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Leadership Practices of K-12 Principals Regarding College and Career Ready Performance Index

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
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Abstract

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EdS, Nova Southeastern University, 2008

MEd, Valdosta State University, 2006

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

School principals are responsible for improving low College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) scores; however, little was understood about how K-12 school principals' leadership practices were perceived to improve CCRPI scores in schools. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the leadership practices of K-12 school principals to increase CCRPI scores in a Title I school district in the southeastern United States. The research question addressed the leadership practices of K-12 school principals that were intended to increase CCRPI scores in their Title I school district. The conceptual framework was the instructional leadership framework of Hallinger and Murphy, which describes the activities, functions, and processes for instructional leadership. Data were collected via semistructured interviews with eight principals of schools that had an overall CCRPI score below 70. Data were analyzed inductively using open and axial codes plus thematic analysis. Themes regarding leadership practices of K-12 school principals that are intended to increase CCRPI scores include (a) CCRPI score and accountability efficacy, (b) collaboration and communication, (c) data driven decision making, and (d) supporting teachers. The findings may contribute to positive social change because increased understanding of these leadership practices for CCRPI scores may lead to higher graduation rates as well as increased college and career readiness for students.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. Thank you to my late parents, Richard and Mae Carrie Edwards, who instilled in me the value of education and hard work. Thank you to my husband James, who has been a constant source of encouragement and support throughout this long process. I am grateful to have you in my life. Thank you to my children, Kiara and Trey, and grandchildren, AJ and Whitley, for their understanding and patience. Lastly, I dedicate this work to my siblings, Bessie, Larry, Yvonne, Donnie, Patricia, Ronnie, Brenda, Cynthia, Richard, Sandra, Gerald, Elsia, Diane, William, Carol, Antoine, Taneka, Martha, Marilyn, Willie, and Phyllis. Thank you for your love and support.

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I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Peter Kiriakidis, my doctorate committee chair, for guiding me, encouraging me, and believing in me when I began to question my ability to complete this process. I would also like to thank Dr. Jerry Collins for serving on my committee.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

School principals are held responsible for the academic success of the schools they lead (Moral et al., 2020). The study site's accountability system is referred to as the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) includes measures beyond end-of-year assessments that indicate school quality, with a focus on college and career readiness (Dennis, 2017; Williams & Welsh, 2017). The education plans submitted by all 50 states to the U.S. Department of Education included various college and career readiness components (Hackman et al., 2019). Each state in the United States chose the components and measures that would be included in its ESSA accountability system (Saultz et al., 2017). With school accountability being a priority for principals, there is a need to understand how K-12 principals' leadership practices are perceived to improve college and career readiness in schools as measured by CCRPI scores.

In Chapter 1, I include the background of the study, the problem and purpose statements. I also include the research question, and the conceptual framework. The final sections of this chapter include the nature of the study, assumptions, scope, and delimitations, transferability, limitations, and significance of this study.

Background

Information on CCRPI scores CCRPI scores represent five components. The first component, content mastery, measures student achievement in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies on end-of-year assessments. CCRPI scores for content mastery are based on a scale of 0% to 100% (State Department of

Education, 2018). Student achievement, the second component, is reported based on learner levels, with beginning learners earning 0 points, developing learners earning 0.5 points, proficient learners earning 1 point, and distinguished learners earning 1.5 points (State Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). The third component, closing gaps, is based on targets for improvement, where 0 points are given if performance did not improve, 0.5 points are given if progress was made but the target was not met, 1 point is given when the target was met, and 1.5 points are given when 6% of student subgroups meet the improvement target (State Department of Education, 2018a, p. 11). The fourth component, readiness, includes three readiness indicators for elementary and middle schools: (a) attendance, (b) literacy, and (c) beyond the core. The attendance indicator is a calculation of the "percent of students who were absent less than 10% of enrolled days" (State Department of Education, 2018a, p. 13). Overall, the five components of CCRPI are weighted and combined to determine the overall scores (see Table 1).

Table 1

CCRPI and Weight Percentages in Schools

Component	Elementary Schools	Middle Schools	High Schools
Content Mastery	30%	30%	30%
Progress	35%	35%	30%
Closing Gaps	15%	15%	10%
Readiness	20%	20%	15%
Graduation Rate	N/A	N/A	15%

Note. The percentage weight out of 100 for each of the five components of CCRPI score.

Low CCRPI scores at study site. The scope of this study was one public school district located in the southeastern United States. Over 105 schools with a 3-year CCRPI average of 57.0% and below were included on the state's list of low performing schools

(Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019). The research site was located in a county with two school systems, one serving students who live in the city limits, and one serving students who do not live in the city limits. The students from the city school district had consistently performed lower that the county's school system, according to the superintendent of schools at the research site. The school district had five elementary schools for Grades K-5, two middle schools for Grades 6-8, one high school for Grades 9-12, and two alternative programs serving students in Grades 6-12. As shown in Table 2, the research site's overall district CCRPI scores were low having a letter grade between C and D over the past 5 years. School districts receive letter grades as follows:

> CCRPI scores: (a) of 90.0% and higher refer to letter grade A, (b) between 80.0% and 89.9% refer to letter grade B, (c) between 70.0% and 79.9% refer to letter grade C, (d) between 60.0% to 69.9% refer to letter grade D, and (e) lower than 60.0% refer to letter grade F. (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, para. 5)

Grading and labeling schools is used to motivate school leaders to improve student achievement by increasing CCRPI scores (Saw et al., 2017).

Table 2

School Districts CCRPI Scores

Year	Elementary Schools	Middle Schools	High School	Overall District	Letter Grade
2015	74.3%	64.5%	69.5%	71.4%	C
2016	67.3%	60.2%	65.2%	65.9%	D
2017	59.3%	56.7%	65.0%	60.9%	D
2018	62.1%	60.8%	72.4%	64.3%	D
2019	66.0%	75.6%	71.6%	69.7%	D

Note. The school district's overall CCRPI scores for the past 5 years. Due to COVID-19, CCRPI scores were not calculated in 2020 and will not be calculated in 2021 (State Department of Education, 2020, 2021)

Importance of leadership to improve scores. With CCRPI scores being a priority for K-12 principals, effective principal instructional leadership is important. Researchers suggested that principal leadership practices affect low performing schools. Principals of low-performing schools should identify ways to improve leadership practices (VanGronigen & Meyers, 2019). Moreover, a leader should understand the school improvement process to improve student achievement (Hitt et al., 2019), applying their leadership to improve achievement (Tian & Huber, 2019). Furthermore, leaders should improve standardized test scores and should improve instructional methods (Rigby et al., 2018). This study was needed to examine the leadership practices K-12 school principals used to increase CCRPI scores in a Title I school district.

Problem Statement

This study addressed the lack of understanding about how K-12 principals' leadership practices were perceived to improve CCRPI scores in schools. CCRPI scores have been low at the research site over the past 5 years (see Table 3), which is a Title I school district receiving Title I funds. Schools designated as low performing schools are required to implement intervention programs in reading and mathematics to increase low CCRPI scores (Dougherty & Weiner, 2019; Meyers & VanGronigen, 2020). School improvement plans use priority goals to increase local state test scores (Meyers & Hitt, 2018). This requires school leadership such as principals to help improve accountability

and CCRPI scores, which they have done through instructional support (Klar et al., 2020; Rigby et al., 2018).

Table 3

City and County School CRRPI Scores for 5 Years

Year	City School District		County School System	
	Score	Letter Grade	Score	Letter Grade
2015	71.4%	C	83.7%	B
2016	65.9%	D	82.2%	B
2017	60.9%	D	82.6%	B
2018	64.3%	D	84.5%	B
2019	69.7%	D	82.1%	B

This study was needed to examine the leadership practices of K-12 school principals regarding CCRPI scores in a Title I school district. The local chamber of commerce drafted a referendum to consolidate the city school district and county school system, for which a majority voted "no." The local chamber of commerce's concerns about how the demographic makeup of having two school systems could be viewed as divided by racial and economic differences (see Table 4) and how low performing schools affect the local economy continue to exist.

Table 4

City and County School Demographics

Demographics	City School District	County School System
Enrollment	8,171	10,273
Black	75%	23%
White	14%	61%
Hispanic	6%	10%
Other	5%	6%
Economically Disadvantaged	58%	28%
Students with Disabilities	12%	14%
English Language Learners	4%	4%

Further, this study addressed a gap in practice regarding the leadership practices of K-12 school principals and CCRPI scores in a Title I school. According to the superintendent of schools, K-12 principals participated in professional learning regarding research-based instructional leadership practices; however, these principals continue to struggle to increase CCRPI scores. Additionally, according to the deputy superintendent of schools, K-12 principals have been replaced because the academic performance of schools was not improving. Despite the strategic plan to help principals to better apply instructional leadership practices to increase CCRPI scores, K-12 principals continued to struggle to increase CCRPI.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to examine leadership practices of K-12 school principals to increase CCRPI scores in a Title I school district. The importance of principal instructional leadership practices for successful student learning has been a research topic in educational leadership for over two decades. The leadership practices of effective principals include organizational management skills, the ability to support instruction, and the ability to manage people, which can also affect student attendance and discipline (Grissom et al., 2021). Student learning, attendance, and discipline outcomes are integrated in the components of CCRPI scores. To improve student performance, principals should focus on instructional leadership practices (Hallinger, 2018; Heaven & Bourne, 2016).

Research Question

What leadership practices do K-12 school principals describe to increase CCRPI scores in their Title I schools?

Conceptual Framework

Because the purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to examine the leadership practices of K-12 school principals, the instructional leadership framework was appropriate to be the basis for the conceptual framework (Murphy et al., 1983). This framework describes the leadership practices of effective principals. Principals empower students and staff by constructing leadership expertise (Bassetti, 2018). The instructional leadership framework includes policies, practices, and behaviors as well as processes like communication and conflict resolution (Murphy et al., 1983, p. 139). The instructional leadership framework emphasizes that the goal of effective principals is to improve student achievement (Hallinger, 2018). The instructional leadership framework includes 10 functions. For this basic qualitative study, I used the three instructional leadership functions for managing the instructional program:

1. Supervising and evaluating instruction: Principal should monitor classroom instruction using informal classroom visits and formal evaluations and providing instructional support to teachers,
2. Coordinating curriculum: Principals should ensure curriculum taught by teachers is aligned to student assessments and provide time for teachers to collaborate within and across grade levels on instructional and curricular issues, and

3. Monitoring student progress: Principals should monitor student progress by reviewing formative and summative test results with teachers and use the data to make decisions about instructional programs and classroom assignments. (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985, p. 222)

At the research site, the instructional program was used as a key to improve CCRPI scores because most of the scores are calculated using student achievement data from ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies end-of-year assessments (State Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). The three instructional leadership functions for managing the instructional program were relevant to this study because these functions focus on what a principal should do to lead their school's instructional program. School principals manage instructional programs and supervise and evaluate instruction.

I used this framework to develop the interview protocol, which contained the interview questions (see Creswell, 2015). Furthermore, I used this framework to analyze the interview data (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Specifically, I used the components of the framework to understand the participants responses (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016) on how they manage instructional programs and supervise and evaluate instruction, how they coordinate the curriculum, and how they monitor students' progress to improve CCRPI scores. I organized the data into categories to include attributes of the conceptual framework to answer the research question (see Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Nature of the Study

Researchers use qualitative methods to investigate a phenomenon not within a bounded system (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Creswell, 2015). The phenomenon addressed by this research was the leadership practices of K-12 school principals regarding CCRPI scores in a Title I school district. A basic qualitative research design was appropriate for this research study because I only conducted interviews regarding leadership practices K-12 school principals described using that were intended to increase CCRPI scores in Title I schools. I did not focus on the culture of the participants. As a result, I did not select the ethnographic qualitative design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Moreover, I did not develop a theory; thus, I did not select the theory design. Furthermore, qualitative research is appropriate when researchers are trying to understand a specific problem from the point of view of the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

For this basic qualitative study, I collected qualitative data (see Creswell, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I aimed to have a sample of 15 K-12 principals to collect enough qualitative data (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used purposeful sampling to select participants to participate in interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I collected data using semistructured interviews and an interview protocol (Appendix A) containing the interview questions (see Creswell, 2015). The interview questions were based on the instructional leadership framework (see Murphy et al., 1983). Data were analyzed using thematic analysis for emergent themes (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Definitions of Key Terms

College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI): The platform used by the study site's state to communicate accountability and school improvement for public schools (State Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). Annually, public schools in the study site's state receive a score between 0% and 100% based on performance in content mastery, progress, closing gaps, readiness, and high school graduation rate (State Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c).

