As a result of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the accountability, annual testing, and demonstrating academic progress of all students has become a major priority of educators throughout the nation. In Ohio, schools are rated based on their students’ performance on state diagnostic and achievement tests (e.g., Local Report Cards). Therefore, school principals and other school personnel are in constant pursuit of learning how to educate students more efficiently. The purpose of this study was to determine the specific practices and leadership emphasis of the principal that are perceived to positively impact student achievement.

Three successful elementary schools were investigated through principal interviews, teacher focus groups, and observations. The schools chosen were each designated as an Ohio School of Promise, meaning each has made great strides
in positive student achievement scores in spite of a low socioeconomic level.

Qualitatively, the study explored the perceptions of the principal’s role in successful schools by answering the following research questions: (a) How does the principal support instruction aligned to the state’s academic content standards? (b) How does the principal maintain continuous improvement of the school? (c) What is the principal’s role in the design of instruction for student success? (d) What is the principal’s role in developing partnerships with parents and the community to support student success? (e) What is the principal’s role in developing a culture where each individual feels valued?

As a result of the data analysis process, 13 themes developed among the three schools (e.g., common planning time, curriculum mapping, and intervention). However, an all-encompassing idea kept reoccurring: The principals were able to create the culture where both adults and students excelled. The principals engaged in activities that created and sustained a sense of belonging for students, teachers, parents, and the communities in which the schools resided. They also successfully provided a clear direction for
students and teachers. These findings are perceived to be a major reason why students are achieving great success at these schools.
WHAT IS THE PRINCIPAL’S ROLE IN SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS?
A STUDY OF OHIO’S SCHOOLS OF PROMISE
AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL

A dissertation submitted to the
Kent State University College and Graduate School
of Education, Health, and Human Services
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Shelly L. Habegger

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A dissertation written by

Shelly L. Habegger

B.S., Ohio Northern University, 1995
M.S., Ashland University, 1998
Ph.D., Kent State University, 2007

Approved by

___________________________, Co-Director, Doctoral
Dr. Mark Kretovics Dissertation Committee

___________________________, Co-Director, Doctoral
Dr. Anita Varrati Dissertation Committee

___________________________, Member, Doctoral Dissertation
Dr. Wendy Sherman Committee

Accepted by

___________________________, Department Chair, Department of
Dr. Kenneth Teitelbaum Teaching, Leadership, and
Curriculum Studies

___________________________, Dean, College and Graduate
Dr. David A. England School of Education, Health,
and Human Services

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As I prepare to walk across the stage to receive my doctorate degree, it only appears that I walk the stride alone. There have been so many individuals that have helped me reach this personal and professional goal. I have been very blessed to be surrounded by very knowledgeable and caring individuals.

First and foremost, I acknowledge my husband, Jeff Habegger, who has been on this journey with me for many years and deserves my undying gratitude. His positive words, silent support, and playful smile kept me on my chosen course. His absolute faith in me continually strengthen my commitment to the dream of achieving my doctorate degree. Thank you Jeff, I love you!

My children have also been on this journey with me. They are too young (Alex age 5 and Abby age 3) to understand the full meaning of my graduation day. They may remember the many times being with good friends and family as I lock myself in the computer room to type. I hope they learn to realize through this process that hard work, passion, and perseverance achieve goals.
Next, I thank my committee of esteemed advisors; Dr. Kretovics, Dr. Anita Varrati, and Dr. Wendy Sherman for their guidance and patience. I have grown tremendously through this process. Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to the principals and teachers of the research study. It is their relentless desire, energy, and love for the children and the community they serve that should be commended. I only researched their actions and thoughts; they live it everyday. Thanks for giving us in education hope and encouragement in this challenging educational society.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Education is undergoing a quality revolution (Noguera, 2004; Perkins-Gough, 2004). The policy environment in education has changed from compliance accountability to performance accountability. Moreover, consequences are attached to failure in response to these policies. These consequences range from moderate inconveniences to high stakes that impact the professional and personal lives of educational practitioners and students alike. Reputations, job security, financial disincentives, public scrutiny, opportunities for advancement, and various levels of corrective action hinge on the quality of performance as measured by student achievement outcomes on standardized tests. The emphasis on performance accountability has the overall potential to impact public education in general.

The high-stakes, performance accountability movement in education is a response to broader, external market forces that are designed to break down traditional practices and drive quality improvement. Likewise, the
performance accountability forces that shape today’s educational policy arena form the external market forces to which local education systems must respond internally if they are to succeed and thrive. Therefore, districts and schools are faced with an urgent need to understand the implications of external accountability for school reform and to implement processes for school reform that mobilize, manage, and sustain continuous improvement of performance outcomes (Schmoker, 1999).

Some schools are demonstrating success by means of performance outcomes and school reform efforts, although many schools are still struggling to meet minimal educational standards and goals. This study explores what three successful schools are doing to positively impact student achievement. However, before tackling any problem, one must understand the basis for the problem and those involved in the process. Therefore, this section highlights major studies showing problems with American education, explains the increasing role of the federal government in education, shows the current status of education in Ohio, and shares how successful schools are “beating the odds.”
The Problem: Statement and Significance

Major Studies Showing Problems in American Education

The National Commission Excellence in Education (1983) published the landmark report *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* that focused on ways to restore America’s competitive edge on international business and national defense. The National Commission Excellence in Education findings indicated that the average achievement test scores were lower than in 1957; Standardized Admissions Test (SAT) scores were in continual decline; remedial math classes in college increased 75%; half the teachers that taught math and science were not qualified in that subject area; in comparison to other industrial nations on 19 academic achievement tests, U.S. students never scored first or second and even scored last seven times. The report recommended critical changes, national assessments and high standards, choice and competition in public schools, rigorous tests for teachers, and order and discipline in the schools.

The Third International Mathematics and Science Study (1995) was the largest, most comprehensive study done for an international comparison of education. The study tested knowledge of half a million students at three different
grade levels in 41 countries. The general results indicated that the U.S. students performed high in fourth grade but fell to low levels in math and science by high school. The Third International Mathematics and Science Study findings indicated that the United States’ education system has created no mechanism at the federal level for developing and enforcing uniform standards of education throughout the country; teacher training occurs primarily in the university classrooms; in poor communities, broken families were most frequently blamed for low achievement, whereas in more affluent areas family support for school was cited as a main factor; homework is done in school and simply represents work that teachers expect to be done before the next class meeting; and students demonstrate a limited repertoire of strategies for studying and are not prepared to do academic work other than short assignments.

Federal Government Increasing Role in Education

The United States Constitution was designed to limit the role of the central government in education, and the states were allowed to give local control to the communities through local school boards (Nelson, Carlson, & Palonsky, 2002). However, in 1965, the federal government began to take a more active role in education with the
enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The ESEA required that new state administrative offices monitor the compliance of the local districts. The focus was to engage in research and development of programs for teaching economically disadvantaged children and to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs. The largest of these federal programs was Title I which provided federal funds to all districts that had children of poverty (Odden & Odden, 1995).

At an education summit held in 1989, President George H. W. Bush and the 50 state governors agreed upon six national education goals for the United States to achieve by the year 2000. In 1992, the National Council of Education Standards and Testing (NCEST) advocated for national curriculum standards and examinations. The general results set an emerging focus in (a) clear student-learning goals, (b) a high-quality curriculum, (c) site-based management with teachers involved in decisions about curriculum and implementation of programs, (d) monitoring system with standards to indicate objectives and mastery, and (e) accountability with real rewards and sanctions (McCarty, n.d.).
In 1994, President Clinton and the state governors added two more goals to the previous President Bush and governing board’s national educational goals. Congress codified The Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Goals 2000 set a national focus on improving teaching, schools, and student performance. These goals included the following: all children will start school ready to learn; the national high school graduation rate will increase to 90%; competency will be demonstrated on challenging core subjects; science and mathematics achievement will be first in the world; schools will be safe and drug free; teaching force will improve professional skills; partnerships and parental involvement will be increased (Paris, 1994).

This leads us to the most current piece of legislation on every educator’s mind, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Three days after taking office, President George W. Bush announced the NCLB framework, which was a bipartisan educational plan. NCLB has increased the federal control of standards, assessment, teacher credentialing, and parental choice (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). The state and local agencies that use federal education dollars face increased control by the federal government on performance standards, adequate yearly progress (AYP),
challenges to methodology and practicality of state and local implementation (Linn, Baker, & Betebenner, 2002).

The "Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)" provision of NCLB set a new standard for defining success. Schools are expected to meet clearly defined goals for teaching all students to state standards. AYP goals and definitions are by each state according to their academic assessments. Test scores are broken out into subgroups of students (e.g., race and ethnicity, students with disabilities); therefore, schools, parents, and teachers know the academic achievement of each group of students and are expected to work to close the achievement gap and ensure that no child will be left behind. AYP refers to the growth needed in the percentage of students who achieve the state’s definition of academic proficiency. The accountability and annual testing of all students, reporting annual statewide progress objectives and proficiency by factors of poverty, ethnicity, disability and limited English proficiency has created a major focus on testing and test results among all states dependent on federal financial support (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

The terminology is derived from the NCLB Act, which requires schools to make AYP or face sanctions. The
students who are of most concern to districts make up some of NCLB’s subgroups (e.g., Students with Disabilities). Christie (2004) explained schools have often reflected a long tradition of maintaining different expectations for key subgroups of students; for example, students with disabilities who by definition have disabilities that interfere with their learning. However, states must show AYP towards meeting the ultimate NCLB goal of all students reaching proficiency in reading and mathematics by the school year 2013-2014. Student achievement tests are reporting that many schools are not meeting AYP goals for certain subgroups. Schools are aggressively looking into ways to improve instructional practices and provide access to the curriculum that are necessary to improve the achievement of these special populations (Christie, 2004; Folkerth, 2006).

Current Status of Education in Ohio

The Ohio Department of Education measures student achievement by means of standardized tests. Therefore, this section explains how Ohio schools are doing against its own measure of student achievement. The state of Ohio is in its fourth year of its new accountability system, which measures current achievement of students in terms of
improvement, and incorporates the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Ohio Department of Education (2005d) shows Ohio schools made important strides in achievement in the 2004-2005 school year. Overall, the state’s performance index (a scale for comparing student performance from year to year) was higher in 2004-2005 than ever before. The performance index has increased by more than 17 points (from 73.7 to 90.8) in six years indicating that Ohio’s students, on average, are making significant academic progress. Nearly 96% of Ohio districts earned Excellent, Effective, or Continuous Improvement designations (583 out of 609). Over the past three years, the number of districts in Academic Watch and Academic Emergency has decreased from 68 to 26. Table 1 shows how many districts earned which state designation. Individual school buildings also receive a designation separate from its district overall rating. Table 1 shows the number of individual school buildings in each designation.

Although Ohio’s students are generally scoring higher on proficiency exams, there are reasons to be concerned. According to the 2004-2005 Local Report Card results (Ohio Department of Education, 2005), there are 527 schools (out
Table 1

Number of Districts and Individual School Buildings in Each Designation

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Individual School Buildings

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Emergency</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>222</td>
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of 3,514) designated as being in Academic Watch or Academic Emergency. There is also evidence that children from low-income communities, children from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds, children whose first language is not English, and children who receive special education services are achieving at much lower rates than the general population. For example, in the 2004-2005 academic year,
only 37% of African-American children demonstrated proficiency on Ohio’s sixth-grade mathematics proficiency test compared to 72% of White children. The dropout rate for Hispanic children, Black children, and children from low-income communities is double and in some cases triple the rate for White children and children from more affluent communities. At every level of the education system, substantial gaps in achievement persist among diverse student groups (Ohio Department of Education, 2005).

Successful Schools "Beating the Odds"

Although these gaps in achievement are prevalent, they are not evident in all schools. Ohio has 113 schools that are getting very different results with the children they serve. In these 113 schools, at least 40% of the students meet federal low-income criteria. However, high percentages of the students in these schools have demonstrated proficiency in reading and/or mathematics. In addition, high percentages of each demographic student group in these schools achieve proficiency in reading or mathematics. For this reason, these schools have been recognized as the State Superintendent’s Schools of Promise (Schools of Promise, 2003).
Schools of Promise must deal with the traditional limitations and barriers to student learning that many urban and rural school districts face: poverty, fewer resources (both material and human), students whose primary language is not English, parents having less than a high school education, and a disproportionately high number of under-qualified teachers (Chima, 2004; Cresswell, 2004; Schools of Promise, 2003). So what is different about this small population of schools where students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds and minority cultures are achieving success academically?

Since the inception of the Schools of Promise (2003) program in 2002, a number of insights have emerged to provide a better understanding of the conditions that produce successful schools. The conditions for teaching and learning evidenced in these schools are summarized in the following five themes: delivering rigorous standards-based instruction; providing strong leadership around improved instruction; designing instruction to ensure student success; engaging parents and the community to support students; and creating a positive school culture. The Review of Literature included in this study expands upon
the research conducted in Ohio along with national studies in regards to each theme.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to determine the specific practices and leadership emphasis of principals that are perceived to impact student achievement positively. A case study approach examined three successful schools making noteworthy increases in student achievement. For this study, “successful” schools are operationally defined as Schools of Promise, as established by the Ohio Department of Education. These schools are displaying great strides in positive student achievement scores in spite of a low socioeconomic level.

Research Question

This study explored the perceptions of the principal’s role in successful schools by answering the following research questions:

1. How does the principal support instruction aligned to the state's academic content standards?

2. How does the principal maintain continuous improvement of the school?

3. What is the principal's role in the design of instruction for student's success?
4. What is the principal's role in developing partnerships with parents and the community to support student success?

5. What is the principal's role in developing a culture where each individual feels valued?

Significance of the Study

Current reform policy, based on the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, requires that a school meet the needs of its entire population. Therefore, it is critical that educators review and continue to assess the preexisting data and research on school reform to determine its relevancy in an ever-changing and increasingly complex institution.

In the literature (Fullan, 1992, 1999, 2001; Rust & Freidus, 2001), discussion of the characteristics of effective schools generally focuses on leadership as the leading factor or catalyst for school reform. Thus, it is crucial to understand the variables that directly impact high-performing schools so that leaders can be trained and prepared effectively to focus on the primary factors needed to produce student achievement results. The role of the school-based administrator, like the role of schools, is perpetually changing and increasingly challenging:
therefore, improved leadership is critical to improved student achievement. As Creemers et al. (1998) stated, an important goal is to identify through educational research those factors that lead to improved student achievement so that, in turn, schools can be changed to optimize the factors that will enhance the performance of their students (Creemers et al.).

In the search for school reform and improvement efforts, a plethora of research studies have been conducted and publications written. However, as previously shown on Table 1, many schools are still struggling to meet minimum Ohio Academic Content Standards. Fullan (1999) affirmed the main problem with educational systems, corresponding innovation, and policymaking is that they are intrinsically, endemically, inevitably overloaded and fragmented. As a result, educators experience overload, fragmentation, and profound confusion about the meaning of educational reform and improvement. Fullan explained the solutions to this confusion need to be ones that contribute to “coherence making” and “connectedness.” This study desires to offer coherence making and connectedness by exploring a few essential components found in successful schools with the purpose of defining the principal’s role
in developing these essential components. The aim of this study is to learn how these principals turn what they know into action for the academic benefit of their students.

Assumptions

The assumptions for this study are (a) all Schools of Promise are considered successful based on current policy by the Ohio Department of Education and the United States Department of Education, and (b) the principals and teachers were willing to participate in the study and were truthful regarding their responses.

Delimitations

The fact that only schools in the state of Ohio were included is a delimitation of this study.

Definitions of Terms

Certain terms used in this study may be subject to various interpretations. The following terms are defined specific to the purposes of this study:

Achievement Gaps—The variations in the extent to which different demographic groups of students demonstrate proficiency on the academic standards established by the State Board of Education.

Academic Content Standards—Statements that describe what all students should know and be able to do in various
subject areas at various points in their educational careers. The State Board of Education has adopted academic content standards in mathematics, English/language arts, science, social studies, technology, fine arts, and foreign languages.

**Accountability System**—A system of reporting, rewards, and sanctions designed to motivate better academic results.

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)**—Each state sets its own definition of AYP based primarily on the state’s academic assessments. Test scores will be broken out into subgroups of students (e.g., race and ethnicity); therefore, schools, parents, and teachers will know the academic achievement of each group of students and can work to close the achievement gap and ensure that no child will be left behind. AYP refers to the growth needed in the percentage of students who achieve the state’s definition of academic proficiency.

**Standards-Based Education**—An academic program in which clearly defined academic content, performance, and operating standards are aligned. A standards-based education spells out what educators, schools, and communities need to do to ensure achievement of expectations.
Benchmarks—Benchmarks are key checkpoints that monitor student progress towards meeting the academic content standard. Benchmarks are organized in grade-level bands or clusters, for example, K-3, 4-7, 8-10, 11-12.

Grade-Level Indicators—Specific statements of what all students should know and be able to do at each grade-level. These indicators serve as checkpoints for monitoring progress towards the benchmarks and standards.

Curriculum Mapping—A technique for visually exploring and representing what is taught, how instruction occurs, and when instruction is delivered. This can be done electronically, facilitating collaboration among teachers, grade levels and schools.

Formal Assessments—IQ tests and Ohio Achievement Tests are examples of a formal assessment. A formal assessment involves standardized administration and that has norms and a formal interpretive procedures. These tests have been tried before on students and have statistics which to support the conclusions. Scores such as percentiles, stanines, or standard scores are most commonly given from this type of assessment.

Informal assessments—Informal assessments are content and performance driven. The test designers choose their
test and/or measure to assess a student’s abilities against some criteria or set of criteria. For example, a teacher might use chapter tests and accuracy criteria—say four out of five correct—to decide whether to reteach parts of the chapter or move on to the next. Teacher observation, student projects, and running records are also examples of informal assessments.

Organization of the Study

This study, the principal’s role in successful schools, is organized in the following manner: Chapter 1 provides a basic framework for the study that includes the introduction, rationale for the study, statement of the problem and research questions. Chapter 2 presents a selected review of the related literature. Chapter 3 describes the research procedures and methodology of the study. Chapter 4 contains an analysis of the data and the findings of the study. Chapter 5 summarizes the data and presents conclusions and recommendations resulting from the study. The study concludes with a bibliography and relevant appendices.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Results, results, and results: these are the three new R’s driving education in the 21st century. The results of tests on students declare the level of student achievement obtained. Student achievement results guide the curricular program. Also, student achievement results make schools publicly accountable for the quality of their educational programs. Words such as “accountability,” “student achievement,” and “testing” are part of educators’ everyday language.

Today, 49 states have statewide academic standards. Fifty states test how well their students are learning, 27 hold schools accountable for results, and 23 states require or are in the process of requiring a high school exit exam as a graduation component (ed.gov., 2004). Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCBL) any state receiving Title I funding is required to adopt statewide academic standards and test student performance against them. The intent is for states to develop rigorous academic
standards, which will drive curriculum, which, in turn, will drive instruction. States conduct annual statewide assessments aligned with their curricula to provide external, independent measures for what is going on in the classroom, and also to identify students who require extra help (ed.gov., 2004).

The review of literature is comprised of two sections. The first section explains the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and its impact on education, Ohio’s response to NCLB through its accountability system, the current achievement and achievement gaps in Ohio, and one way Ohio is trying to combat achievement gaps through the Schools of Promise program. The second section creates a framework of practice built on each of the five lessons learned from Ohio’s Schools of Promise, current research, and literature.

Section I: No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is a landmark in educational reform designed to improve student achievement and change the culture of America’s schools. As President George W. Bush signed the groundbreaking legislation on January 8, 2002, he described this law as the “cornerstone of his administration.” Clearly, our
children are our future, and, as President Bush expressed, “Too many of our neediest children are being left behind” (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

The U.S. Department of Education (2005) explained that The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was enacted in 1965 to provide guidance and funds to K-12 schools. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is the latest revision of ESEA. The new law reflected an unprecedented, bipartisan commitment to ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, receive a quality education. It is built on four common-sense pillars of (a) accountability for results, (b) more choices for parents and students, (c) greater flexibility for states and school districts, and (d) the use of research-based instructional methods.

NCLB represents a sweeping overhaul of a federal effort to support elementary and secondary education. States, school districts, and schools are still doing the hard work of implementing NCLB. Under the pillar of “accountability for results,” states are working to close the achievement gap and make sure all students, especially those who are disadvantaged, achieve academic proficiency. Annual state and school district report cards inform parents and communities about state and school progress.
Schools that do not make progress must provide supplemental services, such as free tutoring or after-school assistance to students, and take corrective actions. If adequate yearly progress is not made after five years, these schools must make dramatic changes. The Center for School Finance and Office of Federal Programs (2004) listed some of those possible dramatic changes as: offer public school choice, replace staff relevant to the failure, notify parents of failure, offer supplemental educational services, and replace superintendent and school board.

Under the pillar of “greater flexibility for states and school districts,” states and school districts have unprecedented flexibility in how they use federal education funds. For example, it is possible for most school districts to transfer up to 50% of the federal formula grant funds they receive under the Improving Teacher Quality Grants, Educational Technology, Innovative Programs, and Safe and Drug-Free Schools programs to any one of these programs, or to their Title I program, without separate approval. This allows districts to use funds for their particular needs, such as hiring new teachers, increasing teacher pay, and improving teacher training and professional development (NCLB, 2002).
The pillar of “more choices for parents and students” presents parents of children in low-performing schools with new options. In schools that do not meet state standards for at least two consecutive years, parents may transfer their children to a better-performing public school, including a public charter school, within their district. The district must provide transportation, using Title I funds if necessary. Students from low-income families in schools that fail to meet state standards for at least three years are eligible to receive supplemental educational services, including tutoring, after-school services, and summer school. Also, students who attend a persistently dangerous school or who become victims of a violent crime while in school have the option to attend a safer school within their district (NCLB, 2002).

The final pillar of “the use of research-based instructional methods” puts emphasis on determining which educational programs and practices have been proven effective through rigorous scientific research. Federal funding is targeted to support these programs and teaching methods that work to improve student learning and achievement. In reading, for example, NCLB supports scientifically based instruction programs in the early
grades under the Reading First program and in preschool under the Early Reading First program (NCLB, 2002).

One can quickly see what an overwhelming and ambitious piece of legislation NCLB represents. Whereas educators, legislators, and the general public embrace the goals of higher standards, improved teacher quality, and school improvement, not all educators and parents agree with all the components of NCLB. There seem to be four major areas of contention regarding the implementation of NCLB. Nichols and Berliner (2007) presented the first area of contention; as NCLB focuses on punishment rather than assistance, they proclaimed the punitive measures accompanying NCLB testing are destroying American public schools. NCLB treats a school that falls just a bit short on one of the 37 required criteria the same way as a school that fails to meet all 37 criteria. Kohn (2004a) emphasized the assumption that achievement is all that counts overlooks the research suggesting that a focus on how well one is doing is very different from a focus on what one is doing. Moreover, a preoccupation with performance often undermines interest in learning, quality of learning, and a desire to be challenged (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Kohn, 1999, 2004b; Nicholas & Berliner, 2007).
The second area of contention regarding NCLB is unfunded mandates. On April 20, 2005, a diverse network of school districts, the National Education Association (2005), and several state education associations filed the first-ever national lawsuit against the Bush Administration to recover the costs of implementing the administration’s own rules and regulations under the NCLB law. Detractors believe NCLB requires rigid, unfunded mandates rather than support for proven practices. The National Education Association reported that since the law’s enactment in 2002, there has been a $27 billion funding shortfall in what Congress was supposed to provide schools to meet NCLB regulations. Cost studies in Ohio estimate the price of the regulations to state taxpayers could run as high as $1.5 billion.

The third area of contention regarding NCLB is the unrealistic expectations forced upon an already disadvantaged group of students. The critics of NCLB admit the law’s aims are worthy. Unfortunately, its approach to school accountability is overly rigid, punitive, unscientific, and likely to do more harm than good for the students who are now being left behind (Crawford, 2004; Kohn, 2004b; Wasta, 2006). Kohn (2004a) described the
achievement scores for students of color, English Language Learners, and students not affluent in the context of NCLB as “nothing short of an educational ethnic cleansing of America” (p. 2).

