appealing design for applied fields of study such as education. Educational processes, problems, and programs can be examined to bring about understanding that in turn can affect and perhaps even improve practice” (p. 41). Given that much of the literature about leadership for learning is theoretical in nature, this study sought to understand leadership for learning in practice in a school setting.

**Site and Participant Selection**

Effective selection of the sites and participants for a case study was essential for the success of this research study. In designing a case study, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggested: “The researchers scout for possible places and people that might be the subject or the source of data, find the location they think they want to study, and then cast a wide net trying to judge the feasibility of the site or data for their purposes” (p. 59). Selecting appropriate school sites, as well as participants within that school, was critical in meeting the purpose of this study.
Number of Cases to be Studied

One of the first considerations was the number of cases to study. For the purpose of this research study, two school sites were selected. Stake (1995) wrote:

Single cases are not as strong a base for generalizing to a population of cases as other research designs. But people can learn much that is general from a single case. They do that partly because they are familiar with other cases and they add this one in, thus making a slightly new group from which to generalize, a new opportunity to modify old generalizations. (p. 85)

This study focused detailed attention on two cases in order to better understand the process of providing leadership for learning.

Purposeful Sampling

In choosing specific cases to study, qualitative researchers often use purposeful sampling to meet the purpose of a study. In describing purposeful sampling, Creswell (2007) noted that a researcher “selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 125). Merriam (2009) stated: “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 77). For this research study, school sites where leadership for learning principles are being enacted were selected using the criteria detailed in the “Selecting a School Site” section of this chapter.

Two levels of sampling were required for this research study: school sites and the participants within that site. As Merriam (2009) writes: “First, you must select ‘the case’ to be studied. Then, unless you plan to interview, observe, or analyze all the people, activities, or documents within the case, you will need to do some sampling within the case” (p. 81). School sites were selected first, then participants for the study were chosen.
Selecting School Sites

The first selection in this research study was school sites. Selecting appropriate sites was critical for this research study, choosing sites that provided rich, detailed information about leadership for learning. As Patton (2002) wrote: “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about the issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (p. 230).

These are critical selections in order to meet the purpose of the study. In addressing the selection of a case to be studied, Stake (1995) wrote: “The first criterion should be to maximize what we can learn. Given our purposes, which cases are likely to lead us to understandings, to assertions, perhaps even to modifying our generalizations?” (p. 4).

A list of criteria was developed in order to select school sites that will be information-rich. As Yin (2009) noted:

A major step in designing and conducting a single case is defining the unit of analysis (or the case itself). An operational definition is needed and some caution must be exercised—before a total commitment to the whole case study is made—to ensure that the case is relevant to the issues and questions of interest. (p. 52)

In order to select school sites that provided rich information about leadership for learning, the following criteria were established: The school site chosen for this study should have:

- a principal who identifies himself or herself as a leader for learning;
- a principal who is able to articulate some practices consistent with the literature on leadership for learning;
- a general positive trend in student achievement data over the past two years.

Using the criteria mentioned above, the following procedures were used to select school sites for this study.
1. The researcher contacted professionals who are knowledgeable about educational administrators for recommendations of school sites for this study.

2. The researcher contacted recommended site(s) in writing asking about interest in participating in this study.

3. The researcher conducted a telephone interview with the principal of selected site(s) to determine consistency with the stated criteria for selection of a school site for this study.

4. The researcher reviewed public achievement data to confirm a general positive trend in student achievement.

Since the purpose of this study was to understand and describe leadership for learning, two very different high schools were chosen for the study. A number of high schools were considered for the study using public demographic data and conversations with educational professionals. The high schools chosen for the study were different in terms of location, size, demographics, and organization. Once two high schools were identified, the researcher contacted the school principals to see if there was an interest in participating in the study. This purposeful selection of very different high schools ensured that a broad understanding of leadership for learning was gained and allowed for a richer description of leadership practices, beliefs, and attitudes.

**Selecting Participants within the School Sites**

Once the school sites were selected for the study, all staff members were invited to participate in a survey about leadership for learning. Next, participants within the school sites to be interviewed were chosen. Merriam (2009) noted: “A sample within the case needs to be selected either before the data collection begins or while the data are being gathered” (p. 81). For this study, the principals were interviewed. In addition, teachers and other administrators from the building were also interviewed.

Teachers and administrators from the selected school sites volunteered to be interviewed for the study. At the end of the survey, teachers were invited to participate in an interview.
Teachers and administrators were also invited to participate in interviews for the study by the principal or the researcher.

A number of criteria were used to select teachers to be interviewed for the study. Merriam (2009) advised: “purposeful sampling is used to select the sample within the case, just as it was used to select the case itself. However, a second set of criteria is usually needed to purposefully select whom to interview, what to observe, and which documents to analyze” (p. 82). In terms of selection criteria, teachers interviewed for this study worked with the principal and at the school for a sufficient amount of time in order to be able to speak about the leadership for learning actions of the principal and the school. Interviewed teachers and administrators had varied backgrounds, levels of experience, and varied school assignments.

In terms of observations, observations were made in as many learning and collaborative environments as possible in order to see how leadership for learning is manifested in those settings. Observations for this study were discussed with the principals in order to be consistent with district practices and contractual obligations. The number and variety of observations conducted for this study varied by building, based on the comfort level of the principal and other factors.

**Data Collection**

For this case study, four major forms of data were collected: survey data, interview data, observation data, and document data. Yin (2009) noted the importance of collecting data from a variety of sources. He wrote: “A major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence. Furthermore, the need to use multiple sources of evidence far exceeds that in other research methods, such as experiments, surveys, or histories”
In addition, Merriam (2009) noted that “A qualitative design is emergent. The researcher usually does not know ahead of time every person who might be interviewed, all the questions that might be asked, or where to look next unless the data are analyzed as they are being collected” (p. 169). Keeping this in mind, the data collection and analysis for the study was defined, but remained flexible for the duration of the study.

**Access and Rapport**

In ensuring access to quality data, two initial steps were important: gaining access and establishing rapport. Creswell (2007) wrote: “An important step in the process is to find people or places to study and to gain access to and establish rapport with participants so that they will provide good data” (p. 118).

In gaining access, required permissions were obtained prior to beginning the collection of data. These permissions were obtained from the Institutional Review Board, the superintendents or designees of the district of the selected school, the principals of the selected school, as well as the survey and interview participants.

In addition, the researcher established a collegial and friendly rapport with the participants as the study began and proceeded. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) cite several common questions about which the participants of the study will wonder about the researcher and the research project:

1. What are you actually going to do?
2. Will you be disruptive?
3. What are you going to do with your findings?
4. Why us?
5. What will we get out of this? (p. 87-88)
Answers to these questions were made clear to the participants as the study begins and at each step of the data collection process. For example, the introduction to the survey indicated answers to the above cited Bogdan and Biklin questions and each interview began by clarifying the answers to these questions. The principal of each school was asked to address these questions as part of an introduction about the study to the staff. Both principals introduced the study to a group of staff members and through electronic messages.

**Survey Data**

A survey about general principles of leadership for learning was sent to each administrator and teacher from the selected school sites during of the case study. The survey was sent electronically and was anonymous. Background about the study and the researcher, as well as permission to participate in the survey, was included at the beginning of the survey.

This survey explored the staff members’ thoughts about leadership for learning. The survey included a description of various elements of leadership for learning as described in the literature. Participants were asked to rate how important each element of leadership for learning is for student learning and to what degree the element is present at the school.

Participants also had the opportunity to respond to open-ended questions at the end of the survey. In addition, participants were invited to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher in order to go more in-depth about leadership for learning as it is enacted in the building.

The data gathered from the survey were used to support and confirm data found from other data sources. The researcher was dependent on the principal of each school to distribute the survey electronically and encourage participation from staff members. The response rate from School A was approximately 42.5%; the response rate from School B was 12.3%. The principal
at School A was highly encouraging of staff participation in the survey. The principal in School B seemed less encouraging and may have limited the access of staff members to the survey. For example, the principal at School B initially released the survey only to members of the leadership team at the school. He eventually released the survey to a wider audience, but the response rate was very limited. Therefore, the survey data were used to confirm data found from other data sources and to provide an opportunity for various viewpoints on the leadership for learning at the schools that may not have been expressed in the interviews or other data sources. In particular, the open response answers on the survey provided information and quotations in support of the findings from other sources and also a few opposing viewpoints.

**Interview Data**

School administrators and teachers were interviewed about leadership for learning. Two methods were used for inviting staff members to participate in interviews: principal invited staff members to participate and an invitation was given at the end of the staff survey. Questions were asked about leadership for learning principles, such as “What does the principal do that supports your work with students?” As Merriam (2009) noted: “Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behaviors, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate” (p. 88).

Interview participants were asked to respond to various elements of leadership for learning and to describe relevant experiences. As suggested by Creswell (2007), all interviews will be recorded and transcribed. All interviews were completed in person, at the school site.

An interview guide was used to structure the interviews. The interviews were semi-structured and asked about issues such as school structures for student learning, leadership practices, and strategies for supporting all students. As Merriam (2009) described, a semi-
structured interview uses an interview guide that includes specific and open-ended questions, is flexible in the use of the questions, and seeks specific data from the participants (p. 89). Merriam (2009) wrote: “For the most part, however, interviewing in qualitative investigations is more open-ended and less structured. Less structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways” (p. 90). The use of the semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to obtain needed data about leadership for learning, while allowing for unintended and unsolicited ideas to emerge from the interviews.

**Observation Data**

Observations at the school sites were conducted for this case study. Observations provided “a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon rather than a secondhand account of the world obtained in an interview” (Merriam, 2009, p. 117). Merriam (2009) acknowledged some of the drawbacks cited for observational data, including its subjectivity and reliance on human perception (p. 118). However, she stated that: “Observation is a research tool when it is systematic, when it addresses a specific research question, and when it is subject to the checks and balances in producing trustworthy results” (p. 118).

Two settings were observed at the school sites: classrooms and collaborative meetings. Classrooms were observed to see instructional practices and learning environments. Collaborative meetings were observed to see interactions among teachers and administrators related to leadership for learning principles and practices. For example, the researcher observed how teachers and administrators engage in professional learning together. In both settings, the researcher was looking for examples of leadership for learning elements and evidence of results of leadership for learning in the classrooms.
Permission was obtained from those being observed prior to the observations by the principal of each school. Observations field notes were recorded during and after the observation. Field notes were be transcribed. Initially, the researcher was a pure observer, not participating in the events being observed. In several instances, the researcher was asked to take on limited participation roles. Often in these circumstances, participants asked for feedback or advice on a particular issue. In discussing the role of the observer, Creswell (2007) suggested: “The role can range from that of a complete participant (going native) to that of a complete observer. I especially like the procedure of being an outsider initially, followed by becoming an insider over time” (p. 134).

**Data Storage**

All data, both in paper and electronic forms, were stored in a locked file cabinet and/or on a secure password protected server for safekeeping as well as maintenance of confidentiality.

**Data Analysis**

The purpose of data analysis is to bring meaning from the data collected to answer the research questions. Merriam (2009) wrote: “Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning” (p. 175-176). Merriam (2009) also noted: “But what does making sense out of the data mean? To me, data analysis is the process used to answer your research question(s)” (p. 176). Thus, the purpose of the data analysis was to make sense of the data and answer the research questions.

**Ongoing Data Analysis**
The data analysis for this case study began as soon as the data collection started and continued throughout the duration of this study. In considering the analysis of data in a case study, Stake (1995) wrote:

There is no particular moment when data analysis begins. Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations. Analysis essentially means taking something apart. We take our impressions, our observations, apart. . . . Analysis goes on and on. There may be a period in which we concentrate more on analysis than anything else. We may mark “Analysis” for those two weeks on our calendar. But even for the quantitative researcher, analysis should not be seen as separate from everlasting efforts to make sense of things. (p. 71-72)

Merriam (2009) wrote: “The process of data collection and analysis is recursive and dynamic. But that is not to say that the analysis is finished when all the data have been collected. Quite the opposite. Analysis becomes more intense as the study progresses and once all the data are in” (p. 169). Based on these ideas, data analysis was continuous throughout and after the data collection process. As the collection of data progressed through the study, questions were revised, foci for interviews were established, and additional questions were asked, primarily of the two principals. Themes from the literature guided the analysis of the data, providing an initial framework for understanding the data and helping to refine the organization of the data as the data collection progressed.

**Data Analysis During Data Collection**

During the data collection for this study, data were organized and analyzed using a number of strategies. As data were collected, the researcher read through the information and made margin notes. Initially, codes were selected from themes that emerged from the literature, but additional and modified codes were developed as the data collection proceeded based on the responses of participants. The researcher did some initial coding of the data as the study progressed. Creswell (2007) defined coding as: “reducing the data into meaningful segments and
assigning names for the segments” (p. 148). Yin (2009) suggested that, “a helpful starting point is to ‘play’ with your data” (p. 129). Yin went on to cite ideas of Miles and Huberman (1994) including arranging data in arrays, developing a matrix of categories and related data, representing data visually, counting frequency of occurrences, and arranging data in time order (Yin, 2009, p. 129).

This initial analysis of data during the collection phase of the study also informed the data collection as the study progressed. In considering the importance of ongoing data analysis during the data collection phase of a study, Merriam (2009) suggested:

The final product is shaped by the data that are collected and the analysis that accompanies the entire process. Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed. Data that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating. (p. 171)

In this way, the ongoing analysis of the data informed the data collection process, whether it focused questions for future interviews or pointed out areas for further observation.

Data Analysis after Data Collection

As Creswell (2007) noted, one of the major purposes of a case study is to provide a “detailed description of the case and its setting” (p. 163). The analysis of the data, then, needed to support this rich description of the case. Stake (1995) stated that qualitative researchers use two strategies to understand and make sense of the data: “direct interpretation of the individual instances and through aggregation of instances until something can be said about them as a class” (p. 74). Stake went on to note that in qualitative research, the researcher “concentrates on the instance, trying to pull it apart and put it back together again more meaningfully—analysis and synthesis in direct interpretation. The qualitative researcher seeks a collection of instances, expecting that, from the aggregate, issue-relevant meanings will emerge” (p. 75). The purpose of
the data analysis after the data collection, then, was to provide a rich description and understand the data from the case in order to derive new understanding of leadership for learning.

A four-step process was used to analyze the data: identified segments of data that was useful for the study based on the literature and observations; determined themes such as vision, teacher capacity, etc., from the data using codes that emerged from the literature and observations; sorted evidence into the themes; developed generalizations from the data and themes.

First, segments of data that were useful in this study were identified. Merriam (2009) noted: “The overall process of data analysis begins by identifying segments in your data set that are responsive to your research questions. This segment is a unit of data which is an answer or part of an answer to the question(s) you have asked in this study” (p. 176). Merriam cited criteria identified by Lincoln & Guba (1985) in determining useful segments of data. First, the data segment needed to be heuristic, revealing relevant information for the study and causing the reader to think beyond the particular bit of information. Second, the data needed to be “the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself—that is, it must be interpretable in the absence of any additional information other than a broad understanding of the context in which the inquiry is carried out” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 385). Major themes from the literature provided the initial framework for determining which data would be useful in addressing the research questions.

Second, the themes were developed from the data. Creswell (2007) suggested that the next step in data analysis is “reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing codes” (p. 148). Merriam (2009) suggested two processes for determining themes: open coding and analytic coding. Merriam (2009) noted: “The challenge is to construct the
categories or themes that capture some recurring patterns that cut across your data. It should be clear that categories are abstractions derived from the data, not the data themselves” (p. 181). Again, the literature provided the larger ideas and themes used to develop the themes for the study.

Third, the data, or evidence, collected in the study was sorted into the themes developed. Marshall & Rossman (2006) referred to the themes as “buckets or baskets into which segments of text are places” (p. 159). Themes were developed around the leadership practices identified in the literature. For example, setting the vision, collaborative opportunities among staff members, and strategically allocating resources became themes that were useful in analyzing the data.

Finally, generalizations were developed from the themes and data. Merriam (2009) referred to this final process as “making inferences, developing models, or generating theory” (p. 188). Stake (1995) referred to the process as a search for patterns and correspondence. He wrote: “The search for meaning is often a search for patterns, for consistency within certain conditions, which we call ‘correspondence’” (p. 78). Stake added: “Sometimes we will find meaning in a single instance, but usually the important meanings will come from reappearance over and over” (p. 78). In this way, larger meanings and patterns and generalizations were developed from the data that were sorted for meaning and categorized into themes.

**Standards of Validation**

Establishing the trustworthiness of a qualitative study is essential for an effective research inquiry. Lincoln & Guba (1985) wrote: “trustworthiness is a matter of concern for the consumer of inquirer reports. It is that person who might wish to use a research paper, act on the basis of an
evaluation or formulate policy on the basis of a policy analysis who must be convinced that the study is worthy of confidence” (p. 328).

In order to establish the trustworthiness of this study, a number of techniques were employed: prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation of sources, use of multiple methods, and member checking. The researcher achieved prolonged engagement and persistent observation by spending extended time at each site and using the four types of data to gain a deep understanding. At least four sources of data were used to triangulate the sources including public document data, survey data, interview data, and field observation data. Multiple methods were also used in this study, including review of public data, survey of participants, observation of participants in the school sites, and interview of multiple participants. Member checking was done by reviewing results, sharing selected passages of the draft study with the participants to attain their feedback.

The use of a variety of standards of validation is important for a qualitative study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) note:

In summary, we believe it to be the case that the probability that findings (and interpretations based upon them) will be found to be more credible if the inquirer is able to demonstrate a prolonged period of engagement (to learn the context, to minimize distortions, and to build trust), to provide evidence of persistent observation (for the sake of identifying and assessing salient factors and crucial atypical happenings), and to triangulate, by using different sources, different methods, and sometimes multiple investigators, the data that are collected. (p. 307)

The application of these strategies will allow readers to trust the results and interpretations of this study.
Limitations and Delimitations

A number of limitations and delimitations were identified in this study. In terms of limitations, there was a risk that the researcher would not be able to obtain candid and open responses from the participants. Although the researcher worked to establish trust and rapport and ensure that the participants understood the purpose, scope, and usefulness of the study, there was the possibility that participants did not feel safe in expressing their true ideas and feelings, particularly if those ideas and feelings were negative or might reflect badly on the school or its students and staff. The researcher felt that the data obtained were generally candid and honest, but since the researcher is not a member of the school communities, it is not possible to know for sure. However, because the principals of each school identified the interview participants, the results of the interviews may have been skewed toward positive responses. The responses from interview participants reflected both positive and negative comments about the school.