Content mastery: "Content mastery is used to measure student achievement in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies on end-of-year assessments regarding beginning learners, developing learners, and proficient learners" (State Department of Education, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, p. 7).

Instructional leadership: The school principal is the instructional leader of the school and is held accountable for student achievement (Khalifa et al., 2016). Instructional leadership refers to the principal's activities, functions, and processes related to curriculum and instruction (Terosky, 2016).

Assumptions

Assumptions indicate the features a researcher assumes to be true without real empirical evidence (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I assumed the participants provided honest responses and used leadership practices concerning CCRPI. The assurance of confidentiality guided the assumption that all participants willingly shared their perceptions openly and honestly with me because of my role as a novice researcher. A second assumption was that K-12 school principals provided accurate data about their

instructional leadership practices aimed at improving CCRPI scores in Title I schools. A third assumption was that principals provided input about school leadership that can add to the field of education to improve schools with low CCRPI scores. A fourth assumption was that K-12 school principals had experienced the same or similar phenomenon of the study, using instructional leadership practices to increase CCRPI scores. A fifth assumption was that participants applied instructional leadership practices to increase CCRPI scores. Finally, I assumed that participants' knowledge levels differed depending on their grasp of the training they received and their personal experiences.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was one Title I public school district with eight schools in the southeastern United States. The K-12 school principals were identified by using the schools' annual report cards issued by the local state department of education. All schools within the study site received Title I funds. The instructional leadership framework was selected for this qualitative study because leadership practices are focused on managing the instructional program (Boyce & Bowers, 2018). The instructional leadership framework also recognizes that the principal is the instructional leader who is responsible for improving student achievement and increasing CCRPI scores (Liu et al., 2021). I selected K-12 school principals who have varied experiences working to improve student achievement and increase CCRPI scores, which led to a diverse sample that may allow for transferability (Finlay, 2013; Patton, 2015). A researcher's ability to apply the findings to other situations is referred to as transferability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Limitations

Limitations are circumstances that are not able to be controlled by the researcher, and that may influence the credibility of the study (Creswell, 2015). The number of participants could be a limitation if fewer than expected participants complete the data collection and circumstances do not allow for additional recruitment (Boddy, 2016). For this study, a small sample size of eight participants could be a limitation. Additionally, I was the principal research investigator; however, I was aware of researcher bias during the qualitative data collection and analysis (Boddy, 2016).

Significance

Student achievement is correlated with principal leadership (Mette & Riegel, 2018). School principals should spend more time on instructional leadership (Lochmiller & Mancinelli, 2019), developing a shared vision, professional development, aligning resources with goals, and providing instructional support to improve student achievement (Hvidston et al., 2018). Findings from this study may have significance for school principals, senior school district administrators, teachers, students, researchers, and the community. Potential contributions of the study that advance knowledge in educational leadership may include gaining a better understanding of how K-12 administrative practices are perceived to improve college and career readiness in schools. The findings may help senior district administrators to better support K-12 principals with managing the instructional program. The findings may also be used to help principals better assist teachers to improve student subgroup academic performance on end-of-year assessments that may improve the CCRPI scores.

At the school level, findings may help K-12 principals to consistently implement instructional leadership practices to increase CCRPI scores. At a high school level, the readiness component of the CCRPI scores include five indicators: (a) attendance, (b) literacy, (c) accelerated enrollment, (d) pathway completion, and (e) college and career readiness indicator. The college and career readiness indicator is a calculation of percent of Grade 12 students who (a) start post-secondary school without needing remediation, (b) achieve a readiness score state exams, (c) pass a career and technical education assessment which results in a national or state credential, or (d) complete a work-based learning program. Based on previous research, the college and career readiness indicators included in the CCRPI reflect college readiness (Conley, 2017). Thus, the implications for positive social change may include strategies for K-12 principals to use to increase CCRPI scores for students to graduate from high school prepared for college and careers.

Summary

School principals are responsible for improving low CCRPI, but little is understood about how K-12 school principals' leadership practices were perceived to improve CCRPI scores in schools. The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to examine the leadership practices of K-12 school principals in a Title I school district in the southeastern United States to improve CCRPI scores. For this basic qualitative study, the focus was on the three instructional leadership functions for managing the instructional program: (a) supervising and evaluating instruction, (b) coordinating curriculum, and (c) monitoring student progress (Hallinger, 2018). The implications for positive social change include findings for K-12 principals to use to

increase CCRPI scores for students to graduate from high school prepared for college and careers. In Chapter 2, I present the review of literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Little was understood about how K-12 leadership practices were perceived to improve CCRPI scores in schools. The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to examine the leadership practices of K-12 school principals to increase CCRPI scores in a Title I school district in the southeastern United States, which the research question addressed. In Chapter 2, I present a review of current research related to the problem. I searched peer-reviewed articles regarding school accountability, and instructional leadership of principals to improve low performing schools.

Literature Search Strategy

The review of literature for this study included textbooks from coursework and peer-reviewed articles from the Walden Library and Google Scholar. Using guidance from Walden's online library via a research appointment with the College of Education and Leadership liaison, I searched education and multidisciplinary databases. Search terms included *K-12 education, K-12 accountability, low-performing schools, school improvement, educational leadership, instructional leadership, leadership practices, principals' duties,* and *Title I school*. Some searches with Boolean expressions included: *instructional leadership* and *practices* or *strategies* or *approaches; accountability or responsibility or accountable* and *principal* or *school leader* or *administrators; instructional leadership* and *school improvement or educational change or school innovation or educational improvement*. Articles related to the research topic were obtained from Education Source, Sage Journals, Taylor and Francis Online, and Google

Scholar. Database search alerts were used to stay abreast of new articles on the research topic.

Conceptual Framework

Intro to framework. The instructional leadership framework was appropriate for this study to identify activities, functions, and processes used to improve student achievement. This framework includes (a) activities such as policies, practices, and behaviors and (b) functions such as framing school goals and objectives, developing and promoting expectations, developing and promoting standards, assessing and monitoring student performance, protecting instructional time, promoting curricular coordination, and supporting instructional improvement. The instructional leadership framework emphasizes the goal of effective principals is to improve student achievement (Hallinger, 2018). The framework led to the development of Hallinger and Murphy's instructional leadership framework and the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (Murphy et al., 1983), which consists of a principal, teacher, and supervisor survey with questions based on the 10 instructional leadership job functions for respondents to rate from 1 to 5, with 1 representing almost never and 5 representing almost always (Hallinger et al., 2018). Additional leadership models that have been developed include transformational leadership, distributed leadership (Harris & Spillane, 2008), and collaborative leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

How framework applies to study. The instructional leadership framework includes 10 functions. For this basic qualitative study, I used three instructional leadership functions for managing the instructional program:

1. Supervising and evaluating instruction: Principal should monitor classroom instruction using informal classroom visits and formal evaluations and providing instructional support to teachers,
2. Coordinating curriculum: Principals should ensure curriculum taught by teachers is aligned to student assessments and provide time for teachers to collaborate within and across grade levels on instructional and curricular issues, and
3. Monitoring student progress: Principals should monitor student progress by reviewing formative and summative test results with teachers and use the data to make decisions about instructional programs and classroom assignments. (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985, p. 222)

The three functions were relevant to this study because these functions focus on leadership practices of principals and what they should do in their school's instructional program. At the research site, the instructional program was used as a key to improve CCRPI scores because most of the scores are calculated using student achievement data from ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies end-of-year assessments (State Department of Education, 2018). The three instructional leadership functions were used to create the interview questions and analyze the interview data to answer the research question. Specifically, I used the components of the framework to understand the participants' responses on how they manage instructional programs and supervise and evaluate instruction, how they coordinate the curriculum, and how they monitor students'

progress to improve CCRPI scores. I organized the data into categories to include attributes of the conceptual framework to answer the research question.

How framework has been used in previous research. The instructional leadership framework was also chosen because of its previous use to investigate how instructional leadership affects teacher efficacy (Ma & Marion, 2021). Instructional leadership evolved from researchers trying to find the link between school leadership and student learning (Marks & Printy, 2003). For example, Alam and Ahmad (2017) used the framework to examine how professional learning communities (PLCs) affect student achievement. Other researchers have noted that school principals spend time on instructional leadership, which may shift the school's culture (Ezzaani, 2020; Lochmiller & Mancinelli, 2019). Educational leadership enhances students' academic achievement and principals' instructional leadership affect school improvement (Tian & Huber, 2019).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

A review of the current literature focused on K-12 college and career accountability measures and on the three instructional leadership framework functions used for instructional leadership of principals to improve low performing schools. Key concepts found in peer-reviewed articles included accountability at both the federal and state government levels, school improvement, the principals' duties as instructional leaders, basic qualitative research design, the leadership practices of K-12 school principals, and ways to increase CCRPI scores in school districts located in the United States. The literature review is presented in the following sections.

Educational Policy

At the research site, school principals were held responsible for following educational policies set forth by the local school district and the state Department of Education to meet federal accountability guidelines regarding CCRPI scores. In the United States, political viewpoints have played an integral role in educational policy, with each political party having its own agenda. Researchers have found three opposing goals at the root of educational inefficiency and conflict in the United States: (a) democratic equality, (b) social efficiency, and (c) social mobility (Tichnor-Wagner & Socol, 2016). These goals are supported by both the Democratic and Republican political parties; however, the terminology used to communicate the goals tends to differ. For example, the Democratic party used the term *equal access*, whereas the Republican party preferred the term *equal treatment*. Education is an important agenda item regardless of political party affiliation. The extent to which the federal government should be involved in education is the basic divide between the political parties (Jennings, 2018). Principals must be able to respond to changes in the elected officials and policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels. The concentration on test scores to determine academic achievement dominates educational accountability. Principals are held accountable for understanding educational policies and implementing initiatives to improve CCRPI scores.

No Child Left Behind

Under President George W. Bush, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 was passed into law, which changed the federal government's involvement in public

school education by initiating test-based accountability (Ladd, 2017). NCLB required states to test students annually and by the end of the 2014 school year have 100% of students proficient in reading and mathematics (Ladd, 2017). Though 100% student proficiency was not achieved, NCLB forced schools to pay attention to the equal treatment and equal access of education for all students (Ladd, 2017). States had to report student performance data and it had to be broken down and reported for subgroups (Diorio, 2018). Schools not meeting the adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals were placed on improvement lists, required to provide supplemental resources, and after 2 years, parents had the option of selecting a better performing school (Diorio, 2018). If schools continued to fail to meet AYP, punitive consequences could include replacing staff and administrators, state takeover, or the school being closed (Diorio, 2018). This led to principals leaving schools (Mitani, 2019). In the local setting, the school districts faced challenges regarding principal turnover, teacher turnover, and state takeover. Additionally, the school district administrators in the local setting struggled with the challenge of punitive consequences by the state for having low CCRPI scores for the past 5 years. At the research site, school principals were expected to meet state goals such as student performance as measured by CCRPI scores.

Schools have responded mostly positively to increased federal accountability started by NCLB. NCLB led to standardized accountability tests, which addressed cheating (Hibel & Penn, 2020). However, though schools have responded positively to increased federal accountability (Wong et al., 2016), schools have also responded negatively to increased accountability (Hibel & Penn, 2020).

ESSA did not replace student testing reporting requirements; however, the responsibility for developing the accountability system used to report students' end-of-year summative assessments was determined by each state in the United States (Ladd, 2017). ESSA requirement of multiple measures of student and school success provides more information for continuous improvement and not just compliance or to avoid punishment (Adler-Greene, 2019; Bae, 2018). For example, California and South Carolina's revised school accountability systems included a greater range of students' knowledge and abilities (Bae, 2018). Moreover, in New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago, the concentration on test scores to judge academic achievement continues to dominate educational accountability; however, updated accountability plans contain broader accountability targets, numerous metrics with varied data types, and a focus on school improvement (Portz, 2021). At the study site, principals are responsible for keeping track of all measures used to calculate CCRPI scores and for improving CCRPI scores. The CCRPI is based on standardized test scores and includes additional data types, such as (a) student attendance data, (b) course offerings data such as enrichment courses beyond the traditional academic core and accelerated enrollment courses through Dual Enrollment, Advanced Placement, or International Baccalaureate, and (c) school climate surveys completed by students, parents, and teachers (State Department of Education, 2019).