Crawford (2004) stated that nowhere is this more evident than in the case of English Language Learners (ELLs). To succeed in school, ELLs must master academic knowledge and skills at the same time they are acquiring a second language. This is not an easy task. Research has shown that students in bilingual and English as second language (ESL) programs require four to seven years to achieve grade-level academic performance in English (Collier & Thomas, 1989; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). Nor is it a simple matter to monitor their progress, because existing assessment tools are generally unable to separate language errors from academic error (Hakuta, 2001). A provision of NCLB allowing states to test ELLs in their native language for up to three years (or five years on a case-by-case basis) appears to add a measure of flexibility to the system. However, Crawford (2004) and August and Hakuta (1997) agreed when measuring the progress of ELLs, little confidence can be placed in tests that assume a mastery of English skills and that were never designed with
ELLs in mind. Crawford (2004) continued to point out that the law does little to address the most formidable obstacles to student achievement: resource inequities, critical shortages of teachers trained to serve ELLs, inadequate instruction materials, substandard school facilities, and poorly designed instructional programs. Meanwhile, its emphasis on short-term test results—backed up by punitive sanctions for schools—is narrowing the curriculum, encouraging excessive amounts of test preparation, undercutting best practices based on scientific research, demoralizing dedicated educators, and pressuring schools to abandon programs that have proven successful for ELLs over the long term.

Wasta (2006) discussed the unrealistic expectations NCLB has for students with disabilities. NCLB requires that all disabled students eventually demonstrate proficient academic performance. This expectation assumes that the state of the art in special education is such that special educators know how to make students who are severely learning disabled into students who are proficient. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Wasta pointed out that if a special education student achieves proficiency, he or she is no longer classified as disabled. Therefore, how
could special education students as a group ever be proficient when the successful ones are removed from the group? Wasta agreed the NCLB assumes correctly that disabled students can learn. However, the yardstick that NCLB forces districts to use to demonstrate these students’ learning goes to the core of most disabilities: verbal skills, as embodied in standardized tests.

This leads to the fourth area of contention regarding NCLB: its perceived focus on bureaucracy and standardized testing rather than on teacher-led, classroom-focused solutions. Accountability is determined through a single standardized test. The results of the test determine the percentage of the students who are proficient. Growth or value models are not part of the reporting process at this time.

Ohio, along with some other states, is hoping that by incorporating a growth standard into the assessment analysis, some of the unintended consequences of NCLB will be mitigated. The Ohio Department of Education and Chester (2006) described Ohio’s plan for piloting a value-added measurement beginning with the school year 2007-2008. The goal of value-added analysis is to show a more accurate picture of student growth by taking into account students’
academic starting points and comparing those to their current achievement. Using this growth metric, schools and districts receive valuable diagnostic information that will help determine the impact of their curriculum and instructional practices on student achievement. Sanders (2003) described a value-added statistical method that can be applied to already existing data collected from the NCLB-required assessments of grades 3-8.

We must remember that as a landmark in educational reform, NCLB will have its critics and areas needing refinement. Yet even as states and school districts continue the hard work of implementing NCLB, the early results are promising. The U.S. Department of Education (2005) boasted that recent studies of state achievement data show reading and mathematics scores are up in most states, and achievement gaps among racial and ethnic groups have begun to narrow. Nationwide, more schools have met the state-set achievement goals (“adequate yearly progress” or “AYP”) in the 2003-04 school year than in the previous year.

The Ohio Department of Education (2005d) reported Ohio is also seeing positive strides in student achievement. Students’ scores continue to rise every year. Over the past
six years, the average of all students’ scores on state tests increased from 73.7 to 90.8, a 17-point increase.
Growth is also seen in the achievement of various groups of students. Over the past four years, the gap between Black and White students in sixth-grade reading decreased by 11.9 points (39.4 to 27.5). Over the same time period, the gap between Hispanics and White students diminished by 6.9 points. On the Ohio Graduation Tests, all groups of students made significant gains, with Black and Hispanic students showing the greatest improvements. In mathematics, Black students improved by 18.6 points over the last year, whereas Hispanic students improved by 17.1 points. In reading, Black and Hispanic students improved by 22.9 and 20.3 points respectively.

Ohio’s Accountability System

Ohio was already making significant education reforms on its own while NCLB was being created. Ohio’s accountability system has been using a report card format since the 1996-1997 school year. The report card conveys school results on multiple measures of state proficiency and achievement scores at predetermined grade levels, attendance rates, and graduation rates. With this descriptive data, school districts can create appropriate

1. The use of multiple measures: The Performance Index and Growth Calculations recognize the achievement levels for students as well as progress over time;
2. Five designations for school districts, school buildings and community schools: Excellent, Effective, Continuous Improvement, Academic Watch, or Academic Emergency;
3. More timely results for families, schools and school districts: Results are published before the start of the next school year;
4. Recognition and consequences for schools that do not show improvement; and
5. Accountability for various groups of students, including: economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial and ethnic groups,
students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency.

The State and Local Report Cards show the progress of a district, individual school buildings, and community schools in up to four ways through State Indicators, Performance Index, Growth Calculations, and Adequate Yearly Progress. The first measure of State Indicators applies to all five designations—Excellent, Effective, Continuous Improvement, Academic Watch, or Academic Emergency—that are earned by school districts and individual school buildings each year. The state has established 18 indicators for student performance. Sixteen of the indicators address performance on state proficiency tests. The other two indicators are attendance and graduation rates. Schools and districts that meet more indicators can earn higher designations. The State Indicators component answers the question, “How many goals/indicators did a district or individual schools achieve this year?”

The second measure of the Performance Index applies to all five designations and is earned each year. This measure rewards the achievement of every tested student, not just those who score at a proficient level or higher. Schools and districts earn points based on how well each student
does on all tested subjects in grades 3, 4, and 6. The achievement test has five performance levels with point values attached to them: Advanced (1.2), Accelerated (1.1), Proficient (1.0), Basic (0.6), and Below Basic/Limited (0.3). All points earned by a school or school district are averaged and multiplied by 100 to generate a school and district index. Higher designations are given to schools and districts with higher index scores. The Performance Index answers the question, “How well did students do on the state tests this year?”

The third measure, Growth Calculations, applies only to those districts and schools designated by Academic Watch and Academic Emergency, acknowledging those schools or districts that have made strong improvement. A school or district improving its Performance Index by at least 10 points over two years can move up one designation, but no higher than Continuous Improvement. The index score has to have increased in each of the previous two years, and the most recent index score must be at least three points higher than the previous year. The Growth Calculation answers the question, “How much improvement did a school district designated as under Academic Watch or Academic Emergency make this past school year?”
The fourth measure of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) applies to every school and district. An Excellent or Effective district or school that does not meet AYP has two years to meet AYP, or its designation will be lowered. This measure rewards the achievement of all demographic groups in a school district. Federal AYP requirements identify a series of standards that each school and district must reach, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Goals for 2003-2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Percentage * Proficient or above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OGT</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>52.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graduation 73.6 or improvement over last year
Attendance 93.0 or improvement over last year

*Based on a formula prescribed by federal law
Two of the standards are targets for the percentage of students who must score at a proficient or above level in reading and mathematics. Another two standards are the requirement of at least 96% participation of enrolled students in both reading and mathematics testing. These four standards are applied to each school and district, as well as to each of 10 different student groups within a school and district. The 10 student groups are: All Students, Native American, Hispanic, White, Limited English Proficient, African-American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Multi-Racial, Economically Disadvantaged, and Students With Disabilities. Schools and districts must also meet targets for attendance and graduation rates. Failure to meet any of the individual standards, attendance levels, and/or graduation targets results in the school or district not achieving AYP. Thus, the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standard answers the question, “Did every student group in a school district or building meet the annual goal in reading and mathematics? If not, which groups did not meet the goal and in which subject(s)?”

As previously mentioned, Ohio does have implementation plans for a value-added analysis to be included as a means to measure a school and a district’s progress. The
projected school year for its implementation is 2007-2008 (Ohio Department of Education, 2006; Ohio Department of Education & Chester, 2006; Sanders, 2003). Figure 1 provides a visual graph of the multiple ways a school building/district can earn a state designation under the current system.

**Report Card Criteria:**
**Multiple Ways of Earning Designations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existing Ohio Report Card Indicators</th>
<th>Performance Index Score</th>
<th>Growth Calculation</th>
<th>Federal AYP Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94% to 100% (17 or 18 for districts)</td>
<td>or</td>
<td>100 to 120</td>
<td>and Met AYP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94% to 100% (17 or 18 for districts)</td>
<td>or</td>
<td>100 to 120</td>
<td>and Missed AYP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75% to 93.9% (14 to 16 for districts)</td>
<td>or</td>
<td>90 to 99.9</td>
<td>and Met AYP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75% to 93.9% (14 to 16 for districts)</td>
<td>or</td>
<td>90 to 99.9</td>
<td>and Missed AYP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous Improvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0% to 74.9% (0 to 13 for districts)</td>
<td>and</td>
<td>0 to 89.9</td>
<td>and Met AYP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51% to 74.9% (0 to 13 for districts)</td>
<td>or</td>
<td>80 to 89.9 or 90</td>
<td>and Missed AYP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Watch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31% to 49.9% (0 to 8 for districts)</td>
<td>or</td>
<td>70 to 79.9</td>
<td>and Missed AYP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Emergency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and Missed AYP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0% to 31.9% (0 to 3 for districts)</td>
<td>and</td>
<td>0 to 69.9</td>
<td>and Missed AYP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shaded rows identify school buildings and districts that missed the AYP standard. Non-shaded rows identify those that met the AYP standard.

* Can miss AYP and earn Excellent or Effective designation for up to two years – third year missing AYP, designation drops to Continuous Improvement.

** Temporary growth calculation sunsets once value-added measure is implemented.

*Figure 1. Multiple Ways of Earning State Designations (Ohio Department of Education, 2003)*
Report Card Data (2004) provided data on school districts and school buildings in respect to their current state designation. Table 3 shows district trends in the past seven years in regard to state designations. Table 4 shows the number of rated school buildings in each designated category for the 2004-2005 school year.

How does the state of Ohio compare to the other states? Educational Week (2006), through their Quality Counts report, examined the state of state educational policymaking using a unique combination of original state data and in-depth journalistic case studies. One of the areas examined was “Standards and Accountability.” Ohio received an overall score of A-. The indicators include (a) standards development of core academic areas, (b) assessments aligned with state content standards, (c) assessments that go beyond multiple choice items, (d) report cards provided for schools, (e) assistance or imposed sanctions for low-performing schools, (f) rewards for high-performing schools, (g) participation by state in most recent cycle of National Assessment of Educational Progress, (h) student promotion contingent on performance on statewide exams, and (i) high school graduation
### Table 3

**District Trends in State Designated Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Continuous Improvement</th>
<th>Academic Watch</th>
<th>Academic Emergency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998-1999</td>
<td>NA*</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>NA*</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Excellent designation was not used at this time*
Table 4

*Number of School Buildings in Each Designation for the 2004-2005 School Year*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designations</th>
<th>Number of School Buildings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>1,136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous Improvement</td>
<td>962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Watch</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Emergency</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

contingent on performance on statewide exit exam. Ten other states received an A score, 23 states received a B, 12 states received a C, 4 states a D, and 1 state (Iowa) received a failing score.

As required by NCLB, all states must provide report cards for each of its schools, assign ratings to each school, and base these ratings according to the school’s adequate yearly progress (AYP); Educational Week (2006) reported all states are in compliance with these requirements. Ohio is one of 23 states to incorporate additional state-developed criteria when assigning a rating to a school. The beginning of this section details Ohio’s
accountability plan that includes how a rating is assigned to a school. Educational Week (2006) also found 37 states offer assistance to all of their low-performing schools. But only 28 states impose sanctions on all low-performing schools. Ohio offers both assistance and sanctions to their low-performing schools.

Achievement Gap

From Ohio’s experience with accountability reporting and implementation of the NCLB legislation, it has discovered that tens of thousands of students are not learning academic skills essential for success in the technologically advanced, economically competitive 21st century. Out of the 3,504 Ohio schools rated during the 2004-2005 school year, 527 school buildings fell into the category of Academic Watch or Academic Emergency (Report Card Data, 2004). From these results, 15% of Ohio schools are struggling to meet the standards.

Surely, there will always be differences in the achievement levels of individual students, but groups as a whole (e.g., Hispanics, African Americans) should not be struggling. The Closing Achievement Gaps Task Force (2003) declares there is no justification for patterns of differences in achievement among various demographic groups.
of students. These patterns are often called “achievement gaps.” Achievement gaps are variations in the extent to which different demographic groups of students demonstrate proficiency on academic standards (Carpenter, Ramirez, & Severn, 2006; Gordon, 2004; Orfield et al., 2000). An important provision of NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2005) requires states to publish achievement results separately for racial and ethnic groups and work to alleviate intergroup disparities. Also, schools have to demonstrate positive results for all groups of students in order to achieve high ratings. Thus, for the first time in the nation’s history, raising achievement levels among racial and ethnic minorities and closing the achievement gaps are explicit goals of federal policy.

In Ohio, gaps are seen in academic achievement based on race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, disability, and limited English proficiency. The Ohio State Board of Education established the goal that by 2005, Ohio would lead the nation in improving student performance, especially in closing achievement gaps among students (Closing Achievement Gaps Task Force, 2003).

In October 2002, The Ohio State Board of Education established a task force to study the achievement gaps in
Ohio and make recommendations to close and ultimately eliminate those gaps. The task force produced a report (Closing Achievement Gaps Task Force, 2003) detailing membership, goals, statistics, and recommendations. A 27-member task force of educators, parents, business leaders, community leaders, and policy leaders determined the attainment of high achievement for all students in Ohio is a reachable goal. Schools in Ohio are making remarkable progress towards this goal. For example, there are more than 50 Ohio schools in which 75% or more of each racial and ethnic group of students demonstrate proficiency in either reading or mathematics on the Ohio Proficiency Tests. These schools prove that achievement gaps are not ability gaps. All students can be taught to achieve Ohio’s state standards. On the other hand, the task force found that Ohio has much to do to close achievement gaps. At the sixth-grade level, only one in four African American students demonstrated proficiency in reading, compared to two out of three White students. In Ohio elementary schools, for every 10 percentage points the poverty level of the school increases, achievement in reading decreases by 5.6 percentage points. In the class of 2007 (the first class required to pass the rigorous Ohio Graduation Test),
only 11% of African American students passed all sections of the Ohio Proficiency Test in 2000-2001.

The task force made 23 recommendations for action that can help eliminate gaps in Ohio (see Appendix A for all 23 recommendations). For the purpose of this study, Recommendation #5 is highlighted: Build upon the success of Ohio schools that are closing achievement gaps and generating high achievement for all students.

_Schools of Promise_

The State Superintendent’s Schools of Promise recognition program fulfills recommendation #5 of the Closing the Achievement Gap Task Force, which involves building upon the success of Ohio schools that are generating high achievement for all students. The task force suggested the Ohio Department of Education establish an annual recognition program for schools and school districts so that other school districts have opportunities to learn about the programs, best practices, and policies of successful schools (Closing Achievement Gaps Task Force, 2003). State Superintendent of Public Instruction Susan Tave Zelman (Schools of Promise, 2003) stated:

Many people actually believe that because you’re poor, because you’re black, because you’re Hispanic that you
can’t succeed. This isn’t so. These schools provide the hope—and the promise—that despite the economic, racial or ethnic backgrounds of students and the communities where they live, these students can succeed. Schools of Promise send a message to students, teachers and families across Ohio that demographics don’t define academic success.

The 2004-2005 school year marks the fourth year of the Schools of Promise program, which recognizes elementary, middle, and high schools across Ohio for demonstrating high achievement for all groups of students. Of the 113 schools recognized during the 2004-2005 school year, 38 are in Appalachian counties and 30 are city schools, including the major urban centers of Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus, and Toledo. Cuyahoga County and Hamilton counties lead the state with 10 Schools of Promise each; Franklin County has 8 and Jefferson County has 7.

Approximately 1,300 schools were eligible based on 2004-2005 statistics. Schools were selected based on the following criteria: (a) at least 40% of students met low-income criteria; (b) in mathematics and/or reading, 75% or more of students passed state tests in third, fourth, and/or sixth grades; (c) at the high school level, at least
85% of students passed the Ninth-Grade Proficiency Test by the end of the 10th grade; (d) at least 75% of low-income students passed the tests; (e) at least 75% of students from the major racial and ethnic groups pass each test; and (f) each school met the goals of Adequate Yearly Progress under federal guideline for all of the above groups of students, including those with disabilities and those with limited English proficiency. Eighty-two schools met the award criteria in reading, 10 in mathematics, and 21 in both reading and mathematics. Five schools are Schools of Promise for the fourth time; 12 were identified for the third consecutive year; another 30 received recognition for the second time. Appendix B lists the recognized schools for the school year 2004-2005.

Ohio is one of only 16 states to recognize their high-performing schools (Educational Week, 2006). Each state conducts their recognition program differently. Wisconsin’s Promise School of Recognition program recognizes poverty schools that achieve above average results on the state test (Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination) in reading and math, similar to Ohio. However, Wisconsin also requires the recognized school to have achieved AYP status for at least two years (Wisconsin Department of Public
Georgia has two recognition categories: Schools of Excellence are schools in the top 10% according to reading and math achievement scores and Greatest Continuous Gains are schools that have made significant improvement in reading and math over a three-year period (Georgia Department of Education, 2007). South Dakota, South Carolina, and Louisiana specifically mention closing the achievements gap in their recognition criteria. For example, South Dakota seeks schools that significantly close the gap by 10% (South Dakota Department of Education, 2003); South Carolina seeks schools that demonstrate improvement for historically underachieving subgroups (South Carolina Department of Education, 2006); and Louisiana gives the title of Exemplary Academic Growth to schools that show two points of growth in every subgroup (Louisiana Department of Education, 2007).

Unlike Ohio, some state recognition programs also include monetary awards. South Dakota awards $1,000 to $50,000 depending on school enrollment (South Dakota Department of Education, 2003). Florida recipients receive award money to be used at their discretion (i.e., one-time staff bonus, educational supplies and resources to enhance school programs; Florida Department of Education, 2006).
Louisiana also grants a monetary amount; however, this money cannot be used for salaries or stipends (Louisiana Department of Education, 2007).

The Ohio’s Schools of Promise program identifies successful practices of high-achieving schools. The state of Ohio recognizes and studies the recognized schools in hopes of learning more about the best practices and policies of successful schools. Zelman (Schools of Promise, 2003) shared five themes that are common among past and present Ohio Schools of Promise:

1. These schools deliver rigorous instruction aligned to the state’s academic content standards. All students have access to challenging academic curricula, and teachers pursue a variety of instructional strategies.

2. These schools provide leadership that results in continuous improvement of instruction. Teachers and administrators have regular opportunities to plan, work, and learn with each other. Administrators are focused primarily on student learning and good teaching, and collaboration among personnel is encouraged.
3. These schools design instruction to ensure every student’s success. These schools are committed to and organize themselves in ways that reflect high academic expectations for every student, including children receiving special education and bilingual education services, children who have exhibited behavior problems, and children who tend to fall behind academically.

4. These schools engage parents and the community to support student success. Parents have multiple avenues for getting involved.

5. These schools create a culture where each individual feels valued. These schools create an environment in which students and staff feel valued, respected, and appreciated. The academic work of students is celebrated. The cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds of students are honored.

Section II: Five Themes of Ohio Schools of Promise

The purpose of the next section is to create a framework of practice built on each of the five lessons learned from Ohio’s Schools of Promise, current research, and literature.
Theme 1: Schools Need To Deliver Rigorous Instruction Aligned To The State’s Academic Content Standards

Rosenholtz (1991) declared the success of any organization is contingent upon clear, commonly defined goals. This section describes how school districts and schools are working together through a common focus and collective purpose by means of standards-based education, curriculum mapping, and data driven decision-making.

Standard-Based Education

Several documents lay out the concept of a standards-based system that substantially influenced the national discussion. M. Tucker (1986) called for a restructuring of American’s schools based on standards. Smith and O’Day (1990) described the major elements of such a system: standards (called, at the time, curriculum frameworks), school curricula, professional development, teacher education, and accountability assessment. The introduction of assessments geared to those standards formed the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce (1990). Building on a benchmarking study of European and Asian education systems, this commission recommended: (a) standards, (b) a high school certificate based on evidence of meeting those standards, and (c) commitment on the part
of employers and higher education institutions to use the standards-based certificate as part of the basis for hiring and admission decisions. Although the Commission’s recommendations concerned only the high school, its report became the basis for the New Standards Project, a consortium of states and urban school districts committed to developing a K-12 standards and assessment system based on state policies and district practices (Rothman, Slattery, Vranek, & Resnick, 2002).

Much of the technical shape of a standards-based instructional system came from the work of Resnick and Resnick (1992) and Tucker and Codding (1998). Based on a study of examination practices in European countries and their relationship to prescribed curricula, Resnick and Resnick (1992) argued that examinations that set clear expectations for students and teachers both motivated and enabled more powerful teaching practices and created more equitable educational practices. Tucker and Codding (1998) advocated building a standards-based instructional system, creating a results-oriented culture devoted to continuous improvement, and making the institution and the people in it accountable for reaching the goals set by the standards.
Finn (1991) asserted “we” must take charge of our educational system. No longer can we arbitrarily choose which suggested student learning competencies (used prior to the standards movement) to focus and teach. “The educational system needs to operate to the benefit of its consumer, not its proprietors or employees. We must organize, manage, and judge the system in relation to the outcomes we seek from it” (p. 244). Finn spoke to the need for consistency across the educational system; for example, a diploma from School District A needs to hold the same significance as a diploma from School District B. How do we know without consistent standards and accountability measures? Malone and Nelson (2006) further explained the shift from “traditional” education to standard-based education. Standard-based education reinforces the changing role of our schools: from sorting students to educating all students; from emphasis on what’s taught to emphasis on what’s learned; from success in school not predicting lifelong earnings to success in school predicting lifelong earnings. This discussion of standards-based reform provided the theoretical framework of the best-known standards-based education law in the United States, the No Child Left Behind Act (Rothman et al., 2002).
NCLB requires states to adopt “challenging academic content standards.” Those standards are supposed to “specify what children are expected to know and be able to do; contain coherent and rigorous content; and encourage the teaching of advanced skills” (NCLB, 2002, part A, subpart 1, Sec.111, a [D]). Required academic content standards are expected to provide the basis for developing challenging assessments that are well aligned with the content standards. According to the Quality Counts report (Educational Week, 2006), every state except Iowa (in progress) has adopted content standards in core subjects, and 44 states (Ohio included) have a test custom-designed to match state standards.

Ohio began its process for developing academic content standards in 1997, years before they were required by NCLB (Ohio Department of Education, 2002). The previous educational system in Ohio did not necessarily align what our students were being taught with what they were expected to know and be able to do. Ohio’s educators and community members began by establishing a set of common expectations concerning what all students should know and be able to do upon completing high school. These expectations were drafted into six content areas: (a) the arts, (b) English
language arts, (c) foreign languages, (d) mathematics, (e) science, and (f) social studies. These drafts evolved into the current Ohio academic content standards detailing the knowledge and skills students should attain in each of the areas (Ohio Department of Education, 2002).

After the development of academic content standards, the natural breakdown of the standards into manageable and workable pieces evolved into the creation of benchmarks and grade-level indicators (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Mctighe, Seif, & Wiggins, 2004; Tucker & Coddington, 1998). Benchmarks are key checkpoints that monitor student progress toward meeting the academic content standards. Benchmarks are organized in grade-level bands or clusters; for example, K-3, 4-7, 8-10, 11-12. Grade-level bands vary across content areas and align with achievement tests where applicable. Finally, grade level indicators further break down the information by representing specific statements of what all students should know and be able to do at each grade-level. These indicators serve as checkpoints for monitoring progress toward the benchmarks and standards. As a result, Ohio has developed a common long-term agenda for kindergarten through 12th grade. Ohio's standards-based education has provided a set of clear and rigorous
expectations for all students. The State Board of Education will use these standards as the basis for the development of achievement or diagnostic assessments used throughout the state (Ohio Department of Education, 2002).

Ohio’s standards-based system differs from those of other states in two key ways (Ohio Department of Education, 2005b):

1. Ohio’s standards, benchmarks, and indicators: many other states simply include broad expectations to be met at the end of a band of grades. Ohio’s standards specify expectations for each grade level.