Another limitation was that the researcher had only limited access to the selected school sites. The schedule of the researcher, combined with the need for the school to ensure minimal interruption to the learning process, may have prevented the researcher from having the amount of access necessary for prolonged engagement required to develop a complete picture of the leadership for learning at each school. The researcher needed to make optimal use of all time available at the selected school sites for the collection of data. Although access was limited, the researcher felt that he was able to gather enough data in order to develop a complete picture of the leadership for learning at each high school. However, the principals controlled access to data collection. While the researcher felt that there was no effort to hide data, the access to the school site and personnel was limited.
In terms of delimitations, only two school sites were selected for this study. This decision was made by the researcher in order to ensure that there was adequate time and resources available to fully study the leadership for learning at the site. Given the schedule of the researcher and the scope of this project, the selection of two school sites seemed appropriate. In addition, the ability to focus energy and time on two school sites helped to ensure that there was both prolonged engagement and persistent observation needed to establish the trustworthiness of the study.

**Significance**

The literature is clear: leadership is an essential element of effective learning for students. Second only to teachers, leaders for learning in schools have the potential to positively impact students in important ways. Leadership is a critical factor in ensuring that student learning is maximized in schools for all students (see, for example, Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins 2006; Hallinger & Heck, 1998, 1996; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982). A clear connection can be drawn between the leadership in a school and student learning. Ensuring that every school has an effective leader, who is knowledgeable and skilled in implementing leadership for learning, is essential if all students are to learn at high levels. Unfortunately, many leadership preparation programs have not adequately prepared school leaders for their roles in ensuring that all students learn at high levels (Theoharis, 2007). This study helped to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and practice for school leaders. The study has the potential to help school leaders understand the leadership practices, beliefs, and attitudes that will ensure that all students are able to learn at high levels.
Chapter Four

Findings: School A

The overall purpose of this dissertation was to describe leadership for learning at two high schools. This chapter presents the findings from the case studies of one of the high schools studied. Results from the second school studied will be presented in Chapter Five.

In reporting the results of the case studies, thick description was used in order to make sense of the complex and divergent data gathered about leadership for learning in the school setting. Describing the use of thick description, Geertz (1973) wrote that the researcher’s role is “setting down the meaning particular social actions have for the actors whose actions they are, and stating, as explicitly as we can manage, what the knowledge thus attained demonstrates about the society in which it is found and, beyond that, about social life as such” (p. 27). Thick description provided the context of the case observed, making the match between research and the case evident. In addition, thick description enhanced the generalizability of the case to other contexts (Merriam, 2009). Thus, this chapter, as well as Chapter Five, provided thick description of the observed school setting in order to better understand leadership for learning.

Two major questions frame the study and provided the focus for the discussion in this chapter:

- What leadership practices, behaviors, and attitudes does a principal enact in order to provide leadership for learning at a high school?
- What leadership practices, behaviors, and attitudes support high levels of learning for all students regardless of the challenges they face?

This chapter was organized around four big themes in order to describe the leadership practices, behaviors, and attitudes at the high school studied: school climate and culture; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; allocation of resources; and principal leadership. These themes are
consistent with the leadership for learning literature, framing key elements in the description of leadership for learning in the literature. While these themes were explored separately in this chapter, there were considerable overlaps in the content of the themes. Examples shared in one theme might well fit into another theme. This chapter will begin with a brief description of the data collection at this school site followed by basic information about the school.

Data Collection at This School Site

Data on leadership for learning for School A were collected over the course of four weeks. The data for this case study were gathered from four main sources: a survey administered to all certified staff members, interviews of selected administrators and teachers, observations of classrooms and teacher collaborations, and review of public documents and documents provided by staff members of the schools. The survey on leadership for learning was sent to approximately 80 certified staff members. Thirty-four responses were received, yielding an approximate response rate of 42.5%. In terms of interviews, ten staff members were interviewed, including the principal, teacher leaders, and teachers. Observations of the school included classroom instruction in 12 classrooms, two team meetings where teachers were discussing students and the support needed for success, an afternoon of professional learning opportunities for staff members, a leadership team meeting reviewing the work of the instructional coaches and progress on the school improvement work, and several informal walkthroughs of the building. Observations took place on three different days. Public documents reviewed for this study included the annual State Report Card and documents available on the school website, including the faculty handbook, organizational structure, and a description of the school community. Staff members provided a
number of additional documents for review, including meeting agendas and notes from collaborative meetings.

**Basic School Information**

School A is a high school of approximately 1,100 students located in a small Midwestern city in the United States with approximately 40,000 residents. The student body is diverse, with approximately 45% Caucasian students, 35% African American students, 10% Hispanic students, 5% Asian/pacific Islander students, and 5% Multi-racial students. About 60% of the students at School A are considered low income. About 4% of the student body qualifies as Limited English Proficient (LEP).

The principal at School A has been Principal for 6 years. Prior to being named principal, she served at School A as Assistant Principal for Curriculum and Instruction for 3 years. Prior to that appointment, she was a special education teacher. The principals indicated that she generally works between 12 to 14 hour each day, arriving early and staying late to participate in extracurricular activities and collaboration opportunities with staff members.

Achievement testing, as reported on the annual state school report card, revealed that School A has held steady in achievement scores for the past three years. The average ACT score of graduating seniors was 20.6 in 2011 and 20.9 in 2010. On the state mandated achievement tests administered to juniors in 2011, 47.4% of student met or exceeded state standards in reading; 40.4% met or exceeded state standards in mathematics, and 39.1% met or exceeded state standards in science.

School A received two national recognitions in the past two years. First, the school was awarded the bronze medal for 2009 in the *U.S. News and World Report* of America’s Best High
Schools. This distinction is awarded to public high schools that have been recognized for serving all students and producing measurable academic outcomes. In order to qualify, a school must perform better than statistically expected on state achievement tests, show that less advantaged students perform better than average for the state, and that student demonstrate college readiness (Morse, 2009). Second, the school district, based on the performance of its only high school, School A, was named to the Advanced Placement (AP) Achievement List by College Board in 2010 and 2011. This distinction is based on increased and broadened in participation in AP courses, including percentage of AP examinations being taken by minority students, and maintained or improved performance on the AP examinations. Only 388 school districts in the United States qualified for this recognition in 2011.

School Culture and Environment

During formal and informal interviews and on the staff survey, the teachers and administrators at School A often expressed a great deal of pride in the school culture and environment they have built. For example, the principal noted extreme pride when visitors, both educators and non-educators, often comment that they “feel a climate of learning” at School A when visiting the school. This section of the study will focus on three areas of school climate and environment at School A: teacher collaboration; student behavior, responsibility and accountability; and the social justice focus.

Teacher Collaboration

Both administrators often cited teacher collaboration and teachers as a cornerstone of the positive work at School A. Teachers have many opportunities to collaborate with one another at School A. A number of structures have been established in order to provide time and opportunity
for teacher collaboration. In addition, the principal has provided resources and removed barriers in order for the collaboration among teachers to grow. When talking about the collaborative work of the staff, one teacher stated: “I’d say, in the last 5 years especially, we’ve become a collaborative community in a way that we haven’t been or weren’t before.” Other staff members also expressed this feeling of accomplishment in the collaborative environment of the school.

One collaboration structure that was established to encourage collaboration is the school improvement advisory team. This team coordinates the overall school improvement plan and efforts of the school. The team is composed of administrators and teacher leaders who lead five school improvement committees. The five committees in place in the year I conducted this research were: curriculum development, literacy, social justice, technology, and discipline. Each of these committees has a chairperson or two co-chairpersons who are paid a stipend to coordinate the committee and to be members of the school improvement advisory team. Other staff members, and students in some cases, are also voluntary members of these committees. These committees meet at least monthly to talk about specific issues, plan improvement strategies, and provide professional learning for colleagues.

Another collaborative structure at School A focuses directly on meeting the needs of students, freshmen and sophomores specifically. Simply called “teams,” these collaborative teams of teachers are assigned to monitor and support specific students who are struggling in school. Each team has a designated leader who coordinates the work of the team. Teams meet weekly to review the progress of students and plan for interventions. Generally, individual students are assigned to one teacher on the team who will monitor them closely and provide support as needed.
Team members also provide direct support for the students. For example, one teacher on a team shared a recent experience with a student. The teacher had established a good working relationship with the student. When the students was having a very difficult time at home and was eventually placed in temporary foster care, the student asked the teacher to speak with her science teacher in order to delay a test. The student explained that she felt that she could do a good job on the test, but needed more study time that was not available previously because of the situation at home. The situation was resolved positively. The teacher on the team commented: “Before teams, teachers didn’t have time with students without the curriculum drive. Teams make a difference for students. It also gives us time to talk with each other.” Interestingly, I also observed this teacher sharing this story with the principal in the hallway during a passing period. There was a great deal of pride and a sense of accomplishment in being able to make a difference for this student on the part of both the teacher and the principal.

The “Teams” structure was spoken about with pride by many of the teachers. However, there are teachers who have been less receptive to the “Teams” structure. One teacher noted: “There are teachers who do not like the idea of teams. But I think it’s what’s best for kids. And I think we’ve gotten to the point now where a lot of teachers see that.” Another teacher recognized that this structure helped him to think about more than just his students. He said: “It’s made me more aware of my students, and now I’m thinking about all 90 or so students that are on our team.”

In addition to the benefits for students, one teacher, who has been in the profession for only three years, recognized that the teams structure, and his role as a team leader, allowed him to express his thoughts and ideas in a safe forum. He said:
As a younger teacher, I wasn’t really speaking up about how I thought we could do things differently or how I thought we could do things better. Now that I’m a team leader, I can do those things and kind of be the one saying, “Hey, let’s do this.” You know, like “What do we think about this, let’s try it.” So it’s kind of given me voice a little bit into what we do as a team.

The principal talked many times during the course of our interviews about the importance of building capacity, specifically leadership capacity, in many teachers. In addition to providing support for students, the teams provide leadership opportunities for teachers.

Two other collaboration structures are focused specifically on teaching and learning: early out Wednesdays and instructional sharing days. These two structures allow teachers to explore issues related to student learning, curriculum, and their instruction. These two structures will be explored further in the next section of this study on curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

These collaborative structures are only a few examples of opportunities for teachers to collaborate about students, student learning, and instruction. Several teachers interviewed commented on the tremendous growth of the collaborative culture over time. One teacher noted that teachers and administrators are not afraid to talk about important issues. He said:

And even if everyone doesn’t agree, we’re going to talk about it in a respectful way to make sure that we are doing what’s best for students. Nothing is going to go unsaid that we’re really passionate about. And I think that’s really cool.

The principal and teachers offered several ideas about how the collaborative culture was built at School A. One way that the collaborative culture was built is through the use of data. The principal noted that almost from the beginning of her tenure, she offered data to teachers in order to begin conversations about students, student learning, and collaboration. In talking about beginning to use data with staff members, the principal said: “They’re getting data. But I know it pushes people away. They get afraid because of many reasons.” For that reason, the principal
noted that she began slowly and continued to provide data to begin conversations and collaboration among staff members. A number of teachers identified the use of data as a critical component to begin honest collaborative conversations. Data on many aspects of the school were offered to teachers and administrators as they considered how to best meet the needs of students, including achievement data, discipline data, attendance data, and survey data. Data were often disaggregated to examine how the data were reflected in various subgroups of the school population and how school practices and policies affected various groups of students.

Another strategy for building the collaborative culture at School A was including teacher voices and respecting diverse opinions. One teacher, feeling particularly strongly about this, said: “What really drives our building is the fact that our teachers have a voice, and their voice is so important that without them, I don’t think we would be where we are.” In reflecting on the collaborative nature of the principal and her willingness to entertain diverse opinions, a teacher noted: “I give (the principal) a lot of credit for allowing those things to happen. It’s very collaborative. It’s very, let’s discuss it. There’s a lot of respect for the opinions of people involved.” Both administrators and teachers cited the inclusive nature of the collaborative culture, respecting teacher voices and diverse opinions, as an important attribute of School A which contributes to improved learning for all students.

**Student Responsibility, Behavior and Accountability**

During formal and informal conversations with staff members at School A, many teachers and administrators cited student behavior, responsibility, and accountability as an important part of the school climate and environment at School A. In particular, many staff members noted the extreme improvement in student behavior over the past few years. In talking about the improved climate of the building, one teacher stated: “The climate of the school now is
so much better than it was. And the students are much happier. The students here really get along well.”

Reflecting on the change in climate at School A, the principal noted that there were 60 fights in the year prior to her first year as principal. She talked about the concerted effort to change the culture in the building, bringing student behavior under control and ensuring that learning was the focus of the building. Reflecting on the work of the building in this area, the principal said: “And so for the first year, it was just kind of cleaning up things. Our building was kind of tough. I can show you the data, but we had 60 fights in a year.” She went on to note that, in her second year, she created a social justice committee, which “really became about school improvement.” The principal noted with pride that visitors often remark that the building is “kind of quiet for a high school.” My observations of the building confirmed that the school is calm and orderly. Students were well mannered in the hallways, classrooms, and common areas. A number of actions and strategies were put in place in order to improve the building culture in terms of student behavior and responsibility.

First, students were held accountable for their actions. One of the teachers attributes the positive change in climate to the increased accountability for their actions on the part of students. As an example, the teacher noted that prior to the current principal, students were given detentions but there was little or no follow through on the detentions. He stated that at that time “it was laughable to get a detention because nothing is going to happen to (the students).” To remedy this situation, a detention system was instituted to provide follow through on detentions and provide students with a safe environment for the detentions with a focus on learning as opposed to punishment. While many teachers noted the success of the new detention system,
some expressed skepticism. For example, on the survey one teacher commented that “various discipline (strategies) have proven ineffective such as our DRA room for in-school suspension.”

In addition to increased accountability for detentions, the social justice committee and other groups began working with students and sending messages about responsibility for one’s behavior and actions. For example, the social justice committee created a video for students asking students to think about their words before speaking. The video focuses on changing the common practice of using derogatory and defamatory language when describing people or actions. The video was used with various groups of students in a variety of settings and was placed on the school’s website. The video was used to begin and sustain conversations about differences and how language used affects others. Based on feedback gathered from students by the principal, the video has been updated to reflect more current language and thinking. In talking about the updated video, the principal stated: “So, we’re trying to update, kind of get on what’s new or what’s relevant for the kids.” The principal has seen changes in students’ attitudes and behaviors in the classroom. She notes that some students “are really hard on each other” and willing to call one another on disrespectful language used in the school.

Second, student behavior data were used widely with staff members to increase awareness and change actions on the part of staff members. Each semester, referral data were shared with staff members. The referrals were disaggregated in a number of different ways, including by race and by socioeconomic status. One teacher, who viewed this data sharing as a positive strategy, stated that some staff members view it as “controversial.” This teacher noted that some staff members interpret the sharing of data as “somehow the message is sent that administration doesn’t want us writing referrals, that we’re writing too many.” Although this
teacher did not see the message as a directive for less referrals, he noted that some teachers do feel this is the message being sent.

The principal often shared data on a variety of topics with the staff. The principal noted that she started sharing data slowly, realizing that data “pushes people away. They get afraid for many reasons, such as loss and fear.” In addition, the principal noted a shift in the data presented to staff over the past few years, from behavior and student responsibility to more instructionally focused data sharing. Reflecting on this shift, the principal noted: “You start with helping children, and now we’ve moved heavily into trying to get the curriculum to really include social justice issues.” The principal has noticed a shifting away from deficit thinking among staff members, and attributes the shift, in part, to the continuous use of data. Talking about the usefulness of the data in moving the thinking of teachers and beginning to address deficit thinking, the principal stated that a goal was “getting teachers to think differently about how we respond to children. So now we’re even—what’s really cool is, we’re getting trying to get away from deficit thinking.” However, the principal firmly believes that the data have helped staff members better understand the students and the building and has led to many positive changes, including improved student behavior and responsibility.

Third, one of the school improvement committees is focused specifically on student discipline and classroom environment. At a recent professional learning opportunity facilitated by the discipline committee, teachers compared discipline from 50 years ago to discipline today after viewing a video about student discipline created 50 years ago. Teachers noted many similarities between the videotape of discipline from 50 years ago and current practice. Next, the teachers analyzed an actual referral given to a student by a teacher the previous school year. In analyzing an actual teacher referral from the school, the participants were able to see that adult
actions and reactions often have a great effect, either positive or negative, on the outcome of a student disciplinary issue. For example, at one point in the referral, the teacher wrote: “A student had his back to me and looked to be texting.” Participants in the session were asked to share their initial reactions. Later in the referral, the teacher wrote: “At that point I saw him slip a phone into his pocket. He got very defensive, saying ‘you didn’t see any phone. What color was it?’” The participants were asked to discuss how sure a teacher needed to be in writing a referral and what other alternative actions a teacher might have taken. I observed that this teacher-led professional learning opportunity was well received by the participants. Several participants commented on the thought-provoking nature of this professional learning opportunity focused on the adult responsibility in student discipline.

Finally, there was a visible presence of staff members and administrators in the hallways between and during classes. Staff members were assigned to monitor hallways during classes. Many of these teachers could be found working with students or talking with students while monitoring the hallways. The tone of the monitors was generally positive and helpful for students. For example, one monitor inquired very politely about the destination of a student without a pass and assisted the student to follow the correct building procedures. In addition, administrators were always present in the hallways before school, during passing periods, and after school. The principal greeted students by name and often engaged students in conversations relative to the individuals. The tone of the principal with students was positive, realistic, and encouraging. Clearly, she knew the students and paid attention to what was happening in their lives. Reflecting on the positive climate and culture in the school, one teacher talked about the role of this principal: “Her vision, her personal commitment to kids. She is a leader who sincerely cares about every single kid.”
Social Justice Focus

There is a pervasive focus on the success of all students at School A. During formal and informal interviews, staff members talked about making sure that all students are successful. Bulletin boards in the hallways displayed social justice themes. As noted earlier in this chapter, a video created by the social justice committee encouraging school community members to think before they speak was placed on the school’s website. In speaking about the challenges that the students face, primarily coming from a low socioeconomic status, one teacher summarized this school-wide social justice focus saying: “Some schools would use it as an excuse for why learning isn’t taking place. (Our school) says ‘we’re going to learn, and we have these factors to deal with.’”

Staff members identified a number of deliberate actions, initially initiated primarily by the current principal, as critical to the school focus on social justice. In a formal conversation about social justice and the role of the principal, one teacher stated: “Social justice is her definite agenda, and the staff knows it. They know that’s what the building is going to be about, and that we are looking out for the best interest of all kids and student learning.” The principal identified the focus on social justice as essential to ensuring that all students learn at high levels. Commenting on her vision for the school, the principal stated: “I always want (the school community) to be more just. I always knew it needed to be a place where all kids can get the same opportunities.” Specifically, the principal identified that people in power need to ensure that all students have access to opportunities and maintain high learning expectations for all students. In fact, she said: “Have higher expectations, bring higher results. Simple as that.”