Race to the Top initiative at the State Level

The Race to the Top initiative was instrumental in developing the CCRPI accountability system. Some of the policy changes initiated by the Race to the Top

initiative in the study site's state included (a) adopting more rigorous standards and assessments, (b) adopting the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) and Leader KES to evaluate teachers and leaders using multiple sources of data, (c) implementing more effective supports for low performing schools, and (d) focusing more attention on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (Howell & Magazinni, 2020). Participating in the Race to the Top initiative was beneficial to the state where the study was conducted. When compared to other states using the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the state improved, going from a Grade of F in 2009 to a Grade of B+ in 2015 for meeting proficiency standards on reading and mathematics examinations administered to students in Grades 4 and 8 (Hamlin & Peterson, 2018).

College and Career Readiness

School principals at the research site are expected to increase the graduation rates and prepare students to enter college or start careers by joining the workforce. In a study of school accountability plans and their emphasis on college and career readiness, 12 states received a high rating, 24 received a medium rating, and 16 states received a low rating (Hackman et al., 2019). Based on research done on keys for college and career readiness and ways to measure them, the college and career readiness indicators included in the CCRPI accountability system reflect college readiness (Conley, 2017). The CCRPI indicators include multiple options along a continuum that leads to college readiness and received a medium rating. Specifically, the CCRPI readiness component assesses students' participation in activities that help them prepare for college and careers. Thus,

principals are held accountable for comprehending the CCRPI's components in order to improve their school's CCRPI scores.

Components of CCRPI

CCRPI scores include five main components, each scored on a scale from 0% to 100% (State Department of Education, 2017). CCRPI's component content mastery is based on student achievement on end-of-year assessments. Assessments are administered in:

> (a) English language arts for students in Grades 3-8 and the high school American literature and composition course, (b) mathematics for students in Grades 3-8, and the high school Algebra I course, (c) science for students in Grades 5 and 8, and the high school biology course, and (d) social studies for students in Grade 8 and the high school United States history course. (State Department of Education, 2018a, pp. 7–8)

Student achievement on end-of-year assessments is categorized by four levels: beginning learners, developing learners, proficient learners, and distinguished learners, who earn 0 points, .5 points, 1 point, and 1.5 points, respectively (State Department of Education, 2018a, p. 7). At the research site, school principals are held responsible for improving low CCRPI scores.

The second CCRPI component is progress, which is based on student growth. To determine student growth, students are compared to "academically-similar students" using student growth percentiles (State Department of Education, 2018a, p. 9). Student growth is categorized into three levels: (a) percentiles between 1 and 34 represent low

growth, 35 and 65 represent typical growth, and 66 and 99 represent higher growth (State Department of Education, 2018a, p. 9). When calculating the progress component, the reading and mathematics progress scores use weights based on four growth levels: those between 1 and 29 earn 0 points, those between 30 and 40 earn 0.5 points, those between 41and 65 earn 1 point, and those between 66 and 99 earn 1.5 points (State Department of Education, 2018a, p. 9). This second component includes English learners progress, which is measured by performance bands on the English language proficiency assessment (State Department of Education, 2018a). The third CCRPI component is closing gaps, which is based on students' improvements in achievement rates. Improvement targets are set based on the previous year's academic performance on end-of-year assessments for all students and for all student subgroups (State Department of Education, 2018a).

The fourth component of the CCRPI is readiness, which is determined by whether students are engaged in activities that prepare them college and careers. The three indicators for elementary, middle, and high school students include: (a) literacy, which is calculated based on the "percent of students meeting Lexile Band for grade levels" (State Department of Education, 2018a, p. 13), (b) attendance, which is calculated based on the "percent of students who are absent less than 10% of enrolled days," and (c) beyond the core, which is calculated based on the "percent of students earning passing grades in fine arts, world language, physical education/health, or career exploratory courses." High school readiness indicators include:

> (a) the percent of Grade 12 students earning credit for taking advanced placement, dual enrollment, or international baccalaureate courses, (b) the percent of Grade

> 12 students completing a series of three courses within one career area concentration, and (c) the percent of Grade 12 students achieving a readiness score on standardized college entrance examinations. (State Department of Education, 2018c, p. 14)

The final CCRPI component is graduation rate, which applies to high schools. The graduation rate is based on whether students graduate from high school in 4 or 5 years (State Department of Education, 2018c). The graduation rate component is calculated by counting the "4-year graduation rate 66.67% and the 5-year graduation rate 33.33%" (State Department of Education, 2018c, p. 16).

The components are used to calculate the overall CCRPI score. School districts and individual schools receive state report cards that report CCRPI performance with a grading scale of A-F (State Department of Education, 2018c). School districts and individual schools receiving CCRPI scores of 90.0% and higher receive a letter grade of A, scores between 80.0% and 89.9% receive a letter grade of B, scores between 70.0% and 79.9% receive a letter grade of C, scores between 60.0% to 69.9% receive a letter grade of D, and scores lower than 60.0% receive a letter grade of F (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2018, para. 5). CCRPI reports also include star ratings for school climate, and financial efficiency status. The school climate rating is based on four components: "(a) student, teacher, and parent perceptions of a school's climate, (b) student discipline, (c) a safe and substance-free learning environment, and (d) student attendance" (State Department of Education, 2018a, p. 15). Star ratings for school

climate range from 1 to 5, with “five stars representing an excellent school climate” (State Department of Education, 2018a, p. 15).

The financial efficiency star rating is based on spending and is a “comparison of per-student spending and the overall student performance” (State Department of Education, 2018a, p. 15). Star ratings for financial efficiency range from 0.5 to 5 with “a five-star rating representing strong student outcomes with low expenditures.” School climate and financial efficiency star ratings are for information only and are not used to calculate CCRPI scores. The research regarding the components of the CCRPI and how the CCRPI is calculated was relevant to this research study because principals are expected to use their leadership practices to increase CCRPI scores. The five CCRPI components are calculated using a variety of data sources; however, test scores remain the most used data source for assessing academic achievement.

Student Achievement in Low Performing Schools

A school with a low CCRPI score receives a letter grade of D or F. According to Saw et al. (2017), the idea behind grading and labeling schools was to create external pressure to motivate schools to improve student achievement, and reported that currently, each of the 50 states in the United States identifies its lowest performing 5% of schools on an annual basis. Also, Saw et al. analyzed data from persistently lowest achieving schools. Schools’ labels appear to have some positive effects. Similar to the research conducted by Saw et al., Bonilla and Dee (2017) used regression discontinuity design and examined school performance data from 920 Kentucky schools designated as low performing. Specifically, Bonilla and Dee (2017) analyzed 2 years of student state test

scores and revealed gains of 17% improvement in mathematics proficiency and 9% improvement in reading proficiency. These findings were relevant to my study because at the research site, school principals are responsible for improving low CCRPI scores.

While Bonilla and Dee (2017) and Saw et al. (2017) reported positive effects, other researchers reported negative impacts for schools labeled low performing. According to Murray and Howe (2017), validity discrepancies in A-F school report cards were found because grades may not be a true reflection of the quality of education provided and recommend the abandonment of A-F school report card systems of accountability. Furthermore, Atchison (2020) examined 126 New York elementary and middle schools designated as low performing that improved within the given time span of 3 years. Using regression discontinuity design, Atchison found that labeling schools as underperforming stymied school improvement. Specifically, Atchison reported a strongly negative and statistically significant correlation with schools identified as low performing, earning 8.7 points lower than other schools in year 1, and 17.5 points lower in year 2. Similar to the study conducted by Atchison (2020), Dougherty and Weiner (2019) used regression discontinuity design and examined school performance data from 274 Rhode Island schools in the United States of which 42 schools were designated as low performing. Moreover, Dougherty and Weiner analyzed 2 years of student state test scores, and wrote schools designated as low performing reported negative outcomes even though the schools were required to implement more intervention programs in reading and mathematics. Null results were found by Dee and Dizon-Ross (2019) who used regression discontinuity design and examined school performance data from 1,158

Louisiana schools of which 94 were low performing with data from 3 years of student performance and no notable changes in school performance were found. Thus, findings from four of the six research studies suggested that being identified as a failing school did not help with improving academic achievement of students. The research regarding schools identified as low performing working to improve student achievement was relevant to this research study because the study site was similar to the schools studied by researchers who found that being identified as a failing school did not help with improving academic achievement of students. CCRPI scores had been low for 5 years and schools have been designated as low performing. Thus, at the research site, there was a need to examine low CCRPI scores because the CCRPI is calculated by using student achievement data.

School Improvement Plan

School principals of low-performing schools should implement the school improvement plan. A comprehensive needs assessment should be conducted to determine goals, needs, and resources to develop an effective school improvement plan that addresses accountability measures. Meyers and VanGronigen (2019) analyzed the extent and ways principals develop school improvement plans, and reviewed the school improvement plans for 134 low-performing schools and identified five behaviors: (a) plan content is consistent across schools within a district, (b) plans resubmitted from the previous year, (c) plans focus solely on state test scores, and (d) timeline is insufficient. Eighty percent of the school improvement plans contained two to four satisficing behaviors to meet minimum levels of school improvement (Meyers & VanGronigen,

2019). Moreover, Meyers and VanGronigen (2020) also analyzed short-cycle school improvement plans that operate on one semester instead of a yearlong basis to allow more frequent changes. Furthermore, Meyers and VanGronigen (2020) evaluated 136 low-performing schools' short-cycle school improvement plans to determine overall quality and whether the school improvement plan changed over time. Additionally, Meyers and VanGronigen (2020) found that principals of low-performing schools do not engage in deep root cause analysis to identify meaningful focus areas. Thus, school principals of low-performing schools should focus on improvement plans of low-performing schools.

School principals struggle to develop school improvement plans. Meyers and Hitt (2018) found that many school improvement plans look similar by analyzing 171 school improvement plans of low-performing schools, focusing on quick-win initiatives that are clear, completed in 30 days, and linked to priority goals in order to gain faculty and staff support before attempting to implement more comprehensive changes to improve low-performing schools. Also, Meyers and Hitt (2018) found that principals struggled to develop quick wins despite being relatively simple to plan. Based on these findings, the literature regarding school improvement plans suggested that low-performing schools do not effectively develop school improvement plans. Furthermore, the research regarding school improvement plans was relevant to this research study because principals are responsible for conducting needs assessments and developing school improvement plans. For example, the school improvement plan is used to communicate the schools' goals and initiatives to improve student achievement data and increase CCRPI scores. Additionally,

the school improvement plan is shared with all district stakeholders and reviewed four times throughout the school year to monitor school improvement.

School Improvement Leadership

There is a disconnect between school leadership and school improvement plan. For example, Yeigh et al. (2019) examined principals' perceptions of demands placed on them and their ability to provide school improvement leadership by analyzing specific school improvement attributes, activities, perceptions, and attitudes of school principals in relation to reading and mathematics achievement. Thus, there is a disconnect between school leadership and school improvement plan.

School improvement leadership affects reading and mathematics standardized test scores. Hitt et al. (2019) conducted a study with 19 principals working in needs improvement schools who successfully improved reading and mathematics standardized test scores in the first 2 years of their principalship. Using interviews, Hitt et al. (2018) identified seven turnaround principal competencies: "(a) initiates and persists, (b) inspires and motivates, (c) elicits intended response, (d) builds capacity through accountability and support, (e) commits to students, (f) crystalizes problems and creates solutions, and (g) uses inquiry to frame and solve problems" (p. 67). For the second part of the study, Hitt et al. (2019) used behavior event interviews and the seven turnaround principal competencies to examine how the leader understands and approaches the school improvement process to improve student achievement. Hitt et al. found that two of the seven competencies *initiates and persists*, and *inspires and motivates*, have a strong relationship with student achievement. Thus, school leaders who improved student

success in less than 2 years had the ability to collaborate with faculty and staff to create realistic goals and devise effective strategies for change in the school.

School district leaders attempt to implement rigorous academic standards. For example, Rigby et al. (2018) examined the importance of district-level support for high-needs schools and found that district leaders were attempting to implement rigorous standards while simultaneously attempting to improve standardized test scores. District leaders encountered difficulties with instructional methods and the capacity of the school's leadership team to monitor students' engagement in deep, critical, and conceptual thinking (Rigby et al., 2018). Therefore, high-needs schools should do a comprehensive needs assessment to ascertain the school's objectives, needs, and resources in order to build an effective school improvement plan.