2. Ohio did not adopt its standards in isolation from the broader educational system. Ohio’s Academic Content Standards were developed within the context of a larger standards-based system, which includes provisions for the development of model curricula, a statewide assessment system including diagnostic assessments and achievement tests and professional development initiatives to support educators in implementing the standards.

Curriculum Mapping

The state has provided school districts and schools with academic content standards, benchmarks, and grade-
level indicators. It is up to the school districts, schools, and individual teachers to take ownership and teach the necessary knowledge and skills. This is hard work and demands great commitment. Jacobs (1997) stated that curriculum mapping is one way to further create instructional coherence or an instructional framework that is truly workable for teachers.

Curriculum mapping as an evaluation tool, attributed to English (1978), is primarily used in schools. English (1984) advocated the use of mapping to ensure that the declared aims of a curriculum match those which are taught and learned. Biggs (1999) suggested the mapping of assessment in order to achieve alignment of declaration, delivery, learning, and assessment of individual skills. Koppang (2004) defined curriculum mapping as a method of collecting data about what is really being taught in schools—the instruction the students are experiencing. By mapping what is actually taught and when it is taught, teachers produce data that they can use in conjunction with assessment data to make cumulative revisions in instruction. According to Perkins-Gough (2003), the key to mapping is that each teacher enters the data into a computer program. Colleagues share immediate access to the
data so they can find out what curriculum is being taught down the hall, what was taught in previous years, and what might be taught the following year.

In the curriculum mapping process, Jacobs (1997) suggested that teachers use a calendar-based system to map the skills, content, and assessments used in their classroom. A map does not represent a daily lesson plan but reflects the major concepts and content that will be covered during that period. The teacher first lists the content that will be covered. Next, the teacher identifies the key skills that will be used. The list of skills is often significantly longer than the list of content. Creating a list of skills is critical; the more clearly skills are identified, the more useful the map will be to other teachers.

The final element of the curriculum map is assessment. Black and Williams (1998) cited evidence that ongoing assessments by teachers, combined with appropriate feedback to students, can have powerful, positive effects on student learning and achievement. They also reported that learning gains from systematic attention to formative assessments are larger than most of those found for any other educational interventions. The investigators (Black &
Williams; Jacobs, 1997; Weaver, 1999) agreed both formal and informal assessments need to be included on the curriculum map.

Weaver (1999) defined formal assessments as tests that have data supporting the conclusions derived from the test, usually referred to as standardized measures. These tests previously have been administered to students and thus have a base of statistics supporting individual results such as a particular student’s reading below average for his or her age. Scores such as percentiles, stanines, or standard scores are commonly derived from this type of assessment. Weaver defined informal assessments as content- and performance-driven, not data-driven. For example, running records are an informal assessment because they indicate how well a student is reading a specific book. Scores such as 10 correct out of 15, percent of words read correctly, and most rubric scores are derived from this type of assessment. Assessment strategies should be identified for all content and skills on the curriculum map. Appendix C provides an example of a curriculum map (Perkins-Gough, 2003).

After all teachers complete their maps, they share copies to gain an understanding of the content, skills, and
assessments that will be covered in each grade level or course. Sharing maps allows teachers to gain information and identify repetitions, gaps, and potential areas for integration. The powerful impact of this process is that it puts the decisions about curriculum alignment in the hands of the teachers who deliver instruction.

Koppang (2004) restated that curriculum mapping amplifies the possibilities for long-range planning, short-term preparation, and clear communication. Increased collaboration and communication among teachers ultimately benefits the students. As curriculum alignment is achieved, students’ educational experiences are enhanced. The curriculum is more coherent and clear for building knowledge and skills (Biggs, 1999; English, 1984; Harden, 2001). Jacobs (1997) added that instruction becomes more closely aligned to the state and district standards on which students will be tested. Finally, as teachers share information about what they teach, they begin a dialogue and share effective instructional strategies. The teachers learn from each other and build strong partnerships that provide instruction to best meet the needs of their students (Jacobs, 1997; Koppang, 2004; Perkins-Gough, 2003).
Data-Driven Decision-Making

Educational leadership literature reveals a steady stream of prescriptions for how the leadership should shape the focus of a school: by raising achievement through shared leadership, data-based decision-making, and unwavering attention to the employment of best practice in curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). If one reads between the lines, the importance of systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of multiple data sources and types becomes much clearer. School leadership must reshape the processes, norms, and behaviors of teaching and learning (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2004) around aggregating and interpreting shared information, that is, data (Picciano, 2006).

The need for data instead of intuition, tradition, and convenience to guide administrative and educational decisions has become increasingly more important. Properly used data can be a compelling means of launching, sustaining, and institutionalizing a reform effort (R. S. Johnson, 2002). Data-driven decision-making needs to be conducted at all levels of the school improvement process. R. S. Johnson (2002) described key roles for data
throughout the reform process. First, Johnson described how data can be used to improve the quality of criteria used in problem-solving and decision-making. Data can help schools and districts make better decisions in the interest of children. Careful analysis of data can help schools dig deeper. Often perceptions of what is working are based on weak indicators, such as whether people “like” an idea or program director, rather than on whether the practice is leading to higher student achievement. Examining the impact of school or district practices can provide a sounder basis for decision-making and can crystallize what needs to happen next.

The work of the Education Trust (Jerald, 2001) revealed that one key to promoting very high levels of achievement in traditionally low-performing schools was the effective use of day-to-day classroom assessment as an integral part of the healthy teaching and learning process. Meisels, Atkins-Burnett, Xue, and Bickel (2003) revealed how student involvement with work sample-based performance assessments yields high levels of achievement compared to students who did not experience the embedded performance assessment. Stiggins (2002) and Assessment Reform Group (1999) referred to two distinct reasons for using
assessments in the classroom: assessment of learning (summative) and assessment for learning (formative). When assessments are used to verify that learning has occurred (or not), this is referred to as assessment of learning. Assessment for learning centers on assessment to support learning—to inform teachers about how to help students learn more and to inform students themselves about how to maximize their success. Students need to know how to judge and monitor their own progress. And they need to know what to do to get themselves from where they are to where they need to be (Black & Williams, 1998; Sadler, 1989; Stiggins, 2005).

Educators must challenge themselves to lay out data from daily assessments in a way that shows clearly who is excelling and needing enrichment, who is performing on target, and who needs help. Then, the challenge is to find a way to provide that help. When meaningful data are kept and used in grade books, charted and displayed with students, or organized in portfolios or electronic decision-support systems, teachers and often students are “in the know.” Based on these data, decisions can be solidly based on how students are performing.
R. S. Johnson (2002) also revealed that data can be used to describe institutional processes, practices, and progress in schools and districts. Traditionally, the sole measure used to describe school improvement has been standardized test scores. If scores go up, schools are deemed to be improved. Typically, these scores offer only minimal clues about whether the school is changing its normative culture so that higher achievement for all becomes institutionalized. Our indicators of progress must be connected to short- or long-term higher-learning outcomes for all students.

The plan-do-study-act cycle for school improvement has been key to many successful settings (Quality Academy, 1998; Schmoker, 1996; Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Zeches, 2005). Diamondstone (2000) reported this cycle as containing four major activities: (a) Plan: develop a plan for improvement; (b) Do: implement the plan; (c) Study: evaluate the impact according to specific criteria; (d) Act: adjust strategies to better meet criteria. When a school or an individual classroom teacher evaluates how interventions (e.g., new teaching techniques) affect student learning, the evaluator learns what inventions are working and for whom. With this information, educators can
adjust practices, renew plans, and try again. Data is the key to continuous improvement. During the “plan” component, the educator must use data to provide insight and focus for goals. Data patterns reveal strengths and weaknesses in the system and provide direction. During the “do” component, the educator collects data that will describe the impact of the strategies used. Through collaborative reflection, he or she will “study” the feedback offered by the data and begin to understand when to stay the course and when to make changes. During the “act” component, he or she refines strategies. Eventually, the whole cycle begins again.

R. S. Johnson (2002) also revealed that data can help examine institutional belief systems, underlying assumptions, and behaviors. Data can help expose how certain educational practices reflect our institutional belief systems. For example, frequently African American and Latino students who score in the top quartiles on standardized tests are not scheduled into higher-level courses as are comparably scoring Asian and White students. Collecting data on who gets placed in specific programs (i.e., gifted, special education) can expose unequal access to knowledge.
R. S. Johnson (2002) pointed out as well that data can be used to mobilize school or district community action. Data can be strategically used to mobilize parents, educators, and the community at large. Schools should create opportunities for these groups to help collect, analyze, and represent data—especially student outcome data. Bernhardt (2004) stated this data can be enlightening and help educators pay attention to opinions and ideas of the school community. Educators need to recognize the many different members of the school community and realize how they value the school’s services impacts students profoundly. Data collection should be orchestrated to provide an honest portrayal of the district and school climate. Surveys, polls, and even analyses of local newspaper editorials and letters can suggest a school climate. Data presented by a collaboration of stakeholders can lead to a richer dialogue about factors that contribute to good or poor outcomes, as well as about what roles different stakeholders can play to improve the future.

R. S. Johnson (2002) revealed data can be used to monitor implementation of reforms. Monitoring students as they progress through the system speaks about their progress or lack of progress and about what teachers,
curriculum, and program interventions they may have experienced. Bernhardt (2004) stated data should be collected when there are questions about student success or student achievement. For example, data on the time demands of the instrumental music program may be important to collect if there is a question about band students’ academic achievements. Programs can include a wide variety of offerings, from specially funded programs to academic curricular sequences to extracurricular programs. A data-informed monitoring process allows for midcourse corrections, reinforces positive directions, and rewards success. From this information schools can describe conditions and patterns for individuals or groups of students. Using this information, practices and policies can be examined in terms of whether they enhance or inhibit student progress.

R. S. Johnson (2002) added that data can be used for accountability. Nationally, the public is demanding greater accountability from schools (i.e., NCLB requirements). At the local level, students, parents, and communities also require information regarding the school’s educational intentions and progress. A school or district needs a plan
for collecting, analyzing, and presenting data that will answer both external and internal questions.

Most frequently schools provide data to external requesters, such as the state, district, or funders. Rarely are those from the school who provide the data sure who will see it or how it will be used. R. T. McLaughlin (1997) described this “data provider” role and imperative need to overcome fears of using data to become “data users.” Reeves and Burt (2006) described challenges principals face as they implement data-based decision-making. Principals expressed frustration about their own and their teacher’s lack of training and understanding of how to use data. Principals also identified time as a major barrier to providing leadership for utilizing data. Teachers do not have time to analyze data or to collaborate with one another regarding the meaning and use of data. As principals, teachers, and school communities understand the power of data to make improvements in student achievement, they must overcome these challenges. As school communities begin using data together as part of the daily business of improving their school, educators make the transition from being data providers to data users (R. S. Johnson, 2002; R. T. McLaughlin, 1997; Reeves & Waters, 2006).
This section explained how standard-based education was developed in Ohio, how curriculum mapping creates instructional coherence, and how to use data as indicators of success and to drive decisions affecting student learning.

Theme 2: Schools Provide Leadership That Leads To The Continuous Improvement Of The School

The spotlight has certainly been placed on schools to achieve higher test scores, and as is the case in most organizations, the responsibility rests largely on the shoulders of the leader. Principals have, no doubt, felt pressure to improve student achievement. There has been a continuous stream of literature focusing on the critical role of leadership in whole-school transformation (Barth, 1990; Elmore, 2000; Sergiovanni, 2001; Williams, 2006). The principal and other leaders in the district must have a vision of change, communicate effectively, lead the instructional pathway, monitor progress, and support the staff continuously. Fullan (1992) suggested that district administrators are the single most important individuals for setting expectations for reform within local school districts. Research also points to the principal as a key ingredient in student academic success. In fact, Leithwood,
Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2005) proclaimed leadership not only matters: It is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning. As principals shape the instructional program to produce improved learning outcomes for students (Gawerecki, 2003; Grove, 2004; Klein, 2002; Spencer, 2003), they are placing the needs to the students in the center of all their decision-making (Williams, 2006).

This section discusses the leadership qualities needed to help shape the instructional program and produce improved learning outcomes. This section also describes the importance of leadership qualities, shared vision, and continuous professional development.

**Leadership Qualities**

The research states the important role that school principals play in the school setting: “The behavior of the school principal is the single most important factor supporting high quality educational programs, and while schools make a difference in what students learn, principals make a difference in schools” (Bredeson, 1989, p. 29). Much of the success of district and school leaders in high-performance organizations (organizations which make significantly greater than expected contributions to
student learning) depends on how well these leaders interact with the larger social and organizational context in which they find themselves. Unquestionably, the list of “effective” leaders’ behaviors could go on indefinitely. Nevertheless, evidence from district, school, and noneducational organizations points to three broad categories of successful leadership practices. Hallinger and Heck (1999) labeled these categories “purposes,” “people,” and “structures and social systems.” Conger and Kanungo (1998) referred to “visioning strategies,” “efficacy-building strategies,” and “context changing strategies.” Leithwood’s (1996) categories are “setting directions,” “developing people,” and “redesigning the organization.” Within each of these similar categories or practices are numerous, more specific competencies, orientations, and considerations; for example, most of the 21 specific leadership practices linked to student learning in Waters, Marzano, and McNulty’s (2003) review fit within these categories.

Lashway (1996) stated that in the past, principals were asked to become “instructional leaders,” exercising firm control by setting goals, maintaining discipline, and evaluating results. Today they are encouraged to be
“facilitative leaders” by building teams, creating networks, and “governing from the center.” Principals who lead today’s schools are leaders who demonstrate the importance of change and reform. They often act as the catalyst for change (Fullan, 1997, 1999). Their leadership style is collaborative and team oriented. These school leaders work side by side with staff to analyze test data and align instruction to students’ academic needs (Northwest Regional Educational Labor, 2001; Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1993). Their goal is to encourage teachers to explore and discover, always prodding their staff to find better ways of addressing school achievement (Barth, 1990; Kretovics & Nussel, 1994; Meier, 2002). Effective school leaders are good problem solvers (Crockett, 1996). They are not experts in addressing low student performance, but rather strive to lead cohesive teams of educators to find answers together (Koschoreck, 2001; Murphy & Louis, 1995). These principals teach others to lead, by sharing the leadership challenge (Crow, Hausman, & Scribner, 2002; Pavan & Reid, 1990).

Shared Vision

Bamburg (1994) declared schools, like any organization, function best when their staff has a clear
idea about what is important. Schools that have been most successful in addressing and increasing the academic achievement of their students have benefited from clarity of purpose grounded in a shared set of core values and beliefs. In studies of school improvement, vision is a central theme (Llamas-Sanchez & Lopez-Martin, 2006; Whitaker, 2003; Williams, 2006). Whereas vision is necessary for all organizations, it is especially important for schools. Because schools are institutionalized, it is often assumed their purpose is known and understood. However, without a stated vision, a school does not achieve its highest potential (Casey, 2005; Lambert, 2003; Rion-Gaboury, 2005). An effective leader communicates an awareness of purpose and demonstrates an active commitment to achieving the school’s educational vision.

Nanus (1992) explained a leader must first develop a mental image of a possible and desirable state of the school. This image, called a vision, may be as vague as a dream or as precise as a goal or mission statement. The critical point is that a vision articulates the view of a realistic, credible, attractive future for the school, a condition that is better in some important ways than what now exists. Sergiovanni (2005) stressed the importance that
principals, along with teachers and parents, develop a vision of the school by collaborating with all of the major stakeholders in the school community, whose hopes, dreams, expectations, and values contribute to the school’s goals and aspirations. This collective vision helps focus attention on what is important, motivate staff and students, and increase the sense of shared responsibility for student learning.

Conger and Kanungo (1998) described a vision as clearly articulated statement of goals, principles, and expectations for the entire learning community. However, having a documented vision statement is not enough to create the transformation needed in schools. A common unifying vision is achieved only when the administration, teachers, support staff, students, families, and communities are able to clearly communicate the vision’s goals through daily school operations. The vision becomes a guiding force when all educational decisions are based on its framework. A clear vision is like a good road map. Without a good map it is difficult to determine where you are going and impossible to know when you arrive. A dynamic vision engages and represents the whole community and outlines a path to follow. Leaders and stakeholders
communicate their vision by how they spend their time, what they talk about, what problems they solve first, and what they get excited about. In every act, leaders reinforce the values they hold and the vision they hope to achieve (Fullan, 1992, 2001; Nanus, 1992; Sergiovanni, 2005). The vision allows school leaders to create a compelling view that excites and engages other constituents to join in the educational journey. Barker (1991) said it best: “Vision without action is merely a dream; action without vision just passes the time; vision with action can change the world.”

Fullan (1998) and Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) offered practical advice for the principals. In developing a vision leaders need to: (a) understand the culture of the school; (b) value teachers and promote their professional growth; (c) extend what they value; (d) express what they value; (e) promote collaboration; (f) make menus, not mandates; (g) use bureaucratic means to facilitate, not to constrain; and (h) connect with the wider environment. Appendix D provides two examples of a vision statement (Doris Miller Elementary, 2005; Franklin Elementary, 2006).
Continuous Professional Development

Once principals and teachers have set a tone for taking responsibility for student outcomes by means of a solid vision shared by all, the next priority is facilitating a process that includes continuous professional development to maintain the focus alignment to the overall goal of improved student achievement.

Professional development is the label we attach to activities that are designed in some way to increase the skill and knowledge of educators (Fenstermacher, 1985). With schools today facing an array of complex challenges—from working with an increasingly diverse population of students, to integrating new technology in the classroom, to meeting rigorous academic standards and goals—effective professional development is seen as increasingly vital to school success and teacher satisfaction (J. F. Johnson, 2002; National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future, 1996; D. Sparks, 2002).

Elmore (2000) offered a definition of school leadership; “Leadership is the guidance and direction of instructional improvement” (p. 13). One of the most important instructionally focused areas for school leaders, according to Elmore is helping others acquire new values
and behaviors. People make these fundamental transitions by having many opportunities to be exposed to the ideas, to argue them into their own normative belief systems, to practice the behaviors that go along with these values, to observe others practicing those behaviors, and, most important, to be successful at practicing those behaviors in the presence of others.

Professional development traditionally has been provided to teachers through school in-service workshops. In the classic conception of that model, the district or school brings in an outside consultant or curriculum expert on a staff-development day to give teachers a one-time training seminar on a garden-variety pedagogic or subject-area topic. Experts variously say this approach lacks continuity and coherence, that it misconceives the way adults learn best, and it fails to appreciate the complexity of teachers' work (Miles, 1995; D. Sparks, 2002; Wenglinsky, 2000). Transitional professional development lacks intellectual rigor, fails to build on existing knowledge and skills, and does little to assist teachers with the day-to-day challenges of improving student learning. For instance, a Chicago study found only 25% of the system's schools received “high quality” professional
(focused, exposed teachers to new academic content, provided opportunities for reflection, and involved collaborative work) development (Blair, Hoff, Galley, & Manzo, 2001).

The U.S. Department of Education (2000) commissioned a three-year study to track the experiences of teachers participating in activities financed by the federal Eisenhower program (primarily for efforts in mathematics and science). The study concluded that six key features of professional development are effective in improving teaching practice: three structural features (characteristics of the structure activity) of reform type, duration, and collective participation, and three core features (characteristics of the substance of the activity) of active learning, coherence, and content focus. These findings support other studies that highlight the importance of content focus and active learning in professional development (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Kwang, 2001; Smylie, Allenworth, Greenberg, Harris, & Luppescu, 2001; WestED, 2000).

The National Staff Development Council (2001) provided standards for professional development. Derived from those standards, D. Sparks (2002) focused on a small number of
core processes that make professional development powerful: relate to student learning (data-driven), focus on a small number of student learning goals, and match the adult learning process to the intended outcome.

D. Sparks (2002) explained the most powerful forms of professional development use data to determine staff development goals, to guide and motivate teacher learning, to monitor the impact of staff development on achievement, and to make appropriate mid-course corrections. It also may provide evidence to teachers that their changes in instructional practices are improving student learning (Joyce & Showers, 2003; D. Sparks, 2002; Walpole & McKenna, 2004). Schmoker (2004) stated data can help educators face difficult realities, select programs, and provide motivation by charting progress in achieving goals. He believed data should play a crucial role before staff development begins—by helping to select the best, most results-oriented initiatives. Data helps us answer the primary question “What do we do next?”

Closely linked to the use of data is teachers’ regular study of student work. Such study serves several important purposes. Stiggins (2001) said it is important that teachers master two tasks: the ability to clearly
articulate the achievement targets they want students to hit and knowledge of how to transform those targets into quality, day-to-day indicators of achievement. Stiggins continued that a good formative assessment process gives teachers evidence that students are progressing and that knowledge will give teachers confidence and motivation to continue improving their craft. Cross (2001) and Richardson (2001a) concluded that nothing motivates and engages teachers more than examining student work and engaging in conversation with other teachers about how that work was achieved. Studying student work is one of the most promising professional development strategies in recent years (Richardson, 2001a; Stiggins, 2001). Unfortunately, Stiggins reported most teachers have little training on how to use formative classroom assessments to monitor progress and improve instruction.

D. Sparks (2002) explained the most powerful forms of professional development focus on a small number of goals for improved student learning. According to Fullan (2001), staff development too often suffers from fragmentation and incoherence. Staff development efforts are based on the current educational trend with little thought given to the congruence between teacher learning and the school’s goals
for student learning. Without clear goals, Schmoker (1996) argued, collaboration is often futile, it is impossible to measure progress, and one-shot staff development fills the void. Calhoun (as cited in D. Sparks, 1999b) recognized the difficulty in a faculty coming together to select school-wide goals. However, arriving at school-wide goals is powerful because it screens out some of the competing demands for times and attention and affects how resources will be allocated. “When a faculty selects a goal it believes will make the most difference in the education of students, it is setting the parameters for collective study and action” (p. 55).

D. Sparks (2002) explained the most powerful forms of professional development match adult learning processes with the intended learning outcomes for students and the desired instructional practices for teachers. Once professional goals are developed, the type of professional development pursued must be carefully structured and planned for optimal effectiveness. Guskey (2002) and D. Sparks (2002) agreed that the professional development team must plan “backwards” from student learning outcomes to the types of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that will
achieve those ends and “backwards” again to the content and process for adult learning that will produce those results.

Although workshops and courses are the most familiar forms of professional development, they are often not the most appropriate to achieve certain objectives. Tienken and Stonaker’s (2007) decision to revamp their school district’s professional development delivery and focus reveals teachers had been working to differentiate instruction for students and wanted differentiated professional development for themselves. These teachers and administrators knew innately what W. G. Sparks (1994) and Guskey (1996) meant when they called for a paradigm shift to get away from disconnected and isolated professional development. Tienken and Stonaker (2007) described their approach to differentiating professional development by offering teachers professional learning based on stages of teacher development, teacher interest, organizational goals, and research-based instructional strategies. For example, first- and second-year teachers spent time in cohorts that focused on their particular needs. Third-year teachers participated in one of 16 year-long courses taught by trained peers within the district. Teachers with more than three years of experience might participate in one of
the year-long courses that directly related to their teaching responsibilities and grade span, develop a personal professional project using action research, lesson study, peer observation, and coaching or a lesson study group aimed at improving classroom instruction, or might create a hybrid of coursework and a personal project.

This new direction of professional development promotes job embedded activities (Joyce, 2004; Schmoker, 2004;) and developing professional learning communities (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006; Hord, 2007) within the school building where continuous learning is part of the job. This new model uses strategies such as coaching, mentoring, peer observation, and reflection for on-the-job training. Hord described professional learning communities as a way of working where staff engages in purposeful, collegial learning. This learning is intentional and its purpose is to improve staff effectiveness so students will be more successful. The job of leadership in a community of practice is to support the job-embedded learning of personnel within the organization. Fullan (2001, p. 252) reminded us of a stark truth: If most schools and districts are not good learning organizations, this means they are
not good employees. They are especially not good employers for teachers who want to make a difference.

This section explained the importance of a shared vision and purpose created and embraced by the educational community. The shared vision must be supported and nurtured by continuous and informed professional development to be effective leadership practices in increasing school improvement.