In terms of actions that supported the school-wide focus on social justice, a school improvement committee centered on social justice issues has been operating in the school for the
past 4 years. The goal of the social justice committee is to systematically improve the school community’s ability to support student learning through the lens of social justice. This committee meets at least monthly and has two teacher co-chairpersons who receive a stipend for their leadership along with a number of other volunteer staff and student members. One of the teachers, who previously served on the committee, commented about the work of the committee: “I was amazed at the conversations that this mixed group of people were able to have. And I think some of those ideas have carried out to students who aren’t even on the committee. And I think that’s affected the climate and the culture of the building.” In particular, this teacher was effusive in his praise about the faculty and student membership on this school improvement committee. Speaking of the school’s focus on social justice, he stated: “I think the social justice emphasis this school has is amazing. I don’t know of any place that has it that prominent and relies on it, and keeps it in focus that much. And I think it’s a really strong thing.”

The reduction of tracking was another major action identified by staff members as moving the building forward with the social justice focus. Previously, there had been at least four tracks for students in core content areas: a special education track, a basic track, a regular track, and an honors track. One teacher noted that it was “embarrassing” and “even insulting” to have a basic track. He said: “It was just part of what we did. And right away, when you even use that terminology, we start to lower expectations.” Currently, there are two levels in the school: college preparatory level and AP preparatory level. Reflecting on the elimination of tracking and its effect on Advanced Placement enrollment, another teacher said:

We look at how many kids are involved in AP classes. Eight or 9 years ago, you walked in there and there were all these middle to upper class white kids sitting in the honors classes. And now it’s not like that, because it shouldn’t look like that.
The principal summarized the overall effect of reducing tracking and increasing participation in Advanced Placement courses: “When you increase the rigor and increase AP, I really believe it steps up everything. That was my goal big time.” School A increased participation among all students in AP courses and increased the number of examinations taken among all students, placing the school on the Advance Placement Achievement List in 2010 and 2011.

This was not an easy change for staff members. The principal recalled the presentation of data to the staff that was the initial step to eliminating tracking. She presented the data about tracking, broken out by race and socioeconomic status among other categories, to the staff to initiate the discussion. The principal said: “I remember one of my assistant principals said, well, if they don’t know you’re a principal, they know now.” Remembering this initial presentation to the staff about the elimination of tracking, one teacher recalled: “I think the building was really suspicious about whether or not this was going to be a good idea. It really challenged a lot of the faculty.” He recalled that teachers were concerned that it would be difficult to teach advanced level courses with students who might be struggling to read the text and materials. He notes: “And it’s still an issue. It hasn’t gone away.” For example, in the survey, one teacher identified “placing students in classes that are too advanced for what their brains are currently ready for” as an action that has a negative effect on student learning.

To address some of the issues raised by staff members about the reduction of tracking, instructional coaches were employed to support teachers with strategies to use in the classrooms. Instructional coaches were chosen from among staff members and given release time during the day to work with colleagues. In addition, the instructional coaches worked with a local university to develop their coaching skills. Also, professional learning opportunities, provided both by colleagues in the school and by a local university, addressed these issues and provided teachers
with new ways of thinking and strategies to address the issues. A number of support structures were also been put in place to support students in being successful in higher-level courses. Academic Learning Support classes, staffed by certified teachers, were made available to students to provide guided support for students instead of a traditional study hall format. Also, Advance Placement preparation courses have been implemented at the high school and the middle school to better prepare students when they enter upper level courses and advance placement courses.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Central to effective leadership for learning are the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Key leadership practices in these areas include aligning, monitoring, and evaluating curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the school. This section of the chapter will explore various leadership aspects of curriculum, instruction, and assessment at School A. Four specific areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment will be explored: leadership practices and structures; use of data; support for teachers; and student success support structures.

Leadership Practices and Structures

A number of leadership practices and structures have been established at School A to align, monitor, and evaluate curricula, instruction and assessment at the school.

One such structure is the Curriculum Development Committee, one of the five school improvement committees at School A. This committee is charged with several responsibilities related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment, including: planning, coordinating, and facilitating professional learning for staff members; reviewing the alignment of final
examinations with the curriculum framework; recommending new courses; and researching and piloting alternate grading systems that foster student learning.

The Curriculum Development Committee has a staff member as a chairperson who receives a stipend for his work. In addition, other staff members volunteer to work on this committee. This committee met at least monthly and was closely coordinated with the work of the instructional coaches. This committee had a number of specific goals during the year this research was conducted. This committee was charged with the responsibility of overseeing the professional learning for the staff, reviewing the final examinations and ensuring that the examinations were aligned to the curriculum framework, recommending new courses, and examining alternative grading practices to better foster learning.

The structure of this committee, and other school improvement committees, allowed for ownership by the staff. One teacher who has been deeply involved with the Curriculum Development Committee talked about the importance of staff ownership in the school improvement process and the committee structure. He noted that each teacher was able to choose which committee to join, based on his or her individual strengths and needs. This ownership in the committee process was essential: “You wanted to help create it. You wanted to help promote it. You wanted to do something to help share with the building and the students. We know it’s hard to do it after school, so we’ll do it and we’ll make it work.”

Another structure that supports curriculum, instruction, and assessment leadership at School A is administrator walkthroughs. Administrators visit classrooms regularly in an effort to monitor curriculum, instruction, and assessment. During one of my observations, the principal was piloting a new recordkeeping system for walkthroughs. Using a tablet computer, the principal recorded specific information gathered during the classroom visits. The information
gathered included: where in the class period the observation took place (beginning, middle, end); the level of student engagement; the use of writing during the observation; the cognitive level of the task or questioning; and the specific task students were asked to do. This information was then electronically sent to a spreadsheet. The aggregate information gathered during the observations will be used with staff members and school improvement committees to understand the current status of curriculum, instruction, and assessment and plan for improved student learning.

**Use of Data**

Data were used at School A in a variety of ways to support curriculum, instruction, and assessment. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the principal used data often to help teachers understand the current status and make plans for change if needed. The principal stated that she puts the data out to staff members, often during a faculty meeting, and allows the teachers to make meaning from the data.

A variety of data are used at School A to make decisions about the quality of student learning and the need for improvement. The principal identified reclassification rates, graduation rates, discipline data including referrals, suspensions and expulsions, in addition to state assessments and ACT scores. One datum point that was very important at School A is the predicted score of the PLAN test as compared to the actual ACT score. In addition, many of the data points are disaggregated by race, gender, socio-economic status, and other groups in order to examine the impact of curriculum, instruction, and assessment on all students.

One structure that supports the close examination of data by teachers is the final examination reviews. Held twice each year in a retreat format at the home of the principal, staff members gather to review data from the common final examinations in courses. Groups of
teachers read final examinations and use a rubric to delineate goals met and not met, looking for patterns or inconsistencies. In addition, the teachers compared the final examination questions to the outcomes of the courses as stated in the curriculum development framework. Reflecting on these examination reviews, the principal said: “I make sure I’m part of it. I always host it. It’s a nice time for me to get away. I feed them. We don’t have much professional development money, so just getting teachers out of school to reflect is valuable.” One of the teachers noted that the examination reviews also provided an opportunity for building leadership capacity in teachers. During the year in which this research was done, for the first time, course team leaders were more involved in the examination review process. Course leaders and instructional coaches had conversations about instruction and needed instructional changes in addition to giving feedback about the examinations themselves.

Another structure that brings data to the forefront for teachers is the collaborative review of student work and collaborative scoring. Recognizing the importance of collaborative scoring in the curriculum process, teachers participated in the process of collaborative scoring a few times each year. One of the teachers who facilitated the collaborative scoring process commented: “If you don’t have collaborative scoring, you haven’t agreed upon your targets yet. Or, you may have agreed on your targets, but it’s kind of like the standards, rubrics and targets can be interpreted.” This teacher noted that collaborative scoring process helped teachers come to a common understanding of the intended targets and how the targets look in actual practice. The principal viewed reviewing student work as an essential source of data. Thinking about teachers collaboratively reviewing student work, she said: “If you are sitting there and you see that the kids are really not getting this, then we need to adjust what we’re doing. Yeah, data is a big part of what we do.”
Support for Teachers

Another critical area of importance in effective leadership for learning is providing teachers with support to understand and effectively implement curriculum, improve instruction, use assessment to guide instructional decisions, and meet the needs of the students. Teachers at School A had a number of opportunities to meet these goals, including instructional coaching, Instructional Sharing Days, and collaborative professional learning.

Instructional coaching has been implemented to support teachers in working with the curriculum, improving instruction, and using assessments effectively. Two part-time instructional coaches are available to work with staff members. Currently there are two instructional coaches on staff. The instructional coaches are teachers who are released for three periods each day to work with staff members. The instructional coaches work with teachers individually and in small groups.

The work of instructional coaches with teachers often arose out of professional learning or the work of the school improvement committees. For example, one of the instructional coaches recalled working with staff members to develop vertical alignment among courses in a department. This work came from school-wide professional learning asking teachers to consider building depth of understanding as opposed to covering content. The instructional coaches worked with teachers to establish three big ideas to develop over the course of the year, sequenced the big ideas from unit to unit to develop them strategically, and then determined how these big ideas will continue at the next level. Reflecting on this important work and the sustained conversations among staff members, an instructional coach commented: “We can talk about vertical alignment now in ways that were too complex for us to do in short conversations, in short department meetings.” The principal acknowledged that these sustained conversations
with instructional coaches have supported teachers in making important and needed instructional changes.

The instructional coaches, teachers, and the principal, could see the positive impact the sustained instructional coaching conversations and work between the teachers and instructional coaches have had on the work in classrooms. In considering actions that have had the most positive impact on students at School A, one teacher identified instructional coaching. She said: “The coaches are going and observing in classrooms, helping different teachers, and then the teachers are taking that back to their classrooms. I feel like that has the biggest impact.”

Coupling the work of the instructional coaches with the collaborative professional culture that has been built over the past few year, another teacher commented on the positive impact of the instructional coaches. He noted that the instructional coaches “are in place to help us. Because, as a teacher, you get into your tunnel vision of the things you have to do. It’s really good for us to have somebody come in and talk with us about what we do.”

In addition to instructional coaching, a structure called Instructional Sharing Days has been developed to support teachers in their work with curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Instructional Sharing Days are three and one half hour blocks of time where all teachers of a common course meet to have conversations about curriculum, instruction, and assessments. Instructional coaches have facilitated the Instructional Sharing Days, but there are plans to begin having others facilitate the work, building leadership capacity in teachers. One instructional coach summarized the work during Instructional Sharing Days: “If we want to focus on student learning, how are we going to get better at it?”

At Instructional Sharing Days, teachers reviewed and analyzed curriculum plans that have been developed by staff members, examined current assessments and assessment data,
collectively scored student work, and planned for professional learning needs. The work varied depending on the course and the needs of the teachers and students in that course. An instructional coach pointed to the importance of this collaboration: “Being isolated and not sharing our practices produced the plateau effect that we’ve had for a long time. What we are going to do makes a difference.” The Instructional Sharing Days have led to the implementation of several important support networks for teachers and students, including the Academic Learning Support classes.

Teachers also participated in collaborative professional learning to support their work with curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Collaborative professional learning often developed as a result of instructional coaching, Instructional Sharing Days, or the work of the school improvement committees. For example, the staff began examining grading procedures. This examination of grading procedures came out of the work of the Curriculum Development Committee. Grading procedures are deeply rooted in tradition and questioning how grades are derived is a controversial conversation at best. The staff at School A has begun this conversation and will continue to explore how grading practices might better foster learning.

**Student Success Support Structures**

The staff at School A has implemented a number of structures to support students in being successful academically. In addition to the teams structure to support struggling freshmen and sophomores described in the school culture and environment section of this chapter, School A provided Academic Learning Support classes and Student Advocates to support students in being successful.

The Academic Learning Support (ALS) classes were developed to provide students struggling in the core content areas of English and mathematics. In addition, the ALS classes
were developed in response to the reduction of tracking at School A. One teacher who was involved in the creation of ALS and currently teaches in the program recalled that when the basic track was eliminated, “how do we just move those kids up that are several years behind grade level and keep maintaining high expectations? The solution was ALS.” Despite the reduction of tracking, the data across years has shown that final examination scores have been maintained or improved in core courses. Reflecting on this data, one teacher said: “I think a lot of people would have guessed that (the scores) would have gone down. And they haven’t. In some classes the scores have continued to get better and better as our supports and ALS have gotten better.”

In the ALS class, teachers certified in these areas provided students with 25 minutes of support in English and 25 minutes of support in mathematics. Students were identified for the class period based on several pieces of data. Instead of taking an elective course, these identified students were placed in an ALS class. The principal recalls that the initial conversation about removing students from an elective to provide the additional support was challenging for many staff members. Currently about 50% of the freshman class requires support through ALS classes.

In creating ALS, one of the teachers of the program recalled that staff members realized that this needed to be much more than a study hall. After the initial thinking that time to complete homework, a study hall in essence, he said: “We’ve realized that it’s not necessarily just the time, because if you’re not giving them the direct one-on-one support in why they’re confused, it’s just more time to be confused, not time to clarify and practice with support.”

Scheduling for the ALS classes has been a challenge. For instance, the classes were changed to the first and last class periods of the day in order to better support the immediate needs of the students. Commenting on the openness of the principal to suggestions from staff members, one teacher recalled that the change in scheduling of ALS classes was made as a result
of “a teacher or group of teachers saying that we want to try this because we think it would work better if it was at the beginning or end of the day.” Despite the scheduling challenges, the principal said: “our schedule absolutely demonstrates our values, because it is crazy.”

Another student support system at School A is the Student Advocate program. Students who are facing challenges, academic and personal, are assigned to an administrator or teacher to provide ongoing support. The staff member acts as an advocate for the student and keeps in close contact with the student. The principal, for instance, had a list of six or seven students on the white board in her office. She monitored the grades of the students and had frequent conversations with the students to provide support. During one of our interviews, the principal saw one of her students walking by her door. She asked to pause the interview in order to check in with the student about a situation at home. While this program is more informal, it provides students with a caring adult who is providing active support.

Allocation of Resources

Allocating resources to effectively support high levels of student learning is a key component of leadership for learning. In addition, how leaders choose to allocate resources send important messages to the school community about what is valued. The major resources that are allocated at School A are time and money. The principal summarized her beliefs saying: “Put your money where your mouth is.” There are many examples of limited resources being allocated to support student learning at School A, including scheduling, professional learning, and school improvement committees.

Scheduling, which translated to the allocation of both time and money, was discussed earlier in this chapter relative to Academic Learning Support classes. Because the principal and
staff valued this opportunity to support the learning of struggling students, the schedule has been developed to accommodate the classes. As the principal stated: “our schedule absolutely demonstrates our values.” A number of scheduling barriers were overcome in order to provide this support structure for students. In addition, the funding for this staffing was allocated out of a limited budget, because of the value placed on providing a support structure for students.

Professional learning is also highly valued by the principal and staff members. Because district level funding for professional learning has diminished significantly over the past few years, the principal and staff have had to be creative in finding opportunities to provide meaningful professional learning for teachers. Most professional learning has to be funded through the school level budget. For example, because Instructional Sharing Days were highly valued by the staff, the funding came from the school budget. In prior years there were three half-day release times for each course. This year the number had to be reduced to two half-day releases because of funding cuts. The teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators have been looking for alternative ways to provide time for this professional learning.

Another opportunity for professional learning was having members of the School Improvement Committees provide professional learning for their colleagues, sharing their learning and giving others a chance to reflect on the work of the committee. For example, two of the district half-day release times were dedicated to committee members providing professional learning with their colleagues. Teachers were able to choose which sessions to attend. Each committee planned and presented the professional learning for their colleagues. My observations of these sessions revealed that they were extremely well planned and well facilitated and very well received by staff members. One of the committee chairpersons, who presented sessions to the colleagues, noted that this is the reverse of typical professional learning, where teachers “sit
and get” strategies in an area that they may need help. Instead, this professional learning facilitated by the School Improvement Committees encouraged teachers to “find an area of strength and interest and come help, help build our capacity in these five areas.” In essence, this professional learning opportunity provided new learning for teachers and also built the capacity of teachers to support school improvement.

A number of other professional learning strategies have been used at School A, including book studies. Teachers and administrators were offered the opportunity to read a book and discuss it with colleagues. While there was no stipend for participating, the principal supported the book study by buying the books out of the building funds. Participation was high across the building in these book studies. It began with teacher leaders being offered the opportunity and quickly spread to other staff members. The books studies led to deeper conversations about the mission and vision of the school. One of the teachers who was an early participant in the book studies remembered: “Part of the book study was that if we’re buying you a book, we’d like you to part of the conversations. We would also make some decisions about mission and vision during these professional development times.” The book studies, then, provided new learning for teachers as well as an opportunity to discuss the core values of the school and development of the vision for the school.

In considering resource allocation of the school, the five School Improvement Committees had become integral to the work of School A. Previously, participation in the committees was voluntary. The principal and some teachers noticed that the same staff members were volunteering for the committees and that the work was not widely distributed. In order to widen the participation, the principal offered a stipend to the chairpersons on the committees. Again, because of limited and shrinking district funding, these stipends had to come from the
building budgets. While the committees still rely on volunteers to fill out the committees, the chairpersons were compensated to facilitate and coordinate the work of the committee.

Summarizing, the principal at School A worked to allocate resources that support the vision of the school and its focus on high levels of student learning for all students. She was cognizant that how the limited resources are used sent a clear and compelling message to the school community. When working with others on allocation of funding, the principal said: “Money is going where we think it’s important. And I say that. You have to verbalize it over and over.”

Principal Leadership

A final area of consideration for School A is the leadership of the principal. The literature is clear: principal leadership makes a difference in the learning of students. For this discussion of principal leadership at School A, three key areas will be considered: vision, sharing leadership, and principal as change agent.

Vision

The literature on leadership for learning identified key competencies for a school principal in regard to vision, including developing the vision, articulating the vision, implementing the vision and stewarding the vision. In terms of the vision for School A, the principal identified a focus on student learning for all students as the primary focus of the vision. The principal and staff spent a year developing the mission and vision for the school. While there were challenges in the process, the mission and vision reflected student learning for all students at the core. Reflecting on the process of vision development, a teacher who was part of the process talked about the importance of developing a critical mass of staff members who
embraced the vision. She said that the principal “built up a team and a building of people that are with her on the vision, which was good, very smart.” The teacher also talked about the teachers who did not embrace the vision, saying: “And the people that aren’t with us, they tend to find another place, they’re not being forced. They just tend to go somewhere else, which is better for the building.” Clearly, the vision was embraced by a critical mass of teachers and was strong enough to cause those who did not embrace the vision to seek opportunities elsewhere.