In conclusion, Hitt et al. (2019), Rigby et al. (2018), and Yeigh et al. (2019) examined school improvement leadership. The findings of these scholars regarding school improvement leadership were relevant to this study. These scholars found that principals should (a) focus their time on behaviors that have been found to improve schools’ achievement scores, (b) collaborate with faculty and staff to create realistic goals, (c) collaborate with faculty and staff to develop effective strategies for change in the school, and (d) develop capacity for monitoring students' critical thinking engagement. K-12 principals are expected to demonstrate leadership characteristics, effectively guide schools through the school improvement and student monitoring processes and adopt measures that help schools improve their CCRPI scores.

Instructional Leadership

Principals are expected to employ instructional leadership to improve schools to meet state and federal accountability requirements. With CCRPI scores being a top priority for K-12 principals, effective principal instructional leadership is essential. Studies on the traits of good instructional leaders, as well as studies on the specific roles and obligations that principals are responsible for, are included under the category of instructional leadership research. For instance, Huguet (2017) examined effective instructional leadership attributes that affect student achievement and found that school principals must be trustworthy leaders who promote teamwork and hire teachers who are genuinely enthusiastic about teaching and care about children. Also, Huguet (2017) focused on working in collaborative teams, and these findings are supported by Brown et al. (2017) who suggested that principals can improve student achievement through building instructional capacity of teachers in PLCs. Another researcher, Burnes et al. (2018) examined PLCs to assess how well PLCs relate to student achievement by examining data from 181 schools and reported that collaborative leadership process and data-driven systems for learning have a small correlation with student achievement. Similar findings were reported by Bush (2019) who provided emphasized that PLCs affect strengthening schools' capacities to improve instruction and students' academic achievement.

Previous research suggested that principals' instructional leadership behaviors affect student achievement. An example is the research conducted by Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2019) who examined the perceptions of their participants concerning

instructional leadership. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2019) administered a survey at 64 schools and found a correlation between student achievement and instructional leadership. Similar to the findings of Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2019), Klar et al. (2020) conducted a multi-site case study and examined principal leadership practices that improve student achievement in high poverty, low performing schools in a rural area. Klar et al. (2020) found principal practices increased student achievement by: (a) developing a shared vision, (b) developing people through professional development, (c) building a collaborative culture, (d) aligning resources with school goals, and (e) providing instructional support to staff. Similar to the findings of both Klar et al. (2020) and Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2019), Schwan (2020) examined the perceptions of principals, teachers, and teacher candidates regarding their opinions of the importance of the 10 instructional leadership functions as measured in the principal instructional management rating scale containing a 50-question survey using Likert scale that was developed by Hallinger (2018) to measure the 10 instructional leadership functions included in the instructional leadership framework. Schwan found that principals ranked goals, professional development, and supervision and evaluation as the most important instructional leadership functions. Thus, research on the characteristics of good instructional leaders and having the ability to hire caring teachers who work collaboratively was relevant to the current study because principals of low-performing schools are expected to improve student achievement and CCRPI scores.

Research on instructional leadership also includes specific roles and responsibilities the principals are expected to carry out to improve student achievement

and increase CCRPI scores. Principals must supervise and evaluate teachers, coordinate curriculum, and monitor progress (Hallinger, 2018). Derrington and Campbell (2018) examined principals' perceptions of the implementation of teacher evaluation systems regarding student performance on state assessments and interviewed 14 principals who were implementing a new Race to the Top teacher evaluation policies over a 4-year period. Derrington and Campbell (2018) reported five themes that principals found useful to their instructional leadership: (a) the required instructional rubric, (b) time demands required for implementation, (c) observation scores as a performance rating factor, (d) student test scores as a performance rating factor, and (e) tenure and compensation. Similar to the research of Derrington and Campbell (2018), Hvidston et al., (2018) examined principal evaluation systems looking at both supervision, which involves providing needed support, and evaluation, which involved summative ratings of job performance and had a sample of 36 elementary principals. Hvidston et al. (2018) found that the key components to improving instructional leadership include trust, communication, goal setting, and systematic observations with feedback. The findings of both Derrington and Campbell (2018), and Hvidston et al. (2018) regarding teacher and principal evaluation systems were relevant to the current study because principals at the research site are responsible for improving instruction and CCRPI scores by supervising and evaluating teachers by implementing the TKES. The main purpose of TKES is to promote teachers' ongoing growth and development. TKES consist of three components: (a) teacher assessment on performance of standards, (b) professional growth, and (c) student growth (State Department of Education, 2018).

Effective implementation of a new teacher evaluation system requires instructional leadership. Lochmiller and Mancinelli (2019) investigated whether elementary school principals spent more time on instructional leadership in response to a new teacher evaluation system. The sample was 354 elementary principals, and the researchers reported that principals had to increase their emphasis on classroom observations because the new teacher evaluation system required principals to evaluate all teachers, and principals distributed non-instructional responsibilities to other personnel to allow time to complete teacher evaluations (Lochmiller & Mancinelli, 2019). The findings reported by Lochmiller and Mancinelli (2019) were similar to the findings of Neumerski et al. (2018) who examined new teacher evaluation systems specifically looking at the principal's role in teacher observations, and how the new teacher evaluation system changes the day-to-day work of the principal's instructional leadership role. The sample was 60 urban school district principals and found that new teacher evaluation policies require principals to spend more time evaluating instruction and analyzing classroom data to provide evidence-based feedback to teachers. Neumerski et al. (2018) found that challenges of the new teacher evaluation systems reported by principals include: (a) the evaluation requirements are time consuming, (b) the principal is less visible in the school building because of the time spent observing teachers in individual classrooms, and (c) the evaluations have had an undesirable impact on relationships with teachers and students.

Scholars examined the school administration manager approach. Goldring et al. (2019) examined how the school administration manager approach helped principals

manage their time so they could focus on instructional leadership. Goldring et al. (2019) surveyed 387 principals who implemented the process and found that using the process helped principals shift their time from managerial tasks to instructional tasks; however, because the ability to evaluate the quality of instruction is based on the principal's expertise of instruction, the researchers discovered that spending more time in the classroom did not correlate with bettering the quality of instruction. Mette and Riegel (2018) conducted a case study and included one school principal and the school system's superintendent whose vison and goals regarding supervision and evaluation were not aligned. Mette and Riegel (2018) found that principals, instructional coaches, and peer teachers can provide formative feedback to teachers because the goal of formative feedback is to provide differentiated support based on a teacher's strengths and needs; however, principals should complete summative evaluations because the goal of summative feedback is to document a teacher's performance, which is used to determine teacher retention. Research regarding supervision and evaluation of teachers and time management was relevant to the current study because principals at the research site are required to manage their time to meet the teacher observation requirements of TKES and to provide feedback to teachers on improving instruction and CCRPI scores.

Principals at the study site were expected to analyze classroom data and provide evidence-based feedback to teachers, as well as make data-driven decisions to improve instruction and CCRPI results. Farrell (2015) examined how schools use data to improve instructional outcomes by including two public school systems and two charter school systems and found that the accountability pressure on public school systems had a strong

influence on data use to improve instructional outcomes. Comparable to the findings of Farrell (2015), Ezzani (2020) investigated how administrators from one low-performing school were able to shift the school's culture. Specifically, Ezzani (2020) collected data through interviews and observations of PLCs, grade level meetings, and teachers' classroom, and found that the principal was able to shift the school's culture by using data informed decision making, PLCs, and distributed leadership. Similar to the findings of Farrell (2015 and Ezzani (2020), Tian and Huber (2019) examined the development of educational leadership, administration, and management by analyzing 2,347 education leadership publications. Moreover, Tian and Huber (2019) found five educational leadership, administration, and management thematic strands: (a) school leadership for enhancing students' academic achievement and teachers' effectiveness, (b) leadership for educational change, accountability, and promoting democratic values, (c) leadership for social justice, equal education, and narrowing achievement gaps, (d) principal's instructional leadership for school improvement, and (e) distributed leadership and its impact on organizational climate and teachers' attitudes and stress. Additionally, while principal's instructional leadership is a frequently researched topic, research addressing the contextual factors that have an impact on principals' instructional leadership is lacking (Tian & Huber, 2019). The research regarding the use of data to improve instructional outcomes was relevant to this research study because the principal should be the instructional leader focusing on increasing CCRPI scores by using student achievement data to make decision.

Researchers use a basic qualitative design to examine a practical problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using a basic qualitative design, data collection was limited to semistructured interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Research designs begin with the purpose of the research study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A qualitative research design was appropriate for this study because I examined a specific problem from the point of view of the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For the purpose of this study, interview questions were designed to align with the research question. Semistructured interviews were used to gather data through video conferencing (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I conducted the interviews, reviewed all interview transcripts, and organized the interview data (Burkholder et al., 2016). The goal of this basic qualitative study was to gain knowledge of a specific phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2016). I focused on Hallinger's instructional leadership framework functions for managing the instructional program.

Summary and Conclusions

In Chapter 2, I focused on the review of the literature related to key concepts found in scholarly journal articles included accountability at both the federal and state government levels, school improvement, and the traits of good instructional leaders, as well as the specific roles and responsibilities of principals regarding instructional leadership. The peer-reviewed articles included leadership practices K-12 school principals should use to improve student performance and CCRPI scores in a Title I school district located in the southeastern United States. Atchison (2020) found that schools designated as low performing hindered school improvement. Also, Dougherty and Weiner (2019) revealed that schools designated as low performing reported negative

outcomes. Moreover, Rigby et al. (2018) found leaders are implementing standards while trying to improve standardized test scores. Furthermore, Klar et al. (2020) found principals' practices increase student achievement. Additionally, Hvidston et al. (2018) reported that to improve instructional leadership practices, principals should build communication, goal setting, and observations. Finally, Tian and Huber (2019) found: (a) school leadership for enhancing students' academic achievement, (b) leadership for educational change, (c) leadership for narrowing achievement gaps, (d) principal's instructional leadership for school improvement, and (e) distributed leadership. In Chapter 3, I present the research design and methodology.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Little is understood about how K-12 school principals' leadership practices are perceived to improve CCRPI scores in schools. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the leadership practices K-12 school principals described to increase CCRPI scores in a Title I school district in the southeastern United States, which the research question directly addressed. Major sections of this chapter include the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, participant selection, data instrumentation, and data analysis plan.

Research Design and Rationale

Decisions about design begin with the purpose of the research study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research is appropriate when researchers are trying to understand a specific problem from the point of view of the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There are many different types of qualitative research designs and approaches. Researchers use a basic qualitative design to examine a practical problem, and the data collection method is typically semistructured interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Other qualitative research designs include (a) ethnographic study, which focuses on culture; (b) grounded theory, which focuses on building a theory; (c) narrative inquiry, which focuses on participants' stories; and (d) basic qualitative study, which focuses on uncovering and interpreting meanings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative research (Burkholder et al., 2016), meaning their identity (i.e., gender, socioeconomic status, race, culture, and so on) can influence the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I conducted the interviews, reviewed all interview transcripts, and organized the interview data (Burkholder et al., 2016). Because the researcher is responsible for both collecting and analyzing data for a qualitative research study, I ensured that the data were valid and trustworthy while addressing bias (Creswell, 2015; Patton, 2015). I interpreted the findings and results of data collection and analysis through the lens of a researcher and through the conceptual framework for instructional leadership.

To conduct an ethical research study, I was reflective during data collection and analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Researcher bias was reduced by keeping a reflexivity journal during the process of interviewing and analysis to document perspectives and attempts to accurately reflect the data. I served as the director of assessment and evaluation at the district level for the schools under study. In my current role, my primary responsibility is ensuring that state mandated end-of-year assessments are administered by all schools according to established administration procedures and security protocols. Establishing a researcher–participant relationship was feasible because my role, but I had no supervisory role over school principals.

I also obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval prior to beginning the research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Prior to interviewing study participants, I explained the purpose of this research study to each participant, and confidentiality

agreements that was signed prior their interviews. I explained the consent forms to each participant prior to participants signing the forms and shared with each participant the interview and analysis process. I conducted member checking with the participants regarding the accuracy of their responses during the interviews, and all participants were given an opportunity to review the transcripts of the interviews to confirm accuracy of the interview data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The rights of the participants were protected by informed consent, confidentiality, and the absence of any identifying data that could reveal the participant or their school (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I collected and stored interview data on a flash drive without identifying the names or schools of any participants. I assigned pseudonyms to each interview participant and to their school. Participants were informed that their identities including schools' names, and the school district's name was disguised and protected (Creswell, 2015).