**Theme 3: Schools Design Instruction To Ensure Every Student’s Success**

At the heart of effective instruction lies a simple philosophy: All students can learn. Many research studies (Armor et al., 1976; Chester & Beaudin, 1996; Guskey & Passaro, 1994; J. A. Ross, 1992, 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) consistently have found that teacher efficacy has a strong relationship to teacher classroom behavior and student achievement. Teacher efficacy relates to a teacher's belief that students in his or her classroom can learn and that he or she can teach them. Lewis (1997) reported teachers with a high degree of efficacy believe that they can succeed with any student regardless of the nature of the home situation, the student’s previous
performance or diagnosis, resource difficulties, and whatever other constraints might confront the school.

This section explores the concept of teacher efficacy and its effect on student success in the classroom, as well as strategies for how a school can nurture a high-level of teacher efficacy through teacher support and accountability. These strategies will help to ensure every student’s success in the classroom.

**Teacher Efficacy**

Teachers who assume responsibility for student learning have a sense of efficacy, a critical component of professionalism (Coberly & Cosgrove, 2002). For example, Ashton and Webb (1986) found that teachers with higher self-efficacy were likely to have a positive classroom environment, support students’ ideas, and meet the needs of all students. Woolfolk, Hoy, and Rosoff (1990) found that a teacher’s sense of efficacy can affect the tasks of managing and motivating students, in that teachers with low self-efficacy might avoid planning activities that they believe exceed their capabilities, might not persist with students having difficulties, might expend little effort to find materials, and might not reteach content in ways which help students to better understand. In contrast, teachers
with higher self-efficacy were more likely to develop challenging activities, help students succeed, and persevere with students who have trouble learning (Ashton & Webb, 1986).

Teacher efficacy is of interest to school improvement efforts because teacher efficacy consistently predicts willingness to try out new teaching ideas, particularly techniques that are difficult to implement and involve risks such as sharing control with students (Hani, Czerniak, & Lumpe, 1996; J. A. Ross, 1992). High expectations of success motivate classroom experimentation because teachers anticipate they will be able to achieve the benefits of innovation and overcome obstacles that might arise. Researchers have found teachers with high expectations about their ability to produce higher student achievement in core academic subjects (J. A. Ross, 1992; J. A. Ross & Cousins, 1993) and on affective goals like self-esteem (Borton, 1991), self-direction (Rose & Medway, 1981), motivation (Roeser, Arbreton, & Anderman, 1993) and attitudes toward school (Miskel, McDonald, & Bloom, 1983).

The research (J. A. Ross, 1998; Kurz & Knight, 2004; Guskey, 2001) makes a distinction between teacher self-efficacy (the individual teacher makes a difference) and
collective teacher efficacy (the perceptions of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students). Collective teacher efficacy is a powerful predictor of student achievement. Bandura (1993) found that collective teacher efficacy was a stronger predictor of achievement than student socioeconomic status or stability of the student body. Goddard (2001) found that collective teacher efficacy explained 47-50% of the between-school variance in mathematics and reading achievement. Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000) and Goddard, Hoy, and LoGerfo (2003) obtained similar results for a variety of grades and subjects. They argued that collective teacher efficacy influences student achievement by creating school norms and sanctions that motivate persistence.

Bandura (1986) argued that the sources of individual and collective efficacy information are similar. Lent, Lopez, and Bieschke (1991) and Lopez and Lent (1992) declared the most powerful source of efficacy information is mastery experience. Teachers who perceive themselves to have been successful on a particular task, either individually or as part of a collective, believe they have the ability to perform that task and anticipate that they
will be successful in future encounters with it. Such expectations encourage teachers to set higher goals and to persist until they have been attained.

Research explains that teacher efficacy (individual and collective) can be enhanced through familiarity of mastery experience by means of prior student achievement, collaborative school processes, including leadership behavior, that contributes to cohesion and support for teachers. For example, J. A. Ross, McKeiver, and Hogaboam-Gray (1997) found that collaboration contributed to teachers’ knowledge of their classroom effectiveness through the collective identification of indicators of students’ cognitive and affective performance. The collective teacher efficacy is more likely to increase if the shared vision is of the school committed to student and teacher learning, key elements of a school that is a professional learning community (Louis & Marks, 1998). Principals can also play a role in enhancing teacher efficacy by defining what constitutes success. Principals can identify exemplars of successful team performance and make it easier to achieve, for example through timetabling for teachers to observe each other, thereby providing opportunities to strengthen collective teacher efficacy
through vicarious experience. Principals can persuade teachers that they can become an effective organization, for example, through personnel supervision and staff development process (Brissie, Hoover-Dempsey, & Bassler, 1988; Hipp & Bredeson, 1995).

Teacher Support and Accountability

The literature reviewed by Odden, Borman, and Fermanich (2004) proclaimed teachers have substantial impact on student learning and teacher classroom practices are likely to be an important pathway for those effects. According to the work of Hanushek (1992), the difference between being taught by a good and a bad teacher can translate into a full grade level of achievement in a single school year. Beyond these potential short-term benefits, the research of Sanders and Rivers (1996) indicates that teacher effects can be enduring and cumulative, whether they advance student achievement or leave children behind. Sanders and Rivers demonstrated that after two years, the performance of fifth-grade students was still affected by the quality of their third-grade teacher.

Evidence of the strong effects of teachers on student achievement can be traced to the classic Coleman Report,
which concluded that teacher characteristics tended to explain more variance in student achievement than other school resource (Coleman et al., 1966). Research continues to show that student achievement is directly related to the preparation that teachers receive, particularly in the subjects they teach, and to the overall effectiveness in delivering instruction (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Elmore, 2000). How teachers acquire this effectiveness is at the heart of the challenge that schools face in raising student achievement.

Odden et al. (2004) proposed that the scores from a well-designed, performance-based teacher evaluation system may provide a measure of important teacher behaviors that can be used in a comprehensive model for teacher, classroom, and school effects on student achievement. Consistent with the movement for standards for students is a reform to develop standard-based teacher evaluations. The effort is to make teacher evaluations more performance based and reflective and provide a more complex conception of teaching guided by the development of more sophisticated teaching assessment systems including those used by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the
PRAXIS III licensure assessment (Porter, Youngs, & Odden, 2001).

The Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC, 1992) has developed model “core” standards for what all beginning teachers should know, be like, and be able to do in order to practice responsibly, regardless of the subject matter or grade level being taught. Appendix E lists the INTASC standards intended to be a resource that all states can use to develop their own state standards. Ohio has adopted the INTASC standards as a basis for guiding entry-year programs for beginning teachers (Ohio Department of Education, 2004b). State departments of education and school districts are also incorporating these standards into their teacher evaluation system.

Standards-based teacher evaluation systems are based on a common conception of teaching, developed from empirical and theoretical literature on effective teaching behaviors, and assessed using multiple, authentic sources of teaching evidence (Danielson, 1996; Danielson & McGreal, 2000). These systems are designed to assess teaching practice using a comprehensive set of standards and rubrics with the intention of enhancing instruction and
strengthening educational accountability. Many school districts (Keiffer-Barone & Ware, 2001; Marshall, 2006) have restructured their evaluation system according to Danielson’s Framework for Teaching (1996, 2007). Danielson’s Framework for Teaching is a research-based set of components of instruction grounded in a constructivist’s view of learning and teaching. The framework can serve as the foundation of a school’s or district’s recruitment and hiring, mentoring, coaching, professional development, and teacher evaluation process, thus linking all those activities together and helping teachers become more thoughtful practitioners.

Danielson (1996, 2007) described the actions teachers can take to improve student learning as falling under four domains of teaching responsibility: planning and preparation, the school environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. Within the domains are 22 components and 76 descriptive elements that further refine our understanding of what teaching is all about. The framework defines four levels of performance—unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, and distinguished—for each element, providing a valuable tool that teachers can use.
Rubric teacher evaluation systems (e.g., Danielson’s Framework for Teaching) address some of the most glaring problems of conventional teacher evaluations. First, rubrics are more “judgmental,” giving teachers clearer feedback on where they stand, usually on a 4-3-2-1 scale. Second, rubrics explicitly lay out the characteristics of each level, giving mediocre and unsatisfactory teachers a road map for improving their performance. And third, rubrics are much less time-consuming for principals to complete, because lengthy narratives and lesson descriptions are not required. Marshall (2006) encouraged school districts to develop or modify rubrics to represent their own circumstances. For example, Marshall agreed with the analysis of pedagogy in Danielson’s Framework for Teaching; however, he believed it is too long and detailed to be practical in a busy school setting and would strike many teachers as overwhelming.

Another type of teacher evaluation strategy being used by districts and schools (several Ohio schools, e.g., Toledo Public, Cincinnati Public, and Columbus Public Schools) is Peer Assistance and Review (PAR). PAR, historically referred to as peer review, was born in Ohio’s Toledo Public Schools in 1981 (Darling-Hammond, 1984).
Teacher evaluation historically has been the principal’s responsibility. However, many administrators fail to carry out regular and meaningful evaluations, even though the current emphasis on instructional leadership encourages principals to increase their presence in the classroom and conduct observations of teachers on a regular basis (Elmore, 2000; Marshall, 1996). Principals are too busy (Copland, 2001; Grubb, Flessa, Tredway, & Stern, 2003), lack the necessary expertise (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1984), or seek to avoid the potential conflict (Bridges, 1986). PAR reduces the burden on principals, the isolation of the classroom teacher, and sometimes even the antagonism between labor and management by involving teachers in the formal evaluation of teachers and making them responsible for employment recommendations (Darling-Hammond, 1984).

In peer assistance and review (PAR), coaches who have been identified for their excellence in teaching provide mentoring support to new teachers as well as veterans experiencing difficulty in their teaching. The coaches are also responsible for the formal personnel evaluations of teachers in the program. Coaches are usually released full-time from their teaching duties for two to three years so
they can provide this support and conduct evaluations. Coaches diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of a participating teacher and tailor support accordingly. The PAR program studied in an urban California school (Goldstein, 2003, 2004) was relatively transparent and open. Coaches discussed their assessment of participating teachers with other coaches at weekly meetings, sometimes visiting teachers’ classrooms in pairs. Coaches also frequently conferred with principals to inform them of participating teachers’ progress, and coaches and principals sometimes observed teachers together and then met to confirm the steps needed to support the participating teacher.

PAR has given teachers the opportunities to discuss their practice with their peers or critically reflect on their teaching. This opportunity is rare, especially for teachers in high-poverty schools, which frequently report lower collegial interaction among teachers related to instructional improvements (Shields et al., 1999; Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999). The PAR program is one promising approach to provide veteran teachers with the help they need. Principals generally give few unsatisfactory personnel evaluations of teachers (Loup, Garland, Ellet, & Rugutt,
Once a PAR program is in place, however, the number usually increases because, for the first time, a mechanism is available to provide support to veteran teachers who are experiencing instructional challenges. Districts that successfully have implemented PAR have found it an effective means to systematically improve the quality of teaching and, in the process, to honor and recognize the best teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1984; Hewitt, 2000; Kelly, 1998; Murray, 1999).

This section explained the importance of having and developing a strong sense of teacher efficacy in the school building. This section also discussed through the literature different means the principal can provide teacher support and accountability.

Theme 4: Schools Engage Parents and the Community to Support Student Success

The evidence is in (National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, 2005): When schools and families work together to support learning, everyone benefits. Students do better in school and in life. Parents become empowered. Teacher morale improves. Schools get better, and communities grow stronger. This section discusses the importance of parental involvement to the child’s and
school’s academic success and the different forms of participation available. This section also provides guidance through the literature on how to develop a high-quality program of school, family, and community partnerships.

Importance of Parental Involvement

Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers have documented the importance of parent involvement. When parents are involved everyone benefits. Epstein (1991) described the benefit of parent involvement for students are: demonstration of more positive attitudes towards school; attainment of higher achievement in reading; completion of higher quality and more grade-appropriate homework; completion of more homework on weekends; and observation of more similarities between family and school. Epstein (1992) and Henderson (1987) and Liontos (1992) agreed the benefits of parent involvement for parents and community are that they: receive ideas from school on how to help children; learn more about educational programs and how the school works; become more supportive of children; become more confident about ways to help children learn; and learn more positive views of teachers. Davies (1998) and Epstein (1992) and Liontos (1992) described the
benefits of parent involvement for teachers and schools as:
improved teacher morale; fewer discipline problems;
increased attendance; higher rating of teachers by parents;
rating of parents as more helpful by teachers; improved
student achievement; support of parents for support schools
and bond issues (also Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1992;
Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Different Forms of Parental Involvement

Although many research efforts have assessed the
relationship between parent involvement and student
achievement, the literature does not indicate which forms
of parent involvement correlate to increased student
achievement and other indicators of school success. Despite
the lack of endorsement of any particular strategy, efforts
to increase parent involvement cluster around two major
approaches: encouraging parents to pursue at-home behaviors
that encourage learning and indicate a value for schooling,
and conducting at-school activities that support the
teacher-parent relationship (Comer, 2005; Eagle, 1989;
Epstein, 1985; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Olmstead & Rubin,
1983).

The term “parent involvement” is used broadly. It
includes several different forms of participation in
education and with the schools. Comer (2005) sorted the various ways parents can participate in their child’s education into three levels. In Level 1, parents support their child’s schooling by attending school functions (calendar events, school concerts, and award ceremonies) and responding to school obligations (parent-teacher conferences). They also provide encouragement by arranging for appropriate study time and space, modeling desired behavior (such as reading for pleasure), monitoring homework, and actively tutoring their children at home. Level 2 parents serve as volunteers in daily school affairs—for example, by providing office support, going along on field trips, providing assistance in the classroom, or working as library assistants. Finally, at Level 3, parents take an active role planning, developing, and providing an education for the community’s children. Parents can serve on school planning and management teams, strategic planning teams, the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), or other school committees.

Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) challenged teachers and schools to rethink the family involvement paradigm to include the values and norms of minority and lower socioeconomic class families. Studies (Eagle, 1989; Lareau,
1987) have shown lower socioeconomic class families tend to follow the “rituals” described above less often. Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) explained the traditional paradigm fails to validate many parent and family actions that are important to the child’s well-being. For example, parents and children may spend the evening in play or visiting grandparents—yet these rich experiences are often excluded from the “involvement” construct that is traditionally valued.

Successful Implementation of Parent Involvement Programs

Acknowledging the research that parent involvement increases student success, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has developed rules on how districts need to involve parents (Keller, 2006). The rules involving parents include parent-involvement policies, inclusion of parents in writing school-improvement plans, expenditure of 1% of the school’s money on engaging families, distribution of an annual report card on the performance of the school, and notification of parents if a teacher fails to meet the federal definition of “highly qualified” (Keller).

Research indicates that there is no one best way to handle parent involvement. Henderson (1987) stated it is more important that involvement be well-planned,
comprehensive, and long-lasting than that it takes one particular form. This directly relates to Epstein (2001) and Comer (2005), who have identified lack of planning and lack of mutual understanding as the two greatest barriers to effective parent involvement. School staff wishing to institute programs will need to be both open-minded and well organized in their approach.

Epstein (2001) has found that comprehensive and high-quality programs of school, family, and community partnerships facilitate six types of involvement: parenting (helping all families establish supportive home environments); communicating (enabling two-way exchanges about school programs and children’s progress); volunteering (recruiting and organizing parental help at school, home, or other locations); learning at home (providing information and ideas to families about how to help students with homework and other curriculum-related materials); decision-making (having parents from all backgrounds serve as representatives and leaders on school committees); and collaborating with the community (identifying and integrating community resources and services to strengthen school programs).
This section explained when families are engaged in their children’s learning, not only do children do better but the school also becomes a better place for all children to learn. Different forms of parental involvement were explored along with guidelines on how to implement parent involvement programs successfully.

**Theme 5: Schools Create A Culture Where Each Individual Feels Valued**

Every school has a culture that influences the way people think, feel, and act. Donohoe (2007) and Aune (2007) agreed that being able to understand and shape the culture is crucial to a school’s success in promoting staff and student learning. Successful leaders have learned to view their organizations’ environment in a holistic way. This wide-angle view is what the concept of school culture offers principals and leaders. It gives them a broader framework for understanding difficult problems and complex relationships within the school. By deepening their understanding of school culture, these leaders will be better equipped to shape the values, beliefs, and attitudes necessary to promote a stable and nurturing learning environment. This section further defined school culture and its effect on school improvement and student
achievement. Common features of positive cultures are explored and guidance on how to shape a positive school culture is given.

School Culture

The field of education lacks a clear and consistent definition of school culture. The term has been used synonymously with a variety of concepts, including “climate,” “ethos,” and “saga” (Deal, 1993). The concept of culture came to education from the corporate workplace with the notion that it would provide direction for a more efficient and stable learning environment. Scholars have argued about the meaning of culture. Geertz (1973) has made a large contribution to the current understanding of the term. For Geertz, culture represents historically transmitted patterns of meaning. Those patterns of meaning are expressed both (explicitly) through symbols and (implicitly) in our taken-for-granted beliefs.

Much of Geertz’s perceptive on culture is seen in current research. Deal and Peterson (1990) noted that the definition of culture includes deep patterns of values, beliefs, and traditions that have been formed over the course of the school’s history. Heckman (1993) reminded that school culture lies in the commonly held beliefs of
teachers, students, and principals. These definitions go beyond the business of creating an efficient learning environment and focus more on the core values necessary to teach and influence young minds. Peterson (2002) provided a working definition of school culture as the underground stream of norms, values, and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, and symbols and stories that make up the “persona” of the school. These unwritten expectations build up over time as teachers, administrators, parents, and students work together, solve problems, deal with challenges, and, at times, cope with failures. For example, every school has expectations about what can be discussed at staff meetings, what constitutes good teaching techniques, how willing the staff is to change, and how important staff development is.

The concept of culture in the study of schools is not new. Waller (1932) emphasized the importance of culture, rituals, rites of passage, ceremonies, and values in his seminal analysis of the school as a social system. Sarason (1971) described how school culture is an important vehicle for resisting and redefining educational innovations. Clark (1972) studied the organizational sagas of three colleges,
each with a distinctive culture that inspired pride and encouraged identification among its members.

Researchers have compiled some impressive evidence on school culture. Healthy and sound school cultures correlate strongly with increased student achievement and motivation, and with teacher productivity and satisfaction. Fyans and Maehr (1990) looked at the effects of five dimensions of school culture: academic challenges, comparative achievement, recognition for achievement, school community, and perception. They found support for the proposition that students are more motivated to learn in schools with strong cultures. Thacher and McInerney (1992) saw significant gains in students’ annual statewide test scores after the school focused on developing a new mission statement, goals based on outcomes for students, curriculum alignment corresponding with those goals, staff development, and building level decision-making. School culture also correlates with teachers’ attitudes towards their work. Cheng (1993) studied effective and ineffective organizational cultures and found strong school cultures had better motivated teachers. In an environment with strong organizational ideology, shared participation,
charismatic leadership, and intimacy, teachers experience higher job satisfaction and increased productivity.

Educators have recently developed a much deeper understanding of school culture and a deeper appreciation for its importance in effective schools (Levine & Lezotte, 1990). Culture plays a major role in school restructuring (Newman, 1996) and school improvement efforts (Fullan, 1998). School culture and student achievement are so closely intertwined that adjustments to one influence the other (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Culture shapes a school’s motivation, commitment, effort, and focus.

**Positive School Culture**

Deal and Peterson (1999) explained that when a school has a positive, professional culture, results include meaningful staff development, successful curricular reform, and the effective use of student performance data. Students and teachers function in a culture where academic success and motivated learning are expected, respected, and rewarded. In contrast, a school with a negative or toxic culture that does not value professional learning, resists change, or devalues staff development hinders success.

Although there is not one best culture, research identifies common features in positive cultures (Deal &
Peterson, 1999; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Gudgel, 1997; Peterson, 2002): (a) a mission focused on student and teacher learning; (b) core values of collegiality, performance, and improvement that engender quality, achievement, and learning; (c) positive beliefs and assumptions about the potential of students and staff to learn and grow; (d) a strong professional community that uses knowledge, experience, and research to improve practice; (e) a shared sense of responsibility for student outcomes; (f) a cultural network that fosters positive communications; (g) a leadership among staff and administrators that blends continuity with improvement; (h) an overall sense of interpersonal connection, meaningful purpose, and belief in the future; and (i) a widely shared respect and caring for everyone.

Studies of successful urban schools have identified school culture components (caring connections, positive behavioral supports, and social and emotional skills) as essential in supporting positive behavior and learning for students. Two research studies demonstrate the caring connections and connectedness. Ryan and Patrick (2001) found students who believe that their teachers care about them perform better on tests. Goldstein and Soriano (1994)
learned students who have strong connections with both teachers and prosocial peers are more likely to resist the pull of gangs that offer an alternative form of connection for alienated students.

Research on high-achieving urban school settings also demonstrated the benefits of positive behavioral supports instilled in the school culture. McNeely, Nonnemaker, and Blum (2002) suggested that harsh discipline works against connection; instead of reducing misbehavior and vandalism, such discipline actually promotes these problems. Punitive approaches hinder achievement. When students are being punished, isolated, or suspended, they are not learning. Sugai et al. (2000) suggested that environmental changes—for example being explicit about behavioral expectations, directly teaching appropriate behavior, providing support to help students meet expectations, monitoring individual and school wide behavior, and providing frequent positive reinforcement—can reduce discipline problems and help teachers and students recover instructional time.

Successful urban schools also nurture the internal assessments that help students regulate their own behavior and deal with the many social and academic challenges they face. Teaching students social and emotional skills—such as
relationship building, self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making—can prevent problem behavior and promote academic success. Students who develop these skills are less likely to participate in high-risk behavior and are more able to persevere through academic challenges (Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000).

Shaping a Positive School Culture

Principals and other school leaders can and should shape school culture. Peterson (1999, 2002) described three key processes principals can use to shape a more nurturing culture. First, the principals read the culture, understanding the culture’s historical source as well as analyzing current norms and values. Second, they assess the culture, determining which elements support the school’s core purposes and mission and which hinder progress. Finally, they actively shape the culture by reinforcing positive aspects and working to transform negative aspects of the culture.

Leaders need to first understand the deeper norms, values, and beliefs of the school. School leaders can talk to the school’s storytellers (staff members who enjoy recounting history), look through prior school improvement plans for signals about what is really important and not
just what is required, or use a faculty meeting to discuss what the school has experienced, especially in staff development, over the past two decades. School leaders can fill in the culture picture by developing a timeline of rituals and ceremonies for the year. When do they occur? What symbols and values are important in each? What do the ceremonies communicate about the school and its commitment to professional and student learning?

Furtwengler and Micich (1991) outlined one strategy where students, teachers, and administrators were encouraged to draw a visible representation of how they felt about their school culture. The idea was to “make thought visible” and highlight positive and negative aspects of their school culture. Ledoux (2005) incorporated another strategy to learn about the culture of the university. He asked students to photograph elements of the culture that best represented the university. The photographs and reflections were quite telling. They included student interactions, leaky toilets, gatherings around food, and interaction among diverse groups.

Next, the school leaders should look at what they have learned about the culture and ask two central questions: What aspects of the culture are positive and should be
reinforced, and what aspects are negative and should be changed? The staff can also ask questions, such as: What norms and values support learning? Which depress or hinder the growth of energy, motivation, and commitment? What symbols or ceremonies are dead and dying and need to be buried or resuscitated? Another approach to assessing culture is to use the School Culture Survey (Richardson, 2001b) to examine core norms and values. Leaders can collect the survey results to see how strongly held different norms or values are, and then determine whether they fit the culture the school wants. Most school climate measures are survey instruments completed by students, teachers, and school administrators. The Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments (CASE: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1986), the Organization Health Inventory (OHI; Hoy & Sabo, 1998; Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991), and the Organizational Climate Descriptive Questionnaire (OCDQ; Hoy & Sabo, 1998; Hoy et al., 1991) are three school climate instruments available to practitioners.

Finally, school leaders should reinforce the positive as a means to shape schools. Peterson (1999) offered many ways to reinforce positive aspects of school culture.
School leaders can celebrate successes in staff meetings and ceremonies, tell stories of accomplishments and collaboration, and use clear and shared language, created during professional development, to foster a commitment to staff and student learning. Leaders can also reinforce norms and values in their daily work, their words, and their interactions.

This section revealed the importance of a positive school culture to professional and student learning. Features of a positive culture were discussed along with key processes used to shape a more nurturing culture.