It was important to the principal to develop a vision that was more than words on a paper. A great deal of time and energy was spent on developing the vision, and a lot of important conversations began. In addition, the vision became a guiding document for the building operations and budget and guided the conversations that needed to happen among staff members. In speaking of the vision, the principal stated: “I refer back to it all the time. And we shifted to a more student learning focus. We still have issues with it. But now people will talk about student learning and what’s best for students. They sure didn’t before.” The principal worked to create a vision and structure that would live beyond her tenure as principal. She said: “You’ve set up systems so that if you walk away, it will still go. And it will. That’s really important.” The vision developed by the staff became an important guidepost in the daily work at School A.

In addition to a vision that focused on student learning, a number of teachers also noticed the shift from some students learning to all students learning. A teacher stated that she is proud of the focus on all students learning. She acknowledges that students come to school with a variety of challenges, but she noted with pride that “we do everything we can to make it a fair playing ground, so that students want to come to school, feel part of the school community, and that nothing is getting in the way of learning, any type of deficiency or disadvantage.” When asked what she felt the key to the shift in the vision and action based on the vision, the teacher
identified the principal. She said that the shift is due to “her (the principal) vision, her personal commitment to kids. She is a leader that sincerely cares about every single kid.”

**Sharing Leadership**

The literature on leadership for learning points out that one person, generally the principal, cannot ensure that all students are learning at high levels alone. Although the leadership of the principal is important, it takes the leadership of many people to make sure that all students are learning at high levels. Clearly, there is an environment of shared leadership at School A. In fact, the principal identified broad-based leadership and building leadership capacity in others as a major component of her work. Talking about developing shared leadership, the principal said: “That’s my job. I need to get the people in place to do the good things. They need to be experts. And we’ve really empowered our teachers to do that.” The principal has employed a number of strategies to accomplish the goal of shared leadership.

The principal believed strongly in rotating teacher leadership positions. For example, department chairperson roles were opened up every two years. Acknowledging that some of her principal colleagues considered this “insane,” she firmly believed that it ensures that leadership is broadly distributed. In addition, the principal described the added benefit of building a deeper capacity among teachers: “It builds capacity more, because the person who was a department head goes out there, having been a part of the inner circle for a while.” Teachers also acknowledged the value of rotating leaders. The teacher noted that the principal will not let a person have a leadership position for more than two years, “which is very smart, because you are empowering a lot of different people in the building to be the leaders and to step up and be part of the change and part of the action.”
In addition to rotating leadership positions, the principal remained committed to developing the leadership capacity of others. One teacher acknowledged this goal to build capacity in teachers, saying that the principal “will plant the seed, and she doesn’t take credit for it. But it’s her. She’ll plan for different people to grow and blossom where they feel like they can make a difference, and they have. She’s a really good leader.” Another teacher recognized the many opportunities available for teachers to lead. He said: “The opportunities are there if people want them. But just the way we work with one another, everyone really is a leader. I don’t feel like anyone is ever isolated or blocked out.”

The School Improvement Committee structure also provided many opportunities for shared leadership. In addition to the opportunity to facilitate one of the committees, teachers on the committees discussed important ideas and developed plans for changes that would support student learning for all students. Many professional learning opportunities also derived from these committees. One teacher who formerly chaired one of the committees believed that these committees provided important leadership. Talking about the teachers leading and serving on the School Improvement Committees, she said: “Those teachers are leaders in the building. They’re leaders for learning.”

Both teachers and administrators recognized the shared leadership opportunities at School A.

**Principal as Change Agent**

A principal must be an effective agent for change as noted in the leadership for learning literature. The principal at School A has employed a number of strategies in order to support change, many of which have been discussed previously in this chapter.
For example, the principal often used data to help others understand the current reality and plan for changes based on the vision and goals for the school. The principal collected data on many different aspects of the school and presents it to staff members. She noted that she often doesn’t need to tell people the story the data are telling; they discover it on their own. Despite an initial fear of data and a reluctance to accept it and the story it told, the principal felt that the staff is generally accepting of data and see it as a positive avenue to understand the work of the school and to guide decisions about change. Describing the use of data, and its impact on practices at the school, the principal noted: “You may not plot it out in a certain way, but . . . after a while you see the kids are not really getting this. We need to adjust what we’re doing. . . . Yeah, data are a big part of what we do.”

The principal of School A often cited the work of Heifetz and Linsky (2002), *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading*, during formal and informal interviews as having been very useful in her work with change. In fact, the assistant principal and some of the deans have also read the book, providing a common framework for understanding the process of change among the leadership team. In reflecting on the process of change, one key concept about change from Heifetz and Linsky (2002) that resonated with the principal of School A was the idea of ripeness for change. Ripeness is defined as the time when there is urgency among stakeholders to address the issue requiring change. In considering issues for change, Heifetz and Linsky (2002) recommended that leaders must wait until the issue is ripe, noting: “patience is not a virtue typically associated with people passionate about what they are doing. But holding off until the issue is ready may be critical in mobilizing people’s energy and getting yourself heard” (p. 146). Alternatively, if an issue is not yet ripe, Heifetz and Linsky suggested that a leader might need to ripen the issue himself or herself.
The principal at School A stated that she was deeply committed to these ideas, noting that although she is fast-paced in her work and thinking, she often found herself slowing down both herself and others to make sure that there was a ripeness for the change. One strategy that the principal found useful was the sharing of data. She stated that she often shared data with the staff and asked them to make sense of it and think about it. This data strategy often ripened an issue and began serious conversation about a number of important issues. For example, the principal was working with chairpersons of a school improvement committee that wanted to move fast on a particular change in practice about which they felt strongly. Even though she strongly agreed with the proposed change in practice, the principal recalled having a number of conversations with the chairpersons, encouraging them to go slowly and make sure that other staff members were ready for the change. As she considered the process of change, the principal stated: “You have to get your building ripe.”

The principal identified herself as a transformative leader. She viewed it as her role “to change the status quo and make sure that we’re always questioning what’s going on and that all kids have access.” In describing the change process, the principal talked often about planting seeds, about going slowly, about having a lot of patience, and waiting for the “building to be ripe” for the change. She recalled cautioning teacher leaders to move slowly and make sure that others are moving forward with the change. Reflecting on her personality and her propensity to move at a cautious pace with change, she said: “I’m pretty patient. Some of my teachers think it’s funny; I walk fast, I talk fast, I move fast. But some committees wanted to push things and I told them ‘Wait—you want them to be in a good place.’”

Teachers also recognized the change taking place and the need for measured change. Recalling a number of changes made in the past few years, one teacher reflected: “I think all the
changes are done with a lot of thought put into them.” In talking about any practice or change, this teacher noted: “Eventually you outgrow them and you need to change and adapt. The underlying philosophy (at this school) is still that we have to keep adapting and helping the students, and that’s going to look different each year.”

Summary

School A is a high school in a small Midwestern city in the United States with a diverse population and more than half of the students considered in poverty. Despite the challenges, the standardized test scores have held steady over the past several years and the school has been recognized nationally for serving all students and providing opportunities for advanced work for students.

School A has a broad conception of learning. While test scores and academic achievement are important to the administrators and teachers at School A, a number of other indicators are also considered important in the learning of students. For example, participation in activities, working for social justice, climate and culture of the building, and being inclusive of all students are also considered important aspects of student learning at School A.

School A is focused on serving all students. Under the leadership of the principal, the school has developed a focus on social justice, moved away from deficit thinking, and improved learning opportunities for all students. At School A, data are used continuously to understand the school experience for students and plan for improvements. The staff values collaboration and leadership is shared among many. Students are provided for opportunities for advanced studies and many support structures to ensure success. Although the test scores indicate that there is more work to do in raising academic performance, the school is focused on meeting that
challenge. The leadership of the principal has been critical. She maintains the focus on the vision of high levels of learning for all students and provides the impetus for meaningful change to attain that vision. School A is a school where many of the principles and practices of leadership for learning are evident.
Chapter Five

Findings: School B

This chapter will present the findings from the second case study of a high school. Like the other case study detailed in the previous chapter, data for this case studies were gathered from four main sources: a survey administered to all certified staff members, interviews of administrators and teachers, observations of classrooms and teacher collaborations, and review of public documents and documents provided by staff members of the schools.

Given the purpose of this dissertation is to describe leadership for learning at two high schools, the two major research questions that frame this study will provide the focus for the discussion:

• What leadership practices, behaviors, and attitudes does a principal enact in order to provide leadership for learning at a high school?

• What leadership practices, behaviors, and attitudes support high levels of learning for all students regardless of the challenges they face?

Like the previous case, this case is organized around four big themes in order to describe the leadership practices, behaviors, and attitudes at the high school studied: school climate and culture; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; allocation of resources; and principal leadership. These themes are consistent with the leadership for learning literature, framing key elements in the description of leadership for learning in the literature. While these themes are explored separately in this chapter, there is considerable overlap in the content of the themes. Examples shared in one theme might well fit into another theme. This chapter will first begin with a brief description of the data collection at this school site followed by basic information about the school.
Data Collection at This School Site

Data on leadership for learning for School B were collected over the course of 6 weeks. The data for this case study were gathered from four main sources: a survey, interviews, observations of classrooms and teacher collaborations, and document reviews. The survey on leadership for learning was sent to approximately 300 certified staff members. Thirty-seven responses were received, yielding an approximate response rate of 12.3%. In terms of interviews, 11 staff members were interviewed, including the principal, assistant principals, department chairpersons, and teachers. Observations of the school included classroom instruction, teacher collaboration meetings, and informal walkthroughs of the building. Public documents reviewed for this study included the annual State Report Card and other information provided on the district website.

Basic School Information

School B is a high school of approximately 4,000 students located in a suburban Midwestern city in the United States of approximately 140,000 residents. School B was opened in 1997. The racial composition of the student body is approximately 70% Caucasian students, 6% African American students, 6% Hispanic students, 15% Asian/pacific Islander students, and 3% Multi-racial students. About 7% of the students at School B are considered low income.

The principal at School B has been Principal for 4 years. Prior to being named Principal at School B, he was a principal at another high school in the area. Leadership for learning at School B is provided in a more traditional organizational structure than in School A. The leadership team structure at School B includes the principal, assistant principal, and department chairpersons. This leadership team meets at least weekly to provide leadership for learning at the
school. The principal reported that he generally works 12 to 16 hour days. One administrator commented that the principal “is always there, always involved in everything.” In addition, the principal indicated that other tasks, such as discipline, district commitments, and extracurricular activities sometimes takes him away from the important work of leading for learning. Although he finds the other activities important and worthwhile, these activities do take time away from focus on student learning.

Achievement testing, as reported on the annual state school report card, reveals that School B has held steady in achievement scores for the past three years. The average ACT score of graduating seniors was 25.2 in 2011 and 24.7 in 2010. On the state mandated achievement tests administered to juniors in 2011, 79.5% of student met or exceeded state standards in reading; 85.3% met or exceeded state standards in mathematics, and 84.8% met or exceeded state standards in science.

School B has received a number of national recognitions in the past few years. First, the school received a special award from the International Reading Association in 2009 recognizing an outstanding high school reading program. Second, School B was named as an outstanding high school in 2010 on the report of America’s best high schools in *U.S. News and World Report*. Third, the school district was named to the Advanced Placement (AP) Achievement List by College Board in 2010 and 2011. This distinction is based on increased and broadened participation in AP courses, including percentage of AP examinations being taken by minority students, and maintained or improved performance on the AP examinations. Only 388 school districts qualified for this recognition in 2011.

Both School A and School B were named as outstanding high schools in *U.S. News and World Report*. Both the school district of School A and the school district of School B were
named to the Advanced Placement Achievement List. School A is the only high school in the
district. School B is one of three high schools in the district. The criteria for placement on the list
were the same for both districts.

In organizing the data for this case, the same four main categories were used as with the
previous case: school culture and environment; curriculum, instruction, and assessment;
allocation of resources; and principal leadership. These main categories were chosen because
they reflect the major content of the data collected and correlate with the literature on leadership
for learning.

**School Culture and Environment**

Staff members at School B verbalized a desire to continue working to develop the strong,
positive culture and environment. Many staff members interviewed expressed great pride in the
quality of the climate of the building, particularly in the relationships between students and staff
members and among the staff members. For example, when asked about what she was most
proud of at the school, one teacher stated: “The rapport that teachers have with kids and kids
have with teachers.” The teacher then described work among staff members early in the school’s
history to develop the positive climate with students. She noted that staff members spent time
role-playing situations and best approaches to working with students. She said: “So, it is how we
approach kids and try to develop a mutual respect. I think that’s been the biggest proponent of
the mutual respect between administration, teachers, and students.”

Leaders at the school stated their belief that there is a strong link between the school
climate, student discipline, and student achievement. With over 4,000 students at the school, one
administrator expressed the goal to “make a big school small.” Another administrator stated: “I
think we have done a nice job of finding ways to connect students in a very large high school.” For example, he cited a program called Get Connected, encouraging students to become involved in the school. Several staff members acknowledged that the most important smaller communities in this large school are the classrooms and the relationships between the teachers and students at the classroom level were of primary importance.

In terms of school culture and environment relative to students, one administrator expressed great pride in the relationships built with students at School B. He said: “We take a lot of pride in building great relationships with students, positive, appropriate relationships with students.” During informal observations of the building, the principal was very visible in the school and knew students. In praising the visibility and relationships with students of this principal, one administrator said: “He could walk out in the hallway and tell you 75-80% of the student names that walk by. He knows students. If you are going to preach relationships, then you’ve got to go out and do it yourself.” Observations of the principal in the school confirm this statement. The principal called students by name and engaged students in conversations related to activities, accomplishments, and academics.

In addition, staff members at School B have implemented a number of opportunities for students to be meaningfully involved in the school operations. For example, there was a Principal Advisory Council established, composed of students serving on one of five committees: the curriculum and instruction committee; the climate and safety committee; the diversity, equity, and fairness committee; the freshman transition committee; and the student life committee. These committees met monthly to discuss issues and develop plans for the school relative to the area of the committee. I was able to observe the principal in action, working with the leaders of these committees at an after school meeting during one of my visits to the school. The student
leaders of the committees meet the week prior to the larger committee meetings to plan for the following week’s meeting. The principal worked with each committee, asking questions, helping to think through plans, and making suggestions. The principal noted that this advisory council helps make issues transparent, seeks the input of the students, and acts as a vehicle for problem solving.

Student feedback is sought in a number of ways to inform the decision making for the school. In describing the culture of the administrators at School B, one administrator stated: “They want feedback from students. How are we doing? And how do we best support you?” For example, when considering how best to increase participation in Advanced Placement courses by minority students, the administrators called together a focus group of students of color and asked them about the issue. Administrators reported that the students were candid with their responses and their input informed the decision making of the administrative team.

The administrative team articulated a vision for the climate for students that they wish to have at School B. Describing this vision for the school climate, one administrator stated that the leadership team is seeking a school climate that is “relational, where adults are modeling good behavior and collegiality, and that students have charismatic adults that they can talk to, that are easy to approach, that’s relational, not just transactional.” The principal expressed the vision for strong relationships between adults and students at School B. In operationalizing this goal, he said: “If I could just take a pause at graduation and ask each student to name one adult that was charismatic and had an influence on you. I would hope that every student could answer without hesitation.”

Several staff members cited the principal who opened the building as influential in this vision of a strong school climate and culture. One administrator described the opening principal
as “very purposeful about going out and finding teachers who built great relationships with students and had those high expectations.” This administrator also acknowledged that the hiring of teachers who build good relationships with students sometimes was given priority over the content knowledge of the teacher. A number of staff members cited the work of the principal who opened the building, who is now the superintendent of the district, as having a continued influence on the climate and culture of the building.

In terms of student discipline, one administrator expressed the importance of the relationships between students and adults. He noted that leaders in the building, administrators in particular in this instance, needed to model the importance of relationships with students. In addition, he worked with the paraprofessional campus supervisors, encouraging them to “build relationships with the students that you know make a habit of trying to exit out of this door during lunch or try to sneak down the hallway when they’re not supposed to.” The administrators were working to be responsive to student survey and interviews that identified these paraprofessional campus supervisors “as a kind of warden supervision.” The administrator summarized this work, saying: “We’ve really tried to turn that so that regardless of who the adult is in the building, it’s more based on a positive relationship with the student than just kind of an anonymous, corrective behavior.”

In addition to the goal of developing strong relationships with students, the leaders at School B have also made a concerted effort to reach out to parents. There are a number of parent organizations and groups, both at the district level and the school level. The principal noted: “We really talk to our parents a lot in this community.” For example, the principal shared a goal to help parents better understand the ACT. In describing this work with parents, he said: “We have really upped the literacy of parents about what these standardized scores tell you and what they
don’t tell you.” Administrators reported that parents are very vocal and appreciative of the outreach from the school.

Two teachers interviewed also commented on the positive effect of strong parental involvement at the school. One of the teachers noted that school staff members “involve parents and reach out to them.” She gave an example of a group of parents who wanted to meet with the department chairpersons. The meeting was well received and productive, providing parents with an understanding of the perspective of the school personnel and the operations of the school. Although the teachers noted that school staff members are very collaborative with parents, there examples offered were all one-sided communication models, with parents receiving information from staff members.

In terms of the climate and culture of School B among staff members, multiple people described the climate and culture as very collaborative. One teacher stated that the staff was “very collaborative. In fact, it would be difficult to survive here without a collaborative view.” Another teacher recalled that she declined an invitation to move to a different school, saying she didn’t “want to leave because of the collaborative nature of the school.” A number of structures have been put in place to allow for collaborative opportunities among staff members. For example, students are released early one day per week, allowing for approximately 45 minutes of collaboration time. During this time, teachers meet in small groups, usually course specific groups, to examine data and strategize about instructional opportunities to increase student achievement. A number of teachers and administrators cited the work of the opening principal as significant in creating the collaborative environment of School B. In addition, one teacher noted that the current principal continues the collaborative culture, citing him as a good listener and an excellent facilitator of conversation and consensus.
Staff members at School B acknowledged a number of challenges to the climate and environment. For example, one administrator identified the “drive to always be best at everything” as a challenge to the school climate. He said: “It almost creates an environment where it’s tough just to take a breath for fear that it’s going to be viewed by someone as perhaps less than being successful if you just take a minute to collect your thoughts.” While the extreme success of the school and its students is a source of pride and distinction, it also causes strain on the culture of the school, and the high expectation of staff members in particular.

A teacher expressed another challenge to climate and culture. Because of the large size of the school, the teacher was concerned that there is a lack of opportunity to interact meaningfully with colleagues, particularly colleagues from other departments. Although the teacher commented on the positive relationship among staff members, he was concerned that the large number of staff members made it difficult to know other staff members and felt that some deliberate opportunities in this area would be of great benefit to the overall climate and culture of the building.

