2016

Exploring the Effectiveness of Leadership Practices in Urban Charter Middle Schools

Cherise Cupidore
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Cherise Cupidore

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. John Flohr, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Cheryl Keen, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Estelle Jorgensen, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2016

Abstract

Exploring the Effectiveness of Leadership Practices in Urban Charter Middle Schools

by

Cherise Monet Cupidore

M.Ed., Michigan State University, 1995

BS, DePaul University, 1989

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Educational Policy, Leadership, and Management

Walden University

July 2016

Abstract

Researchers have noted that educational manager and instructional leadership roles are vital to achieving sustainable student achievement. Ineffective leadership practices may decrease students' academic success and are a continuous concern for educators, especially for those of urban charter schools. The purpose of this study was to explore practices that leaders of urban charter middle schools have implemented to advance their schools from a priority school to a focus school designation. This multiple case study sought to identify and clarify leadership practices of successful leaders in urban charter middle schools. Leithwood and Riehl's core leadership practices model served as the basis for understanding successful leadership practices in 3 Midwestern urban charter middle schools that progressed from a priority school to a focus school category. Data included semistructured interviews with 3 principals, 3 focus groups with a total of 16 teachers, and a review of relevant documents at each school. Data analysis entailed coding and theming significant statements for emerging patterns related to successful leadership practices until reaching data saturation. Emerging themes included leadership practices, professional development, student academic achievement, parental involvement, and redesigning the schools. Findings from this study resonate with Leithwood and Riehl's leadership model and indicate the efficacy of core leadership practices to meet state and national guidelines. Positive social change comes from providing school leaders in urban charter schools with leadership practices that may more effectively offer students with educational preparation to compete in a global society.

Exploring the Effectiveness of Leadership Practices in Urban Charter Middle Schools

by

Cherise Monet Cupidore

M.Ed., Michigan State University, 1995

BS, DePaul University, 1989

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Educational Policy, Leadership, and Management

Walden University

July 2016

There are so many people that I want to thank for their continued love and faith in me throughout my schooling and dissertation process. First, I give thanks and honor to God for his grace and mercy, as well as placing angels in my life during my doctoral journey. I would like to dedicate this research to my late grandparents Myrtle and Pervis Wilson who made many sacrifices to enable me to pursue a college education, my loving mother who has loved me in spite of all of my shortcomings and served as my initial teacher.

Acknowledgments

To my loving husband Calvin C. Cupidore, Jr., you have been my rock through this journey and the security of your love and support has helped me to reach this milestone. To my daughter Liza Strode who kept me laughing and my spirits lifted when I was not motivated to stay the course in my late night writing exhibitions. I also would like to acknowledge my baby sister Renata Burford, who I love dearly, for supporting me and caring for my daughter like a second mother during the course of my educational journey. I would like to acknowledge Dr. Tanya Adams who has been my friend, colleague, cheerleader, and shoulder to cry on when I was in the valley or the top of the mountain. I would like to acknowledge Miriam Snyder who is a dynamic school leader that recognized my leadership ability as both a teacher and school leader.

I would like most of all to acknowledge my wonderful Chair Dr. John Flohr who has been my blessing in disguise. I would like to acknowledge Dr. Cheryl Keen, Dr. Estelle Jorgensen, and Dr. Paula Dawidowicz for assisting me and coaching me through understanding the doctoral journey from a scholarly perspective. I would like to thank all the participants who shared their personal experiences to make this study a reality. Finally, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Alecia Brooks for being my angel sent from heaven. I thank her being a friend, coach, mentor, and therapist, especially when I was on the ledge wanting to give up. Her wisdom, strength, and knowledge helped get me through a challenging paper and program. I thank her for providing me with constructive feedback and guidance. Because of her unselfishness, I am a better person.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore practices that leaders of urban charter middle schools have implemented to advance their schools from a priority school to a focus school designation. Researchers have identified numerous leadership practices effective for improving the leadership skills of school administrators (Almond, 2012; Dobbie & Fryer, 2011; Halqachmi, 2013; Kantabutra & Saratun, 2013; May, Susskind, & Shapiro, 2013; however, limited research has addressed the effects that the practices of leaders in urban charter schools have in promoting positive student achievement outcomes. To address this gap, I collected data on the experiences of participants who have successfully improved student learning, program effectiveness, and school success by using leadership development and a systematic approach based on Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) core leadership practices. Chapter 1 includes the background of the study, problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions. Inclusive in chapter 1 is operational definitions of key terms, assumptions, limitations, scope, and delimitations of the study.