Summary

This review of literature focused on the current policy of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and its impact on education with a particular look at Ohio’s strategy to remain compliant with it and continue to enhance student achievement. The Schools of Promise recognition program is one way Ohio is closing the achievement gap. Five major lessons learned from the Schools of Promise program were highlighted with examples and supported with current research and literature. After reading this review of literature, one might comment on the considerable amount of research and literature available to
schools and school leaders to help them achieve success for their students. However, as stated in Chapter 1, the educational profession needs to continue to research practices, organization, and culture structures that positively impact student achievement because there are still many schools and students struggling to meet minimum standards imposed by current policy.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the research design and methodology used in this study, which explores the role of the principal in successful schools. A brief review of qualitative research and the qualitative case study design is followed by a description of the data sites and an explanation of procedures for data collection and analysis. Measures taken to meet the requirements of internal validity and trustworthiness are also presented.

Research Design and Strategy

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the research design and methodology used in this qualitative study. The purpose of qualitative research is to understand a particular program, person, group, institution, or social event in its natural setting through holistic and inductive understanding (Merriam, 2002). As Patton (1985) explained:

Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to
predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting—what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like in that particular setting... The analysis strives for depth of understanding. (p. 1)

The researcher’s goal is to enter the participant’s world not to manipulate or alter it, but to find a deeper level of understanding.

From education to anthropology to management science, researchers, students, and practitioners are conducting qualitative studies. It is not surprising, then, that different disciplines and fields ask different questions and have evolved somewhat different strategies and procedures. Understanding the manner in which different communities come to construct truth or knowledge is necessary in qualitative research. Pepper (1942) and Fox (2006) introduced four worldviews: (a) formism, (b) mechanism, (c) contextualism, and (d) organicism. The contextualists’ worldview is the basis for this research study, as it is for most educational studies because it is useful for interpreting both constructivist and behavioral approaches to education (Fox). The contextualist view is that an entity cannot be known without understanding the
full context of its connection to other entities. Thus, our everyday understanding of an event includes an appreciation of the behavior or action and its current context or setting as an integrated whole “in which the many features of an action blend, both with themselves and with their context” (Gifford & Hayes, 1999, p. 289).

As previously mentioned, qualitative research can employ different strategies and approaches to finding answers to research questions. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) identified eight research strategies of case study, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, biographical, historical, participatory, and clinical. Creswell (1998) identified five “traditions”—biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Tesch (1990) listed 45 approaches divided into designs (e.g., case study), data analysis techniques (e.g., discourse analysis), and disciplinary orientation (e.g., ethnography).

This qualitative research design is in the form of a collective case study. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) stated during a collective case study, several cases are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to a better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a
still larger collection of cases. One of education’s most recognized collective case study is *Savage Inequalities* (Kozol, 1991). Kozol researched the deplorable conditions of several school buildings in the United States and its effects on the children’s education.

Beck and Murphy (1995), in an effort to understand the role of management in creating good schools, state powerful dynamics both in the environment and in schools themselves are shaping education’s efforts to redefine school management. The authors studied factors influencing school success by going into different school settings and attempting to tease apart the structures that shape success. This study used a similar case study design by entering successful schools in order to study the programs, leadership, and collaboration within them.

The purpose of this study was to determine the specific practices and leadership emphasis of principals that are perceived to positively impact student achievement. This study explores the perceptions of the principal’s role in successful schools by answering the following research questions: (a) How does the principal support instruction aligned to the state’s academic content standards? (b) How does the principal maintain continuous
improvement of the school? (c) What is the principal’s role in the design of instruction for student’s success? (d) What is the principal’s role in developing partnerships with parents and the community to support student success? (e) What is the principal’s role in developing a culture where each individual feels valued?

Case studies were conducted of three Ohio Schools of Promise at the elementary level. An examination of the events, qualities, and behaviors of principals within these successful environments was conducted. Patterns, common traits, and individuality of the three elementary schools’ principals guided the analysis of the data.

Population and Sample

School principals and teachers served as respondents and provided data for this study. Several lists were obtained from the Ohio Department of Education, including a list of Ohio school buildings that have received the following state designations: Excellent, Effective, and Schools of Promise. According to the reports from the Ohio Department of Education (2005a), there are 889 school buildings in the state of Ohio with the Excellent designation, 1,136 school buildings with the Effective
designations, and 113 school buildings with the Schools of Promise designation.

Purposive sampling was used to identify schools within the population meeting specific criteria for selection; these include (a) elementary school buildings with the state designation of either Excellent or Effective, and recognized as a School of Promise; (b) school buildings where the current principal has been the principal of that building for at least three years; and (c) school buildings willing to participate in the study.

The first criterion was selected because this study focuses on the events, qualities, and behaviors of educators who have created successful school environments. There are many ways to define “success” in schools. In this study, the opinions of experts at the state level who establish criteria for the designations of Excellent, Effective, and Schools of Promise were relied upon to define “successful” schools. Please refer to Chapter 2 for the definitions of Excellent, Effective, and Schools of Promise designations according to criteria established by the Ohio Department of Education.

This study focuses on elementary school buildings. Each educational level of elementary, middle, and high
school encompasses its own unique style, which includes different methodologies, age-appropriate events and programs, and developmental issues. Therefore, only elementary school buildings were selected for this study.

The second criterion of this study was the inclusion of school buildings where the current principal has been the principal for at least three years. The rationale is related to the role the principal has in creating, promoting, and maintaining the academic climate of the school building where students can excel (Fullan, 2001; Schmoker, 1999; Shellard, 2003). Finally, the third criterion suggests each principal and each teacher’s willingness to participate in this study. Since the design of this research involves detailed interviews and focus groups, participants need to be willing to take the time necessary to participate and respond.

After careful review of the schools that met the selection criteria, three schools were selected (based on convenience and accessibility to the researcher’s location) and agreed to participate in the research study. The three school buildings in this research study received an “Excellent” rating from the Ohio Department of Education, are considered economically disadvantaged, and are located
in north central to northeastern Ohio. The major difference between these three schools is the type of community they are located within: Building A is located in a city school system, Building B in a rural setting, and Building C is in an urban community.

Building A is located in north central Ohio. The city surrounding Building A is comprised of 14 square miles and has a population of 26,000 residents. The children of the community are educated in one of six elementary buildings, a middle school, a high school, boys’ residential facility, or a special education building.

Building B is also located in north central Ohio. However, this school system covers over 119 square miles by blending several villages and small rural towns. A total of six different communities educate their children in a consolidated primary, intermediate, upper elementary, middle, and a high school building. The intermediate building housing the third and fourth grades is the focus of this study.

Building C is located in a large, urban city within northeastern Ohio. The city encompasses 62.41 square miles of 212,000 residents. The children have the option to attend one of the 57 buildings within the public school
system, along with many community and private schools in the immediate area. Table 5 breaks down the demographics of the three school buildings highlighted in this research study.

Data Collection Procedures

A qualitative methodology permits the study of an issue in depth and in detail. Patton (1990) described three kinds of data collection using the qualitative method of study: in-depth, open-ended interviews; direct observation; and written documents. During this study the researcher was the primary instrument of data collection through visitations, personal interviews with principals, focus group interviews with teachers, observation, and document analysis.

Once the focal point of the study was decided, an extensive review of literature was conducted, followed by a written research proposal. A formal presentation of the research proposal was made to the approving dissertation committee on November 7, 2005. The first phase concluded when Kent State’s Research Subjects Board approved the study’s Human Subjects Research application on November 16, 2005.
Table 5

Demographics of the Schools in the Research Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Building A</th>
<th>Building B</th>
<th>Building C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Report Card Rating</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Indicators Met</td>
<td>13 of 14</td>
<td>8 of 8</td>
<td>9 of 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Index (0-120)</td>
<td>96.3</td>
<td>99.6</td>
<td>102.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate Yearly Progress</td>
<td>Met</td>
<td>Met</td>
<td>Met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of District</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Enrollment</td>
<td>3,908</td>
<td>3,264</td>
<td>27,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades in Building</td>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>3 &amp; 4</td>
<td>K-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Enrollment</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>89.9%</td>
<td>97.7%</td>
<td>66.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi Racial</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
<td>96.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NC-Not Calculated. Used if fewer than 10 students in group.

The second phase of the research study entailed the field-testing of the guiding questions. Questions were developed for both the personal interviews with the principals and focus group sessions with the teachers. The questions, located in Appendices F and G, were used as a guide when conducting the interviews and focus groups. All
questions were asked during each data collection session. Additional questions were added only for clarification of the respondents’ comments to the original questions.

The content validity of the questions was examined by a group of 15 current educators on November 21, 2005. The educators included classroom teachers, curriculum specialists, special education directors, school administrators, and a graduate assistant. They were divided into groups of three. Each group investigated one of the five research questions and the interview questions pertaining to the designated research question. They were asked to evaluate the questions in terms of clear wording, targeting student achievement, and effectiveness at targeting the desired research question.

The field test respondents answered their designated interview questions and discussed whether the effectiveness and intent of the questions had been achieved. The group members recorded any suggestions on rewording and clarification. As a result, no major changes were made to the original set of questions. However, the suggestions were noted and used when clarification was needed during the principal interviews and teacher focus groups. For example, at times clarification was needed for the question
on professional development and in-service education; therefore, a variation inquiring about the criteria used when deciding who was invited to provide professional development and on which topics to focus was asked. As the interview process began, one question was added: “What is the principal’s role in successful schools?” It was insightful to learn the participants’ perception of the study’s overall research question.

During the third phase of the data collection, permission was granted by the selected superintendents and principals to conduct the study. To adhere to proper protocol, the superintendents were initially contacted through a letter of introduction and intent (Appendix H) followed by a phone call. One superintendent gave a positive response before a follow-up phone call was made. Another superintendent asked for a personal meeting to determine the merit of the study before granting access to his teachers. Lastly, the large, urban school district its governing board. Permission was established for this particular district/building on February 7, 2006.

Next, each principal received a letter of introduction and intent (Appendix J) and a phone call. The first three schools selected for the study were pleased to participate
and welcomed me into their settings. The principals were very interested in learning the results of the research study. The general impression was that “we” in education are constantly looking for effective ways to increase student achievement and anything that will aid in the process is positively received.

The researcher entered the environment during the fourth phase. The format of the actual data collection varied a little between the three schools due to the daily schedules of the participants. Each site was visited several times with the intent to: (a) observe the environment, programs, and events geared towards enhancing student achievement; (b) collect documents; (c) interview the principal; and (d) conduct focus groups with the teachers. The data collection occurred from November 29, 2005, to May 1, 2006.

The majority of the data collected was acquired through the focus group sessions. A focus group session is a moderator-led discussion among a group of individuals about their needs, habits, or life circumstances relevant to the research issue(s) at hand (Qualitative Research Consultants Association, 2003). The open-ended interaction of focus groups stimulates thoughts and emotions and
reveals material that is not ordinarily forthcoming in an individual interview. It also allows the researcher to examine how people in various roles interact and observe important behavior. Market Navigation, Inc. (2005) offered several suggestions to enhance the effectiveness of focus groups: invite participants using a specialized list, network to get the right people, tell them what the meeting is about beforehand, create an informal environment, make the experience fun, make the participants feel good about themselves, encourage interaction, and ask the right questions.

Due to time constraints, scheduling teachers for the focus groups could have been very challenging. Thankfully, the principals were very supportive and accommodating of this research process. The principals released teachers during the school day to participate in the focus groups. During the focus group sessions, many of the suggestions listed above from Market Navigation, Inc. (2005) were implemented: principals asked selected individuals to participate due to their involvement in school and student activities, committees, and knowledge of processes and systems in place at the school; teachers were given the guiding questions prior to the focus group session;
questions were field-tested for content validity and generally the same questions were asked in the principal interviews; and a generous lunch or snack was provided for the participating teachers. The teacher focus groups were very productive and encouraged a lot of interaction with the teachers.

Data Analysis

To assist in data collection and data analysis, a field log was used, principal interviews were transcribed, and the teacher focus group sessions were audiotaped and transcribed. In qualitative research, the investigator finds patterns while reviewing documents, observing, and interviewing. The investigator conducts a coding process where the frequencies of themes or topics are aggregated (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Inevitably, this involves interpretation on the part of the researcher. The data analysis process was conducted by going from a holistic perspective, and then deciphered the individual pieces of the data, only to revert to a holistic view.

The first step in the data analysis process was to organize and prepare the data. This involved transcribing interviews and focus group sessions, typing up field notes, and optically scanning material. The materials were read
several times. The goal of the first reading was to gain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning: What general ideas are the participants raising? What is the tone of the ideas? What are the general impressions or the overall depth, credibility, and use of the information? General thoughts about the data were recorded at this stage.

During the repeated readings of the data, coding began. Coding is the process of organizing the material into “chunks” before bringing meanings to those “chunks” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). It involves converting data into categories to create meaning and understanding. Data was placed under the corresponding research questions. For example, any comments about parents and community involvement went under Research Question #4: What is the principal’s role in developing partnerships with parents and the community to support student success? Also each piece of data was coded in regards to which school building provided the information. Themes began to emerge within each research question category. For example, Research Question #1: How does the principal support instruction aligned to the state’s academic content standards? was further divided into the emergent themes: attitude toward
the test, how they prepared for the test, and what alignment looked like.

The data analysis process was conducted by going from a holistic perspective (obtain a general sense and meaning from the data), and then deciphered the individual pieces of the data (place into categories and emergent themes) only to revert back to a holistic view (determine overall patterns and themes among the schools).

All the transcripts were reviewed a final time to assert whether the findings, main themes, and patterns were indeed consistent with the data. A comparison of the literature was conducted to determine which findings were supported or not supported by the literature. As a result of the data analysis, a portrait of three successful schools was created, reflecting the individuality of these school communities, and illuminating qualities or behaviors they have in common.

Trustworthiness

Several strategies were used to ensure internal validity and trustworthiness of the study. First, a reflective log was kept to prevent the researcher’s bias, as a result of past professional experiences (holding positions as a classroom teacher, an administrator at the
middle-school level, and an educational consultant helping school districts improve student achievement through professional development), to emerge and interfere with what was observed and documented during this research study. The researcher reflected on experiences throughout the research process using the log. During the data analysis process, the reflective log was examined to determine any inconsistencies between the researcher’s perception and what was observed or said by the research respondents. The only inconsistency noted was the researcher’s bias about how dark and gloomy one of the buildings appeared inside. In the data collected from the respondents, there was no mention about the appearance of the building; therefore, the researcher attributed this comment as a personal bias and it received no further mention in the research study.

Next, the concept of triangulation was used to strengthen the accuracy and validation of the analysis. Triangulation in qualitative research is complex because there is no one way to establish a best view (Stake, 1995). Data triangulation was employed by involving the use of different sources of information (interviewing the principals, teacher focus groups, and documentation
review). Guion (2002) stated data triangulation occurs when all stakeholder groups agree upon outcomes. The weight of evidence suggests that if every stakeholder, looking at the issue from different points of view, sees an outcome then it is more than likely to be a true outcome.

Next, Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) member check strategy—where participants review, clarify, and verify analysis and interpretation—was used. Member checking was conducted by taking the final report, specific descriptions, or themes back to the participants to determine whether these participants felt they were accurate. The principals and teachers were given the opportunity to view the data analysis and were asked questions concerning its findings. Such typical questions during this process were: Was the data represented correctly? Are there missing gaps in the data? Do the categories named correspond with the data received? Are you seeing the same general patterns and themes emerge? Basically, would you interpret the data as the study did? As a result, at least 20 different educators looked at the data to further enhance the internal validity and trustworthiness of the study.

Finally, a peer debriefer was used to enhance the accuracy of the account. This process involved locating a
person to review and ask questions about the qualitative study so that the account would resonate with people other than the researcher.

Two individuals in education but not associated with this study were chosen to review its contents and findings. Their questions resulted in adding a few clarification statements to what was unclear upon their first reading.

Limitation

The major limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size. Three school buildings were selected for this study from north central to northeastern Ohio, and therefore, they may not adequately represent elementary schools throughout the state. Another limitation is the interview and focus group method. The interview and focus group data yield information the participants choose to share, and their responses may be skewed by fear of repercussions, a desire to make the building look good, the time of year the information is gathered, and the tension present in Ohio schools today regarding accountability and budget cuts. The sample may or may not represent the majority views of teachers and administrators in Ohio schools.
CHAPTER IV
PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Chapter 4 focuses on analyzing the data collected and presenting the results. As is the case in many qualitative research studies, data for my study consisted of personal interviews as primary sources. In addition, observations, field notes, principal interviews, teacher focus groups, and review of educational documents were used as sources to explore the principal’s role in successful schools. This chapter first identifies the participants in the research study; it then presents the data in relation to the five research questions.

Research Participants

For this study I interviewed three school principals and conducted three teacher focus groups (totaling 15 teachers) in three different school systems. Each school building selected to participate in the research study received an “Excellent” rating from the Ohio Department of Education, is considered economically disadvantaged, has been honored as an Ohio School of Promise, and has had its
current principal in place for at least three years. Please refer back to Chapter 3 for specific information regarding an individual building’s performance according to the Local Report Card indicators, student enrollment, and building demographics.

Principals were asked to participate in the study based on their individual school building being honored as an Ohio School of Promise and their years of experience. However, I allowed the principals to select the teachers for the teacher focus groups within their own buildings. The principals selected teachers based on their involvement in school and student activities, committee participation, and knowledge of processes and systems in place at the school. The teachers’ level of experience ranged from 5 to 30-plus years of teaching experience in their current setting.

Building A

Building A is a traditional elementary building in that it houses students from kindergarten to sixth grade within a city school system. It is one of six elementary buildings in the district (10 buildings in all). Overall, the district houses 3,908 students in 10 different buildings. Forty percent of those students are considered
economically disadvantaged by the federal guidelines. However, the percentage of poverty students attending Building A is much higher. Building A has a student enrollment of 277 students, where 76.2% of those students are considered academically disadvantaged. Other subgroups of students within Building A are 6.2% American-American, 89.9% White, and 19.3% are Students with Disabilities. The Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals for each subgroup exceed the state requirement of 58.1% (White: 87.7%, Economically Disadvantaged: 85.7%, and All Students: 87.7%).

Building A received an Excellent rating from the Ohio Department of Education by meeting 13 of the 14 state indicators. To receive an indicator the school must achieve a 75% passage rate in any area tested and 93% in attendance. Building A met or exceeded the state required goal in all but one area, the third grade mathematics achievement scores (54.3%). Table 6 shows the percentage scores for all three buildings in the study, including Building A.

The student school day starts at 9:00 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. There are 20 teachers who have an average class size of 20 students. All the teachers have at least a
Table 6

Percentage of Students At and Above the Proficient Level
for the School Year 2004-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Achievement</th>
<th>Building A</th>
<th>Building B</th>
<th>Building C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3rd Grade Achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>85.1</td>
<td>93.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>93.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Grade Proficiency/Achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>88.6</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Grade Achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>82.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th Grade Proficiency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>92.3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>97.4</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>87.2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Goal (93%)</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>95.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
Table 6 (continued)

Percentage of Students At and Above the Proficient Level
for the School Year 2004-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Building A</th>
<th>Building B</th>
<th>Building C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NA—Not Applicable. Used if building does not have students at that grade level.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* State requirement is 75% passage for all tested areas and 93% for attendance.

Bachelor’s degree with 41.2% of the teachers with at least Master’s degree. The principal has been at the school for 11 years as the principal.

Gaining access to this site was relatively simple. Upon receiving my initial letter of research intent, the superintendent immediately responded with a phone call. The superintendent was very accommodating and had already informed the principal of Building A of my research and to anticipate my calling to schedule interviews and focus groups.

I interviewed the principal of Building A on two different occasions (for a total of two hours), observed a classroom, was given a guided tour of the facility and its
programs, and conducted a two-hour focus group session with five teachers. I learned through discussion and posters and charts displayed throughout the building that academics, parent involvement, and student citizenship in terms of behavior and respect were the focus of the building. When asked what they perceived as having the greatest impact on the success of their school, the teachers responded in unison that their high expectations for their students and strong dedication to helping students succeed had the greatest impact. Both the principal and teachers agreed that everyone (principal, teachers, support staff, parents, students, community members, partnerships, etc.) went above the call of duty. For example, every teacher was involved with some type of student intervention either at lunch or before or after school.

Building B

Building B uniquely caters to third and fourth graders in a large rural community. The school district covers 119 square miles and encompasses 6 villages that feed into the total district enrollment of 3,264 students. The district itself is not considered economically disadvantaged, only 30.8 students are at the poverty level (federal guidelines set the economically disadvantaged criteria at 40%).
Building B has 44.7% of its students as economically disadvantaged. Even though the building itself only houses two grade levels, it has an enrollment of almost 500 students, where 97.7% of those students are White and 12.4% of the students have a disability. Building B exceeded the state required AYP goal of 71.2% for each student subgroup (White: 85.2%, Economically Disadvantaged: 81.5%, and All Students: 85.1%). In fact, Building B received an Excellent rating from the Ohio Department of Education by meeting 8 of the 8 state indicators. Refer to Table 6 for the percentage scores in each tested area.

In 2003, due to financial constraints, the school district restructured the traditional elementary buildings into a consolidated primary (PreK-2), intermediate (grades 3-4), upper elementary (grades 5-6), middle (grades 7-8), and a high school. As a result, teachers and principals were moved to different locations throughout the district. The community, teachers, and administration strove to make this a smooth transition for all. Now, in the second year of relocation, the transition has proved to be very successful (according to Building B). In fact, the teachers laughed during the focus group session; they could not believe they had been so worried about the transition.
The student school day starts at 9:20 a.m. until 3:20 p.m. There are 32 teachers who have an average class size of 24 students. All the teachers have at least a Bachelor’s degree with 30.8% of the teachers with at least a Master’s degree. The principal has been an elementary principal within the district for 7 years. However, with the recent restructuring of the district, the principal has only been working with this particular staff for two years. Half of the staff did work with the principal prior to the restructuring.

Prior to gaining access to the building, I personally met with the superintendent. The superintendent was very protective of his teachers and what activities he asked of their time. The superintendent welcomed the research study since it provided both positive recognition to the building staff and a researcher’s perspective of what was working within the building. I conducted a principal interview and a focus group session with six teachers. My general feel in talking with the principal and the teachers was that they enjoyed working together and helping students meet challenging goals. They strove for students to be successful and have fun in the process. For example, instead of counting down the days until summer break, a
teacher and his class counted down the days until the new school year began. When asked what they perceived as having the greatest impact on the success of their school, they responded: They believed in their vision of high curriculum, academic, and behavioral expectations. These beliefs drove the action and motivation within the building; everyone (students, parents, teachers, principal, staff) knew this was a learning environment and respected that notion.

Building C

Building C is nestled in a large urban district of 57 school buildings. Even though the school district educates over 27,000 students, only 182 kindergarten through fifth graders are housed in Building C. Both the principal and teachers commented about the benefits of having a “smaller” school setting. One of those benefits was really getting to know and develop a connection with students’ families.

The school district is considered a poverty school district due to 75.8% of its students being economically disadvantaged. Building C has 96.2% of its students considered economically disadvantaged. Other subgroups of students within Building C are 23.8% African-American, 66.1% are White, 8.7% are Multi Racial, and 17.8% are
Students with Disabilities. The AYP goal of 71.2% was exceeded for All Students (93.8%). The other student subgroups were not reported for the 2004-2005 school year.

Building C received an Excellent rating from the Ohio Department of Education by meeting 9 of the 9 state indicators. The school celebrated when all of the fourth graders (100%) passed their achievement test in reading for the school year 2004-2005. Refer to Table 6 for the percentage scores in each tested area.

The student school day starts at 8:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. There are 12 teachers who have an average class size of 15 students. All of the teachers have at least a Bachelor’s degree with 92.3% of the teachers with at least a Master’s degree. The principal has been at the school for eight years.

Gaining access to Building C was a little more time-consuming than the other two sites. The district had specific guidelines on conducting research within its schools. Approval to conduct research within the district needed to be granted by a research committee, working on behalf of the superintendent. As a result, I submitted a four-page research proposal to the district’s research
committee for careful consideration. My proposal was approved a month later.

I had the opportunity to interview the principal of Building C and conduct a focus group session with four teachers. When asked what they perceived as having the greatest impact on the success of their school, they responded that everyone (teachers and principal) was on the same page and carried the load, use of the Accelerated Reader reading program, and use of data folders and Quality Tools. I saw evidence of Quality Tools as I entered the building: A bulletin board displayed each classroom’s yearly goal. I later learned the students themselves developed these goals.