Methodology

Qualitative research is appropriate when researchers are trying to understand a specific problem from the point of view of the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The goal of a basic qualitative study is to gain knowledge of a specific unit around a phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2016). The qualitative design that matches the goal of discovering knowledge and truth is the basic qualitative research design (Patton, 2015).

Participant Selection

The sampling approach used in qualitative research is purposeful sampling, which means the participants are chosen for a specific reason (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Using purposeful sampling, the research site was intentionally selected because it was

information rich regarding the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2015). The research site had consistently low CCRPI scores, ranging between C and D over the past 5 years. The school district was a Title I school district, with all schools meeting the U.S. Department of Education's guidelines to qualify for Title I funds. I sought participants who: (a) currently serve as the principal of the school or is the former principal of the school, (b) worked in a Title I school district, with all schools meeting the U.S. Department of Education's guidelines to qualify for funds allocated under Title I, and (c) worked in a school district with an overall CCRPI score that was below 70.

All K-12 principals working in one Title 1 school district with a district CCRPI score below 70 were solicited by email to participate. The email addresses for all principals were listed on the school district's website. The email invitation included background information and procedures that participants were expected to follow if they volunteered to participate.

Sample size and the number of research sites for qualitative research studies vary because of the need to report details about each participant, and the amount of time needed to collect and analyze qualitative data can be extensive (Creswell, 2015). All principals and three former principals working for the research site met the participant selection criteria to participate in this research study. The school district had five elementary schools serving students in K - 5, two middle schools serving students in Grades 6-8, one high school serving students in Grades 9 - 12, and two alternative programs serving students in Grades 6 - 12 (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019).

Instrumentation

Participant's responses were recorded and transcribed. I used the Hallinger's instructional leadership framework functions for managing the instructional program:

- Supervising and evaluating instruction: Principal should monitor classroom instruction using informal classroom visits and formal evaluations and providing instructional support to teachers.
- Coordinating curriculum: Principals should ensure curriculum taught by teachers is aligned to student assessments and provide time for teachers to collaborate within and across grade levels on instructional and curricular issues.
- Monitoring student progress: Principals should monitor student progress by reviewing formative and summative test results with teachers and use the data to make decisions about instructional programs and classroom assignments. (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985, p. 222)

I developed 10 interview questions. Interview questions 1, 2, and 10 were developed based on the research study question. Interview questions 3 and 4 were developed based on the supervision and evaluating instruction function of the instructional leadership framework. Interview questions 5 and 6 were developed based on the coordinating curriculum function of the instructional leadership framework. Interview questions 7 and 8 were developed based on the monitoring student progress function of the instructional leadership framework. Interview question 9 was developed based on the

three instructional leadership framework functions for managing the instructional program.

To establish content validity and sufficiency of data collection instrument to answer the research question, I completed the interview protocol refinement (IPR) framework (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). According to Castillo-Montoya (2016), the IRP process includes four steps: (a) make sure interview questions align with research question, (b) constructing an inquiry-based conversation, (c) receiving feedback, and (d) piloting the interview protocol. I used a matrix to align interview questions to the research question and conceptual framework's three instructional leadership functions for managing the instructional program (Appendix B). All questions were open ended and created a conversational exchange, instead of yes or no responses. A coworker reviewed the questions and provided feedback. The purpose of this feedback was to enhance the trustworthiness of the research instrument (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The co-worker used a close reading checklist to check for writing style and comprehension (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The coworker provided feedback and indicated that the questions were open ended, clear, easy to understand, and answered the research question. I piloted the interview protocol with two colleges who worked in a neighboring district who met the characteristics of the sample (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The procedures for gaining access to participants included completing the school district's research request application. The application included specific questions about the research study, whether the study had IRB approval, and information about

confidentiality and non-disclosure requirements. The completed application and proposal were submitted to the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction for approval at the research site. I submitted the IRB application after completing the collaborative institutional training initiative (CITI) program research, ethics, and compliance training. Once the proposal was approved by Walden university's IRB (approval no. 08-26-21-0672473), the school district granted access to proceed with the study. I informed the principals about the research study by email. I requested the voluntary participation of eight current K - 12 principals and three former principals working in one Title I school district with a district CCRPI score below 70 to participate. The study sought participants who: (a) served as the principal of the school or was the former principal of the school, (b) worked in a Title I school district, with all schools meeting the United States Department of Education's guidelines to qualify for funds allocated under Title I, and (c) worked in a school district with an overall CCRPI score that is below 70. Participants were informed that participation in this study was voluntary, their responses are confidential, and their identities, their schools' identities, and the school district's identity are disguised and protected. Participants were informed that the individual interview would be conducted virtually using Zoom, should last approximately 60 minutes, and would be recorded to facilitate my notetaking. Participants were asked to sign a consent form by replying to the email with the words "I consent." Eight principals consented to participate.

Data were collected using semistructured interviews that were conducted using an interview protocol (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I individually interviewed eight K - 12

principals. Due to COVID-19, instead of face-to-face interviews, I used a virtual communication tool, Zoom, to conduct the interviews. The interview sessions were recorded and transcribed. After ending the interview, I reviewed the recording to make sure the session recorded properly. The recorded sessions were transcribed using word processing software.

Participants were scheduled for virtual individual interviews based on the date and time that was convenient for them. Individual interviews are used when the researcher plans to develop multiple themes from individual experiences (Burkholder et al., 2016). My goal was to schedule all interviews within a 4-week time span. I used an electronic calendar with an appointment time slot feature for participants to sign up for their interview. Once scheduled, participants received an email invitation with the date, time, and Zoom link to the virtual meeting. An email reminder was sent 1 day before the meeting date.

At the beginning of the interview, I thanked the participants for agreeing to participate in the study. Participants were reminded that they were invited to participate in this study because they serve or recently served as principal in a Title I school district where the overall district CCRPI score is below 70. I reminded the participants that their written consent was obtained by email; however, I reviewed the consent form and asked if there were any questions before we started. I asked for their permission to begin recording the virtual session. According to Burkholder et al. (2016), the interview protocol ensures consistency across interviews. Furthermore, I used member checks simultaneously during the interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After the participant

responded to a question, I summarized my understanding of what was stated and ask the participant to verify that I had clearly described their perception. This process of involving the participant to confirm the results helped to reduce researcher bias (Birt et al., 2016). Thus, using the interview protocol, I asked the interview questions to probe, and I listened to each participant reflectively.

Data Analysis Plan

Data collection and analysis were, in part, conducted simultaneously. Waiting until all interviews are completed before beginning analysis can be overwhelming due to the amount of data collected for a qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As I completed each interview, I transcribed the audio recording. Each participant's interview transcription file was saved using the naming convention "Participant + Number" such as Participant 1 referring to the first participant.

After transcription of the audio file was completed, I uploaded the transcript file to 2020 version of NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software program. I used the NVivo software program to organize and categorize the qualitative data. The qualitative data analysis process was inductive, going from large quantities of text from transcripts to segments of codes then a few broad themes (Creswell, 2015). Data were analyzed using open, axial, and thematic analysis. Open coding refers to highlighting sections of text and adding labels (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Axial coding is the process of grouping open codes into categories that go together (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The steps for the qualitative data analysis using the 2020 version of NVivo included creating a new project and importing the data sources. I created a new project by

clicking the new project button on the menu bar. I named the project, then uploaded the word-processed transcript file for each participant. Each transcription file was listed as a data source within the NVivo project. I began my analysis by double-clicking on the file named Participant 1Transcript to open the transcript. As I read through the transcript, I highlighted segments of text such sentences or paragraphs, then right clicked to add codes. This process was repeated until I worked through each transcript. These steps were repeated for the second transcript and so on to complete the first round of open coding. The process was repeated multiple times, revising and refining categories and themes as warranted until no new information was discovered (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Issues of Trustworthiness

To conduct this study, I followed IRB ethical data gathering procedures. I kept notes in a journal, conducted member checks, and interviewed participants from multiple sources for triangulation. Dependability was established by interview transcript reviews by participants, peer reviews by the doctoral committee, and data audit. For qualitative research, trustworthiness relies on dependability, credibility, transferability, confirmability (Burkholder et al., 2016). The researcher's trustworthiness is critical to the qualitative study's success (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Trustworthiness refers to a study's credibility and rigor, as well as whether the findings accurately reflect the participants' experiences. Moreover, when qualitative research is rigorous, the results become more trustworthy. I used participant validation strategies to assure the accuracy and credibility of the findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). After the participants responded to an interview question, I made notes in a journal to summarize my understanding of what was stated to

verify that I had clearly described their responses (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The process of involving the participant to confirm the accuracy of the interview transcripts helped to reduce researcher bias (Birt et al., 2016).

Credibility

I used interviews to achieve credibility of this study by interviewing the participants until no new data emerged from the participants. I also addressed credibility by limiting researcher biases by employing member checking. I have been an educator for the past 20 years in a public school district located in the Southern United States. While I conducted this study, I controlled my researcher biases by remaining open-minded and neutral. I maintained a journal during the interviews and data analysis.

Peer review is a process in which the researcher solicits feedback on the study's progress in terms of data analysis and potential findings from trusted and qualified colleagues (Burkholder et al., 2016). I received input regarding the interview questions from three qualified colleagues, who served as directors of curriculum and instruction and had advanced degrees in educational leadership. These individuals were engaged in peer-review of the interview questions and provided me with feedback. Based on the feedback from these individuals, the interview questions were found to be appropriate.

Transferability

Transferability is the application of the findings to other settings. The findings of this study may apply to similar Title I school districts. Transferability refers to the capacity of qualitative studies to be applied to other contexts while retaining their context-specific richness (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Using a qualitative approach, the

findings may not be generalized or transferred to other contexts as there may be alternative valid explanations for the observed outcomes (Yin, 2018). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested that instead of looking to generalize findings, qualitative researchers should consider whether the findings are transferable to other settings.

Dependability

I used a data audit to establish dependability, which refers to the consistency of the data (Burkholder et al., 2016). A researcher should have a reasoned argument for how to collect the data, and the data must be consistent with the argument (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used member checking with the participants during the interview process, as well as giving all participants an opportunity to review the interview transcripts to confirm accuracy (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To facilitate dependability of interview data, I used a nonjudgmental, reflective approach guided by the interview protocol (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To facilitate dependability of the interview data analysis, I used the most current version of NVivo, which is a software used as a management tool for coding interview transcripts. Also, I maintained NVivo coding records for an audit trail of the interview data analysis to ensure confirmability. Therefore, I established dependability by using the interview protocol and NVivo to facilitate the coding process.

Confirmability

Qualitative researchers seek to have freedom from researcher biases and need to understand how their own biases may influence the interpretation of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For the past 20 years, I have served as an educator in a public school district located in the Southern United States. Understanding that my 20 years of work

experience could potentially have an impact while conducting this study, I followed the guidelines listed in Ravitch and Carl (2016), and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) to control researcher biases. For example, I avoided asking leading questions by only including open-ended interview questions on the interview protocol. I used open-ended interview questions for the participants to provide honest responses about their experiences regarding increasing CCRPI scores. Furthermore, during the interviews and when I analyzed the interview transcripts, I self-reflected and recorded my thoughts to control researcher biases.

Confirmability also refers to the likelihood that other researchers would agree that the findings of the study align with the data that was collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the methodology section of Chapter 3, I included the steps I followed for data collection, coding, and analysis. I used the data analysis procedures based on the instructional leadership conceptual framework by Murphy et al. (1983). I explained thoroughly the findings of this study. I believe that if my study was replicated by other researchers in similar school district settings, they would get similar findings. The school district where this study was conducted served approximately 8,000 students. The school district's demographics included 75% African American, 14% Caucasian, 6% Hispanic, and 5% other (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Students categorized as economically disadvantaged made up 57% of the student population, students with disabilities made of 12% of the student population, and English Language Learners made up 4% of the student population (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Ethical Procedures

The procedures for gaining access to participants included completing the school district's research request application. The application included specific questions about the research study, IRB approval status, and information about confidentiality and non-disclosure requirements. The completed application and proposal were submitted to the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction for approval.

I received Walden University's IRB approval before beginning this study. Once approved, I emailed an invitation to principals meeting the criteria to seek participants and get consent to participate. The identities of participants were kept confidential. Codes were used instead of names. All electronic data were properly stored on a password protected computer and printed files were properly stored in a locked file. The files will be maintained for 5 years as required by the university.