This study may contribute to social change by identifying leadership strategies to help school leaders in urban charter schools achieve the academic performance goals for their schools under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). School leaders help create strong communities in school by establishing community cultures using personalized learning environments, development of a professional learning community, and smaller schools (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). The findings from this study will add to

the existing research by providing school leaders in urban charter schools leadership practices to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation.

Background

Many educators face challenges with meeting the established guidelines of NCLB and President Obama's Race to the Top. NCLB mandated that states use accountability systems and report test results in both aggregated and disaggregated forms (Gullo, 2013). NCLB's adequate yearly progress measures involve standardized tests of student achievement (Hamilton, Schwartz, Stecher, & Steele, 2013). For example, one of the central focuses in schools is funding, student retention, teacher termination, and the schools' administrative control based on data-driven decision making and student academic outcomes (Gullo, 2013; Meylani, Bitter, & Castaneda, 2014). Rice, Trafimow, and Kraemer (2012) asserted that consistency, strategy, knowledge, and motivation influence student performance. During the 2009-2010 school years, 20 states published school performance ratings that exceeded the NCLB requirements (Hamilton et al., 2013). The Center for Research on Education Outcomes study revealed that students in charter schools in 41 metropolitan areas outperformed the district-run schools, and two Midwestern districts were among the highest-performing charters in math and reading (Peterson, 2015).

Assessment of Urban Charter Schools

One challenge for educators in the Midwest region of the United States is the progression of low-performing schools to consistently achieve adequate yearly progress (Peterson, 2015). Based on the high-stakes accountability guidelines outlined in NCLB

and Race to the Top, the major challenge for educational leaders is to improve the nation's lowest-performing schools (Reyes & Garcia, 2014). As part of a redesign of Michigan school districts, the Michigan Department of Education created the Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (M-STEP) to reduce the 3-year test development process to 9 months (Michigan Department of Education, 2015). The Chicago Public Schools' performance policy schools provide weekly reports that identify at-risk students (Hamilton et al., 2013). To address the increase in Indiana's low-performing schools, the Indiana Department of Education uses the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress-Plus (ISTEP+), which provides measures of student knowledge and understanding that the Department uses for decision-making regarding improving student achievement (Indiana Department of Education, 2015a). In 2003, the Illinois Department of Education received approval of their plan for aligning to the NCLB accountability guidelines, and the governor signed into law statues to modify the state testing system and Academic Early Warning and Watch List processes (Illinois Department of Education, 2015). The Consortium on Chicago School Research determined that first-time freshman students who accumulated at least fivecourse credits and did not fail more than 1 semester in English, math, social science, or science would graduate within 4 years (Hamilton et al., 2013).

When assessing urban charter schools, administrators make decisions based on the statewide tests results that measure student performance. For this study, I selected focus schools in Michigan as my research sites. Michigan ranks schools on a Top-to-Bottom List of four categories: reward schools, beating the odds schools, focus schools,

and priority schools. The school performance ranking includes school improvement and student achievement (Michigan Department of Education, 2015). In addition, the ranking includes the school districts' graduation rates for students at the end of twelfth grade (Michigan Department of Education, 2015). Michigan classifies focus schools as institutions with student achievement gaps between the top 30% and bottom 30% (U.S. Department of Education, 2015b; Michigan Department of Education, 2015). Reward schools are schools in the top 5% of the Top-the-Bottom ranking whereas beating the odds schools are institutes outperforming their expected ranking (Michigan Department of Education, 2015). The priority schools are amongst the lowest achieving 5% of the bottom 5% of the Top-to-Bottom List (U.S. Department of Education, 2015b; Michigan Department of Education, 2015). Out of 100 charter schools in Michigan, 10 remain priority schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2015b; Michigan Department of Education, 2015).