In summary, this study includes interviews from three school principals and three different teacher focus groups (totaling 15 teachers) in three different school systems. I selected the principals due to their buildings’ Ohio Schools of Promise distinction. The principals selected individual teachers based on their involvement in school and student activities, committee participation, and knowledge of processes and systems in place at the school. The teachers’ level of experience ranged from 5 to 30-plus years of teaching experience in their current setting.
Research Questions

This section presents the data in relation to the five research questions. Data was collected using qualitative methodologies (interviews, focus groups, observations, documentation, and field notes). All individual interviews and teacher focus group sessions were audiotaped and then transcribed verbatim by the Research Bureau at Kent State University. One step in my data analysis process was to place data under the corresponding research questions. I quickly discovered that within each research question themes began to emerge. As a result, the data are reported according to the original five research questions and the themes that emerged during the data analysis process. Table 7 displays the research questions and emergent themes.

Research Question #1

How does the principal support instruction aligned to the state’s academic content standards?

Principals need to be certain the curriculum provided to students is aligned to the state academic standards for two simple reasons: State diagnostic assessments and
### Table 7

**Research Questions and Emergent Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| #1 How does the principal support instruction aligned to the state's academic content standards? | - Attitude toward test  
- How they prepare for the test  
- What alignment looks like |
| #2 How does the principal maintain continuous improvement of the school? | - Common planning time  
- Staff development focus on needs  
- Team approach to finding more effective ways |
| #3 What is the principal's role in the design of instruction for student's success? | - Common planning time  
- Encourage conversation about best practice  
- Provide intervention |
| #4 What is the principal's role in developing partnerships with parents and the community to support student success? | - Show parents what's going on  
- Get "them" in as much as possible |
| #5 What is the principal's role in developing a culture where each individual feels valued? | - Children's success is the priority  
- Treat teachers as professionals |

Achievement tests are developed from the standards and the Ohio Department of Education rate a school building based on the performance on these tests (e.g., Local Report Cards). As a result, many responses to questions about the alignment of state’s academic content standards made references to the “test(s)”.

The responses were categorized...
as follows: their attitude towards the test, how they prepare for the test, and what alignment looks like in their building.

**Attitude Toward the Test**

A school building receives a “passing score” by the Ohio Department of Education’s standards if 75% of the students in the building pass the given test. However, each principal in the research study wanted more than the 75% passage rate for his or her students. The responses below represent comments made from the principal (P) and teachers (T) within the corresponding schools of Building A, Building B, and Building C.

**A:** The principal commented, “I want them [the students] to be successful academically, and the test is one aspect of that. But what I want to see is a lot of honor roll students on my wall. Honor roll is continuous. It is a work ethic. How are you able to do your work on a day-to-day basis? Are you able to study and do things that are necessary for tests that come up on a regular basis?” (P)

**B:** The principal and teachers saw the achievement tests as a challenge. The teachers tried to beat last year’s scores. (P&T)
• The principal, the teachers, and the students are all in this together, all for one and one for all. (T)

• The teachers shoot for 100% passing the tests. Sinking ship scenario, don’t want to leave anyone behind. (P&T)

• A male teacher wears a dress if class meets goal of 85% passage rate. (T)

C: The principal and teachers referred to the achievement tests as “academic windows.” (P&T)

• Goal is for 100% to pass, not just 75%. (P&T)

How They Prepare for the Test

Listed below are comments from Building A and Building B regarding how they prepared for the test. Building C’s responses are better represented in the next section, “What does alignment look like?”

A: The principal and teachers took apart each test and looked at question format, vocabulary terms, and how to answer each question. (P&T)

• The building has adopted the “Better Answer Formula” developed by Ardith Cole (2002). It demonstrates how to teach students to break a
question down into its parts and how best to formulate an answer. (T)

- There are intervention programs during lunch, before and after school available for students; they are well attended. Almost all teachers provide an intervention program; there is a $500 stipend. (P)

- The teachers teach with the test in mind. (T)

- The principal has arranged that the third to sixth grade level teachers only teach two subjects, so they can concentrate on those standards. (P)

B: Third grade teachers provided workshops for parents. (T)

- Practice tests and testing information is available online for parents. (T)

- The teachers revamp classroom tests to look like Ohio’s achievement tests. (T)

- The Title Reading teachers help with the testing. (P&T)
• The principal encourages other forms of assessments; for example, students keep writing portfolios to show progress and growth. (P&T)

What Does Alignment Look Like?

All three schools in this research study have developed and worked from a curriculum map. These maps are aligned with the Ohio Content Standards. Refer back to Chapter 2 for the research-base and more detailed explanation of the curriculum mapping process. In fact, the schools also mapped their assessments. They used this information to inform future instructional decisions. The following is a representative sampling of the responses obtained regarding alignment:

A: The curriculum has been mapped for a few years. (P)

• The principal is trying to unify the unit tests in math to give a more accurate idea how the students are doing. (P&T)

• The Continuous Improvement team analyzes the testing data with the district specialists then develops goals, and makes recommendations to the teachers. (P)
• The principal conducts a goal setting meeting in August after the data has been analyzed, before school starts, which is not mandatory, but most attend. (P&T)

B: The curriculum has been mapped; now the district is trying to do assessment mapping. (P)

• The teachers have the standards on “packets” to show students and parents they are indeed covering the standards. (T)

• The students keep portfolios that demonstrate work and progress towards mastering grade-level indicators. (T)

C: The district has a pacing guide the teachers must follow. Appendix J provides a sampling of the pacing guide used. (P&T)

• The pacing guide includes 6-week assessments. (P&T)

• The standards are posted in the classroom; the class marks them off as they are mastered. (P&T)

• The district has transformed the grade level indicators into “I can statements” that are easier for the students to understand. Each
student is given an “I can” booklet with grade-level appropriate skills. They are to check off each skill as they are mastered. Examples of “I can” statements are: I can identify where a story takes place. I can read a thermometer. I can use a table of contents to locate information. (P&T)

- The principal has introduced the use of data folders in the classrooms. They are utilized as a contract with the students and used to “data process” with them. (P&T)

Summary of the Principal’s Role

The principal’s role in supporting instruction aligned to the state’s academic content standards was that of a coach. Hersey and Blanchard’s (1988) Situational Leadership Model stated coaching leaders define roles and tasks, but seek ideas and suggestions from the follower. Decisions remain the leaders’ prerogative, but rationale for decisions and communication for clarification are given. Due to the hierarchical nature of how academic content standards are passed down from the Ohio Department of Education to the schools, the principals have little to no choice to adhere to the standards. The principals were very
aware of the academic standards and testing procedures and sought out curriculum alignment to assure standards were being taught effectively. The teachers were competent in their specific teaching area; however, the principal assumed the responsibility to create a building cohesiveness of instruction. This was seen through the curriculum mapping process, facilitating the alignment of classroom tests to resemble components and language used on the Ohio Achievement tests, and organized interventions for students for skills not yet mastered. The principals sought answers to such questions as: Are all the standards being effectively taught? How and when are they being taught? How do we know this? What can we do to help students master the skills needed?

Research Question #2

How does the principal maintain continuous improvement of the school?

All three schools were consistent in their answers regarding the principal’s role in maintaining continuous improvement. Each principal made a significant effort to create a common planning time for the teachers, used a team approach to finding more effective ways, and conducted
staff development which focused on staff and students’ needs.

Common Planning Time

Each of the three schools had a common planning time for their teachers. During this time, the teachers and principals discussed curriculum alignment, reviewed achievement test data, sought assistance for particular students, communicated about instructional strategies, and developed action plans to enhance academic success for the students. However, the structure of the time allotted for this professional dialogue varied between the three schools.

The common planning time in Building A occurred every Wednesday from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Any teachers who wanted to meet as a group signed up for this time slot. For example, the first grade teachers may meet to collaborate on how to best teach a particular skill to the students, the intervention specialist and second grade teacher may meet to discuss appropriate modifications for a particular student, or the fifth grade math and science teachers may meet to create an interdisciplinary unit. The teachers are given a two-hour time slot within their workday to collaborate with various colleagues to enhance student
success. It is a “give and take” situation between the teachers and the principal: The teachers will bring their lunch to the meeting, making it a working lunch, while the principal provides substitute teachers in their classrooms to cover the remaining meeting time. To help maintain consistency in the building, the principal used the same substitute teachers every Wednesday; therefore, the substitute teachers were familiar with the building and the students were familiar with the substitute teachers. The principal explained this arrangement of common planning time was not an easy task to get “approved.” The principal worked hard with the teacher’s union and the board of education to work out the particulars of paying and justifying a permanent substitute teacher. However, the principal and teachers were very pleased with the outcomes and progress occurring as a result of the common planning time. The principal generally attended the Wednesday sessions to be of assistance and/or stay in touch with the teachers’ and students’ needs.

In Building B, the common planning time occurred in grade level meetings either before or after school. Each grade level met once a week (e.g., every Tuesday at 7:30 a.m.). They met to discuss the curricular direction and
progress of the week and weeks to come and to solicit ideas from the group about instructional and intervention strategies. This school building was unique because it only housed two grade levels, third and fourth. The common planning time was outside contracted hours, meaning the teachers were not being paid for this weekly meeting. In fact, the teachers initiated the common planning time. The teachers proclaimed this common planning time was vital to strengthening collegiality in the building, improving their performance in the classroom, and enhancing student achievement. The principal attended each meeting to show support and be a resource to the teachers.

The common planning time in Building C occurred during waiver days. Waiver days were granted through the Ohio Department of Education through an extensive application process. The Center for School Improvement (2005) explained how a school district can request additional professional development days through its innovation education pilot program. The State of Ohio granted this school district three waiver days: one before school starts, one in the middle of the year, and one in the spring. A task the principal gave the teachers during this time was analyzing their own classroom data from achievement testing results.
The kindergarten, first grade, and second grade teachers met as a group. Then the third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers met as a group. Even though this is a time-consuming and difficult task, the principal stated it created understanding and ownership of the process. The teachers agreed that the task was tedious but beneficial to them, because only after completing the data analysis process did they truly understand where their students’ strengths and weaknesses lie. With this knowledge the grade-level teachers then brainstormed and formulated solutions to areas needing improvement in the classroom.

The teachers of Building C also considered their common lunchtime as common planning time due to the quality of conversation that occurred each day. The teachers were always trying to help out a student or another teacher in meeting their learning or instructional goals. For example, before the focus group started, one teacher handed another teacher a teaching resource she had inquired about earlier.

Staff Development Focused on Needs

All three buildings were constantly looking for relevant professional development to enhance their practice and student achievement. Each expressed a desire for staff development to be meaningful and building applicable. The
principals and teachers agreed the best professional development occurred when the activity was at building level, everyone could attend, the principal was in attendance and supportive, the information presented was data-driven, and the activity was relevant to their particular situation. Listed below are comments made by each of the schools regarding staff development currently being conducted in their buildings.

A: The district holds staff development meetings to “unwrap the standards.” The teachers divide up by grade level to create conversation about indicators securely taught and those needing refinement. (P&T)

- The best staff development is when only the building meets instead of a district-wide event. (P&T)

- Many of the staff development has been focused on literacy, exploring best practices and hands-on. (T)

B: The principal goes to a workshop of interest and takes a group of teachers with him. The group first goes to the workshop, then discusses among themselves how something would work in the building,
then present as a group to the rest of the grade level/building for their opinion. (P&T)

- The teachers are currently working on backward lesson planning. (T)

- Past staff development opportunities have been CORE-basic reading support, differentiating teaching, and backward lesson planning. (T)

- The teachers felt they were already doing a lot of what they were hearing at the workshops, so it was a nice pat on the back. (T)

C: The building itself has little money to use towards professional development; therefore, the principal is largely dependent on what the district offers. (P)

- Past professional development activities have been: Accelerated Reader, Baldrige and Quality Tools, brain research, and reading strategies. (P&T)

- The staff has embraced the Accelerated Reading program, even though the rest of the district focuses its energy on the 100 Book Challenge. (T)
• The teachers and principal feel the students are held more accountable through Accelerated Reader. (P&T)

• The building has incorporated many of the strategies learned through the Quality Tools in-services. The principal can only afford to send a few teachers at a time to this in-service; therefore, those who do go share the information learned. The principal hopes to eventually have everyone gain direct exposure to the content. (P)

• The principal and teachers commented that much professional development occurs within the building via professional dialogue with one another. (P&T)

*Team Approach to Finding More Effective Ways*

The principal was the educational leader and administrative head of each of the school buildings researched; however, each of the principals realized the expertise of the professional teachers in his or her building and solicited that insight before making curricular and programming decisions. As demonstrated by
the comments below, each building had a team approach to
the decision-making process.

A: The Continuous Improvement Team recommends any new
ideas for programs and processes. The teachers then
decide at the teachers’ meeting. (P&T)
• The principal rarely makes a decision without
teacher input. (T)

B: The principal makes suggestions. (T)
• Many times the ideas for improvement starts
conversation and a few teachers take ownership
and develop into full swing. (T)
• The principal knows when to sit back and let the
teachers devise a plan of action. (T)

C: Team approach is used for making decisions. (P&T)
• Decisions are made on collaboration days,
principal presents, teachers brainstorm and look
at solutions and implement, and there is total
buy-in because everyone has a voice. (P&T)

Summary of Principal’s Role

The principal’s role in maintaining continuous
improvement of the school is that of coach and supportive
leader. Walter, Caldwell, and Marshall (1980) verified that
leaders who attend to both task and personal needs are considered to be most effective; indeed, the majority of the evidence indicates that no one style or one type of leadership is "consistently more effective than another ... those perceived to be effective are task oriented at times and concerned with socio-emotional needs at other times" (p. 618). Hersey and Blanchard (1969) referred to these deliberate actions as examples of situational leadership; their theory held that leaders should engage in different combinations of tasks and relationship behaviors depending upon the maturity level of the members of the group in relation to a specific task. In the case with the researched schools, the teachers were very competent in their teaching area; they sometimes required a little guidance, a cohesive plan to focus teaching efforts, and specific resources to complete a task. The principals were there to be coaches and supportive leaders.

It was the principals’ role to stay informed with the academic progress of the students. The principals knew the skills the students were mastering and which areas needed reinforcement. Using student academic data and teacher suggestions, the principals designed a cohesive focus for the building (e.g., topics for staff development) and then
continued their coaching role (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988) as the plan was implemented throughout the building. The principals also utilized Hersey and Blanchard’s supporting leader style. For example, the principal placed decision-making in the teachers’ control when it came to the needs of individual students and when they wanted to try out a new procedure or process thought to enhance student achievement. The principals drew on the expert knowledge and skill of the teachers to help in maintaining continuous improvement of the school.

Research Question #3

What is the principal’s role in the design of instruction for student’s success?

It was learned that principals and teachers desire informed instruction. Assessment data is used to support student success and provide valuable feedback regarding areas needing improvement. This information is continual and from multiple sources. Principals and teachers want to use this information to design instruction ensuring every student’s success. Forms of assistance include: tutoring, integrating students with disabilities, regrouping students for instruction, using varied instructional strategies, spending time on content, reorganizing the schools’
resources, and providing additional programs outside normal school hours. The principal’s role in designing instruction for students’ success is presented through the prevailing themes of common planning time, encouraged conversation about best practices, and intervention programs.

Common Planning Time

The idea of a common planning time for teachers was brought up repeatedly during both the principal interviews and teacher focus groups and therefore deserves being mentioned again. All parties agreed this concept was instrumental to the success of their school and its students. Simply put, this time allowed the teachers and principals time to reflect on curricular issues “in the moment” (e.g., what is going on now, this week), seek appropriate expertise (e.g., share resources and instructional strategies), and then make necessary adjustments (e.g., brainstorm solutions). The teachers and principals benefited from the opportunity to have professional dialogue and reassurance that they were all working toward common goals. As mentioned previously, each of the three schools had a common planning time for its teachers; however, each school went about it differently.
Refer back to Chapter 3 to see how each school designed its common planning time.

Encourage Conversation About Best Practice

The teachers from Building C summed up the underlying motivation of professional dialogue by all three buildings: “Teachers [and principals] have an inner desire for all students to do well and they are always looking for just one more piece to help.” The common planning time provides the foundation for such conversation, but both the principals and teachers in each building commented that the professional dialogue went well beyond this segment of time. In fact, conversations about best practices were an integral part of their daily professional lives.

The teachers of Building A and C responded that the teachers’ lunchroom was a positive place. Many said the positive, professional atmosphere in the lunchroom was different than in previous buildings where they had worked. Currently, the lunchroom was a place where they could celebrate the successes of the day, gain insight into the challenges they are facing, receive assistance from a colleague, and reaffirm common goals. It was not uncommon for an individual to share an article and by the end of the week have several other colleagues respond by finding
materials and information pertaining to the topic at hand. As a result, strategies and activities were tried in classrooms and then discussed professionally to determine their success.

The principal and teachers of Building B engaged in book studies. A book study was when everyone read the same book in order to participate in meaningful discussions about the major themes and reactions the book elicits. Participation in the book study was voluntary; however, most did participate. Perhaps some were fearful of being left out because much of the conversations in the lunchroom and in the hallways were about ideas presented in the book. It was powerful to read the latest research, discuss its merit with colleagues, determine its validity in a specific situation, and try it out with the guidance and support of fellow colleagues. The most recent book chosen was Making Standards Work by Douglas Reeves (Reeves, 2001b). Titles used in the book study came from a variety of sources. The principal and teachers recommended books based on attendance at a conference or workshop, discussion with another educator, or suggestions in professional journals.
Provide Intervention

Each of the schools in this research study provided an intense intervention program to help their students meet challenging goals. In fact, most of (if not all) the teachers in the three schools personally provided an intervention service. The teachers were compensated anywhere from $0-$500 a year for intervention instruction. The teachers were grateful for the money, but it in no way reflected the time and energy spent providing this service.

Each school provided this extra service to its students in a different manner. The principal and teachers of Building A focused their intervention program at lunchtime. They felt it was best to “get the kids” while they were still in the building and on “school time.” Most students enjoyed eating their lunch with the designated teacher while receiving one-on-one or small group instruction. The principal and teachers of Building B developed a “join a club” atmosphere out of its intervention program. The students (with parent permission) chose a predetermined before or after school session. The time spent was full of structured activities with a flare of fun.
Although the principal and teachers of Building C did offer intervention before and after school, they emphasized intervention based on data folder information used in the classroom and individual contracts developed as a result of a student’s progress. The principal had been instrumental in introducing and incorporating Quality Tools into the classrooms. The teachers liked having the instructional data at their fingertips and in the hands of the students. It helped create responsibility for the students and has given the teachers actual data on which students mastered which skills.

The use of Quality Tools came out of an in-service the principal and several teachers attended on The Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence. The Baldrige Criteria provides a systems perspective for understanding performance by creating a common language for communication and sharing best practices, and the use of Quality Tools can help aid in that communication (National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2006). Quality Tools can be used to improve any kind of process. In this instance, Building C was using the tool of student data folders. Data folders were a way for students, teachers, and parents to keep track of student performance. Students took ownership,
accountability, and responsibility for their own learning by setting individual goals and then tracking their own performance to determine their progress. Students began by keeping track of their spelling test, math facts, homework completion, attendance, and behavior. Once they understood the concept and skill of data collection, they became more involved in measuring individual progress and multiple goals. The data folders provided “in-process measures” that promoted data-driven decisions about student learning and intervention as individual goals and progress towards those goals were documented.

Below are more comments about each of the intervention programs in place to help succeed at the designated school buildings.

A: Offers an intervention program at lunch. (P&T)

- After school study hall is meant to help struggling students to help get started with their homework, and is teacher recommended. It is staffed by volunteers (college and high school students) 3 days a week for 45 minutes. (T)
• Every teacher is either working before or after school or during their lunch conducting some sort of intervention. (P&T)

B: The building has “clubs” that meet either before or after school (student choice) to provide extra help toward the achievement test and create overall better learners. These “clubs” are very well attended. There are 3 teachers for about 20 students. The teachers and student work in stations: right- and left-brain activities to get them moving and fed, reading activities, and computer lab for content-related games. (T)

• Title I teachers are in the classrooms. (P)

• Teachers share ideas among themselves to help a struggling student. (T)

C: Implementation of Quality Tools such as data folders to chart reading, behavior, and homework. Data folders provide a visual for students and parents. They create ownership for the students. The students begin to see the connection between their actions and results. They begin to understand they
earn grades, not given grades. It teaches them, they are responsible for their work and success. (P&T)

- The classroom goals are charted for all to see. (P&T)

- Students can see where the class (as a whole) is on the continuum of meeting their goal(s). (T)

Summary of the Principal’s Role

The principal’s role in the design of the instruction for student success was that of a coach and supporter (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). The principals kept the atmosphere focused on improvement, fine-tuning, and continuous quest for learning. For example, the principals provided opportunities for professional discussion (e.g., common planning time), shared professional literature and information, and provided the time needed to work with students needing extra help. Again, the principal utilized the teachers’ expertise to help design and improve the instruction for student success.

Research Question #4

What is the principal’s role in developing partnerships with parents and the community to support student success?
All three school buildings stressed the importance of informing and involving parents and community members. The principal of Building A stated the parents’ role was complementary to the schools. The principal of Building B wanted the parents and community members looking in and knocking hard at the door saying, “What’s going on in there!” because what is going on inside is so good. The teachers of Building C kept in contact with parents daily through data folders. The principals in each building made a substantial effort to inform the parents and community members about what was happening at school and invited their assistance and presence in the building as much as possible. Below is the data regarding how the parents are informed about their children’s progress and events where parents and community members participated in the educational process.

*Show Them What’s Going On*

Each principal desired to keep parents informed of what and how their children were doing in school. Listed below are some of the ways parents were informed and part of their children’s educational process.

A: The Continuous Improvement Team conducts a parent needs assessment and acts upon the results. (P)
• The upper grades have daily homework that needs to be signed by a parent. (T)

• The principal creates a monthly newsletter. (P)

• The school holds 10-20 conferences a year. (P)

• The principal has hired a parent volunteer coordinator to help encourage and organize parents in the building. (P)

B: Parents have their child’s teacher’s home phone number and do indeed call. (T)

• The principal reminds teachers that they need to send home twice as many good notes as bad ones. (P&T)

• Principal says often to the teachers, “We don’t want the parents looking in and saying ‘What is going on in there?’ We want them to say, ‘HEY WHAT’S GOING ON IN THERE!’ as a positive.” (T)

• The principal says to the teachers often, “You’ve got to get them in here every chance you get.” (T)

• The principal says often to the teachers, “You’ve got to get them hammering at the door, coming to
find out what you’re doing because it is good.” (T)

• The principal says often to the teachers, “You need to show the best of your best all the time, you can’t have the parents only showing up at school because there is a problem.” (T)

• The parking lot is packed on choir and party nights. Parents want to come in and be a part of what is good. (T)

C: The parents are involved. The principal see them before, during and after school. (P)

• Parents and teachers correspond every day through use of data folders. Behavior logs, academic progress, and homework assignments are charted and shared with the parents daily. (P&T)

• The school is small. The principal and teachers know the families; the principal and teachers know all the kids and care for them. (P&T)

• The building has family nights covering areas of content concern. (P)
Get Them In As Much As Possible

The three principals strived to improve in this area. They were always looking for additional ways to enhance students’ education by their relationships and partnerships with the community. They all agreed this is a resource that has not been used to its fullest potential for the students, teachers, individual community members, and the community itself.

All three schools had parents and other community members come into the building to provide teacher assistance, help out with special programming, provide one-on-one or small group assistance, and other various items based on school need. While I was in the buildings, I saw several community members providing such services. In Building A, I saw a community member preparing the computer room for an upcoming fourth grade class. In Building B, I saw a parent collecting soup labels as a fundraiser for the school. In Building C, I saw a community member reading to a class of students in the library.

The principal of Building A made a collaborative effort to emphasize the importance of developing partnership with parents and community members to support student success. In Building A, two positions were funded
to aid in developing relationships with parents and community members: a parent volunteer coordinator and public relations promoter. The parent volunteer coordinator was a teacher who received a stipend for overseeing all the programs that depended on parent volunteers. The principal also hired a retired community member to help with public relations. Many times these individuals worked together to help parents and community members provide wonderful opportunities for the student and volunteers alike.