Summary

The focus of Chapter 3 was to provide details about the research design and methodology. The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to examine the leadership practices K - 12 school principals described that were intended to increase CCRPI scores in a Title I school district located in the southeastern United States. Since the purpose of this study was to discover knowledge about the leadership practices K - 12 school principals used to increase CCRPI scores in a Title I school district, the data collection instrument was interviews.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to examine the leadership practices of K - 12 school principals to increase CCRPI scores in a Title I school district in the southeastern United States. The research question that guided this study was "What leadership practices do K - 12 school principals describe that are intended to increase CCRPI scores in their Title I schools?" In Chapter 4, I present the setting of the study, how I recruited the participants, including the participant selection criteria. I will also present the method I used for data collection. Next, I present the steps I followed to code the data using open, axial, and thematic analysis via the NVivo coding method and Excel. Lastly, I present the four themes with participants' quotes as support.

Setting

The setting was one public school district in the southeastern United States with 8,200 students, 1,200 employees, and eight schools. Other than the COVID-19 pandemic, there were no staff changes, budget cuts, or other stressful conditions during data collecting that may have influenced or contributed to the data analysis. Because data collection occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic rather than doing face-to-face interviews, I conducted Zoom interviews.

Participants

The study participants: (a) served as the principal of the school or were the former principal of the school, (b) worked in a Title I school district where all schools met the U.S. Department of Education's guidelines to qualify for funds allocated under Title I, and (c) worked in a school district with an overall CCRPI score below 70. Participation

was voluntary. The goal was to have between eight and 10 participants. Eight participants participated in interviews.

Data Collection

Upon IRB approval from Walden University, the school district administrator granted access to conduct this study. I emailed an invitation containing the consent form to current principals and three former principals. The interview questions were included as an attachment to the email. I requested that respondents reply with the phrase "I consent." I received replies from six current principals and two former principals, for a total of eight participants. I scheduled the interview appointments with each participant using an electronic calendar and sent an email containing a link to the Zoom meeting. Furthermore, I sent an email 1 day before the scheduled interview reminding each participant about the scheduled interview.

All interviews occurred within 3 weeks. Interviews were conducted on the specific dates and times selected by the participants. Prior to the start of each interview, I explained the purpose of this research study and that the participants' responses would be confidential. I asked each participant for permission to use the Zoom recording feature for the interview, then I began the interview using the interview protocol (Appendix A) that I developed to ensure I asked each participant the same interview questions. When each participant responded to the last interview question, I ended the recording. I took notes during each interview and kept a journal to document my predispositions, feelings, and reactions.

The Zoom recordings were saved to the Zoom Cloud storage using each participant's number as the file name. For example, the file name used for the first participant's audio file was "Participant 1 Audio." The audio files were transcribed. I entered the interview transcripts into NVivo, a data analysis application. After all files were transcribed, participants were asked by email to review their responses. All participants confirmed that their interview transcripts were accurate.

Data Analysis

I used NVivo to organize the interview data. I used an inductive data analysis process. Inductive analysis is used to review large quantities of text from interview transcripts to identify broad themes (Williams & Moser, 2019). Data were analyzed using open, axial, and thematic analysis. The steps for the qualitative data analysis using the 2020 version of NVivo included creating a new project and importing the interview transcripts. I followed the NVivo coding method, using the participants' terms and concepts as codes (Saldana, 2021). As I read through the transcripts, I highlighted segments of the transcripts such as individual words, short phrases, and sentences, then I added the codes. This process was repeated until all interview transcripts were reviewed. I repeated the same process for each participant's interview transcript to complete first cycle coding. Throughout the data analysis process, I took notes and wrote memos and kept a journal.

Codes developed during open coding were exported from the NVivo program to an Excel spreadsheet for second cycle coding. Axial coding is a second-cycle coding method for refining, aligning, and categorizing themes (Williams & Moser, 2019). I

refined the data by sorting the codes alphabetically, removing redundant codes, and combining codes that were synonyms. Then, I organized the codes by placing similar codes in columns to develop categories linked to the instructional leadership framework (Murphy et al., 1983). The categories were used to identify themes. After I completed the interviews data analysis, four themes emerged: CCRPI score and accountability efficacy, collaboration and communication, data-driven decision making, and providing support for teachers. The participants' responses were consistently related to the themes that addressed the research question. In this basic qualitative research, no discrepant cases were found in the interview transcripts during the data analysis (Yin, 2018).

Results

The research question was "What leadership practices do K-12 school principals describe that are intended to increase CCRPI scores in their Title I schools?" There were 10 interview questions included in the interview protocol. Interview Questions 1, 2, and 10 were based on perceptions of accountability. Interview Questions 3 to 9 were based on the instructional leadership framework (Murphy et al., 1983).

Theme 1: CCRPI Score and Accountability Efficacy

The participants reported that CCRPI scores are used for accountability at the schools under study and shared their perspectives regarding their confidence in their understanding of the CCRPI score, accountability, and their ability to improve their schools' CCRPI scores. P1 stated, "I think that the CCRPI is an excellent evaluation tool that gathers detailed data regarding a school's instruction, climate, and culture." P4 stated, "The CCPRI index is a holistic view of how schools are preparing students for

post-secondary education and also for the workforce." P7 stated, "I feel the CCPRI index is important for accountability." Though all participants referred to the importance of CCRPI scores regarding accountability and why schools must be held accountable for student learning, participants expressed concerns about the components of the accountability index used to calculate a rating for all schools. P3 mentioned, "There has to be a way of scoring and rating to hold schools accountable." P6 said, "The CCPRI index could be simpler and easier to figure out, if one did not have to look at so many different components and indicators that are calculated differently," indicating that an understanding of the CCRPI components and calculations is needed to improve scores. P2 mentioned, "I think some of the CCRPI components are more effective in evaluating the success or lack thereof than others," suggesting that the participant is not confident that all of the components used to calculate the CCRPI should be used for determining how well a school is performing. P8 replied, "The goal of CCRPI is specific; however, in practice, schools serving students from low-income neighborhoods are frequently given unfavorable grades." P5 stated, "I believe that assigning letter grades to schools, which in turn creates stigmas for low performing schools, takes the wind out of people's sails."

The participants also reported concerns regarding their CCRPI score and accountability efficacy due to CCRPI components being tied to high stakes testing. Schools serving low-income students with high percentages of African American students often struggle with student achievement and are classified as failing schools. P4 mentioned, "There are so many factors that are out of our control that we cannot do anything about, yet those factors affect and inflict on our school district's CCRPI scores."

P7 noted, “Considering the COVID-19 shutdown in March 2020 and virtual learning, we are trying to get our students back up to grade level.” P2 said, “There are some things that cannot be measured on the CCRPI, but I truly believe we must meet the needs of the students in order for the students to be engaged in the classroom.” P6 responded,

> A principal’s job is difficult in a district with mostly African American students, a low CCRPI score, and a history of poor performance on standardized state assessments. Teachers work hard, but it is never enough, and it probably never will be, but the students have showed growth, which is precisely what we want.

P1 said, “The leader must constantly promote very high expectations and provide support to school staff on a consistent basis.” P3 replied, “We want to constantly encourage our teachers to continue to provide quality instruction, despite some of the challenges that they may face, because we are held accountable according to the CCRPI.” P8 noted, “The CCRPI challenges me to continue to do what is needed for the students. It is rewarding when students show improvement on standardized state assessments.” The sentiment of challenging but rewarding was also shared by other participants.” P5 stated, “The rewarding side of it is when we see the students’ progress, but the progress oftentimes is not enough to meet student achievement improvement goals.”

Theme 2: Collaboration and Communication

Principals engaged in collaboration and communication with district leaders and their school leadership teams who assisted with developing and implementing school improvement plans and monitoring progress. P1 stated, “As principal, you rely on your

school leadership team to assist with implementing and monitoring short-term action plans and goal-setting that will help move your school towards a higher CCRPI score." P1 added, "PLCs are held twice a week. Instructional coaches and teachers collaborate in PLCs to deconstruct state-adopted standards, then develop learning targets and success criteria. Instructional coaches and teachers also examine the results of their students' common formative assessments." P6 collaborated and communicated by "planning, reflecting, goal-setting, and defining learning targets and success criteria during PLCs. Teachers also participate in peer observations." P4 said, "Instructional coaches attend meetings with district-level curriculum specialists, then share meeting details with school administrators. School administrators and instructional coaches monitor teachers to ensure that lesson plans are prepared in accordance with the district's curriculum pacing guides" The participants also engaged in collaboration and communication on a regular basis with grade level and content specific school level teachers and staff. P5 referenced "collaborative meetings" being held with discussion about "strategies that teachers could use to teach the state-adopted standards." P7 stated, "Weekly grade level PLCs are held to discuss English language arts (ELA) and mathematics curriculums, and instructional coaches model teaching strategies." P8 noted, "We have a number of PLCs that meet on a weekly or monthly basis. The leadership team meets once a month. Weekly meetings are held by the administrative team, the content area teams, and the grade level teams."

All participants mentioned collaborating with instructional coaches who serve as school level content specialists and assist with implementing the local school districts' ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies initiatives. P3 responded, "Instructional

coaches receive curriculum requirements from district-level curriculum specialists, then provide professional development and modeling during grade level PLCs. The instructional coaches also conduct walkthroughs to monitor instruction and provide feedback to teachers." P2 said, "Instructional coaches assist with monitoring classroom instruction in ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies."

Theme 3: Data-Driven Decision Making

All participants mentioned reading and mathematics universal screener data, common summative assessments in ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies developed by the district content specialists, students' progress reports and report card grades, and standardized state assessment results for goal setting and to guide decision making. The data driven decision making process used by P2 included, "instructional coaches collaborating with teachers during PLCs to analyze student assessment data and using that data to drive classroom instruction." P1 stated, "Teachers are required to establish student and classroom quarterly goals based on reading and mathematics universal screener data." P7 said, "We review the reading and mathematics screener data to establish where our students are at the beginning of the school year and to determine suitable interventions so students may catch up with their grade-level peers." P2 added, "We use universal screener data to determine which students need targeted support. We differentiate instruction to allow students who have mastered the academic standard to accelerate and students who have not mastered the academic standard to receive remediation." P8 reiterated using "universal screener data to monitor student progress." P3 stated, "Within our PLCs, instructional coaches and teachers review assessment data,

then discuss instructional strategies to improve classroom instruction and interventions to improve student performance." P4 said, "I hold all team members accountable for reviewing and analyzing reading and mathematics universal screener data for their students, and holistically for the content area team to make informed instructional decisions and changes to promote student success." P4 also stated, "Based on 4.5 weeks progress report grades and 9-weeks report card grades, teachers develop an action plan for students who earned failing grades. The action plan includes strategies to differentiate instruction to help students improve." P5 mentioned using universal screener and common summative assessment data and stated, "I'm a huge believer in utilizing data to guide our small groups." P6 said, "Student progress is monitored by analyzing student data to improve and guide teaching and learning practices."

Participants also collected and used data to make informed decisions about teachers. All participants mentioned using data collected through classroom observations to monitor and evaluate classroom instruction. P3 stated, "It has been challenging to persuade teachers that assessment results are more than just a means of assigning grades to students. The results must be used to improve instructional strategies." P3 said, "Administrators complete a process, which includes walkthroughs, formative observations, and teacher conferences during which we examine data to see if the instructional strategies we implemented improved our results." P6 stated:

> During formal classroom observations, we listen for teacher and student usage of the terminology found in the state-adopted standards, look for student

engagement, and rate teachers on the ten Teacher Keys Effective System (TKES) standards, which is how we evaluate our teachers and instruction.

P7 and P8 also discussed utilizing TKES to monitor teacher effectiveness. P4 stated, “We observe classrooms, provide feedback to teachers, and then check to see if the proposed next steps are being implemented in their classrooms.” P1 stated, “Administrators and instructional coaches conduct monthly focus walks to ensure that the expected instructional practices are being followed.” P2 said, “We conduct classroom observations to determine if teachers are adhering to teaching the state-adopted standards.” P5 discussed expectation of teachers implementing the instructional framework, identifying the learning target and success criteria, and using the language of the standard. P5 stated, “Implementation was monitored by identifying those student and teacher behaviors that we would expect to observe during the opening, work session and closing parts of the lesson.” P5 said, “I developed a walkthrough schedule because I wanted to make monitoring instruction my top priority, but due to managerial duties, it became difficult to stick to the schedule as the school year progressed.”