A number of social justice issues emerged during this study. Most of the issues related to the growing diversity in the school. Although small in numbers, there are a number of students from diverse backgrounds and experiences at School B. In fact, the principal stated: “We’re not a diverse school, but we do have diversity. So our subgroups, for example our African-American students or our low income students, like when you’re really clearly in the minority, tend to resist the majority more.” Data from the annual reveal that Black and Hispanic students do not perform nearly as well as White and Asian students on state achievement tests. For example, 81% of White students and 87% of Asian students met the standards in reading. In contrast, 56% of Black students and 68% of Hispanic students met the standards.
One social justice issue that emerged was the disenfranchisement of students with a diverse backgrounds, including ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic status. For example, the principal, in talking about African-American students, noted that they feel “like they’re visiting this place.” At a staff meeting which was held the week prior to the beginning of the data collection for this study, the principal said to the staff: “We’re in trouble with our African-American students. It’s not a critique of them or a critique of us; let’s just say it and let’s just focus on it.” He appealed to the teachers to begin seeking strategies to “enfranchise them in the school.” At this meeting, the principal stated: “And what it gets to is the degree to which an institution is inclusive or exclusive. Do you see your class as a place that is set up to exclude some people and include others? Or is the goal to bring everyone in?”

A second social justice issue that emerged dealt with the discrepancy in racial composition of Advanced Placement and honors courses. Comparing the number of Asian-American and Caucasian students in the upper level courses to the number of Hispanic and African-American students, the principal noted that the Hispanic and African-American students had few adults encouraging them to take higher level courses. The principal stated: “We had all sorts of African-American and Hispanic students who were getting 95%, A, great kids in English I or language arts in middle school or in mathematics or in science. But there was no agent moving them forward.”

Another issue causing lower participation in advanced courses by minority students identified by the principal was the stereotypes held by the students themselves. He stated: “We were shocked at how many minority students walk around with the assumption that when they pass another minority student in the hallway, they assume that student is not taking advanced classes. It was shocking.” In response, the principal brought together a group of minority
students. He noted: “When we would get them together in the room and say, all of you are taking honors or AP classes, they would be shocked that the center on the basketball team is in an AP class because they subscribe to the stereotype about that basketball player. So, just that social process.”

A number of strategies were put in place to increase the diversity of students taking AP and honors courses. For example, the principal held a focus group of minority students to ask what students needed in order to take and be successful in upper level courses. Results of this focus group will be discussed in the next section of this chapter. As another example, a program called Upward was instituted to support minority students in talking and being successful in honors level and Advance Placement courses. The principal acknowledged that these have been beginning steps, and more needs to be done in order to “have them enfranchised in the school, brought into what they can do to be the best students they can.”

A final social justice issue that emerged was elements of deficit thinking expressed by some staff members. A number of staff members expressed the core belief that not all students can learn, and it was often the fault of the student, or the student’s situation. For example, when asked about structures in place at School B to ensure that all students would be successful, one department chairperson stated: “That is an idealistic statement. Not all kids are (successful). I don’t think all kids will ever be successful, because there are things beyond our control.” This department chairperson went on to state that home life, behavior, and lack of motivation are all factors “beyond our control.” Later in that same interview, the department chairperson was talking about the fundamental importance of helping students become learners. When asked if all students were becoming learners, she stated:
Yes, in some classes. Some kids are here just to get out of here. And I don’t know how to change that. I think it comes with maturity. Some kids here are learning to be learners. I think the teacher offers it, but there’s a partnership, a contract unspoken. I can’t force you to learn, but I’ll teach you how to learn if you want, if you take my hand, we’ll make a deal. But that is individual.

In another example, a department chairperson explained an elaborate tracking system in the department. The lowest track was designed “to get kids to graduate.” Concerned about potential budget reductions to the lowest track courses, the department chairperson noted that if you put students into the next highest track course, “kids that are of this behavior and whatever kinds of things you see in there . . . they will fail.” The three-year, three-course lowest track will end with students only attaining some of the very basic skills from the regular track first year course. In addition, in describing challenges placing students from other schools into appropriate coursework, this department chairperson noted: “I could place kids that come from China better than I can place some kids that come from Chicago. They come in with no books. . . . So, we’ve had kids that have been misplaced that we have to move back down.”

In summary, the staff at School B expressed a great deal of pride and accomplishment related to the climate and culture of the school. They acknowledged the deliberate work to ensure a positive climate and culture for students, staff members, and parents. The staff members also acknowledged a number of challenges faced by the school community and a desire to sustain and improve the climate and culture of the school. In addition, a number of social justice issues were identified during the collection of data for this study.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Central to effective leadership for learning are the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Key leadership practices in these areas include aligning, monitoring, and evaluating
curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the school. When asked to describe what he is most proud of at School B, the principal stated: “There’s a clarity of expectation in terms of what we think are effective instructional practices and why. And I think I’m proud that we’ve developed that clarity from some direction, not just my direction, but all of these folks.”

This section of the chapter will explore various aspects of curriculum, instruction, and assessment at School A. Four specific areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment will be explored: school improvement planning and actions; alignment and monitoring of curriculum; support for teachers; and student success support structures.

**School Improvement Planning and Actions**

A specific school improvement plan was written each year at School B. The improvement plan was based on data that were gathered and analyzed by the leadership team. A number of data sources were used at School B to determine the level of learning for students. The principal cited the ACT testing series—Explore, Plan, and ACT—as a primary source of achievement information. In particular, the leadership team looked at the predicted scores from the Explore and Plan tests and compared these predicted scores to the actual ACT scores. In addition, the leadership team looked at grades in critical courses. In particular, the principal looked at failure rates in courses as an additional source of data. Finally, the school has developed a number of common assessments in courses that are used at the building level to gauge student learning. There were three main areas of focus in the current plan, which was written in 2009 and reviewed and revised each year: literacy, formative assessments, and collaborative learning. Action plans were developed and implemented in order to address the focus areas.

In the focus area of literacy, all teachers were trained in a literacy program called Project CRISS. Project CRISS is a program offered by a company, providing teachers with strategies to
assist all students, regardless of their ability levels, in learning content across all areas. The program focused on metacognition and support teachers in helping students develop reading and information strategies including accessing background knowledge, purposeful reading, active involvement in reading, and processing reading through discussion and writing. The company provided a research base for the program. For the past 3 years, groups of teachers have taken the 2-day training. At this time, most staff members have completed the training.

In reflecting on the professional learning provided for staff members through Project CRISS, both teachers and administrators noted that many teachers were somewhat reluctant to participate in the training at first, but came back from the training with positive reviews. One administrator described teacher reaction to the training as “lukewarm going in, hot coming out.” Administrators and teachers noted positive results with the implementation of the strategies. Data about the implementation and effect were primarily gathered through walkthroughs done by leadership team members, both teachers and administrators, and monitoring of achievement data. Teacher leaders and administrators reported seeing the implementation of a variety of the CRISS strategies in the classroom and attribute a positive increase in test scores to the implementation of these strategies. Both teachers and an administrator acknowledged with pride and a sense of accomplishment that this was one of the few initiatives that he could remember being sustained across several years. For example, in talking about the school’s work with Project CRISS, one teacher stated: “I think one of the things I’m particularly proud of is that we started the initiative four years ago, and we actually are still doing it. Which, you know, in education, you start something and never finish it.”

In addition to the CRISS training, leadership team members studied achievement testing results, practice ACT tests in particular, to determine weaknesses in the area of literacy for
students. Three areas of weakness were discovered: summarizing, providing support from the text, and use of visual data. Leadership team members worked with teachers to analyze current examinations to see if students were being asked to demonstrate the identified weak areas on the exams. In addition, the issue of pacing was addressed with teachers. Teachers were asked to provide students with opportunities to demonstrate the areas of weakness in a timed environment in order to prepare them for the tests. There was a significant amount of reluctance on the part of teachers to put students in a timed situation, citing special needs students who often have timing requirements adjusted by their individual education plans. In responding to the reluctance of teachers to putting students in a timed situation, one administrator stated: “You don’t have to hold them (the students) accountable to it, but you can start to introduce it.” He went on to state that teachers, on completing the timed test tasks, could ask students such questions as “Okay, what did you find out about yourself when you had to kind of race to get something done?” The administrator noted that educators had taken timed tasks “out of our teaching toolbox,” and believed that teachers have increased the use of timed tasks because the administrators emphasized only a few areas to address.

An area of success for this school and district has been participation and success by students in Advanced Placement courses. The district has been placed on the AP Honor Roll for two years. In order to qualify for this honor list, a district must increase participation in AP courses, increase the number of students who receive a passing score on the AP test, and increase participation of minority students in AP courses.

Staff members at School B have implemented strategies to increase participation in AP courses, particularly by minority students. For example, some minority students have been clustered into honors and AP courses in order to increase their comfort level in the classroom.
Some parents raised objections to this practice, labeling it as racial profiling. Another strategy was to hand business cards with positive messages to students of color, telling them that the administrators believe that they could be successful in an honors level course. One administrator stated that sharing these positive messages was designed to encourage students, minority students in particular, to know that others believe in their potential for success. Also, a program called “Upward” was established to support minority students in successfully taking and completing honors level courses. Students in this program met with a group of staff members at least quarterly to encourage, provide support, and problem solve.

In order to understand the needs of minority students in taking and successfully completing honors at AP courses, a focus group of primarily minority students was held. The principal reported that the students articulated three needs they had in order to feel comfortable taking advanced level courses. First, they said that they needed to be recruited for the advanced level courses. Second, the students voiced a need for support and teachers who would be supportive of the struggles. Third, the students identified the need to have a “go-to person” to get help. The leadership team interpreted this need was interpreted as a call for mentors for the students. As a result, an informal mentoring program was established for minority students. Students were allowed to choose an adult staff member as a mentor. The mentor monitored the student’s progress, met with the student, and provided support as needed. The leadership team sought feedback from minority students and developed specific plans to address the issues and needs identified.

**Alignment and Monitoring of Curriculum and Instruction**

One of the challenges faced by School B is a perceived lack of direction on curriculum at the district level. There are three high schools in the district, and there has been a significant
amount of turnover in the curriculum department. This turnover has caused “almost no archived curriculum” according to an administrator. The leadership team has begun to develop common learning targets across content areas to provide some guaranteed skill and content development for students. This work to align curriculum has been met with some resistance by teachers, who view it as a restriction on their academic freedom. One administrator commented that teachers in the district are accustomed to a great deal of freedom in their work in the classroom. Reflecting on the need for a more common curriculum, this administrator noted: “It’s probably a horizontal curriculum we’re trying to build from scratch that is skill based . . . that is an affront to sort of the academic freedoms that people have enjoyed, particularly at our school.”

In addition to reviewing and analyzing achievement data, leadership team members participated in walkthroughs of classrooms. The team uses the Instructional Practices Inventory developed by Dr. Jerry Valentine at the University of Missouri. This process provides a school with data about perceived student engagement in order to inform improvement plans and actions. An administrator revealed that there had been 3,000 classroom visits, completed mainly by administrators and department chairpersons, over the course of the current school year. Each classroom walkthrough yielded a rating of the extent of student engagement according to the scale developed by Valentine. The data collected during the walkthroughs led the leadership team to determine the need to work with teachers on increasing levels of student engagement, primarily through increased use of collaborative learning structures in classrooms.

**Support for Teachers**

Another critical area of importance in effective leadership for learning is providing teachers with support to understand and effectively implement curriculum, improve instruction, use assessment to guide instructional decisions, and meet the needs of the students. Despite the
shrinking funding for professional learning opportunities at the district level, teachers at School B have a number of opportunities for professional learning.

One of the points of pride articulated by the principal was School B’s lead role in altering the weekly schedule to provide 45 minutes of release time each week for teachers to work collaboratively. This weekly time was designated for teams to meet to review curriculum, analyze data, and talk about instructional approaches. An administrator stated that, in general, this time is used well. In describing where the teams are in terms of the vision for this collaborative work, the administrator said, “They’re about half-way there.” Reflecting on the change in scheduling that allowed for the collaboration time, the principal said: “Our school made a huge case for (the collaborative time) for the whole district. That’s probably been the single thing that we’ve done that we’ve gotten a great deal of lift out of.” The principal noted that School B was instrumental in getting the provision for the weekly release time into the collective bargaining agreement for the entire district.

In addition to the weekly collaborative time, the principal made a commitment to ensuring that all professional learning time was well planned and well facilitated. Talking about the principal’s skill in facilitating meetings and professional learning, an administrator noted: “He has an agenda that is put out in advance. He doesn’t allow a lot of sidebar conversations to continue. We stay on task. We stay focused. And we walk out saying ‘We accomplished something today.’” One of the teachers also acknowledged that the principal is a masterful facilitator, ensuring that time is used well for both meetings and professional learning. The principal implemented a rule about the use of time on professional learning days. Professional learning days may schedule a maximum of 75 minutes of direct instruction. The rest of the professional learning day must be devoted to the application of the ideas by teachers. The
principal noted that teachers have appreciated the time for application that “really gives the teachers time to internalize it.” Two teachers interviewed expressed appreciation for the time dedicated to planning for implementation of new ideas and initiatives.

Early in this principal’s tenure at School B, he joined a 2-year cohort of other high schools sponsored by the National Staff Development Council. In addition to providing training and guidance on effective professional learning, staff members at School B were able to interact with and learn from other high schools across the nation.

As noted earlier in this chapter, most teachers also received Project CRISS training based on needs identified in the review of data. Despite the lack of funding for professional learning, the leadership team at School B has develop a variety of ways to provide support for teachers in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Support Structures for Student Success

A number of support structures have been put in place to assist students in finding academic success. One such structure was described earlier in this chapter: the Upward program for minority students to encourage success in advanced level courses.

In addition, School B has established academic resource centers in six content areas. Students are able to access these resource centers, staffed by certified teachers, during lunch hours. In order to staff these resource centers, certified staff members had to be relieved of supervision duties. Feeling that staffing academic resource centers was a much better use of teacher time and expertise, one teacher stated: “It was a waste of time for teachers with advanced degrees to be patrolling the hallways telling kids to be quiet.” Both teachers and administrators noted the increasing use of the centers. One teacher observed “the culture of this building is one where students seek help.”
This year, students scan an identification card when entering the resource center, recording their use of the resource center. These scans provided data on the use of the centers for the leadership team and triggered an electronic message to parents and teachers of the students. During the first quarter of the current school year, there were more than 4,000 scans, representing over 1,900 individual students who made use of the resource centers. At this time, no other data were collected about the effectiveness of the resource centers, although teachers reported anecdotal success from the use of the resource centers.

Another structure to support students is the Target Teams. Based on achievement data analysis, students who, according to one administrator, are “right there in the middle and not receiving a preponderance of services” are identified. The teachers of these students are then brought together collaboratively to understand the needs of these students and to strategize classroom interventions that could support the students to attain higher scores on the assessment. The principal noted: “Once the teachers understood the college readiness standards and that, Troy has an 18 (on the Plan test), and I’ve got eight other kids like him in my U.S. History class, they really understood what they needed to do.” These teachers were provided with collaborative time, professional learning, and time to understand the achievement scores and develop strategies to address them in the classroom.

In addition, the staff has implemented a math intervention program that allows students in beginning algebra courses to retake a quiz or test with a grade of “C” or lower. Students who receive the low grades attended the intervention, staffed by teachers, during one-half of their lunch period. Students then were allowed to take the test or quiz again. The higher score counted toward the student’s grade.
Another structure to support students in being successful was provided for students who are receiving a failing grade in a core academic subject. These students attend an after school program called After School Assistance Program (ASAP) two times per week. Teachers, who receive a stipend, staff the after school program. Students are compelled to attend, but may be removed at the request of a parent. One teacher noted that the typical problem is a lack of homework completion, so the time is “mostly spent getting homework done.” Although no specific data have been collected on this program, an administrator noted that the program has led to a lower number of failing grades.

One final support structure that was shared is a student advocacy program, designed primarily for minority students. In this program, students have the opportunity to select an adult mentor, or advocate. The mentor meets with the student periodically, provides support, and checks in to make sure that the student is finding success. Both the principal and another administrator noted that they have students who selected them as mentors and felt that the program provided positive results by developing a positive adult relationship with students.

**Allocation of Resources**

Allocating resources to effectively support high levels of student learning is a key component of leadership for learning. In addition, how leaders choose to allocate resources send important messages to the school community about what is valued. The major resources that are allocated at School B are time and money.

In terms of the allocation of time and energy, the principal felt the use of time was the most important allocation to teachers. Talking about the allocation of resources, the principal stated: “They think of the resources as time. What am I expected to do? Am I expected to
contribute? What I hear is that here there are clear and high expectations for teaching and learning.” Several teachers also commented on the increased expectation on teachers and the lack of time to accomplish all that needed to be done.

A number of decisions have impacted the allocation of time, based on the value at the school of supporting students for academic success. Target Teams, described the preceding section, for example, involved a large amount of time and energy, as well as financial resources for substitute teachers, on the part of administrators and teachers. Describing the process, the principal noted that they “really sank quite a bit of teacher focus and time into those students.” The Target Teams also involved the resource of money as substitute teachers were hired to provide the collaboration time. Another example of time resource allocation involved the Academic Resource Centers described earlier in this chapter. In order to staff the Resource Centers, teachers needed to be relieved of their supervision duties in the hallways and cafeteria. Again, this resource allocation also involved money, as paraprofessionals were hired to provide some of the supervision. Teachers viewed this change somewhat differently, noting that it was wasteful to have highly qualified teachers patrolling hallways instead of working with students.

In terms of the allocation of money, there have also been a number of decisions that reflected the values of the school. The principal brought a collaborative budgeting process to the school. Each year the leadership team works together to develop the building level budget. Describing the process, the principal said: “We go through a process. It can be somewhat painful, because it’s very tedious to get 30 people in a room to try to build a line item budget, but we do it.” Although the process is challenging, the principal sees great value in it. He noted: “I think it’s paid off because you match the priority to the decision and then everybody’s in the know. No
one is mysterious about where the money went and why I didn’t get the same amount of funding.”

The process allows the funding to be directly related to the values of the school.

There had been a lot of discussion about technology and its place in educating students. While the school is in a relatively affluent area, funding for technology had not kept pace with other districts. In order to begin incorporating technology in a meaningful way into the instructional program, the budget workshop participants decided to create classrooms with a great deal of integrated technology. These classrooms would be shared by teachers and used all periods of the day, “impacting a lot of students,” as noted by one staff member. In addition to providing current technology for instruction, these classrooms provided professional learning for the teachers. The principal recalls that once the decision was made to invest in these integrated technology classrooms, “department chairs chipped away at their budgets, from the building budget, and we collaboratively came up with what we were going to do.”

In another venue, funding decisions also impacted students and instruction. When the current principal arrived at the school, he worked with the master schedule to be strategic in class sizes, while maintaining fiscal responsibility to the district. The principal noted that the staff “was strategic on key classes and making sure that the class size is going to be effective.” For example, he noted the smaller class size in a junior Algebra II class, where more individual attention is needed to ensure student success. He compared this class size to an Advanced Placement course with a class size of 29. While he wished that the AP course could also have a lower class size, the decision supported the school value of allocating resources to best meet the needs of the students.