Indiana has a similar school ranking system, and lists its schools as Tier I, Tier I (New), Tier II, and Tier II (NEW) based on 1 to 3 years of data on ISTEP+ (Indiana Department of Education, 2015b). Tier I consist of Title I schools within the lowest 5% of all Title I schools in improvement or restructuring (Indiana Department of Education, 2015b). Tier I (NEW) is Title I eligible elementary schools within the bottom 20% of all elementary schools and schools that are no longer higher achieving (Indiana Department of Education, 2015b). Tier II is any secondary school within the lowest-achieving 5% that is eligible for, but not receiving, Title I, Part A funding (Indiana Department of Education, 2015b). Tier II (NEW) consist of secondary schools that are eligible for Title I

funding in the bottom 20% and no longer higher achieving (Indiana Department of Education, 2015b). Title I schools should use cost-effective approaches because achieving gains in academic performance and standardized test scores are challenges among Title I students (Shaha, Glassett, Copas, & Ellsworth, 2015).

School Performance and Accountability

NCLB defines penalties for schools failing to achieve adequate yearly progress for consecutive years. For example, Title I schools are subject to penalties including school choice and corrective action (Illinois Department of Education, 2015). More specifically, schools face decreased funding, job losses, and leadership changes: the state may even take control of a school district's administration (Meylani, Bitter, & Castaneda, 2014). According to Reyes and Garcia (2014), schools not meeting NCLB standards for basic skills assessments are required to develop a school improvement plan. Charter schools face the penalty of possible closure for low performance, in which the disassembling of the school commences during the second year of not meeting the NCLB standards for basic skills assessment (Arce-Trigatti, Harris, Jabbar, & Jane, 2015; Reyes & Garcia, 2014). For example, the largest school closings in U.S. history were the Chicago school closings in 2013 that eliminated 49 public schools (Russo, 2014; Vogt, 2013). Teachers encounter great pressure to raise student scores on standardized tests because the department of education uses the students' yearly testing scores to assess school performance (Meylani et al., 2014). One example of the teachers' reaction to the pressure is the cheating scandal in Georgia, where teachers and leaders changed students'

scores to meet adequate yearly progress (Vogt, 2013). Another example is the Texas legislature's choice to reduce the number of tests required for graduation (Vogt, 2013).

Even after decades of educational reform initiatives, some educational leaders and teachers may lack practices to provide effective instruction for students in the nation's lowest-performing schools. For example, teachers with access to the student data systems often lack the training to extract pertinent data; therefore, teachers rely on administrators to fully access student data (Gullo, 2013). The most important factors for improving the lowermost performing schools is quality principals and teachers, as well as clear communication among stakeholders (Patterson, Campbell, Johnson, Marx, & Whitener, 2013; Reyes, & Garcia, 2014).

Research on Educational Leadership Practices

Researchers have extensively studied education reform, education leadership practices, and academic achievement of students. May, Susskind, and Shapiro (2013) implemented a multi-institution project to examine science education reform and the faculty grassroots leadership at four higher-education partners. May et al. focused on the role of upper-level leaders in positions of authority to create organizational change. May et al. contended that institutional culture affected the organizational leadership hierarchy. Dobbie and Fryer (2011) addressed the concerns regarding the academic achievement of students attending charter schools. To address the issue of education leadership and student academic achievement, Dobbie and Fryer provided an experimental test of the causal impact of Harlem Children's Zone charter school on educational outcomes. Dobbie and Fryer used an instrumental variable identification strategy to assess the

relationship between attending a Harlem Children's Zone charter middle school and the mathematics achievement gap among students. Dobbie and Fryer indicated that community programs were not sufficient, yet high-quality schools were sufficient for improving academic achievement among poor students.