Theme 4: Providing Support for Teachers

All participants mentioned instructional coaches, professional learning, and PLCs to provide support for ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies content area teachers. P3 stated, “We have our instructional coaches go into the classrooms, model, observe, provide feedback, and also just work very closely with the teachers in order to improve the instructional delivery.” P3 replied:

> We have our instructional coaches go into the classrooms and model, observe, provide feedback, and work very closely with the teachers to improve their instructional delivery. We are constantly working within our PLCs, which are held for each grade level and by content area, so that teachers can analyze their universal screener, formative, and summative data. We do our very best to adjust our instruction based on that data.

P2 stated, "I ask my instructional coaches to assess the teachers' needs and provide support. We discovered that teachers struggled to follow the district's curriculum pacing guide because they needed time for student remediation; therefore, the pacing guide was altered accordingly." P8 stated, "Grade level meetings are conducted weekly to communicate a variety of topics." P4 commented, "We have designated dates and time for collaborative planning meetings, and PLCs for instructional coaches to provide professional development. We do focus walks to monitor implementation of the instructional strategies demonstrated during professional development." P5 reiterated having designated dates and time for collaborative planning meetings, and PLCs for instructional coaches to provide professional development and stated, "On Tuesday, we concentrated on ELA, and on Thursday, we concentrated on mathematics." P4 discussed supporting teachers by using peer observations so teachers learn from one another, and stated, "I select exemplary teachers for teachers who are struggling with content knowledge or with the delivery of instruction to observe." P4 also discussed instructional coaches to model instructional strategies to support teachers with high percentages of students who are not mastering grade-level standards. Several principals discussed

providing support to teachers through focusing on the school environment. P1 commented, "As we focus on improving data for our school, one cannot ignore the school climate and culture. It takes a balance in supporting your teachers and staff yet maintaining very high expectations for them." P7 discussed some of the issues that existed when hired as principal and stated:

> I had to hire almost 40 teachers the summer I was hired. My priority was to create a positive school culture and climate. My philosophy is simple. I treat the students the same way I would want my own children and grandchildren to be treated. I treat the parents the way I would want to be treated as a parent. I treat my teachers the way I wanted to be treated when I was a classroom teacher. After establishing relationships amongst faculty, staff, students, and parents, we concentrated on our district ELA and mathematics initiatives.

P7 also said, "I tell our teachers to be the best you, you can be, to do the best job you can do, to do what you can do to make yourself better and teach your students with love and passion." P6 discussed providing support to teachers by "limiting intercom announcements and phone calls to the classroom to protect instructional time." P6 also discussed how school administrators maintain high visibility and provide a safe and orderly school environment by "welcoming teachers and students to school by participating in morning and afternoon carpool and bus duties, visiting the playground during recess, and monitoring the cafeteria during breakfast and lunch." P4 discussed the importance of "being visible and actively engaged and involved with what is going on in our school," which enables principals to have a better idea of which teachers need

support and which teachers who are doing well so they can "extend their support to struggling teachers." P4 said,

> I think that extending my support to struggling teachers may improve CCRPI scores because everyone will be on board with the same ideology. We have the same message, we have the same goals, and our mission is to provide the best opportunity for students to meet proficiency standards on state standardized assessments.

All responses and themes contributed to my knowledge of the research question, which was to examine the leadership practices of K - 12 school principals that are intended to increase CCRPI scores in their Title I school district. The participants' responses were consistently related to the themes that answered the research question. During my data analysis, no instances of nonconforming data were discovered in the interview transcripts.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the credibility and rigor of a study and whether the findings provide an accurate reflection of the participants' experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Researchers must follow established procedures to ensure that criteria related to trustworthiness of a qualitative research study have been addressed (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Trustworthiness for qualitative research include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Credibility

To ensure credibility of this research study, I conducted member checking and kept a journal. As the participants responded to interview questions, I recorded my understanding of what was stated in my journal notes. Listening while simultaneously writing notes helped me to verify that I had a clear understanding of the participants' perspectives. The purpose of keeping a journal was to record my predispositions, emotions, and reactions when I conducted interviews and analyzed the data to minimize my biases (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Once the audio recordings were transcribed, all participants were given an opportunity to review their interview transcripts to ensure I accurately transcribed their responses. The interview transcripts were emailed to the participants. Participants were asked to review and clarify if needed. Two participants added additional information to clarify one of their responses. All participants confirmed that their interview transcripts were accurate. To compare or triangulate data, I searched for common themes presented in audio recordings, transcripts that were reviewed by participants for accuracy, and my journal notes.

Transferability

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommended that instead of looking to generalize findings, qualitative researchers should consider whether the findings are transferable to other situations. To promote the likelihood of transferability, I provided a detailed account of the participants' perspectives by including participants' quotes from interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In Chapter 1, I provided a detailed description of the setting, a community with two school systems with the city school district

consistently earing low CCRPI scores, while the county school district consistently earned above average CCRPI scores. When discussing transferability, Merrian and Tisdell (2016) stated:

> Today, when rich, thick descriptions is used as a strategy to enable transferability, it refers to a description of the setting and participants of the study, as well as a detailed description of the findings with adequate evidence presented in the form of quotes from participant interviews. (p. 257)

Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency of the data (Burkholder et al., 2016). Dependability is the structure for how data are collected and aligned to a research problem and purpose (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used a data audit. First, when conducting this study, I followed the data collection process as outlined in Chapter 3. I recruited participants who met the participation criteria. I used an interview protocol. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. I maintained a journal to document possible biases during the data collection and analysis. I asked the participants to review the interview transcripts for accuracy. All participants reviewed their interview transcripts and confirmed by email that the transcripts were accurate (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used my journal notes to check for accuracy as well. I used the NVivo coding method and searched for common themes presented in the audio recordings, transcripts, and my journal notes. During the review of the interview transcripts and the data analysis, four themes emerged.

Confirmability

As stated in Chapter 3, confirmability of a study exists when similar conclusions about the data analysis and findings of a study would be made by other researchers (Burkholder et al., 2016). I achieved confirmability by following the ethical procedures established by Walden's IRB and providing the steps I followed in the data analysis plan that can be found in Chapter 3. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated, "Rather than demanding that outsiders get the same results, a researcher wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense" (p. 251). Other researchers should be able to validate my findings because I classified phrases based on participant replies and discovered patterns and similarities in participant responses based on the conceptual framework. To mitigate potential bias and ensure confirmability in this qualitative study, I maintained a self-reflection journal to understand my own biases during all parts of the research study. Lastly, the Walden doctoral committee reviewed interview transcripts and codebook.

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to examine the leadership practices K-12 school principals described that were intended to increase CCRPI scores in a Title I school district located in the southeastern United States. The research question asked about leadership practices K-12 school principals described using that were intended to increase CCRPI scores in their Title I schools. Data were collected from 8 principals during semistructured interviews via Zoom. Data were coded for emergent themes. Data analysis revealed four themes. Leadership practices perceived by K - 12

school principals that are intended to increase CCRPI scores include (Table 5): (a) CCRPI score and accountability efficacy, (b) collaboration and communication, (c) data-driven decision making, and (d) providing support for teachers. In Chapter 5, I discuss my interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, implications for social change, and a conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the leadership practices K - 12 school principals described using intended to increase CCRPI scores in a Title I school district located in the southeastern United States. The conceptual framework was the instructional leadership framework (Murphy et al., 1983), which consists of principals' activities, functions, and processes. Data were collected using semistructured interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Zoom was used to interview the participants. Each interview was recorded. I used an interview protocol (Appendix A), took field notes, and kept a journal. The interviews were transcribed using NVivo. Data were analyzed using open, axial, and thematic analysis, and four themes emerged.

Interpretation of the Findings

Instructional leadership practices focus on the quality of instruction in the classrooms (Pietsch & Tulowitzi, 2017). Findings of this study included: (a) CCRPI score and accountability efficacy, (b) collaboration and communication, (c) data-driven decision making, and (d) providing support for teachers. Each theme is presented with a summary of participants perceptions followed by peer-reviewed literature that provide evidence that the findings were aligned with the findings of other scholars.

Theme 1: CCRPI Score and Accountability Efficacy

The first theme, CCRPI score and accountability efficacy, was reported by K-2 principals as a leadership practice intended to increase CCRPI scores. Interview Questions 1, 2, and 10 asked participants about their perceptions of the CCRPI score and accountability. The participants described the following instructional leadership practices

to improve CCRPI scores: (a) their ability to understand the components of the CCRPI, (b) concerns about the components of the accountability index, (c) concern about the negative consequences of low ratings for schools serving low-income students with high percentages of African American students, and (d) concerns regarding the CCRPI components being calculated using standardized state assessments, which has resulted in schools serving low-income students with high numbers of African American students being labeled as failing schools.

These findings regarding principals' concerns were in line with previous research. If students continue to fail to meet proficiency goals, the school administrators, teachers, and staff are subjected to punitive consequences such as replacing staff and administrators, state takeover, or the school being closed (Diorio, 2018). Low-performing schools thus have organizational issues, such as a staffing shortage and school leaders with high levels of stress and pressures of being a low-performing school (Hibel & Penn, 2020). The participants described the pressure and stress of working in a district with low CCRPI scores serving low-income, predominantly African American students. The participants discussed organizational issues of low performing schools and described strategies for meeting the needs of students and teachers during the COVID-19 school shutdown and during virtual learning. However, despite the pressure for performance on assessments, research has indicated that A-F grades may not be a real reflection of the quality of education offered (Murray & Howe, 2017), and labeling schools as low-performing has not helped them improve but rather impeded them (Atchinson, 2020).

Theme 2: Collaboration and Communication

The K-12 school principals identified collaboration and communication as an instructional leadership practice aimed at improving CCRPI scores. The participants described the following instructional leadership practices to improve CCRPI scores: (a) engaged in collaboration and communication with district leaders regarding school improvement planning; (b)engaged in collaboration and communication with their school leadership teams regarding the implementation of school improvement plans, monitoring instruction, and monitoring student progress; and (c) engaged in collaboration and communication within grade level and content specific PLCs. Specifically, the principals collaborated and communicated with grade level and content specific school level teams, and with school level and district level content specialists who assisted with implementing the school districts' ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies initiatives.

The findings of this study are in line with previous research regarding principals' collaboration and communication to improve CCRPI scores. The principal is responsible for communicating the school's goals, ensuring that teachers' curriculum is linked with student assessments, and providing time for teachers to collaborate on instructional and curricular concerns within and across grade levels (Hallinger, 2018). Principals should use communication, goal-setting, and systematic observations with feedback to improve instructional leadership (Hvidston et al., 2018). Principals who communicated a shared vision and built a collaborative culture have been able to improve student achievement in high poverty, low performing schools (Klar et al., 2020). Furthermore, principals have

changed school culture through PLCs, grade level meetings, and teachers' classroom observations (Ezzani, 2020). To effectively build teams, principals should have dedicated meeting times to collaborate and established methods to communicate with faculty, staff, and students (Weiler & Hinnant-Crawford, 2021). In the current study, participants (a) communicated goals in their school improvement plan, (b) ensured the curriculum and students assessments were linked by using common formative assessments developed by collaborating with district level content specialists, and (c) provided dedicated time for instructional coaches and teachers to collaborate regarding instructional and curricular concerns within grade level and content specific PLCs that were held weekly.

Theme 3: Data-Driven Decision Making

Participants identified using student data to make informed decisions as an instructional leadership practice aimed at improving CCRPI scores. Specifically, participants reported using the following types of data to make decision regarding students: (a) universal screener data in reading and mathematics, (b) common formative assessments ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies, (c) students' progress reports and report card grades, and (d) standardized state assessment results. The data were used to guide decision-making regarding: (a) school improvement plan goals, (b) intervention programs, (c) differentiated instruction, and (d) small-group instruction.

Participants also identified using teacher data to make informed decisions as an instructional leadership practice aimed at improving CCRPI scores. Specifically, participants reported using the following types of data: (a) focus walks, (b) walkthrough observations lasting at least 10 minutes, (c) formal observations lasting at least 30

minutes, and (d) teacher conferences. The data were used to guide decision-making regarding: (a) school improvement plan goals, (b) professional learning needs, (c) teacher efficacy, and (d) teacher retention.