Hiring and retaining quality teachers was also put forth as a way to allocate resources based on the school values. For example, one administrator was proud of the quality of teachers
that are hired at School B. He gave the example of hiring athletic coaches who were great teachers first and foremost. He noted that the athletic director, who hired teachers and coaches “wants to hire great teachers.” In a different vein, one administrator talked about “aggressively removing teachers we felt weren’t a part of our program.” This administrator noted that this school has let go more teachers than all the other schools in the district combined. This administrator felt that teachers on staff make good instructional decisions, and removing teachers who did not make these good decisions, using either the non-tenure release policies or the evaluation system, was extremely important to the success of the school.

Principal Leadership

A final area of consideration for School B is the leadership of the principal. The literature is clear: principal leadership makes a difference in the learning of students. For this discussion of principal leadership at School B three key areas will be considered: vision, sharing leadership, and principal as change agent.

Vision

The literature on leadership for learning identified key competencies for a school principal in regard to vision, including developing the vision, articulating the vision, implementing the vision and stewarding the vision. A number of staff members, including the principal himself, noted a shift in focus when the principal began. In reflecting on the school and the vision for the school, the principal said: “This is a relatively young school. This is our 15th year being open, so it’s still like a teenager. It’s like a 15-year-old, so its identity search is still going on.” Previously, there had been a great deal of emphasis on school culture, activities, and people. When the current principal arrived, he shifted focus to academics and learning. He stated
that in researching School B prior to accepting the principal position, he was impressed by the many athletic and performing arts honors and activities. He also noticed that the school was not comparable to other similar high schools in the area in the area of academics. As he began to shift the focus of the school, he recalled: “I just felt there was a hunger for it. And some of the systems of how the school was set up were not necessarily normed to academic achievement.”

In working to shift the focus, without losing the special character of the school, the principal placed a premium on professional learning, developed a partnership with the National Staff Development Council, and had many conversations with staff members, students, and parents. An administrator acknowledged the principal’s vision stating: “He’s got a great vision for learning, and I think he does a nice job communicating that with our team.”

**Shared Leadership**

The literature on leadership for learning points out that one person, generally a principal, cannot ensure that all students are learning at high levels alone. Although the leadership of the principal is important, it takes the leadership of many people to make sure that all students are learning at high levels. School B has a very traditional approach to leadership. There is a structured leadership team that makes most of the decisions for the school. The leadership team included the principal, assistant principals, and department chairpersons.

After accepting the principal position, one of the first changes the current principal made was the structure of the administrative team. Previously, the administrators had been generalists and assigned to a variety of responsibilities, responsibilities that often shifted from year to year. The principal recalled: “The most frequent thing I experienced was people walking in the office and saying, whose job is this?” To provide clarity and ensure that goals could be accomplished, the principal assigned a more typical role structure to the assistant principals. The current
structure has one assistant principal was in charge of curriculum and instruction; one was in charge of operations; another was in charge of student services. The principal was particularly interested in having one person take the lead with curriculum and instruction. He stated: “Having one assistant principal primarily be at the fulcrum of curriculum and instruction, working with the principals, working with the (department) chairs, I think is just giving a little more clarity of vision.”

When asked about the leaders for learning for the building, most administrators identified the department chairpersons as the most critical leaders in the building. An assistant principal, when asked about the leaders for learning at School B, stated: “I think department chairs are the critical piece. They do the hiring, but also foster the growth of teachers.” Interestingly, only one administrator eventually identified teachers as leaders. He said that some teachers “take on more of a leadership role in wanting to try new instructional methods, whether it be technology, collaborative learning or reading strategies. So I think we have some teacher leaders that are modeling that.” Several teachers and department chairpersons identified teachers as leaders, but mostly in terms of their work with students in the classroom, not at a building level.

Principal as Change Agent

The principal has made a number of changes in the focus and operations of the building. He gave an analogy for change that he found compelling. Instead of steering a speedboat, making lots of quick turns, he views his role as steering a huge cruise liner. He said: “If you’re cranking that steering and zigzagging, people are going to be seasick and they’re not going to enjoy their food.” So, he sees his role as maintaining a steady course and making changes progressively over time. He works to introduce new ideas to the staff with consistency. He noted: “Consistency over time is what’s allowed people to get good at it.”
Staff members cited effective communication as a strength of the principal, which contributed to positive change. An administrator noted that the principal “is a master communicator.” This administrator cited many examples of open communication, including weekly bulletins and shared minutes of meetings. The administrator praised the principal noting the principal’s “transparency and just being open to communicating with everyone.” He also cited the principal’s favorite phrase: “Surprises are for birthdays.” The strong communication, openness, willingness to listen, and transparency have supported positive change in the school.

Summary

School B is a large high school in a suburban Midwestern city in the United States in a relatively affluent area. The staff values collaboration and expressed pride in the collaborative culture among students, staff, and administrators. However, School B is struggling in some areas to ensure that the needs of all students are being met. Standardized test scores indicate strong academic achievement for the students. The school has been recognized nationally in a number of different forums for high levels of programming and achievement.

The conception of learning at School B is narrower than the conception of learning at School A. While administrators and teachers at School B expressed concern about various aspects of learning for students, including participation in activities, working for social justice, and developing strong habits of learning, the main focus always came back to academic achievement as measured by standardized measures. The data mentioned in multiple interviews with administrators and teachers at School B, used to develop improvement plans and assess the success of interventions, were standardized testing measures of academic achievement.
School B is focused on high levels of academic achievement for students. Under the leadership of the principal, the school has shifted to a focus on academic achievement and improved learning opportunities for students. A variety of data, particularly standardized data, are used to understand the academic progress of students and plan for improvements. A number of structures are available to students to support academic success. The staff is working to align, monitor, evaluate, and strengthen curriculum, instruction, and assessment at School B. The leadership of the principal is valued and recognized to have shifted the focus to academic achievement. He maintains the focus on the vision of high levels of learning for students and guides instructional improvement to strengthen the learning opportunities for students. Despite the declining resources, the staff works to ensure that important opportunities are maintained for students and staff, and that some are expanded to meet the needs of both staff and students. Principles and practices of leadership for learning are evident at School B.

An unexpected finding in the data collection at School B was the presence of deficit thinking. During a number of interviews, administrators and teachers talked about the fact that not all students would be able to learn, that the backgrounds and family situations of some students would prevent their success, and that no amount of work on the part of the school could make up for these deficits. While the administrators, and the principal in particular, talked about the importance of an inclusive environment and meeting the needs of all students, it appears that efforts to work toward social justice are operating on a highly superficial level at School B.

While the administrators and teachers at School B clearly have many elements of leadership for learning in place to support the academic achievement of students, the underlying beliefs do not truly support learning for all students. The presence of deficit thinking and the narrow conception of learning at School B is indicative of the belief that all students will not be
able to learning at high levels. It is clear that both the principles of leadership for learning and transformative leadership must be present in a school in order to ensure that all students will learn at a high level. Transformative leadership needs to inform and underlie the vision and be part of the decision making and everything that happens at a school in order for all students to learn at high levels. It appears that this is not the case yet at School B.
Chapter Six

Discussion and Recommendations

School leadership is a critical factor in ensuring that student learning is maximized in for all students (Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 1998; Heck et al., 1990; Leithwood et al., 2006; Leithwood et al., 2010). A clear connection can be drawn between the leadership in a school and student learning. In fact, school leadership is second only to classroom instruction in its impact on student learning (Leithwood et al., 2004). Today’s school leaders need support and guidance to meet the challenge of ensuring that all students learn at high levels. Given the impact of school leadership on student learning, it is imperative that school leaders understand and enact effective leadership for learning.

School leaders have the critical responsibilities of ensuring that all students are learning at high levels and ensuring that teachers are providing learning opportunities that meet both the needs of the students as well as the learning standards that have been established in this age of accountability. While the goal of powerful learning for all students is an important one, the research has shown that many students today, particularly students who have been marginalized for one reason or another, are not learning at high levels (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Shields, 2004; Valencia, 1997). Although many school leaders have the best of intentions to ensure that all students are learning at high levels, their training, background, and experiences may not have provided them with the necessary knowledge base and skill sets to successfully meet this goal. In addition, few school leadership preparation programs have provided school leaders with the background to be successful in making sure that all students learn at high levels (Theoharis, 2007).
As the stakes continue to rise for principals and other school leaders, the research in the field is beginning to support this work in a way that focuses specifically on the relationship between leadership and student learning. Beyond the accountability and high stakes testing that has become part and parcel of a school leader’s work, there is a moral obligation to ensure that all students are learning, and learning at high levels.

This study examined leadership for learning practices in two high schools, using the leadership for learning literature as a framework and the transformative leadership literature as a lens to understand how leadership practices impact student learning. The two major research questions were:

- What leadership practices, behaviors, and attitudes does a principal enact in order to provide leadership for learning at a high school?
- What leadership practices, behaviors, and attitudes support high levels of learning for all students regardless of the challenges they face?

These questions will provide the basis for the discussion in this chapter.

There is an urgent need to provide school leaders with an understanding of the leadership practices, behaviors, and attitudes which will ensure that all students are able to learn at high levels. While the leadership for learning literature and transformative leadership literature begin to provide this understanding, it is important to assist school leaders in moving from “quick fix” strategies to a deep understanding of how leadership can positively impact student learning. In addition, serious consideration must be given to how all students, regardless of the challenges they face, both inside and outside of school, can be supported to successfully learn at high levels.

Perhaps the most important learning coming out of this study for the researcher was this: it is of essential importance that both the principles of leadership for learning and transformative leadership be present and active in a school in order for all students to be able to learn at high
levels. In School A, the principal and staff members clearly have worked to make sure that the principles of leadership for learning and transformative leadership are present and guide all the work of the school. Despite a number of significant challenges, the students at School A are learning at high levels. School B, in contrast, has fewer challenges facing the students, demonstrates many principles of leadership for learning, has strong academic achievement for many students, but is only beginning to recognize the need for transformative leadership. Therefore, a number of students are not able to learn at high levels due to the presence of deficit thinking and a narrow conception of learning and the measurement of learning. It has become clear to this researcher that both leadership for learning and transformative leadership are essential in order for all students to learn at high levels.

**Review of the Study**

Chapter One provided an introduction to this study. The focus, purpose, and research questions for the study were defined. The significance of this study was identified: providing school leaders with an understanding of the leadership practices, behaviors, and attitudes that will help ensure that all students are learning at high levels.

In Chapter Two, literature relative to school leadership was examined. Three bodies of literature were reviewed to provide a framework for this study. First, the literature on the relationship between principal leadership and student learning was reviewed (e.g., Bossert et al., 1982; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 1998; Heck et al., 1990; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2006; Leithwood et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2008; Waters et al., 2003). This body of literature provided strong evidence about the positive relationship between principal leadership and student learning. In addition, this body of literature identified some
leadership practices and principles that can positively impact student learning. Next, the leadership for learning literature was reviewed (e.g., Knapp et al., 2003; Knapp et al., 2006; Knapp et al., 2010; Knapp, Copland, & Tablert, 2003; Louis et al., 2010; Murphy et al., 2006, 2007; Portin et al., 2003; Portin et al., 2009). This body of literature focused the work of school leadership directly on student learning. The literature provided a new way of thinking about leadership practices, focused specifically on student learning, which were designed to ensure that all student attain equitable and powerful learning. Finally, transformative leadership literature was reviewed (e.g., Astin & Astin, 2000; Kose, 2011; Shields, 2004, 2009, 2010; Theoharis, 2007). This body of literature provided a theoretical lens to bring a broader perspective about equity of opportunity to the other bodies of literature and the data in the study. Taken together, these three bodies of literature provided a framework for understanding the nature of leadership for learning in two high schools.

In Chapter Three, the methodology for the study was developed. This study employed a case study methodology. A case study methodology was chosen for this study in order to closely examine the concepts about leadership for learning presented in the literature in the specific context of schools.

Chapters Four and Five presented the findings from the case studies of two high schools. Data collection in each school was reviewed and basic school information provided. Thick description was used to describe the context and leadership actions in the schools.

This final chapter will integrate the findings from the case studies with the principles found the literature on leadership for learning and transformative leadership to consider the major lessons that can be drawn from the research. First, emergent themes and major lessons
learned from this study will be discussed. Next, recommendations based on the research will be developed. Finally, I will provide some closing reflections on the study.

**Discussion**

Examining leadership for learning at two high schools has provided me with a rich understanding of leadership that could not be provided by reading the literature alone. A number of themes emerged from this dissertation and a number of major lessons were learned about effective leadership for learning which address the two major research questions of this study. The first research question addresses leadership practices that lead to high levels of student learning; the second research question addresses leadership practices that ensure that all students are learning. This discussion will integrate both questions. This discussion will explore five major themes in order to address the research questions: the fundamental importance of the role of principal in leadership for learning (Knapp, Copeland, & Talbert, 2003; Louis et al., 2010; Portin et al., 2003; Wahlström & Louis, 2008), the critical need to understand the process of change (Elmore, 1996; Knapp et al., 2006; Waters & Cameron, 2007), the importance of context to leadership for learning (Knapp et al., 2003; Louis et al., 2010; Portin et al., 2003; Portin et al., 2009; Wahlstrom, 2008; Waters & Cameron, 2007), the critical importance of focus on learning (Elmore, 2000; Knapp et al., 2003; Knapp et al., 2006; Knapp et al., 2010; Louis et al., 2010; Murphy et al., 2006, 2007; Portin et al., 2003), and the need for transformative leadership to ensure that all students learn at high levels (Kose, 2011; Shields, 2004a, 2004b, 2010; Theoharis, 2007).
Fundamental Importance of the Role of Principal in Leadership for Learning

The role of principal is absolutely essential in effective leadership for learning (Knapp, Copeland, & Talbert, 2003; Louis et al., 2010; Portin et al., 2003; Wahlstron & Louis, 2008). Researchers have studied the link between principal leadership and student learning and concluded that the principal can play a significant role in student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2010). Evidence gathered in the cases studied in this dissertation supported the fundamental importance of the role of principal in providing a school with leadership for learning that supports high levels of learning for all students.

Two key aspects of leadership are essential in effective leadership for learning on the part of the principal: visualizing how to connect leadership actions with improved student learning and mobilizing the energy and effort of others to support the vision (Knapp et al., 2006). At both School A and School B, teachers and administrators recognized and acknowledged the central role of the principal in improving student learning. In analyzing the impetus for shifting the school focus to student learning, a number of teachers and administrators at both School A and School B cited the significant role that the principal played. For instance, when asked who the leaders for learning at the school were, one teacher at School A said: “Well, definitely (the principal). I think it all stems from her and what she has set up for us all to work in.” Similar responses were given by others in School A and by staff members in School B.

One area of critical importance for a principal is in the vision for the school (Knapp et al., 2003; Murphy et al., 2006, 2007). Principals have the opportunity to make a significant difference in the school by working with the vision of the school, making sure that the vision of all school community members focuses on ensuring that all students learn at high levels. The principal can make the difference between a school that is actively working to bring a vision
about high levels of learning for all students to life and a school where the vision is empty words in a document or hanging on a wall. Both principals in this case study took a lead role in developing a school vision focused on student learning and worked to mobilize others to attain the vision. In both cases, the current principals moved the vision of the school to focus on student learning. This shift in the focus of the vision, centering on students and student learning, was stated directly by both principals and acknowledged by other administrators and staff members in both buildings.

There are four key skills needed by principals relative to a vision for a school: developing the vision, articulating the vision, implementing the vision, and stewarding the vision (Knapp et al., 2003; Murphy et al., 2006, 2007). Both principals in the schools studied displayed these key skills in working with the vision of their respective schools.

In developing the vision focused on high levels of student learning for all students, two elements are critical for success: including all stakeholders and using a variety of data (Knapp et al., 2003; Murphy et al., 2006). In terms of including all stakeholders, for example, the principal at School A led the school community to build a vision. This work took more than a year. While the development process for the vision included primarily staff members, input from other stakeholder groups was incorporated into the work, including parents, community members, and students. Likewise, the principal at School B, the principal included the feedback of students and parents in the discussions of the school’s vision. He sought feedback from students on a variety of topics related to the work of the school and the support that was needed for the students to be successful. The principal at School B also noted “we really talk to our parents a lot in this community.”
In terms of the use of a variety of data to develop the vision of the school, the principal at School A gave many examples of data shared with staff to help the staff develop a deeper understanding of the current reality at the school. Often, the data were disaggregated by race or socioeconomic status in order for teachers to fully realize the impact of their work on all students. While staff members at School A acknowledged that some staff members still are not fully vested in the concept of all students, sharing comments like “what about the white kids,” the data have supported most staff members in developing a more realistic understanding of the impact of the school on all students.

In stewarding the vision of the school, it became clear that the principals at School A and School B were able to move the vision focused on student learning forward and “mobilizing others’ energies and commitment accordingly” (Knapp et al., 2006, p. 4). Interestingly, allocating resources, both time resources and monetary resources, sent a very clear message to staff members at both schools about the fundamental role the vision would play in the operation of the school. Effective leaders for learning ensure that operational aspects of the principal position, including such areas as scheduling, budgeting, and building organization, “are no longer ends in themselves but assume importance to the extent that they strengthen the quality of the instructional and curricular program and enhance student learning” (Murphy et al., 2007). There were a number of examples of resource allocation from the case studies that support this belief.

For example, the principal at School B noted that staff members understood the vision of the school in terms of how it impacted their time commitments and the expectations around those time commitments. In reflecting on the message sent to teachers by the allocation of resources, he stated: “I think probably the way our teachers would conceptualize it more is where is the
time going here. They think of the resources as time. What am I expected to do, what am I expected to contribute.” The principal expressed keen awareness of the time commitment asked of teachers in strengthening student learning.

At School A, as another example of resource allocation that support and stewards the vision of the school, the principal articulated the absolute importance of the message sent by the allocation of resources. “You have to put your money where your mouth is,” she said. For example, the school schedule has been developed to support the learning of all students in a variety of ways at School A, including the academic learning classes. The principal stated that the schedule of the school, which is challenging to develop based on limited resources and the desire of the staff to truly meet the needs of all students, reflects the values and vision of the school. Clearly, the allocation in resources both ensured that a school community was able to work on attaining the school’s vision, and that a transparent message was sent about the importance of the vision in the work of the school.

In the area of vision, a clear distinction can be drawn between the two schools. School A has a principal and staff members committed to equity of opportunity for all students. The staff makes social justice a clear and compelling part of the vision. School B recognizes the need for equity of opportunity, but the transformative leadership needed to make this a compelling part of the vision and work of the school is not yet in place. The presence of deficit thinking and a limited understanding of learning for students, focused solely on academic achievement, indicate that social justice and equity of opportunity are not yet significant in the work of the school.