Few studies (O'Brien & Roberson, 2012; Spillane & Kenney, 2012; Wang, Walters, & Thum, 2013) have focused on the leadership practices that educators in urban charter schools use to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation to achieve NCLB and Race to the Top goals. For example, Spillane and Kenney (2012) examined the shifts in the policy environment while focusing on school leaders' management of the shifting of school administrative practices, external policy environment, and classroom teachers. To provide supportive evidence, Spillane and Kenny reflected on the results of shifts in school administration from 2002 through 2012. Spillane and Kenney argued that organizational legitimacy and integrity continue to be some school leaders' central concerns. Karuna, Kanokorn, Sujanya, Somjed, and Aduldej (2014) used a quantitative study to determine the difference in leadership practices between principals in Thailand and principals in the United States. Researchers have conducted studies on leadership practices in schools; yet, the phenomenon requires more research in urban charter middle schools to help school leaders sustain student achievement.

The rationale for conducting this study was to arm school leaders in urban charter middle schools with leadership practices to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation, address the accountability challenges, and provide an excellent

education. As a result, educational leaders will have a better understanding of the

significance of leadership practices within educational institutions to set direction,

develop people, and reorganize the organization from the experiences of school principals

and teachers. Furthermore, this study was needed because it will help school leaders

sustain student achievement, prepare students to be college-ready and compete in a global

society.

Problem Statement

The research problem was the gap in the literature that exists on the leadership

practices successful leaders in urban charter middle schools use to advance from a

priority school to a focus school designation. Few studies have explored the experiences

of urban charter school leaders and teachers to understand the significance of

implementing leadership practices as a strategy to advance from a priority school to a

focus school designation. Having competent school leaders equipped with strategic

leadership skills is a prerequisite to improving academic achievement. Reform efforts

include federal mandates and lawsuits, state and local legislation, budgetary and

governance changes, local structural changes, policy and curricular changes at all levels

of government, private money and influence, and public and private partnerships

(Gomez-Velez, 2013). The education reforms have caused school leaders' roles to change

from a manager of schools to an instructional leader (Gosnell-Lamb, O'Reilly & Matt,

2013). According to Ahmad, Salleh, Awang, and Mohamad (2013), one requirement for

school leaders is competence in leading the organizations towards improved academic

performance to meet the challenges of educational reforms. To meet the established

guidelines for accountability, standardized testing, and adequate yearly progress under NCLB, education leaders implement strategies for advancing from a priority school to a focus school designation.

Researchers have studied various aspects of the effect of education reform on educational leadership practices and student academic achievement. For example, Margolin (2013) examined the probabilities that educators have to demonstrate leadership practices daily to create distributive leadership and foster collaborative actions within their environment. According to Margolin, one main role of the leaders is to create distributive leadership, because leaders proactively shape the environment. Sharija and Watters (2012) agreed that a leader's most powerful factors are their roles and exercised practices. Meredith (2013) argued that the strategies leaders develop to lead change and build support for change are important. More specifically, Meredith (2013) suggested leaders use Kotter's model for creating change. Kotter's model, which is similar to the core leadership practices, consists of building a perception of urgency and forming a guide for the coalition (setting direction), creating and communicating the vision (developing people), and empowering individuals to aspire to the vision (reorganizing the organization). Hesbol (2012) added that instructional leaders should engage in constructivist experiences and demonstrate leadership competency in creating schools that provide opportunities for learning and changing to meet students' emerging needs.