A: The school has the Ohio Reads program that brings in community members, mostly college students and retired individuals in town. (P&T)

- An after school study hall program is dependent on volunteers. It meets 3 times a week for 45 minutes. Generally it is high school and college age students who help out in this area. (P)

- Volunteers run the computer lab: They get the computer turned on and running and assist students during the class. The classroom teacher has the lesson plans and facilitates the class, but is grateful for the assistance in the room. (P)
• The school has had large donations that have paid for computers and smart boards. This is a direct result of the work of the community relations position. (P)

• The local university provides dance instructors for the students. It is a great cultural experience for the students. (T)

• A representative from the local university comes once every two weeks to expose the children to different careers and skills needed for those careers. (T)

• A hotel chain in the area sponsors a family game night at the school. Families play games from the classrooms. The public library staff attends to sign families up for a library card. Every family leaves with a door prize of a board game. It is very well attended. (T)

Summary of the Principal’s Role

The principal’s role in developing partnerships with parents and the community to support student success is that of a public relations promoter. The principals took “it takes a village to raise a child” approach to educating
the students understanding that all the different entities (school, parents, and community) play a vital role in the child’s growth. Therefore, the principals felt it was imperative to keep the parents and community members informed about the status of the school. Through informational literature (e.g., newsletter), personal notes home, informal conversations, and formal requests, the principals kept the parents and community members knowledgeable about the activities and successes at the school, individual student progress, and areas requesting their assistance.

Research Question #5

What is the principal’s role in developing a culture where each individual feels valued?

Before presenting data for this research question, I want to describe the atmosphere I encountered in each of the schools. There was a positive air in all three buildings. I felt a true sense of educators working together to reach optimal success for their students. The principals and teachers were very dedicated to their students and were always looking for better ways to help one another, educators and students alike, to be successful. For example, Building C commented that all
teachers carry the load: “No one says ‘I don’t have to do that.’ We trust each teacher in the building even with our children.” They were also individuals who enjoyed their jobs and who they worked among. For example, one teacher in Building B did a countdown to the first day of school instead of a countdown to summer vacation. One teacher used the metaphor, “The school bell signals the starting pistol. We teach at a fast pace and need to get running.”

Every school had a culture that influenced the way people think, feel, and act. Being able to understand and shape the culture is key to a school’s success in promoting staff and student learning. Refer back to Chapter 2 for the research-based discussion on school culture. The data collected for this research question developed a summary of two underlying beliefs: Children’s success is the priority and teachers should be treated as professionals.

*Children’s Success is the Priority*

I previously mentioned there was a positive air in all three buildings and felt a true sense of educators working together to reach optimal success for their students. Listed below are comments to support that statement.

A: The principal greets the kids as they enter in the morning. (P)
• The principal and teachers track past Honor Roll students through high school because Honor Roll represents a strong work ethic they like to encourage, not a “one day test.” The principal and teachers recognize them at an assembly and invite them back. The past students are sent a laminated newspaper clipping with their name, a candy bar, and a certificate. (P&T)

• Students are rewarded for good citizenship and behavior by a special lunch with the principal. (T)

• Teachers have goodie baskets to reward good behavior and citizenship. (T)

• The principal wants the students to develop a relationship with a caring adult, in the building, that will want them to come to school even though they don’t want to. (P)

• Principal and teachers have high expectations for the students. (P&T)

• Everyone (parents and school) helps the students. (P&T)
B: Setting of high curriculum, academic standards and expectations. (P&T)

- A school with high academic and behavioral expectations guarantees all students an education that will prepare them for life’s challenges by providing a comprehensive, engaging curriculum delivered by quality educators in a safe, stimulating, and respectful environment. (P&T)
- All children should and can learn. (T)
- Learning is encouraged and positive. (T)
- High expectations for achievement and behavior. (T)
- A Respectful environment. (T)
- The mission filters down to the students’ class rules, how the principal and teachers walk in the halls (respectful that learning is going on) and how the principal and teachers present themselves to kids. (P&T)
- The principal and teachers all believe in the mission. (P&T)
- Vision drives action. (P&T)
• Teachers work hard and are dedicated. Everyone goes above the call of duty. Most of the teachers are providing intervention either at lunch, before or after school. (P&T)

• Everyone (students, parents, teachers, staff) knows this is a learning environment and respects that notion. (T)

C: One of the major goals is everyone works together: teachers, parents, community members. (P&T)

• Each classroom develops their own goals. They are posted in the hallway for all to see. It creates ownership for the students. (P&T)

• All the teachers are on the same page. (P&T)

• All the teachers are on board. No one says, “I don’t have to do that.” Everyone carries the load. The teachers agreed they would trust each teacher in this building with their own children. (T)

• The school’s mission was developed by the teachers: “We will work together to help others learn.” (P&T)
Treat Teachers as Professionals

After interviewing and conducting focus groups, no one interviewed stated that the principal took an “I am the boss” position. There was an attitude of everyone working with the principal, not for the principal. In fact, one might say it was the other way around: the principal worked for the teachers. All three principals were conscious of the teachers’ workload, their personal time spent on work issues, and their having resources and information needed to perform their jobs efficiently. Each school researched stated it was not uncommon for the principal to ask them such questions as: “What do you need? How can I help you? What can I do?” The teachers were appreciative of the care, concern, and professionalism their principals showed towards them. Listed below are collective comments about the care, concern, and professionalism the principals demonstrated:

- The principal will not say “no” to you. He or she may say, “I’m concerned about this” and lets you work it out if it’s something you still want to pursue. (Building B, T)
- The principal will find the time and resources needed. (Buildings B & C, T)

- It’s a common place to bring ideas together and help each other. (All three buildings, T)

- The principal and teachers want the kids to know and see we have fun here. (Buildings B & C, T)

- Principal greets the teachers in the morning and talks with them. It is an opportunity for them to ask the principal questions. They know he or she will come around each morning. (All three buildings, T)

- There is a tear-off section on the meeting agenda for teachers’ thoughts and concerns. This is intended for all voices to be heard, not just the vocal ones. (Building A, P)

- The lunchroom is a positive place. (All three buildings, T)

- It is a respectful environment. (Building B, T)

- The principal has the teachers’ backs. (All three buildings, T)

- The principal is very, very open-minded. (Building B, T)
• The principal is extremely supportive. (Buildings B & C, T)

Summary of the Principal’s Role

The principal’s role in developing a culture where each individual feels valued is crucial. The principals were determined to engage in activities that developed positive relationships and in hopes of creating a family atmosphere where members were valued, supported, and praised. The principals demonstrated Sergiovanni’s (2005) servant leadership role. The principals gladly spent much of the day in creating and sustaining the culture of the school building (welcoming students in the building, visiting teachers in the morning, continuous communication to all stakeholders, participatory decision-making, and providing support for students and teachers). The principals developed a collaborative culture of an “our” instead of a “we” orientation. The culture was characterized by: sharing and networking, rewards and recognition, and empowerment opportunities.

Summary of Results

So far in Chapter 4, I have introduced the research participants and presented the data collected. I
interviewed three school principals and conducted three teacher focus groups (totaling 15 teachers) in three different school systems. The data were presented in reference to the five research questions that guided the study and the themes that emerged during the data analysis process. The data were presented in such a way that the reader could also observe how each school responded (Building A, Building B, and Building C).

The purpose of this study was to determine the specific practices and leadership emphasis of principals that are perceived to positively impact student achievement. I wanted to learn what behaviors and qualities these Ohio Schools of Promise had in common to better inform and enhance my personal practice as well as that of fellow and future educators, particularly school administrators. How are these principals able to turn what they know into action for the academic benefit of their students? I was successful in my quest. As I spent months reading and reflecting on the responses and comments of the research participants, my thoughts and data kept returning to the extraordinary positive culture exhibited by the three schools. The principals were able to create a positive culture with the purpose of promoting learning and
engagement for both students and teachers. This was demonstrated by the principals’ capacity to create a sense of belonging and clear direction. The principals at these schools had the ability to create and sustain a sense of belonging for students, teachers, parents, and the community in which the schools resided. For example, Building A wanted students to develop a relationship with a caring adult in the building that would encourage the students to come to school even though they did not want to. I believe this sense of belonging was also achieved for the teachers, parents, and community members by the encouragement, professionalism, and success they received from being part of the educational process. The principals were also successful in providing a clear direction for the students and teachers. Each principal shared their desire for all students to do well and their quest to help students succeed. These schools focused on this goal through means of curriculum mapping, common planning time, informed instruction, clear goals, and constant reflection.

Chapter 5 includes an in-depth analysis of the major findings of the research study briefly introduced above (how the principal was able to create a positive culture that promoted learning and engagement for both the students
and teachers by creating a sense of belonging and providing clear direction. Conclusions were drawn along with implications for action and recommendations for further research.
Chapter 5 begins with an overview of the research study. Then, the chapter presents a summary of the research findings and important conclusions drawn from the data presented in Chapter 4. These findings were compared to other current research. Next, the chapter provides a discussion of the implications for action and recommendations for further research.

Overview

As a result of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the accountability, annual testing, and demonstrating academic progress of all students have become major priorities of educators throughout the nation. In Ohio, schools are rated based on their students’ performance on state diagnostic and achievement tests (e.g., Local Report Cards). Therefore, school principals and other school personnel are in constant pursuit of learning how to educate students more efficiently. The purpose of this
study was to determine the specific practices and leadership emphasis of the principal that are perceived to impact student achievement positively.

Three successful elementary schools were investigated through principal interviews, teacher focus groups, and observations. The schools chosen were each designated as an Ohio School of Promise, meaning each has made great strides in positive student achievement scores in spite of a low socioeconomic level.

Qualitatively, the study explored the perceptions of the principal’s role in successful schools by answering the following research questions: (a) How does the principal support instruction aligned to the state’s academic content standards? (b) How does the principal maintain continuous improvement of the school? (c) What is the principal’s role in the design of instruction for student success? (d) What is the principal’s role in developing partnerships with parents and the community to support student success? (e) What is the principal’s role in developing a culture where each individual feels valued?

As a result of the data analysis process, 13 themes developed among the three schools (e.g., common planning time, curriculum mapping, and intervention). However, an
all-encompassing idea kept reoccurring: The principal had been able to promote learning and engagement for both adults and students. The principals at these schools created and sustained a sense of belonging for students, teachers, parents, and the community in which the schools resided. They also successfully provided a clear direction for students and teachers. These findings are perceived to be a major reason why students are achieving great success at these schools. Chapter 5 continues with an in-depth analysis of the major findings of the study along with a discussion of the implications for action and recommendations for further research.

Research Findings

One universal question guided this study: What is the principal’s role in a successful school? It is important to continuously ask this question as the role of the principal is perpetually changing and increasingly challenging. The research (Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 1992; Sergiovanni, 2001; Williams, 2006) confirms improved leadership is critical to improved student achievement. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the variables that are perceived to help create high-performing schools.
During the data analysis process, themes emerged as to many of the specific practices, programs, and beliefs the three “successful” schools had in common. Chapter 4 gave a detailed account of the 13 themes that emerged through the data collected. In addition to the emerging themes, major findings were also generated from the research study. The universal question of the research study (What is the principal’s role in successful schools?) was answered. The principal needs to engage in activities that create and sustain a positive school culture. It is within this positive school culture that learning and success prevail.

Major Finding 1: Positive School Culture

McCloud (2005) detailed that when one urban elementary school changed its culture from rowdy to calm, the students and staff became empowered and confident resulting in the drastic rise of student achievement. Deal and Peterson (1999) explained that when a school has a positive, professional culture, results include meaningful staff development, successful curricular reform, and the effective use of student performance data. Refer back to Chapter 2 to review the discussion and research on a positive school climate. The benefits of creating a positive school culture are exactly what were observed in
this research study. This study shows how vital the school culture is to the success of the school. A positive school culture is imperative. Because the principals focused their time and energy into creating a positive school culture, this enabled the other areas (instruction aligned to standards, maintain continuous improvement, design instruction for student success, and development of partnerships with parents and the community) to also achieve noteworthy outcomes.

The principals in the research study created a culture that empowered and instilled confidence in teachers as they prepared for achievement testing, solicited the expertise of the teachers for instructional improvements, encouraged professional dialogue and research, valued its members (students and teachers), and sought after parents and community members to enhance the school’s effectiveness. A positive school culture is the underlying reason why the other components of successful schools were able to flourish. For example, a principal seeking ways to increase reading comprehension will ask for and value teacher suggestions. As a result, suggestions are developed into action plans and then implemented. Next, assessment of the new approach or program determines the next course of
action. Because the principal valued the expertise of the teachers and allowed the latitude to try new approaches, an unbroken cycle of continuous improvement was observed in the building. The culture was one where the teachers felt their opinions mattered and felt comfortable enough to take risks and try new approaches. Therefore the positive culture that the principal created allowed for the continuous improvement of the building to occur.

The principals focused on creating a positive school culture by engaging in activities (e.g., making a point to visit each teacher before class started, greeting students as they entered the building, providing common planning time for the teachers, and celebrating successes) that developed both the students’ and adults’ capacity for learning and success. This study found two significant types of activities on which the principals concentrated and in which they engaged to help create the positive culture. The principals achieved this positive working environment by creating a sense of belonging and providing a clear direction for all involved: students, teachers, parents, and community. I further develop these two findings and explain how these two major elements in a school building can breed success for all involved.
Table 8 displays the research findings and how the principals were able to create a sense of belonging and provide clear direction to the students, teachers, parents, and community.

Table 8

*Summary of Research Findings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: What is the principal’s role in successful schools?</th>
<th>Answer: The principal needs to create a positive school culture that promotes learning and engagement for students and adults.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How: Create a Sense of Belonging</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| For Students                                               | - Develop positive adult relationships  
|                                                           | - Show care and concern  
|                                                           | - Provide intervention  |
| For Teachers                                               | - Develop professional learning communities  
|                                                           | - Include in decision making  
|                                                           | - Show care and concern  |
| For Parents & Community                                    | - Learn their desires and needs  
|                                                           | - Solicit questions and concerns  
|                                                           | - Demonstrate need for their time and expertise  |
| **How: Provide clear direction**                           |                                                                                                                                  |
| For Students                                               | - Share Ohio Content Standards  
|                                                           | - Involve in goal setting  
|                                                           | - Involve in the charting of progress  |
| For Teachers                                               | - Understand mission statement  
|                                                           | - Include in building goal setting  
|                                                           | - Curriculum map  
|                                                           | - Professional learning communities  |
| For Parents & Community                                    | - Share building goals and Ohio Content Standard  
|                                                           | - Update with progress  
|                                                           | - Encourage dialogue  |
Major Finding 2: Create a Sense of Belonging

The principals at these schools demonstrated the ability to create and sustain a sense of belonging for the students, teachers, parents, and the community in which the schools resided.

For Students

When asked, “What were your major goals for the building?” the answers were not to generate high test scores, but to develop positive relationships. One principal articulated a desire for the students to develop a relationship with a caring adult, in the building. The principal hoped that a relationship would encourage children who did not really want to come to school to come anyway because of the support and nurturing received from both that relationship and their relationships with other adults in the building. Payne (2003) declared that for students, from backgrounds of poverty, their primary motivation for success will be in their relationships. Karns (2005) stated learning can only take place when teachers have positive relationships with students and among other teachers, helping them make connections and make materials tangible to their backgrounds and prior
knowledge, thus making instruction more responsive to the students. Sammon (2005) explained that effective schools recognize that learning environments must provide an atmosphere in which students are known well, are respected by caring adults, and are supported in their social and personal development. All three schools made providing opportunities for building positive relationships a high priority. They were constantly looking for ways to establish a natural connection and enable this vital resource to take root and grow.

A typical day at one of these three schools begins with the principal greeting students and visitors walking into the school building. In the hall, student work is proudly displayed, student classroom goals are posted, and lists of students who have achieved various successes (e.g., addition facts, multiplication facts, Accelerated Reader points, good citizenship, honor roll, etc.) are on display. Teachers who are excited for them to be there greet students. For example, some teachers interviewed referred to the school bell as a starter’s pistol. They greeted the day as an exciting challenge and were anxious to start running. The principals and teachers strive to meet the challenge of lesson content in a fun and caring
way. Students may hear comments such as: “We are all in this together;” “We leave no one on the sinking ship;” “We are a team—it is all for one and one for all.” Individual and class progress is charted and goals are set accordingly. Teachers celebrate and build on students’ past successes. If at any time students are struggling, there is intervention help available. There is always a teacher or volunteer willing to help (e.g., before school, at lunch, in an after-school study hall). What a wonderful environment to be in for students: somewhere where someone (everyone) is rooting for their success and will help them with each step along the way.

For Teachers

This sense of belonging was also achieved for teachers by the encouragement, professionalism, and success that being part of the educational process gave them. During the course of the research study, the teachers often expressed the empowerment they felt in being part of a team working together. Each building met as a group and in small units (e.g., grade-level teachers) several times a year. In fact, small units met on a weekly basis to discuss curriculum issues, how to enhance student achievement, and other job-embedded issues. Many ideas and desire to make changes
within the building originated in small unit meetings and were decided upon during building-wide meetings.

DuFour and Eaker (1993) referred to the construction of an intentional community, such as those in the research study, characterized by: shared mission, vision, and values; collective inquiry; collaborative teams; action orientation/experimentation; commitment to continuous improvement; and results orientation as a “professional learning community.” Creating strong professional learning communities holds several potential advantages for schools and districts. Among the positive outcomes reported in the research are: increased efficacy, both collectively and individually (Bandura, 1986; Louis, 1992; D. Ross, 2004); collective responsibility for student learning (Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1995; Little, 1990); reduction in teacher isolation (Lieberman, 1995); substantial learning about good teaching and increased content knowledge (M. W. McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993); higher morale, greater job satisfaction, greater retention rates, and more enthusiasm (Hall & Hord, 2001; Lee et al., 1995). The teachers participating in this research study felt the common planning time was so vital to their professional and their students’ academic growth that they were willing to meet on
their personal time (e.g., during lunchtime, or before the school day contractually started).

Lambert (1998) defined leadership as a verb, not a noun. Leadership is the set of reciprocal learning processes that enable participants in a community to construct meaning toward a shared purpose. This means that leadership is considered to be the processes, activities, and relationships in which people engage rather than an individual role. Angelo (2005) found teachers felt empowered to participate in the decision-making process of the school, thus enhancing the positive school culture. Each principal interviewed realized the expertise of the professional teachers in their building and solicited that insight before making curricular and programming decisions. The principal rarely made a decision without teacher input. In fact, the principals in these buildings took a different approach than traditional manager-style leadership; they would ask the teachers, “How can I help you? What can I do for you?” The teachers felt the principals tried very hard to meet their needs and in most cases were successful at finding the resources needed (e.g., adjusting schedules to allow teachers to have more time with a particular student.
or providing training on how to better accommodate some
gifted students).

Angelo (2005) found a high level of respect for
teachers by the principal was prominent in the high-
performing, high-poverty schools researched. The teachers
in this study also appreciated the care and concern shown
each individual teacher by the principals. For example, the
principals made a substantial effort to "visit" each
teacher in the morning. Before the start of the school day,
the principals (all three of them) walked around the
building to every classroom to greet and talk with each
teacher. The teachers saw this as a little "one-on-one"
time with the principal where they could ask a question or
just catch up on common personal interests. When the
principals were asked why they did this, one commented, "I
enjoy talking with the teachers; I like them! It is also a
chance to say 'hello' before the craziness of the day
begins."

Another example of a principal demonstrating care and
concern for teachers is the principal's exhibiting
professional flexibility. All three principals were noted
as being "flexible" when personal family issues arose in
teachers' lives. For instance, if a teacher needed to leave
early due to a sick family member, permission was granted with little to no questions asked. As teacher contracts note, there are procedures for taking personal time; however, these “minor” instances were handled with a smile and wave from the principal. The teachers appreciated the latitude shown. The principals stated it was the least that could be done for all the time and energy the teachers contributed outside their contracted hours. Again, what a wonderful environment in which to work: Somewhere where someone (everyone) is rooting for teachers’ success, appreciating the work they do, and helping them with each step along the way.

For Parents and Community

Epstein (2001) stated that parent involvement benefits students, improves schools, assists teachers, and strengthens families. The desire of the principals in this study to embrace this resource was evident. Each principal referred to the parent’s role (and community’s role) as complementary to the school’s. Each school strove to learn parental desires and needs as well as welcomed and solicited parents’ questions and concerns at any time. Informally, information was gathered through conversation the principals had with parents as the parents were
dropping off and picking up their children from school, attending various school events, and through phone calls made to parents. More formally, each principal conducted a needs assessment survey of its parents to keep in tune with what and how to best communicate with parents concerning their children’s social and academic growth. Each school noted having many parent conferences throughout the school year to discuss individual students and how best to accommodate their learning and behavior. Action plans would be devised and carried out during conferences; therefore, everyone (principal, teachers, parents, and students) had input and investment in hopes of reaching positive results. Each school displayed substantial efforts to invite, include, and demonstrate need for the time and expertise of parents and various community members. In fact, one school funded two positions to aid in developing relationships with parents and community members: a parent volunteer coordinator and public relations promoter. Remember, the schools selected for this research are of low socioeconomic status; therefore, money is very limited. However, these schools viewed these relationships and connections to the community as a high priority and benefit to its students;
they placed what little money they had towards these efforts.

The literature review of this research study (Chapter 2) details Epstein’s (2001) six types of involvement that creates a capacity for comprehensive and high-quality school, family, and community partnerships. Each of the three schools researched had evidence of the six types of involvement: (a) Parenting (e.g., school newsletters with helpful hints for parents to follow at home to improve their child’s social and academic success); (b) Communicating (e.g., data folders sent home daily, written notes sent home); (c) Volunteering (e.g., adults collecting labels for a fundraiser, reading to a class, or talking to students about future careers); (d) Learning at home (e.g., sending home packets with specific skills addressed so parents can help their children with the skills); (e) Decision-making (e.g., being a member of the Continuous Improvement Team, feedback on parent needs assessment); and/or (f) Collaborating with the community (e.g., college students coming to provide assistance, college representatives providing career introduction, retirees reading with students). Again, what a wonderful environment to be in for parents and community members: Somewhere where
someone is soliciting their knowledge and experience and appreciative of their time and efforts.

Major Finding 3: Clear Direction

The principal had an active role in providing a clear direction for the students, teachers, parents, and community.

For Students

Carlson, Shagle-Shah, and Ramirez (1999) researched 32 schools within the Chicago public school system that have shown the most improvement. The findings declared students must have clear goals in mind in order to show results. This research study had similar findings. Providing clear direction and focus was a priority of the principals in this research study. Principals and teachers exposed the students to the Ohio Content Standards and goals set by the entire school and then showed them ways to accomplish those goals.

The importance of goal setting was emphasized to the students through practical action. The students participated in goal setting, charting progress, and developing action plans on a daily basis. For example, at one school each individual classroom developed a classroom goal for the year and displayed it in the hallway;
progression toward classroom goals was monitored and then posted for all to see. This created awareness and ownership for the students.

Each of the schools presented goal attainment concepts every day to their students. State standards were posted in each classroom. In most classrooms, the standards were rewritten into “I can” statements (child-friendly phrases) that were easier for the students to become familiar with and comprehend. These statements were continuously interwoven into daily lessons. Students also tracked their personal progression towards goal attainment (e.g., using data folders).

For Teachers

A cohesive schoolwide focus is the by-product of a shared vision, mission, and beliefs among school stakeholders. Kotter (1990) explained once a shared focus has been realized, needs assessment data are analyzed to provide a solid basis for informed decision making about instructional issues. A holistic, strategic, clearly outlined approach to improving the school is most effective (Aldersebaes, Potter, & Hamilton, 2000; Berman & Chambliss, 2000; Elmore, 2000; Newman, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001).
Most school districts in Ohio have developed a mission statement. This is a requirement for Continuous Improvement Plans and grant proposals. The mission statement is the underlying rationale for all actions within a school district and building. My experience in education is that the mission statement is either something developed once for necessary state and federal documentation and then rarely referred to again or, as in the case with the schools researched, serves as the guiding force for all decisions made within the school building. In the three schools researched, the principals and teachers were all very familiar with the building mission statement. One teacher commented, “The mission filters down to the students’ class rules, how we walk in the halls [respectful that learning in going on] and how we present ourselves to the kids.” Each principal acknowledged the mission statement as the guiding force when making decisions. At one of the schools researched, the teachers developed the mission statement for their particular building and the principal recited it on the PA system each morning.