The vision of the school guides the work of the school. In his study of transformative school visions, Kose (2011) noted: “Given the resistance that principals for social justice face, the ways in which principals develop and construct school visions may thwart or propel their
transformative school direction” (p. 121). Kose (2011) suggested two key strategies for principals in developing a transformative school vision: direct conversation about transformative ideas and the deliberate inclusion of all groups in the development of the vision, particularly groups that have been marginalized (p. 131). In the cases in this study, School A has developed a vision that is transformative; School B has not.

While the work of developing, articulating, implementing, and stewarding the vision of the school to focus on high levels of learning for all students is critical, the principal also has an essential role in creating an environment where the school community can bring the vision into reality. Without a productive and supportive school environment, it is unlikely that a school vision focused on student learning can flourish. Effective leaders for learning must create learning organizations: communities of learners committed to providing the opportunities necessary for all students to learn (Murphy et al., 2007). A productive school environment includes effective professional learning, a culture of learning and collaboration among staff members, a safe and orderly environment, and an ethic of care (Beck & Murphy, 1996; Murphy et al., 2007).

Many examples of the principal working to develop a productive and positive school environment can be drawn from the case studies. The principal at School A, in particular, demonstrated a solid commitment to creating a collaborative school environment. Clearly, she and the staff identified the school environment as collaborative, and many attributed the collaborative nature of the staff to the explicit work of the principal. The principal put a number of structures in place, and supported the structures with precious limited resources, to ensure that staff members had opportunities to collaborate meaningfully to support student learning. Both principals, at School A and School B, worked to ensure that the school environment is
productive, safe, and orderly. Both principals shared a common goal in this area: making sure that a safe and orderly environment enhanced the learning of students and minimized interruptions to learning. In addition, both principals worked within the constraints of limited resources to provide teachers with meaningful professional learning opportunities. While they approached professional learning in different ways, both were committed to providing teachers with new learning to support their students in the learning process.

One key difference can be noted between the schools in this study in this area. The staff at School A openly and candidly discusses and deals with the issues of equity, social justice, and deficit thinking. At School B, however, the presence of deficit thinking in the interviews, along with little or no indication of serious discussion about equity, social justice, and deficit thinking among staff members, indicated that this dialogue is not occurring at a school level. Even though the principal identified issues of social justice as present in the school, no clear indication of meaningful addressing of the issues was found. Clearly, the principles of transformative leadership can inform the work of the principal in working the school environment. If a school is to develop a positive and productive school environment that ensures that all students will learn at high levels, these issues must be addressed.

Collaboration and shared leadership are essential for effective leadership for learning. Although the principal plays an essential role in providing effective leadership for learning, it is not a one-person job. Effective leadership for learning, which ensures that all students can learn at high levels, requires both a collaborative environment among staff members and shared leadership, where many in the school community provide leadership for the goal of student learning. The principal plays a key role in developing a collaborative environment and sharing
leadership with others (e.g., Knapp, Ford, & Markholt, 2003; Knapp, Copeland, & Talbert, 2003; Knapp et al., 2010; Louis et al., 2010; Portin et al., 2003).

The principal is absolutely critical in providing a school building with effective leadership for learning. Supported by both the literature (e.g., Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 1998; Heck et al., 1990; Leithwood et al., 2006; Leithwood et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2008) and evidence from this study, it is clear that the principal is a pivotal player in ensuring high levels of learning for all students. While the leadership for learning is clearly a shared responsibility and requires the leadership of many, the principal is the linchpin. Through visioning and mobilizing the energy of others, as well as other actions, the principal can provide the impetus for a school to ensure that all students are able to learning at high levels.

**Critical Need to Understand the Process of Change**

In order to attain the goal of high levels of learning for all students, change must happen in schools. The leaders for learning, the principal and other leaders, must understand the process of change and be able to facilitate change in organizations that can be very resistant to change (Elmore, 1996; Knapp et al., 2006; Waters & Cameron, 2007). In addition, the literature on transformative leadership noted that school leaders, in order to ensure that all students have equitable opportunities to learn at high levels, must constantly examine the status quo, facilitate dialogue about inequities in the system, and address the issues (e.g., Shields, 2004b, 2010).

Change is a theme that emerged on many levels during the case studies. Both principals, as well as many other staff members, talked about changes that were positive and well-received and other changes that were difficult and some that were unsuccessful. All staff members who were interviewed for the case studies, however, commented in one way or another about the need for change in order to make sure that all students are able to learn at high levels.
One approach to change leadership portrayed school leaders as master diagnosticians. Portin et al. (2003) noted that as a master diagnostician for the school, school leaders must understand the needs of the school and determine how to get those needs met. A number of skills and actions are critical in accurately diagnosing the needs of the school and leading others to meet those needs, including understanding the school’s vision, context and resources, assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the school, setting priorities, mobilizing others to act, and keeping the long-term vision in mind. Both principals studied in the case studies indicated the need and importance of understanding the needs of the school and acting to meet those needs. Both principals focused change on improving the learning of students.

For example, at School B, the principal spent a considerable amount of time studying the school, talking to school community members, examining a variety of data, and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the school, both before the interviews for the position and after accepting the position. He began to see the culture and climate of the school as a strength. School B had many accomplishments in sports, music, and other activities. Students, parents, and staff members felt pride and an attachment to the school and positive about the accomplishments of the young school. However, he also noted that academically, the data indicated that the school was not as strong on academic measures as other comparable schools in the area. He stated, with pride, that feedback from others indicated that he had shifted the focus of the school community to academics and student learning. In reflecting on the feedback he received from others about shift in focus based on his diagnosis of the school, the principal said: “Prior to my arrival, most of the identity formation of the school was around climate. People feel that there was a distinct shift to academic achievement on my arrival, which is probably accurate. That’s been a focus of mine.” Clearly, this principal diagnosed the needs of the school and mobilized others to action,
confirmed by the perceptions and feedback of others. Many data sources confirmed that there has been a positive change in academic achievement over the past three years, including the highest ACT scores in the school’s history and the placement on the Advanced Placement Honor Roll.

In addition to being a diagnostician, school leaders also need to understand the change process. To say that change can be difficult for people is an understatement. While there is no magic formula for ensuring that change will happen successfully, there are a number of change theories that can support leaders in the process of change.

For example, the principal of School A often cited the work of Heifetz & Linsky (2002), as influential in her work with change. In particular, the principal found the idea of ripeness for change extremely useful as she approached and planned for change in the school community. The principal at School A stated that, despite her fast-paced nature in her work and her thinking, she often found herself slowing down both herself and others to make sure that there was a ripeness for the change. One strategy that the principal found useful was the sharing of data. She stated that she often shared data with the staff and asked them to make sense of it and think about it. This data strategy often ripened an issue and began serious conversation about a number of important issues. For instance, the principal was working with chairpersons of a school improvement committee that wanted to move fast on a particular change in practice about which they felt strongly. Even though she strongly agreed with the proposed change in practice, the principal recalled having a number of conversations with the chairpersons, encouraging them to go slowly and make sure that other staff members were ready for the change. As she considered the process of change, the principal stated: “You have to get your building ripe.”

The principal at School A also spoke about another critical concept developed by Heifetz and Linsky (2002): an understanding of technical change compared to adaptive change.
Technical problems are problems for which people already have the ability, skills, or answers to solve the problems. Adaptive problems, on the other hand, cannot be easily solved by others and require such processes as experimentation, inquiry, and changes from multiple stakeholders in an organization. In explaining adaptive changes, Heifetz & Linsky (2002) wrote: “Without learning new ways—changing attitudes, values, and behaviors—people cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in the new environment. The sustainability of change depends on having people with the problem internalize the change itself” (p. 13).

The principal at School A has used her understanding of adaptive change to support important change in the building. In fact, she stated: “I focus very much on the adaptive, trying to really change the habits of heart and what they’re doing.” For example, the climate of the building, related in particular to student behavior, has dramatically improved over the past several years. Observations of the school confirmed this to be true and a number of staff members commented on the positive change in behavior, attributing the change to the work of the principal. Consistent with the understanding of adaptive change outlined by Heifetz and Linsky, the principal first presented data to the staff, allowed the staff to develop an understanding of the problems, and begin to generate and try solutions to the issues. Some issues, however, were treated as technical problems and solved through authority. For instance, detentions given to students needed to have some meaning, so the principal made sure that structures were put in place to ensure that detentions were served. The larger issue of student behavior, and its relationship to the climate and culture of the building, however, was treated as an adaptive change, taking time, multiple opportunities for conversation, and experimentation with various strategies to solve. As a matter of fact, the student discipline school improvement
committee is a relatively new committee, indicating the continuing need to work on this adaptive change.

In thinking about the concept of technical and adaptive changes, the researcher conceptualized leadership for learning as a kind of technical change: providing the elements necessary to ensure that students would have quality opportunities for learning. Leadership for learning provides a venue for examining and improving the learning that happens in classrooms in a school. Transformative leadership, then, might then be viewed as adaptive change. Transformative leaders ask the hard questions and compels school communities to self-examine their core beliefs and practices to determine if social justice is a goal of the school. Transformative leadership is the adaptive change that has the potential to make sure that all students are able to learn at high levels, not just some students.

This study confirmed a leadership for learning practice essential to ensuring high levels of learning for all students: the ability to create change in a school. The literature noted that leaders for learning must have a clear and well-developed understanding of the process of change (e.g., Elmore, 1996; Knapp et al., 2006; Waters & Cameron, 2007). The leaders at both schools in this study demonstrated an ability to assess the need for change, align support for the change, motivate others to act on the changes needed, and focus change on students and student learning. Whether the change is related to an instructional practice, the allocation of resources, or an inequity in the system, school leaders must understand the process of change and be able to lead the school through the change process. Waters and Cameron (2007) noted that school leaders must be willing to challenge the status quo, be willing to lead change, even when the outcome is uncertain, and strategically and continually examine ways to strengthen the learning of all
students. Effective leaders for learning must understand and use a variety of change models and strategies in order to best meet the learning needs of all students.

**Importance of Context to Leadership for Learning**

As school leaders choose leadership actions and develop plans to support the learning of all students, the school context is a most critical factor that must be considered (Knapp et al., 2003; Louis et al., 2010; Portin et al., 2003; Portin et al., 2009; Wahlstrom, 2008; Waters & Cameron, 2007). As researchers develop frameworks and models for leadership for learning, there is a danger that school leaders might interpret these frameworks and models as checklists or “a simple laundry list of technical competencies” (Stoll et al., 2003, p. 103). Instead, the leadership frameworks and models must be viewed as options for school leaders; choices that can be made based on the school context.

Researchers often have developed frameworks or models of leadership behavior based on their study. Portin et al. (2003), for example, created a list of seven leadership areas based on their research of leadership for learning. Portin et al. (2003) stated that the seven leadership areas were separated for analysis purposes only, and that in reality the seven areas “necessarily and inextricably linked” (p. 23). In a discussion about how the seven areas might best be used in schools, Portin et al. (2003) pointed out the importance of school context in decision making, suggesting: “What leaders and schools choose to do and the areas of leadership in which they invest the most energy is the result of a complicated array of situational influences. Site-specific characteristics often determine the urgency of specific leadership issues” (p. 24). Thus, it is essential that school leaders consider school context in making leadership decisions and not rely on leadership frameworks as recipes or checklists.
The schools studied in this dissertation were extremely different in many ways, including location, demographics, socio-economic status, and history. One school was well established with a long history and many traditions; the other was relatively new and still, as noted by the principal, in search of an identity. The leadership for learning practices in these two buildings were, not surprisingly, extremely different. For example, with very different racial profiles, the issues around race and the related leadership actions were extremely different. At School A, data on differences in achievement and in the number of referrals were broken down by race to reveal some inequalities that needed attention. These data were regularly presented to the staff members, who then engaged in conversation about the story the data was telling about the school. Plans to improve achievement and the number of referrals were developed, implemented, and evaluated. At School B, the academic data revealed that students in some racial populations lagged behind others. The issue was identified and the principal began to work with staff members to ameliorate the problem. Given the difference in the communities, the staffs, and the expectations of the communities and staffs, it followed naturally that different approaches were required in order to address the issues. Although there was some similarity in the core issues at both schools, the approach and leadership actions needed to be varied, based on the school context.

Context is a critical factor in the work of leaders for learning. The frameworks and models developed by researchers need to be use as a guide and analyzed in relation to the school context. As Leithwood et al. (2004) stated: “We need to be developing leaders with large repertoires as needed, not leaders trained in the delivery of one ‘‘ideal’ set of practices. (p. 10) Leadership for learning principles need to be used as a guide for school leaders, not a checklist of behaviors to complete.
Interestingly, Wahlstrom (2008) noted that: “It is no wonder that because the school context is where the teachers ‘live,’ it is also the context which is most malleable (unlike either the state or district context) and responsive to the direct actions of a leader” (p. 594). So, in addition to ensuring that leadership actions are in line with the school context, leadership decisions at the school context level also have the greatest chance of making a difference for students and their learning. This study validated the importance of consideration of context in choosing and implementing appropriate leadership practices to ensure high levels of learning for all students.

**Critical Importance of Focus on Learning**

Although it may seem to be an obvious statement that it is essential for school leaders to focus on learning, it is an exceedingly important statement and one that does not always translate into action at the school and district level. School leaders must make a conscious effort to give top priority to leadership behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes that focus on student learning (e.g., Elmore, 2000; Knapp et al., 2003; Knapp et al., 2006; Knapp et al., 2010; Louis et al., 2010; Murphy et al., 2006, 2007; Portin et al., 2003). The workdays of school leaders are busy and filled with a multitude of activities that may or may not support student learning. It is critical that school leaders deliberately choose actions that keep them focused on student learning.

Virtually all researchers cited in the leadership for learning section of the review of literature stated the absolute essential importance of school leaders focusing their efforts on the core technologies of the school, namely curriculum, instruction, and assessment (e.g., Hallinger et al., 1996; Leithwood et al., 2006; Murphy et al., 2007; Portin et al, 2003). However, today’s principals are faced with a challenging role, that, in addition to being the chief leader for learning, include such tasks as student discipline, building operations and management, financial oversight,
extracurricular activities, community relationships, public relations, and conflict resolution. Although these roles have an impact on student learning, that impact can be minimal in some cases. In many instances, these roles can take the energy and focus of the principal off of the core work of the school: learning and teaching. Given the current role of principal, it can be challenging for a principal to maintain a strong focus on learning and teaching.

Both principals talked extensively about their work with learning and teaching. At School A, the principal described a considerable investment of her time and energy related to teaching and learning. She talked about her work with the school improvement teams, reviewing and sharing of relevant data, planning and coordinating a variety of professional learning opportunities for staff members, and observing classrooms both formally and informally. At School B, the principal described his work with teaching and learning, and highlighted such actions as reviewing academic data, working with the leadership team, developing and implementing improvement plans, evaluating teachers, and visiting classrooms. Both principals expressed a desire to spend more time focused specifically on teaching and learning.

One consideration in leading effectively in the area of learning and teaching is developing a deep level of expertise and understanding in the areas of instruction and learning. In describing the importance of expertise in an area, Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) stated: “People who have developed expertise in particular areas are, by definition, able to think effectively about problems in those areas” (p. 31). Several researchers have been exploring the importance of school leaders developing deep knowledge and expertise about learning and teaching in order to lead effectively (e.g., City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009; Fink & Markholt, 2011; Stein & Nelson, 2003). For example, Fink and Markholt (2011) stated: “In the truest spirit of you cannot lead what you do not know, it is incumbent on school leaders to
develop their own expertise about quality instruction” (p. 16). Thus, having a strong level of expertise in teaching and learning would support a school leader in analyzing the instructional needs of the school and providing support for teachers to make meaningful instructional improvement. Having a deep level of expertise is an important characteristic for an effective leader of learning.

Although both principals in the cases studied spent a great deal of time working with the teaching and learning, neither principal had a specific plan to develop a deep expertise in curriculum, instruction, or assessment. Both principals talked about their own learning and developing deeper understandings in various aspects of teaching and learning, but becoming an expert in teaching and learning was not a stated goal for these principals. Given the fundamental importance of leading teaching and learning, it would be important for school leaders to develop specific plans for developing a deep expertise in this area.

Clearly, it is important for school leaders to focus a great deal of their time, energy, and expertise on teaching and learning. The role of the principal and other school leaders, however, often makes this important focus a challenge with the distraction of myriad other demands. It would be valuable to examine the role of principal and other school leaders to recreate the roles with a strong emphasis and focus on teaching and learning. This shift in roles would, in turn, support higher levels of learning for all students.

In addition to developing expertise in the areas of learning and teaching, another area that needs development of expertise, especially for the school leaders, is in the principles of transformative leadership. In order for all students to learn at high levels, the need for equity of opportunity for all students is clear. The principles of transformative leadership, and the
strategies and practices that support transformative leadership, can be challenging and often are not understood by school leaders.

For example, while the principal at School B could identify the issue of disenfranchisement on the part of at least one group of students at the school, he was not able to support this need with actions that would make a difference. The principal and staff members had implemented several surface level attempts, such as handing out positive sayings on cards to disenfranchised students and developing a relationship with an adult at school. These actions did not address the core issues present in the school. Clearly, the principal at School A was able to meaningfully integrate transformative leadership practices throughout the school, making social justice a key focus of the work of the school.

Developing expertise in both learning and teaching, as well as transformative leadership principles, is essential for school leaders in order to support high levels of learning for all students.

**Need for Transformative Leadership to Ensure that All Students Learn at High Levels**

It is common for schools to state that their primary mission is to ensure that all students learn. The challenge in that statement is in the word “all.” This last theme is critical to support schools in making sure that all students are learning, and learning at high levels. Many students come to school today, whether in an affluent suburb or a city with many families in poverty, facing a variety of challenges each day (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2010; Valencia, 1997, 2010). In addition, students who have been marginalized for one reason or another are also coming to our schools each day. It is essential that school leaders understand and enact transformative leadership in order to address core issues of equity and social justice, to truly ensure that all students are learning at high levels.
An overarching goal of school cited in many leadership for learning studies is to provide powerful and equitable learning for all students, regardless of the challenges they face. Strong school leadership will be needed in order to reach this important goal. As Valencia (2010) noted: “Institutional leadership is a very powerful factor, if not the strongest, in the promotion and realization of school success, particularly regarding low-SES students and students of color” (p. 135). Researchers have cited a number of leadership practices that can be enacted in order to attain the goal of high levels of learning for all students (e.g., Shields, 2004a, 2004b, 2010; Kose, 2011; Valencia, 1997, 2010).

School leaders need to challenge unjust practices. Shields (2010) wrote: “Educators must do what they can to challenge unjust practices, to overcome inequality, and to create conditions under which all children can learn” (p. 582). Both schools that were studied offered examples of challenging unjust practices.