Additional research on leadership practices used in urban charter middle schools to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation needed to address this gap in the literature. Researchers have addressed various strategies used to promote positive

student achievement outcomes and meet the accountability requirements of NCLB, but not strategies for implementing leadership practices. This study relied on the experiences of urban charter middle school principals and teachers who successfully developed strategies to implement leadership practices for advancing from a priority school to a focus school designation.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore practices that leaders of urban charter middle schools have implemented to advance their schools from a priority school to a focus school designation. Clearly identifying the research purpose aids with the development of the appropriate research questions (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012). I interviewed three principals and three focus groups of six teachers from three urban charter middle schools in the district that served as the research site, and reviewed school district documents to explore core leadership practices from the perspective of educational leaders. This study enhances the body of research that explores leadership practices in contemporary schools effective for improving urban charter school outcomes.

Research Questions

This qualitative multiple case study answered to the following research question: What leadership practices do successful leaders in three urban charter middle schools use to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The core leadership practices model offered by Leithwood and Riehl (2003) formed the conceptual framework for this study. The holistic view of Leithwood and

Riehl's core leadership practices model is that core leadership practices are necessary for improving student achievement. The core leadership practices, which include setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization, are significant for successful school leadership and student learning (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Jacobson, 2011). Thomas, Herring, Redmond, and Smaldino (2013) defined the components of Leithwood's transformational leadership model as building vision, developing people, and developing the organization. Leithwood and Riehl's core leadership practices allow school leaders in urban charter schools to process and utilize the central practices, improve their craft, and address accountability challenges while focusing on increasing student achievement. I provided a more thorough explanation of the model in Chapter 2.

Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) core leadership practices model originated from research studies on transformational school leadership. For example, Leithwood, Tomlinson, and Genge (1996) reviewed the effects of transformational leadership on achievement outcomes. Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) reviewed research studies to identify the relationship between transformational school leadership and student achievement. In addition, Leithwood and Sun (2009) conducted a third review of the effects of transformational leadership practices on teachers' practices, as well as school conditions and student achievement. According to Sun and Leithwood (2012), transformational school leadership significantly affects student success, whereas some core leadership practices affect student outcomes (i.e., achievement, attendance, college-attendance, dropout rates, and graduation rates).

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) core leadership practices are pertinent to this study because setting direction and developing people may assist educational leaders to promote positive student outcomes. The core dimensions linked to school success help school leaders set direction and sustain continual student achievement (Garza, Drysdale, Gurr, Jacobson & Merchant, 2014). Principals set direction by monitoring the progress in achieving the schools' vision and shared goal, which may lead to changes in teachers' practices to improve student achievement (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). In relation to the core leadership practices, the school leaders and teachers I interviewed provided insight about the practices implemented to develop people including the teachers, teacher assistants, and students to improve achievement outcomes. The core leadership practices model related to this study because educational leaders redesign the organization to meet the accountability measures of NCLB.

Nature of the Study

Three research methods I considered using for this study included qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Bourgeault (2012) argued that qualitative studies clarify and improve the understanding of multifaceted psychosocial issues. Qualitative studies include the use of multiple design decisions in the research inquiry. The five qualitative designs are phenomenology, grounded theory, narrative, ethnography, and case study (Yin, 2014). A qualitative multiple case study design was appropriate for this study. A multiple case study will provide a process for the exploration of individuals, organization, and supporting evidence (Yin, 2014). A multiple case study is most appropriate when the goal is clarifying the phenomenon (Stake, 2010; Yin 2014).

After a review of the three research methods, I chose to use the qualitative method and the case study design to gain an understanding of the strategies used by leaders in urban charter middle schools to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation. The multiple cases for analysis included the leadership practices of three urban charter middle schools located in the district serving as the research site. The participants consisted of three school principals and one focus group comprised of six teachers from each urban charter middle school. I collected data using multiple sources including focus group interviews with teachers, interviews with school leaders, and an archival record review of test scores and school rating scores.

Definitions

I used the following key terms throughout the study and have provided operational definitions here.

Alternative licensed literacy teacher: An individual who actively teaches literacy at schools while completing the certification process (Ajayi, 2011).

At-risk students: At-risk students are individuals who may not graduate high school (Hung, Badejo, & Bennett, 2014).

Designing the organization: Designing the organization is a process that leaders use to strengthen school cultures, remove obstacles to success, and build collaborative processes among stakeholders (Jacobson, 2011).