The findings are in line with previous research regarding using multiple sources of data to make informed decisions. Specific responsibilities of effective instructional leaders involving data-driven decision making are included in the instructional leadership framework for managing the instructional program. According to Hallinger (2018), the principal is responsible for monitoring student progress by reviewing formative and summative test results with teachers and using the data to make decisions about instructional programs and classroom assignments. For example, Ezzani (2020) found that the principal can change the culture of the school by using data-informed decision-making. According to Ezzani (2020), the data types used by the principal included: (a) information gathered from teacher conferencing, (b) classroom observations, (c) observations of PLCs, and (d) observations of grade level and content specific meetings. Moreover, Derrington and Campbell (2018) examined principals' perceptions of the implementation of teacher evaluation systems in relation to student performance on state standardized assessments. Also, Derrington and Campbell reported that teachers' observations and students' state standardized test scores were found to be useful when making decisions.

Neumerski et al. (2018) examined new teacher evaluation systems, focusing on the principal's role in teacher observations, and reported that new teacher evaluation policies require principals to spend more time evaluating instruction and analyzing

classroom data to provide teachers with evidence-based feedback. For example, Mette and Riegel (2018) found that instructional coaches and peer teachers use classroom observation data to provide support based on a teacher's strengths and needs. Also, Mette and Riegel found that principals use classroom observation data for summative evaluations to document a teacher's performance, which is used to determine teacher retention. Finally, Farrell (2015) examined how school administrators used data to improve instructional outcomes and found that accountability had a strong influence on data use to improve instructional outcomes.

The findings are in line with the finding of Hallinger (2018), Mette and Riegel (2018), because monitoring student progress by reviewing formative and summative test results with teachers and using the data to make decisions about instructional programs and classroom assignments were described by all participants working to improve CCRPI scores. Specifically, participants reported using the following types of data: (a) universal screener data in reading and mathematics, (b) common formative assessments in ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies, (c) students' progress reports and report card grades, and (d) standardized state assessment results. The data were used to guide decision-making regarding: (a) school improvement plan goals, (b) intervention programs, (c) differentiated instruction, and (d) small-group instruction.

The findings are also in line with the findings of Derrington and Campbell (2018), Ezzani (2020), Farrell (2015), and Neumerski et al. (2018) because the participants working to improve CCRPI scores reported using information gathered from teacher conferencing, classroom observations, observations of PLCs, and observations of grade

level and content specific meetings to make decision. Specifically, participants reported using the following types of data: (a) focus walks, (b) walkthrough observations lasting at least 10 minutes, (c) formal observations lasting at least 30 minutes, and (d) teacher conferences. The data were used to guide decision-making regarding: (a) school improvement plan goals, (b) professional learning needs, (c) teacher efficacy, and (d) teacher retention.

Theme 4: Providing Support for Teachers

The K-12 school principals identified providing support for teachers as an instructional leadership practice aimed at increasing CCRPI scores. Participants reported supporting teachers by providing instructional coaches, professional development, PLCs, and a positive work environment. Specifically, participants supported teachers by providing: (a) professional development based on classroom observation feedback that was facilitated by instructional coaches, (b) PLCs to provide support to teachers teaching ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies, (c) collaborative planning meetings, and (d) peer teacher observation opportunities. Regarding a positive work environment, participants supported teachers by: (a) providing a safe and orderly school environment, (b) having an administrative team that is highly visible in the school building, (c) protecting classroom instructional time by limiting interruptions, and (d) building relationships with faculty, staff, students, and parents and treating everyone with respect.

The findings are in line with previous research findings regarding providing support for teachers. Specific responsibilities of effective instructional leaders involving supporting teachers are included in Hallinger's and Murphy's (1985) instructional

leadership framework functions for managing the instructional program. According to Hallinger (2018), the principal is responsible for monitoring classroom instruction using informal classroom visits and formal evaluations and providing instructional support to teachers. Moreover, the principal is also responsible for ensuring curriculum taught by teachers is aligned to student assessments and provide time for teachers to collaborate within and across grade levels on instructional and curricular issues (Hallinger, 2018). Besides, Klar et al. (2020) examined principal leadership practices that improve student achievement in high poverty, low performing schools, and found that developing people through professional development and providing instructional support to staff are principal practices that increased student achievement. Furthermore, Mette and Riegel (2018) found that instructional coaches and peer teachers provide differentiated support based on a teacher's strengths and needs. Hitt et al. (2019) investigated how leaders perceive and approach the school improvement process to increase student accomplishment and found that one of the competences with the strongest links to student achievement is inspiring and motivating others. According to Hitt et al. (2019) principals inspired and motivated teachers by incorporating their feedback into the development of actionable goals, and ultimately, change in the school. Additionally, Schwan (2020) reported that principals ranked goals, professional development, and supervision and evaluation as the three most important instructional leadership functions, all of which are ways that principals provide support to teachers. Lastly, implementing TKES is another way principals support teachers because the main purpose of TKES is to promote teachers' ongoing growth and development (State Department of Education, 2018).

The findings are in line with the work of Hitt et al. (2019), Klar et al. (2020), Mette and Riegel (2018), and Schwan (2020), because building relationships, developing people through professional development, providing instructional support, and a positive work environment were described by participants working to improve CCRPI scores. Specifically, participants described supporting teachers by providing: (a) professional development based on classroom observation feedback that is facilitated by instructional coaches, (b) PLCs to provide support to teachers teaching ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies, (c) collaborative planning meetings, and (d) peer teacher observation opportunities. Regarding a positive work environment, participants supported teachers by: (a) providing a safe and orderly school environment, (b) having an administrative team that is highly visible in the school building, (c) protecting classroom instructional time by limiting interruptions, and (d) building relationships with faculty, staff, students, and parents and treating everyone with respect.

Limitations of the Study

This study had limitations. I used purposeful sampling. Although I was planning to have a larger sample size and approached 15 participants, eight agreed to participate in this study. However, according to Creswell (2015), a sample size of six is good enough for qualitative studies. Additionally, according to Ravitch and Carl (2016), a small sample in a qualitative study is a limitation. The sample size for qualitative research is dependent upon contextual circumstances and the research paradigm (Boddy, 2016).

Recommendations

The first recommendation is that the study's findings be shared with the school district's content specialists, principals, assistant principals, and instructional coaches to provide insight into the instructional leadership strategies that principals believe should increase CCRPI scores. The findings could be used by school district administrators to support K – 12 school principals and assistant principals to work with teachers, parents, and community members to increase CCRPI scores. One recommendation for future research is to conduct a study to examine the perceptions of district level content specialist regarding data-driven decision making, collaboration, and communication with instructional coaches. School administrators could use the current study's findings to support instructional coaches and teachers to increase CCRPI scores. Another recommendation for future research is to conduct a study examining the perceptions of instructional coaches regarding providing instructional support to teachers to improve instruction and CCRPI scores. Lastly, I recommend that this study be conducted using a larger sample size. One of the limitations of this study was sample size. Replicating this study using a larger sample size could address one of the study's limitations, which was the small sample size of eight participants.

The findings of this study are four themes regarding leadership practices of K-12 school principals that are intended to increase CCRPI scores in one Title I school district. The themes were: (a) CCRPI score and accountability efficacy, (b) collaboration and communication, (c) data driven decision making, and (d) supporting teachers. One strength of the current study was that the findings corroborate that the principals'

instructional leadership practices were focused on quality instruction (Pietsch & Tulowitzi, 2017). Literature in Chapter 2 revealed that there was a correlation between principals' instructional leadership practices and student achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2019). School leaders who improved student achievement in less than 2 years had the ability to collaborate with faculty and staff to create realistic goals and devise effective strategies for change in the school (Hitt et al., 2019). Furthermore, when school district leaders attempt to implement rigorous academic standards, district leaders encountered difficulties with instructional methods and the capacity of the school's leadership team to monitor students' engagement in deep, critical, and conceptual thinking (Rigby et al., 2018).

Implications

The findings center on four themes relating to instructional leadership practices of K-12 school principals with the goal of increasing CCRPI scores. The themes are: (a) CCRPI score and accountability efficacy, (b) developing collaborative teams who communicate effectively, (c) using multiple sources of data to make decisions, and (d) offering support to teachers. These findings inform district level leadership about K - 12 principals' perceptions regarding accountability, team building, data analysis, and teacher support measures. While all of the administrators worked in a low-performing school district, their perspectives shed light on the specific instructional leadership methods on which principals attempting to raise CCRPI scores are concentrating their efforts. If instructional leadership initiatives fail, principals risk losing their jobs. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, CCRPI scores have not been calculated for the past two years. It is

important for district level administrators to know the principals' instructional leadership strategies so district level leaders can provide individual support to each principal. Gaining a deeper insight of the specific instructional leadership practices that might lead to higher CCRPI scores may result in positive social change for students by increasing student achievement and graduation rates, as well as increased college and career readiness for students entering colleges, universities, or the workforce.

Gaining a deeper insight of the specific instructional leadership practices that might lead to higher CCRPI scores may be used by school leaders, and researchers. School leaders may use the findings to guide teachers with selecting more intentional instructional strategies that may help improve student achievement. Lastly, the findings may be used by instructional leadership researchers in future studies regarding instructional leadership practices aimed at improving CCRPI scores.

Conclusion

With greater focus on the principals as the instructional leaders who are held responsible for student achievement and school accountability, additional research must continue to be conducted to uncover instructional leadership practices that principals must use to improve schools. The current study's findings regarding instructional leadership practices of K - 12 school principals with the goal of increasing CCRPI scores were: (a) CCRPI score and accountability efficacy, (b) developing collaborative teams who communicate effectively, (c) using multiple sources of data to make decisions, and (d) offering support to teachers. While current CCRPI scores are unavailable, current universal screener statistics used to predict students' level of achievement on end-of-year

tests indicate that student achievement is increasing. Positive social change may occur when school leaders gain a better understanding of the specific instructional leadership practices that may lead to higher CCRPI scores because students may graduate at higher rates, as well as increase college and career readiness for students entering colleges, universities, or the workforce.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Research Participant #: _____ Date: _____

1. What are your thoughts about the College and Career Ready Performance Index?
2. Tell me about working as principal in a school district with an overall College and Career Ready Performance Index score of D.
3. Tell me about the specific instructional leadership practices you use in your school to promote and support instructional improvement.
4. Tell me about how instruction is supervised and evaluated in your school.
5. Tell me about the specific instructional leadership practices you use in your school to coordinate the curriculum.
6. Tell me about how curricular materials are reviewed to verify if it is working.
7. Tell me about how your school's academic performance is communicated with teachers and students.
8. Tell me about how student progress is monitored in your school.
9. Which of the three instructional leadership functions for managing the instructional program: (a) supervising and evaluating instruction, (b) coordinating curriculum, or (c) monitoring student progress do you feel has the most positive impact on improving the College and Career Performance Index score for your school? Why? (Murphy et al., 1983, p. 141)
10. Is there anything else you wish to share about your experiences serving as instructional leader working to improve College and Career Ready Performance Index scores?

Appendix B: Research Instrument Questions Alignment Matrix

Research Instrument Questions	Research question: What leadership practices do K-12 school principals describe using that are intended to increase College and Career Ready Performance Index scores in their Title I school district?	Supervising and Evaluating Instruction - instructional leadership conceptual framework function for managing the instructional program	Coordinating Curriculum - instructional leadership conceptual framework function for managing the instructional program	Monitoring Student Progress - instructional leadership conceptual framework function for managing the instructional program
What are your thoughts about the College and Career Ready Performance Index?	X			
Tell me about working as principal in a school district with an overall College and Career Ready Performance Index score of D.	X			
Tell me about the specific instructional leadership practices you use in your school to promote and support instructional improvement.		X		
Tell me about how instruction is supervised and evaluated in your school.		X		
Tell me about the specific instructional leadership practices you use in your school to coordinate the curriculum.			X	
Tell me about how curricular materials are reviewed to verify if it is working.			X	

Tell me about how your school's academic performance is communicated with teachers and students.				X
Tell me about how student progress is monitored in your school.				X
Which of the three instructional leadership functions for managing the instructional program: (a) supervising and evaluating instruction, (b) coordinating curriculum, or (c) monitoring student progress do you feel has the most positive impact on improving the College and Career Performance Index score for your school? Why?		X	X	X
Is there anything else you wish to share about your experiences serving as instructional leader working to improve College and Career Ready Performance Index scores?	X			