For example, the principal at School A identified herself as a transformative leader. Reflecting on her work, she stated that she tries “to change the status quo and to make sure that we’re always questioning what’s going on and that all kids have access.” Other staff members reflected on the questioning of the status quo by the principal. For instance, one teacher at School A reflected on the racial composition of Advanced Placement (AP) courses. She stated: “Eight or nine years ago, you walked in there and there were all these middle to upper class white kids sitting there.” The principal and other school leaders challenged this practice and implemented a number of strategies to increase participation in AP courses by students of color. In addition, strategies were implemented to ensure that all students would be prepared for AP courses and successful in AP courses. There has been a significant change in the racial composition of AP courses at School A.
The same issue of low registration by students of color in AP courses has been identified at School B. The leadership team has begun to address the issue and has committed to implement strategies to correct the situation. For example, the principal met with a group of students of color and asked them what would be needed to support the students in successfully registering for and taking advanced level course. The students identified a number of needs that were taken seriously and enacted by the leadership team. Despite the differences in the contexts of School A and School B, both schools recognized the same issue and addressed, or have begun to address, the issue in order to move toward a more equitable school environment.

Another important action for school leaders is to “resource strategically” (Robinson et al., 2008). The strategic allocation of resources provided School A and School B with an opportunity to address inequalities of opportunity in the schools. Both schools have implemented a number of structures and strategies in order to assist students in being successful at school. For instance, School A provided funding for teams of teachers to collaborate about students who needed support and provided funding to assist the students. In addition, the school schedule and staffing allocation was altered to provide academic learning support classes for students who were having difficulty in core courses. At School B, staffing allocations were also altered to provide academic resource centers to provide students with accessible and available resources for academic support. In both cases, school leaders used resources to ensure that support was available for students in need of academic help.

Perhaps one of the most important, and difficult, issues that must be addressed by school leaders is the reduction of deficit thinking in the schools. Deficit thinking in schools was defined by Valencia (2010) as: “the ubiquitous blame the victim mentality, where educators view
differences as deficits, and value certain groups of students over others” (p. 139). Deficit thinking was identified as an issue at both schools in the study.

At School A, the principal shared data with the staff to begin unveiling the issue of deficit thinking. Data were disaggregated in a number of different ways, revealing inequality of opportunity and achievement at the school. One teacher, commenting on the response of the staff to deficit thinking, noted that some teachers still make comments like “What about the white kids?” But, in general, the staff has embraced the issues related to deficit thinking and has worked to improve equality of opportunity. The principal, reflecting on the issue, said: “What’s really cool is that we’re trying to get away from deficit thinking.” The social justice committee has worked to inform and develop understanding among staff members about deficit thinking. During the interviews at School A, a number of staff members cited the powerful work of this committee, chipping away at deficit thinking among staff members.

At School B, deficit thinking was not identified specifically as an issue by the administrative team. However, during an interview with a staff member about structures to support success in learning for all students, she stated:

Not all kids are successful. I don’t think all kids will ever be successful. Because there are things beyond our control. Home life is so critical to a kid’s success. We can feed them. We can give them a place to go after school. There are some kids that we get too late. We can’t help them any more to read or there’s disciplinary issues. There’s some kids, that there’s got to be some motivation.

Although this staff member went on in the conversation to talk about support structures that were in place to support student success, this statement was alarming in its underlying belief that some students could not be successful. In an interview with another staff member at School B, the teacher spoke with pride about the tracking that is done in the department. The staff member described a tracking system where the eighth grade teacher placed students in a track. There was
little, if any, opportunity for students to change tracks during the high school experience. In addition, the lowest track provided only the equivalent of the basic introductory level course over the 3-year program. At one point during the interview, the staff member stated: “If you put them in (the introductory level course), they will fail.”

The staff members making these statements are members of the school leadership team. Their comments did not reflect a belief that all students can learn at high levels. In describing deficit thinking, Shields (2010) wrote: “a belief that children need to be cured rather than a belief that teachers using multiple pedagogical strategies can help all children to attain high standards.” The comments of these teachers demonstrated deficit thinking. No one interviewed at School B acknowledged deficit thinking or offered ideas on strategies to confront and address deficit thinking.

The presence of deficit thinking at School B was unexpected. The talk about some students being unable to learn and the tracking of students early in their school careers, preventing them from reaching appropriate levels of coursework, clearly indicated the presence of deficit thinking among staff members. While the general school environment was positive and caring for students and the interactions between students and staff members respectful, it was disturbing to this researcher that teachers are not holding high expectations for some students and not believing that some students can succeed. If transformative leadership had been in place at School B, this deficit thinking talk would not be heard, or only in a few isolated instances, and the impact on student learning for these students would be significant.

In order to meet the goal of high levels of learning for all students, school leaders, leaders for learning, must address the issues related to social justice in the schools. Transformative leadership principles, such as developing a school vision for social justice (Kose, 2011),
confronting unjust situations, engaging in dialogue, and addressing unjust situations (Shields, 2010), can provide school leaders with an understanding of the issues and strategies to begin working with the issues at schools. As Astin and Astin (2000) noted: “Consistent with the notion that leadership is concerned with change, we view the ‘leader’ basically as a change agent, i.e., ‘one who fosters change’” (p. 8). School leaders must work to transform schools into places which offer equity and opportunity for all students to learn at high levels.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings in this study and the literature reviewed for the study, a number of recommendations can be made. Both the literature in the field and the case studies informed these recommendations. Recommendations will be presented in three areas: recommendations for practice, recommendations for professional learning, and recommendations for future research.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Given the finding that the role of the principal is fundamental in providing effective leadership for learning in schools (Knapp, Copeland, & Talbert, 2003; Louis et al., 2010; Portin et al., 2003; Wahlstron & Louis, 2008), the job responsibilities of principal need to be rethought by districts and policy makers. Principals need to be able to focus their energy and talent on providing the leadership needed to ensure that all students learn at high levels. The work of today’s principal is complex and challenging. As Tye (2000) wrote: “It’s not easy to be a good principal these days” (p. 57). She notes that today’s principal, in addition to responsibilities related to student learning, must be able to lead, protect others from unimportant tasks, maintain good public relations, resolve conflicts, and work collaboratively with subordinates, colleagues,
and supervisors. Tye (2000) concluded: “And if it’s so difficult to be even a good principal, as defined by these well-established expectations of the role, it’s all but impossible to be that rare creature, a genuinely innovative educational leader” (p. 57).

As this study has indicated, the principal needs to focus considerable time and effort on teaching and learning, as well as the climate and environment of the school in order to positively impact student learning. In addition, principal must be able to focus attention on transformative leadership and supporting social justice work in the school in order to ensure that all students will learn at high levels. Both principals in this study indicated that they generally work 12 to 16 hour days and often other tasks take them away from the important work of leading for learning. Districts need to examine the myriad responsibilities assigned to principals and prioritize the roles assigned to the principal, allowing the principal to focus on the important. Knapp et al. (2010) suggested that the district office personnel could streamline non-instructional matters for principals allowing them to focus on student learning. They wrote: “Absent this kind of operational and crisis-management support, school administrators’ working days were at risk of being consumed by matters that did not necessarily enhance the instructional improvement work of the school” (p. 24). Finding strategies that allow school leaders to focus on learning and the improvement of learning will be important in promoting effective leadership for learning.

In addition, because leadership for learning is not the sole responsibility of the principal, strategies for providing time for others to lead need to be found. The importance of collaboration and shared leadership has been revealed in the literature (e.g., Louis et al., 2010; Marks & Printy, 2003; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008; Murphy et al., 2007). Examples of school leaders working to build collaborative environments and sharing leadership to ensure high levels of learning were shared in this study. Solutions, such as release time for teachers and reduced course loads, may
provide teachers with the time to assist in providing effective leadership for learning. Although economic times have significantly reduced the resources available to schools, looking for innovative solutions that provide time for leadership among staff members will ultimately assist the school in attaining the goal of supporting high levels of learning for all students.

**Recommendations for Professional Learning**

Given that most principal preparation programs did not prepare administrators for the work of leading for learning (Portin et al., 2003; Theoharis, 2007), districts, universities, and state departments of education need to find effective ways to provide current practitioners with the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in the role. Also, school leaders must have time and space to consider transformative leadership and the actions that can lead to social justice in schools. Since the principles of transformative leadership and the related practices are complex, ample time must be devoted to supporting learning for school leaders in this area. Revamping course work, workshops, and other professional learning opportunities will be essential to provide current practitioners with the foundation necessary to lead for learning effectively. In addition, consideration must be given to providing strong job-embedded professional learning, providing principals with new learning and support at the building level. Coaching and mentor are promising alternatives to traditional course work and workshop formats for administrative professional learning.

In addition, pre-service administrator preparation programs must be reworked in order to prepare educators effectively for the work of leading for learning. Although the State of Illinois is currently revamping administrative preparation programs, the new programs need to be analyzed relative to the preparation of future administrators for effective leadership for learning. As pointed out in this study, future administrators need to develop a strong knowledge base,
expertise in instruction, the skills needed for leading for learning, and an understanding of social justice issues and the actions that can ensure equity of opportunity for all. Future administrators need to understand the process of change, the principles of transformative leadership, and the importance of school context in leading and decision making.

Because effective leadership for learning is not the sole responsibility of administrators, professional learning also needs to be provided for teacher leaders (e.g., Knapp et al., 2006; Knapp et al., 2010; Portin et al., 2003). This professional learning needs to prepare teachers and other school leaders to understand how they can provide essential leadership to make sure that all students learn at high levels. Like administrators, teachers need to build expertise in instruction, understand the process of change, and develop leadership skills to make a difference at the school site. It would be extremely important for all teachers to consider issues of social justice and the principles of transformative leadership in order to ensure that all students have equitable opportunity for learning at high levels.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The research process used in this study provided an in-depth examination of leadership for learning guided by the theories and ideas presented in the literature. Although the study provided a strong understanding of leadership practices that can positively impact student learning, it would have been useful to study one case in-depth to fully understand the implications and outcomes of leadership decisions at a school site. In the future, I would consider replicating this study in one site, allowing for more prolonged engagement and the opportunity to observe the impact of specific leadership behaviors. Alternatively, it would also be interesting to widen the scope of the study, and examine a number of schools to find patterns across schools. In
addition, it would be important to have the full cooperation of the building administrator in order to truly understand the leadership practices and their impact on student learning.

Several topics for potential future research became apparent during this study. First, a study to explore better measures of learning would be useful. Many educators interviewed during this study acknowledge that the current measures of student learning do not accurately reflect either the learning gained by students or the learning needed by students for success in the world. For example, participation in extracurricular activities is often correlated to higher levels of learning. Interestingly, while participation in extracurricular activities was clearly valued by the staff at School B, participation rates were never mentioned as a metric of student learning. It would be useful to student alternate measures of student learning in order to best understand what students are learning and what learning is important for students.

Second, this study focused on leadership for learning at the high school level. It would be useful to look at leadership for learning at all levels of schooling, including higher education, to make comparisons relative to the level. While some researchers have completed studies designed to identify the generalizability of leadership across levels and contexts (e.g. Bossert et al., 1982; Heck & Marcoulides, 1990), it would be useful to see the similarities and differences in effective leadership for learning across levels.

Finally, it would be worthwhile to study how the background of the principal influences the leadership for learning at the school. It would be useful to find out if the background experience, education, college or university choice, other experiences outside of education, or other factors have an impact on the leadership style of the principal. In turn, research could determine the impact that the experience and leadership style has on student learning at the schools.
Closing Reflections

Leadership is complex. Although some school reformers would have us believe that with a few simple changes, all would be fixed in schools, it is not the case (e.g., Stoll, 2003). True and fundamental change in our school, change that will finally ensure that all students, regardless of the challenges they face, will be able to learn and learn at high levels, requires bold and courageous leadership. It has become clear to me that transformative leadership is the key to making sure that all students learn. While the principles of leadership for learning are important, and support the learning of students, only the transformative leadership can move a school to a place where all students will learn at high levels. At School B, for example, it seems that transformative leadership is the missing piece in ensuring that all students are afforded the opportunity to learn at high levels.

Not surprisingly, there is no formula for providing meaningful leadership in our schools today. The context, the history, the challenges, and the members of the school community all matter in providing effective leadership for learning that will make sure that all students are learning. But, careful examination of the literature in the field, along with studying leadership practices and their impact on student learning in the field, will support school leaders in providing effective leadership for learning. This study has provided me with a beginning place to understand how leadership can positively impact the learning of all students.

Combining the careful review of the literature available on the subject with the in-depth examination of the principles in action at two school sites has provided me with a rich and deeper understanding of leadership for learning. As with all good learning, however, it has also produced more questions for me than answers. As I work with school leaders—administrators, teachers, staff members, parents, and students—in our schools, I will continue to seek to
understand the leadership behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes that have the best chance to making sure that all students learn, and learn at high levels. This study has confirmed for the critical importance of the principal in providing effective leadership that has the potential to support the learning of all students. The study has helped me understand the absolutely essential need to understand change and how change happens in schools, schools that are often resistant to changes. This study has confirmed for me the importance of collaboration and all adults in a school working on behalf of all students. The study has given me a new perspective on the importance of transformative leadership: leadership that confronts issues of social justice and has the power to ensure that all students are able to learn at high levels. Indeed, transformative leadership may be the only way that schools can ever get to meet the challenge of educating all students at high levels.

It is clear to me that leadership—strong, bold and courageous leadership—is the key to helping all students to learn, and learn at high levels. Transformative leadership, supported by leadership for learning, have the power to ensure that all students will learn at high levels.
References


Appendix A

Staff Survey

Leadership for Learning: Ensuring High Levels of Learning for All Students

Dear School Staff Member:

This letter is written to request your participation in a study for a doctoral dissertation as part of my doctoral program in Educational Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois. As part of this study, I am conducting a staff survey on leadership for learning. Leadership for learning examines roles and actions that school leaders take in order to ensure that student learning is maximized.

My name is Bob Allison. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Illinois and work in a public school district supporting the professional learning of educators. I am extremely interested in understanding the role of the principal and other school leaders in making sure that all students learn. I would appreciate your time in thinking about leadership for learning.

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary, and your choice to participate or not will not impact your position in your school district. Your survey responses will remain completely anonymous. Pseudonyms for the school, district, and participants in the study will be used to respect the confidentiality of all information.

The results of this project will only be used for the purposes of this dissertation and for school improvement. They will not be used for official evaluation purposes of yourself, your team, the school, or me. The anonymous results may be shared with staff at the aggregate level.

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary. You may elect to terminate this survey if at any time you begin to feel uncomfortable about the experience without any penalty or consequence. You may skip any question you do not want to answer. Your decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will have no effect on your grades, status, or future relations with the University of Illinois.

If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact Dr. Carolyn Shields at 217-333-0084. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant of this study, please contact Anne Robertson at BER at 217-333-3023.

Sincerely,

Bob Allison
Doctoral Student
Consent:

I have read the above information and consent to participating in this survey. If you check “no” you will not be able to participate in this survey.

(Yes/No choice buttons)

Directions: This survey will ask about some of the roles and actions that school leaders can take to maximize student learning. The results of this survey will be used, along with other data, to complete the study examining leadership for learning at your school.

The survey will take approximately ten minutes to complete. Your responses will be anonymous. If you would be interested in participating in an interview about this topic, please respond to the prompt at the end of the survey. Thank you in advance for your time.

Please consider each element of leadership for learning presented in the survey. Rate how important this element is to you as an educational practitioner and to what degree this element is in place at your school. There are also two open-ended questions at the end of the survey.

### Element 1: School leaders ensure that there are high standards and learning goals for all students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How important do you feel this element is to student learning?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what degree is this element in place at your school?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Element 2: School leaders ensure that there is a rigorous curriculum in place and that the curriculum is taught in classrooms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How important do you feel this element is to student learning?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what degree is this element in place at your school?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Element 3: School leaders ensure that instruction is of high quality and that effective instructional strategies are used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How important do you feel this element is to student learning?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what degree is this element in place at your school?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To what degree is this element in place at your school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly</td>
<td>Strongly</td>
<td>Somewhat in place</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Element 4: School leaders ensure that assessments are effective and used to guide instruction.

How important do you feel this element is to student learning?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
<td>Not at all important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To what degree is this element in place at your school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly</td>
<td>Strongly</td>
<td>Somewhat in place</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Element 5: School leaders ensure that educators collaborate to meet the learning needs of students.

How important do you feel this element is to student learning?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
<td>Not at all important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To what degree is this element in place at your school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly</td>
<td>Strongly</td>
<td>Somewhat in place</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Element 6: School leaders ensure that resources and operations of the building support student learning.

How important do you feel this element is to student learning?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
<td>Not at all important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To what degree is this element in place at your school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly</td>
<td>Strongly</td>
<td>Somewhat in place</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Element 7: School leaders ensure that there is a shared vision for the school and a focus on student learning.

How important do you feel this element is to student learning?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
<td>Not at all important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To what degree is this element in place at your school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly</td>
<td>Strongly</td>
<td>Somewhat in place</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What actions do school leaders take that have the most positive effect on student learning?

What actions do school leaders take that have a negative effect on student learning?

I am interested in conducting interviews with staff members about leadership for learning to explore ideas more fully. If you are willing to participate in an interview, please complete click the box below. You will then be asked to provide contact information on a separate form. A book, other similar classroom material, or professional book will be donated to the classrooms of participants in interviews. Thank you again for your time.

(Click Box)
Appendix B

Interview Protocol: Administrators

Leadership for Learning: Ensuring High Levels of Learning for All Students

Explanation of Study
- Topic: Leadership for learning
- Case study; examining leadership for learning in this building
- Pseudonym selection and use
- Donation of book to classroom
- Questions?

Obtaining Consent
- Explanation of consent form
- Signature

Tentative Questions:

Tell me a little about yourself and your experience.

What are you most proud of about your school?

Who are the learning leaders in this school? How do you know? What makes them leaders?

What roles and actions do you take as a school leader take to make sure that all students learn?
What evidence do you have that these roles and actions are effective?

What additional roles or actions do you wish you could take?

How do you know that students are learning? What do you do when students are being successful? What do you do when students are not being successful?

What advice would you give to other school leaders about leadership for learning that will have a positive effect on student learning?
Appendix C

Interview Protocol: Teachers

Leadership for Learning: Ensuring High Levels of Learning for All Students

Explanation of Study
- Topic: Leadership for learning
- Case study; examining leadership for learning in this building
- Pseudonym selection and use
- Donation of book to classroom
- Questions?

Obtaining Consent
- Explanation of consent form
- Signature

Tentative Questions:
Tell me a little about yourself and your experience.

What are you most proud of about your school?

Who are the learning leaders in this school? How do you know? What makes them leaders?

What roles and actions should a school leader take in making sure that all students learn?

How do you know that students are learning? What do you do when students are being successful? What do you do when students are not being successful?

What roles and actions do your school leaders take that positively affect student learning?

What other roles or actions do you wish your school leaders would take in order to have a positive effect on student learning?