The mission statement serves as the focused belief system of the building. However, each principal decided to further define their efforts towards more specific goals.
based on the mission statement. Each building began the school year with a planning meeting where the principal presented school-specific data. Together, they analyzed the data and set yearly goals based on the data presented. This event provided direction and concentration for the upcoming school year. As a result, “everyone was on the same page.” The successes and challenges associated with achieving these goals were the topic and guiding force of much (if not all) of the common planning time throughout the year.

As mentioned before, each school had a common planning time for various groups and grade level teams to meet and dialogue professionally about curricular and student issues. Many times these “teams” would meet on a weekly basis.

In addition to yearly goal setting, curriculum mapping was another way principals and teachers provided instructional coherence and direction. Each school used a curriculum map; this instructional framework was truly workable for teachers. Jacobs (1997) described a curriculum map as a technique for visually exploring and representing what is taught, how instruction occurs, and when it is delivered. The curriculum map, developed by the teachers, uses a calendar-based system to map skills, content, and
assessments used in their classroom. It does not represent a daily lesson plan but reflects the major concepts and content to be covered during that period. Koppang (2004) declared curriculum mapping amplifies the possibilities for long-range planning, short-term preparation, and clear communication. As grade-level teachers work from the same curriculum map and share their curriculum map with other grade levels and subject area teachers, the resulting increased collaboration and communication among teachers and principals ultimately benefits the students. As curriculum alignment is achieved, students' educational experiences are enhanced. The curriculum more coherently and clearly builds knowledge and skills. In addition, instruction becomes more closely aligned to the state standards on which students will be tested.

In conjunction with goal development, curriculum alignment, and weekly planning time, each school stated their building atmosphere encouraged constant collaboration and dialogue about best practice. In fact, collaboration and dialogue occurred daily. Whether it was participating in book studies, exchanging journal articles, conversing in the lunchroom, or chatting in the hallway, the teachers and principals constantly provided guidance and assistance to
each other in achieving their professional goals and enhancing their practice.

*For Parents and Community*

Providing clear direction and focus was also a priority for schools in terms of parents. Each building made a point of keeping parents well informed of what and how children were doing in school. Each school had developed a daily communication log with parents (e.g., data folders and homework folders). For example, data folders contained goals the students were working on and each individual student’s progress record. Parents viewed the data folder and responded within it every day. The teachers also used methods such as phone calls, conferences, and sending complimentary notes home to stay in constant contact with parents.

**Conclusions**

My reason for conducting this research was to discover how the principals of these successful buildings interact with students, teachers, parents, and the community in hopes of creating coherence and connectedness to the challenging role of the principal. The aim of this study was to learn the perceived actions and leadership emphasis of principals in high-performing schools. After finishing
this research study, I developed a profile of what these successful schools look like, learned how culture plays a vital role in a school’s success, concluded that developing professional and positive relationships is crucial for learning to occur, and learned the value of seeing research in action. Below, I expand upon these lessons learned.

The following is a profile of the three schools researched. The schools had a high leadership capacity and broad-based participation. The principals made concentrated efforts to include all staff in leadership development and decision-making. Staff members gathered evidence from existing sources or through action research and tended to base decisions on these data. The schools had a clear purpose, focused on student and teacher growth. Information loops kept staff, parents, and students informed with opportunities to discuss, clarify, and refine ideas before a final decision was made. Roles and responsibilities were shared and blended, but clear. The school community tended to assume collective responsibility for the work of leadership and learning. Staff members considered themselves to be part of a professional community in which innovation was the norm.
One of my lessons learned throughout this research study was the vital role culture plays in a school’s success and the principal’s ability to impact the culture either positively or negatively. I began this research with five research questions. In the beginning, I believed all the research questions had equal significance. I no longer do. A positive school culture is necessary in order for the other areas (aligning curriculum to state standards, maintaining continuous improvement, designing instruction for success, and developing partnerships with parents and community) to also be successful. As I analyzed the data, comment after comment kept emphasizing how the principal was able to create the capacity (the culture) for learning and engagement. The staff (principals and teachers alike) were very confident in their working relationships with one another and felt together they could tackle any challenge set before them (I believe they could also). I was fortunate to be exposed to a very empowering culture.

This next lesson learned, that developing professional and positive relationships are crucial for learning to occur, is a by-product of a positive school culture. However, it was not until I conducted this research that I realized how much developing a positive relationship could
impact the students. One comment continues to stand out in my data collection. When I asked the principals what their major goals for the building were, they answered that the goals were not to generate high test scores, but to develop positive relationships. One principal stated a desire for the students to develop a relationship with a caring adult in the building in hopes that the relationship would encourage children to come to school even though they did not really want to; the hope was that they would come anyway because of the support and nurturing received from that adult and other adults in the building. I have always understood the importance of a good role model for students, but now I comprehend the magnitude a positive relationship can have on a child and an adult. Because of this positive relationship, not only does the individual student feel accountable to someone, but the relationship can help principals and teachers make connections to student backgrounds and prior knowledge, thus making instruction more responsive to students. I learned relationships are key for learning and engagement to occur.

I also learned that there is tremendous value in seeing research in action. Prior to interviewing the principals and conducting focus groups with the teachers
for this research study, I conducted a literature review of how successful schools enhance student achievement. I was not surprised at what was revealed in the literature and research about successful schools. I had been exposed to many of the concepts through my graduate studies, professional readings, and personal experience. However, during the course of this research study, I was able to see the “research come to life.” For example, I saw Jacobs’ (1997) curriculum mapping develop instructional cohesiveness for the staff and students; saw evidence of Epstein’s (2001) six types of parent and community involvement in each of the schools; saw what Barker (1991) meant when he stated, “Vision without action is merely a dream; actions without vision just passes the time; vision with action can change the world.” Honestly, I could provide many more examples of previous research results coming to life in my study. Not only has this experience improved my skills as a practitioner, but it has also enhanced my appreciation for research and desire to conduct future research. It was fascinating to me to see how groups interacted and constantly ask myself as I observed them, “What does this mean for educators?”
Implications

Based on the results and conclusions of this study, several recommendations can be made for the following groups of educators.

School Leaders

The core issue that has been central to this research’s findings and conclusions is the leader’s capacity to develop a positive school culture. It was within this positive school culture that learning and engagement occurred and thus generated a high level of student achievement. School leaders need to fully understand the importance of this resource and how it can help or hinder student achievement and professional growth in a school building.

School leaders need to determine the current degree of their school climate and either take action to encourage the current situation or improve it. Richardson (2001b) used a School Culture Survey to assess the culture and examine core norms and values. Peterson (1999, 2002) offered many ways to reinforce the positive aspects of the culture and key processes school leaders can use to shape a more nurturing culture. The three schools in this research demonstrated many of these processes and activities (e.g.,
clear vision and goals focused on student and teacher learning, recognition and celebration of success, and a widely shared respect and caring for everyone) to promote a positive school culture.

School leaders need to engage and develop collaborative teams within the building. The principals in each of the schools researched created the capacity for the development of professional learning communities (e.g., by providing substitute teachers or completing the application for state waiver days). The principals saw the importance, value, and benefits in providing teachers with collaboration time during the school day. School leaders can begin by exploring the work of Peter Senge’s (1990) learning organizations and Rick DuFour’s (DuFour & Eaker, 1993; DuFour et al., 2006) books on professional learning communities. Remember, teachers (and principals) are the first learners. Through participation in a professional learning community, teachers (and principals) become more effective, and student outcomes increase—a goal upon which we can all agree.

Colleges and Universities

Colleges and universities need to prepare future K-12 administrators for what it means to be school leaders in
today’s educational system. Aspiring administrators can no longer adhere to traditional manager-style leadership. When we think about leadership, we are accustomed to picturing people in roles with formal authority, such as principals, vice-principals, directors, or superintendents. Lambert (1998) challenged us to view leaders as a verb, rather than a noun, by the processes, activities, and relationships in which people engage, rather than as the individual in a specific role.

If we view leadership as a verb, colleges and universities need to inform future educators about the processes and activities that promote collegial dialogue and the culture where such conversation and productivity can exist. Colleges and universities need to emphasize that leadership asks principals (and other school leaders) to attend to the learning of their colleagues as well as students. The skills of an effective leader as demonstrated in this research included convening and facilitating dialogue, posing questions for inquiry, coaching other educators, and inviting others to become engaged with a new idea. As was stated previously, the school leaders need to create the capacity (culture) where this professional dialogue can flourish. Colleges and universities need to
inform future leaders how to develop and sustain a positive and productive school culture.

Colleges and universities need to prepare school leaders for a data-driven educational society. The principals and teachers in this research study tackled educational challenges from a data-driven framework. They determined focus of need based on data, developed goals based on areas needing improvement, and developed a plan of action to implement success. Today’s K-12 educational society is inundated with data; however, few know how to effectively analyze and interpret data (Fullan, 1992; R. T. McLaughlin, 1997; Reeves & Burt, 2006). In the schools researched, data interpretation was the task of principals, superintendents, and data specialists. One principal researched had the teachers analyze their own data. Even though the teachers saw the benefit of the process, a feeling of frustration and tediousness overshadowed the process. I believe this overwhelmed feeling can be attributed to their lack of understanding of how to analyze student data. Colleges and universities need to provide more training on how and why K-12 school educators should analyze student data and how to interpret the results found.
Future Research

This study researched high-performing schools to learn what they are doing to achieve student success. Many lessons were learned from this research study; however, I feel there is more that can be learned from these specific schools.

A recommendation would be to conduct an in-depth study focusing on the positive culture of the school(s). What was the culture prior to the current principal? Understanding that a culture needs to be cultivated, how specifically was the culture created? What were the intentional acts to enhance the culture and create the capacity where learning and engagement occur? What are the struggles in sustaining a positive culture?

A recommendation would be to conduct a study focusing on the intervention programs offered at each of the schools. The current study provides a description of the intervention programs each school offered and assumes success based on overall Ohio Achievement testing scores. Educators and students would benefit from learning more about the components, format, style, strategies presented, skill emphasized, and improvement of students’ achievement during these intervention sessions. Each school offered
intervention in a different format (e.g., after-school session or “club” atmosphere). This proposed study could provide a basis for comparing and contrasting the findings. Most schools offer a type of intervention to enhance or improve upon skills taught; a study exploring how best to provide this intervention would be beneficial to all.

Another recommendation would be not only focus on the intervention programs of all students, but also (or solely) on the structure and type instruction provided to students with disabilities. According to NCLB, students with disabilities are a key subgroup required to meet AYP goals set by the state. The schools in this research study did not meet Ohio’s minimum of 45 students with disabilities to constitute a student subgroup. However, many schools in Ohio and across the nation are struggling to meet AYP status for their special education population. Lessons learned from a study demonstrating how schools are successfully achieving AYP for their students with disabilities could help other schools reach positive results for their special education population.

Another recommendation would be to repeat this study with schools with struggling performance rates. The current study attributes the success of its students to the
positive culture created within the building. Can one have a positive school culture and still struggle with student achievement? What are the two differently achieving schools doing differently? What do they have in common?

Another recommendation for further research is in the area of teacher collaboration. This study emphasized the importance and value in providing teachers the opportunity to discuss job-embedded issues during school time. A recommendation is to conduct a study with schools perceived to have a “professional learning community.” How and when does collaboration occur? Is it structured? How did it originate and how did it develop into its current form? What is discussed and accomplished during such collaboration? What are the results of collaboration? Lessons learned from this study could help other schools develop the capacity to foster collaboration in their buildings to increase student outcomes.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

CLOSING ACHIEVEMENT GAP RECOMMENDATIONS
Recomendations made by the Closing Achievement Gaps Task Force

1. Develop a public campaign that emphasizes everyone’s role in closing achievement gaps and bringing about high achievement for all students.

2. Modify the state’s school accountability system to drive attention to the performance of all demographic groups of students.

3. Create a system for holding regional service providers accountable for the impact of their work in helping schools improve achievement for all students.

4. Help parents and students learn about Ohio’s academic content standards and keep focused on the achievement of those standards.

5. Build upon the successes of Ohio schools that are closing achievement gaps and generating high achievement for all students.

6. Provide financial incentives to schools that close achievement gaps by getting all populations of students to achieve state standards.
7. Shape the requirements of new and existing discretionary grants to ensure a greater focus on teaching Ohio’s academic standards to all students.

8. Provide incentives for the adoption of programs that increase access to advance courses and gifted education programs for diverse populations of students.

9. Ensure that teacher and administrator standards articulate the knowledge, disposition and skills necessary to lead all students to achieve high levels of academic success.

10. Establish networks to improve the skills of principals in hard-to-staff schools.

11. Redesign regional professional development services to focus on what teachers need to know and be able to do in order to generate academic success for all students.

12. Deliver high-quality information about best practices to teachers when they need it and in a manner that facilitates implementation.

13. Develop policies that shape the use of professional development time in ways that facilitate regular collaboration among teachers.
14. Fund literacy specialists and/or innumeracy specialists for Head Start and elementary schools at a ratio of one for every ten teachers.

15. Use curriculum models and diagnostic assessment to help teachers learn to teach Ohio’s academic content standards to diverse populations of students.

16. Provide high-quality, universal, voluntary access to preschool to all 3- and 4-year-old children and full-day kindergarten for all 5-year-old children in Ohio.

17. Develop a system of family/community learning centers that work with schools to build the capacity of parents to support the learning of their children.

18. Vary the length of the school year so that it can be lengthened if the student has not mastered grade-level standards.

19. Provide intensive, immediate intervention programs for students in danger of not passing the Ohio Achievement Tests and the Ohio Graduation Test.

20. Provide incentives for school districts to redesign high schools to create environments that are more likely to motivate students to succeed.

21. Revise testing calendars to push dates as close to the end of the school year as feasible.
22. Provide a system of diagnostic/interim assessment to give teachers high quality information about the extent to which students are learning state standards.

23. Provide academic emergency districts a caliber and intensity of support that has a high likelihood of helping districts move out of that classification within two years.
APPENDIX B

SCHOOLS OF PROMISE RECOGNIZED FOR THE SCHOOL YEAR 2004-2005
## 2004-2005 State Superintendent's Schools of Promise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>School Building</th>
<th>Former Name of School of Promise</th>
<th>Subject(s)</th>
<th>Number of Years as a School of Promise</th>
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** School building closed after the 2004-2005 school year.
2004-2005 State Superintendent's Schools of Promise

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** School building closed after the 2004-2005 school year.
## EXAMPLE OF A CURRICULUM MAP (Perkins-Gough, 2003).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Science</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>* Characteristics of plants</td>
<td>* List characteristics of plants</td>
<td>* Plant worksheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Seedless plants</td>
<td>* Compare vascular &amp; nonvascular plants</td>
<td>* Vascular plant art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Seed plants</td>
<td>* Describe &amp; illustrate structures of roots, leaves, &amp; stems</td>
<td>* Plant drawings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complex plants</td>
<td>* List characteristics of seed plants &amp; find seeds in plant lab</td>
<td>* Flower lab report &amp; labels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Plant reproduction</td>
<td>* Describe &amp; label the functions of the flower in flower dissection lab</td>
<td>* Oral presentation of group work in plant lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Rain forest</td>
<td>* Describe methods of seed dispersal</td>
<td>* Rain forest essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* Understand the environmental impact of the rain forest</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX D

EXAMPLE OF VISION STATEMENT
EXAMPLE OF VISION STATEMENT

(Doris Miller Elementary, 2005; Franklin Elementary, 2006)

WE BELIEVE...

school should reflect a caring community; a safe and fair environment in which the school staff, with the support of parents, guides the children toward respecting others, understanding the varied cultures of our society, and striving for academic and behavioral excellence;

all our students, including those with special needs, should be prepared for a rapidly changing technological world and should be able to access information, solve problems, think critically, make decisions, and learn to cooperate and work productively with others;

that ongoing communication and collaboration among classroom teachers, support staff, and the principal result in an integrated program for all students, including those with special needs;

that student progress in achieving the established instructional and social goals should be frequently and systematically monitored using a variety of assessment techniques;
our students should become enthusiastic, life-long learners and productive citizens.

We believe:

- Every person should be respected
- Every staff member will participate to his/her potential
- Parents should be actively involved in every part of the school structure and student’s education

Communication between parents and the school community is an essential part of the education/evaluation process

Quality time spent with children by teachers and parents achieves positive results
APPENDIX E

INTASC STANDARDS
INTERSTATE NEW TEACHER ASSESSMENT AND SUPPORT CONSORTIUM

STANDARDS

Standard One: Subject Matter

The teacher understands the central concepts, tools or inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) he or she teaches and can create learning experiences that make these aspects of subject matter meaningful for students.

Standard Two: Student Learning

The teacher understands how children and youth learn and develop and can provide learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social and personal development.

Standard Three: Diverse Learners

The teacher understands how learners differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to learners from diverse cultural backgrounds and with exceptionalities.

Standard Four: Instructional Strategies

The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage the students’ development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.
Standard Five: Learning Environment
The teacher uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.

Standard Six: Communication
The teacher uses knowledge of effective verbal, non-verbal and media communication techniques to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom.

Standard Seven: Planning Instruction
The teacher plans and manages instruction based upon knowledge of subject matter, students, the community, and curriculum goals.

Standard Eight: Assessment
The teacher understands and uses formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social, and physical development of his/her learners.
Standard Nine: Reflection and Professional Development

The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of her/his choices and actions on others (students, parents, and other professional in the learning community) and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally.

Standard Ten: Collaboration, Ethics, and Relationships

A teacher communicates and interacts with parents/guardians, families, school colleagues, and the community to support the students’ learning and well being.
PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are your major goals, purpose, and/or mission for the building?

2. As a building principal, how have you responded to the demands for higher proficiency test scores?

3. How have teachers been involved in addressing these testing issues?

4. Which do you credit as having had the greatest impact? Why do you think your building won the honor of being a School of Promise?

5. How are decisions made on changes to be implemented?

6. Do discussions take place about current research, best practices, teaching strategies or student data? Can you give me specific examples of how these topics are addressed?

7. Can you give me examples of professional development or in-service education that has been provided and who provided it? Was it at a district level, a building level, or a grade level?

8. What support has been available for teachers in regards to diverse learners? Can you give me examples?
9. How do you monitor student progress in addition to proficiency testing?

10. What is the parent’s role in their child’s education? How does your school support families in guiding their children’s learning?

11. In what ways has the school built connections with the community?

12. How do you create a positive learning culture among both the students and the teachers?

13. Can you think of additional information that might be helpful for me to know about your building?
TEACHER FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What are your major goals, purpose, and/or mission for the building? Your classroom?

2. How has your building responded to the demands for higher proficiency test scores? How have you personally responded to the demands for higher proficiency test scores in your classroom and/or grade level?

3. Which do you credit as having had the greatest impact? Why do you think your building won the honor of being a School of Promise?

4. How are decisions made on changes to be implemented building-wide and/or grade level?

5. Do discussions take place about current research, best practices, teaching strategies or student data? Can you give me specific examples of how these topics are addressed?

6. Can you give me examples of professional development or in-service education that has been provided and who provided it?
7. What support has been available for you, as a teacher, in regards to diverse learners? Can you give me examples?

8. How do you monitor student progress in addition to proficiency testing?

9. How does your school support families in guiding their children’s learning?

10. How does your building encourage a positive learning culture among both the students and the teachers? How do you create a positive learning environment in your classroom?

11. Can you think of additional information that might be helpful for me to know about your building and/or classroom?
APPENDIX H

SAMPLE LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENT
Sample letter to Superintendent

Dear Dr. Superintendent:

Congratulations! The distinguished honor of being selected as an Ohio School of Promise should be one of great celebration. Cloverleaf Local Schools has defied the demographic barriers by demonstrating high achievement for all groups of students.

Only 130 elementary schools in Ohio have earned the privilege of being called a School of Promise, and therefore, have been selected to participate in this study. The desire of the study is to learn what is working at Seville and Westfield Elementary Schools in hopes of aiding struggling schools. This study wants to learn more about what Schools of Promise are doing to create successful learning environments. Participation by the district would be acknowledged, but individual comments will only be reported upon their permission. Each participant will receive a copy for review before submission.

I am requesting your permission to contact the principals to obtain insight from teachers and administrators at both Seville and Westfield Elementary Schools. My study includes an interview with the principal and an opportunity to talk with a group of teachers within the building. I will be asking questions such as the following:

* As building principal/teacher, how have you responded to the demands for higher proficiency test scores?
* Which do you credit as having the greatest impact? Why do you think your building won the honor of being a School of Promise?
* Do discussion about best practices, research findings, teaching strategies, and/or student data occur at the district level or at the building level? In what context?

I will contact you during the first week of November to answer any questions you may have. You may contact me prior at (330) 335-3529 or following persons at Kent State University, Kent, Ohio 44242: my advisor, Dr. Ralph Waltham, 410 White Hall (330) 672-0626 or Dr. John L. West, Vice President and Dean, Division of Research and Graduate Studies (330) 672-2851. The Ohio Department of Education is aware of this study.

Results of the study are expected to be tabulated by June 2006 and will be mailed to you. Thanks for sharing with others what makes your school district shine!

Sincerely,

Shelly Habegger
Educational Consultant
Ph. D Student
APPENDIX I

SAMPLE LETTER TO PRINCIPAL
SAMPLE LETTER TO PRINCIPAL

Dear Mr./Ms. Principal:

Congratulations! The distinguished honor of being selected as an Ohio School of Promise should be one of great celebration. Seville Elementary School has defied the demographic barriers by demonstrating high achievement for all groups of students. Only 61 elementary schools in Ohio have earned the privilege with the title of a School of Promise, and therefore, have been selected to participant in this study. I have the permission of Dr. Hulme, to contact you about participation of your building. The desire of the study is to learn what is working at Seville Elementary in hopes of aiding struggling schools. Participation by the district would be acknowledged, but individual comments will only be reported upon permission. Each participant will receive a copy for review before submission.

The study includes an interview with the principal and an opportunity to talk with a group of teachers within the building. I will be asking questions such as the following:
* As building principal/teacher, how have you responded to the demands for higher proficiency test scores?
* How have teachers been involved in addressing these testing issues?
* Which you credit as having the greatest impact? Why do you think your building won the honor of being a School of Promise?
* Do discussion about best practices, research findings, teaching strategies, and/or student data occur at the district level or at the building level? In what context?

I will contact you during the week of November 14th to answer any questions you may have and make some appointments. Questions may be directed to me at (330) 335-3529 or the following persons at Kent State University, Kent, Ohio 44242: my advisor, Dr. Ralph Waltham, 410 White Hall (33) 672-0626 or Dr. John L. West, Vice President and Dean, Division of Research and Graduate Studies (330) 672-2851. The Ohio Department of education is aware of this study.

Results of the study are expected to be tabulated by June 2006 and will be mailed to you. Thanks for sharing with others what makes your school shine!

Sincerely,

Shelly Habegger
Educational Consultant
Ph. D Student
APPENDIX J

SAMPLE OF CURRICULUM MAP FROM STUDY
**First Grade**

**Grading Period 2**
**Content Focus:** Chapters 20, 5-10

| STANDARD |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| **F. Count using numerals and ordinal numbers.** | **G. Develop strategies for basic subtraction facts, such as:** | **K. Demonstrate fluency in addition facts with addends through 9 and corresponding subtractions.** | **A. Explain the need for standard units of measure.** | **A. Describe and create plane figures: circle, rectangle, square, triangle, hexagon, trapezoid, parallelogram and rhombus, and identify them in the environment.** |
| **BENCHMARK** | **Grade Level Indicator** | **Evidence of Understanding** | **Current APS Adapted Materials** | **Suggested Supplemental Activities and Resources** |
| (Must be mastered by the end of 2nd grade) | (What we teach in our grade level) | | | |
| + Count backwards from 100. | Start at any number (1-100) and count backwards | Find differences through nine | | |
| | | | Ch. 5 & 6 | |
| | | | P - 36 | |
| | | | PS - 36 | |
| | | | R - 36 | |
| | | | 2nd Quarter is a good time to develop fluency with numbers to 20 | |
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