Developing people: Developing people is a process of building personal and mutual capacity by using intellectual stimulation to sustain the communities of practice and provide an appropriate role model (Jacobson, 2011).

Distributive leadership: Distributive leadership is an alternative leadership style to the traditional top-down leadership models used by educational leaders to meet the challenges and changes within the educational system (Margolin, 2013).

School choice: School choice refers to the parents' flexibility in choosing the educational institution and determining the content of their children's educational experiences (Dempster, 2013).

School vouchers: School vouchers are public funds that families receive for paying tuition and costs at a public or private school their children attends (Dempster, 2013).

Setting direction: Setting direction is a leader's action to develop goals and inspire teachers and students regarding the schools vision (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Direction setting is the process that leaders use to communicate the vision statement, the acknowledgment of goals, and the high-performance expectations for teachers and students (Jacobson, 2011).

Situational Leadership: Situational Leadership is a leadership style that managers employ to determine the various behaviors to use for making environmental changes and delegating responsibilities (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982).

Student learning management: Student learning management is an educational process used to create a classroom environment with the teachers' focus on management before instruction and student learning (Sandholtz, 2011).

Assumptions

Four assumptions guided this research study. My primary assumption was that participants would provide understandable and accurate responses to the research questions. It was imperative that I gathered understandable and accurate responses to the research questions (Marshall & Rossman 2016; Yin, 2014). My second assumption was that participants would demonstrate truthfulness and genuineness. Participants need to be truthful because the veracity of their responses ensures the reliability of the case study findings (Miles, Huberman, & Saladana, 2014; Yin 2014). My third assumption was that participants would share their experiences regarding the positive and negative aspects of the leadership practices sustained for overall school success. An important factor is that the participants share their experiences to add validity and trustworthiness to the case study findings (Rubin & Rubin 2012; Yin 2014). My final assumption was that participants would explain the specific leadership practices used in their school to advance from a priority school to a focus school.

Scope and Delimitations

The participants of this study included three school principals with a minimum of 3 years of leadership experience each, and teachers who had been in leadership positions for three or more years and who were responsible for training new teachers at an urban charter middle schools identified on the top to bottom list as a focus school. I focused on obtaining descriptions of school principals' and teachers' experiences with implementing leadership practices to address challenges in schools. I specifically focused on the purpose, which was to explore practices that leaders of urban charter middle schools have

implemented to advance their schools from a priority school to a focus school

designation. To facilitate transferability, I provided rich and thick descriptions of

similarities in the participants, school culture, school climate, and schools site

characteristics. Using rich, thick descriptions allows the reader to understand in depth the

similarities between each research site (Patton, 2015).

I delimited the study to charter schools operating for three or five years that had

progressed from a priority school to a focus school designation. This study is specific to

Michigan and not the entire the Midwest region. This study was purposely small-scale

and does not represent all urban charter middle schools nationwide. I limited this study

specifically to the middle school educational level. The study did not include urban

traditional public, parochial, magnet, or alternative schools.

Limitations

Limitations of the study included my use of a qualitative exploratory multiple

case study design. Yin (2014) stated that case studies have limitations such as limited

generalizability, the absence of systematic research procedures, and the large amount

required as a result of the massive number of documents that need to be reviewed. In this

study, the limitations included the availability of school principals and teachers and the

number of school principals and lead teachers willing and available to participate.

Significance

Contribution to School Leadership

This research is significant in that it will add to evidence that effectively identifies

and addresses leadership challenges for charter school leaders. Further, the research

expanded the body of research that explores school leadership practices by focusing on effective leadership practices for urban charter schools. My findings provide a body of evidence regarding how effective school leadership practices link to improved student achievement, specific professional leadership development processes, and school leadership training needed to create an effective leadership prototype for urban charter schools.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this study will contribute to the social change of the educational preparation of students upon completion of high school prepared for postsecondary education and exempt from remedial college coursework. All stakeholders may gain an understanding of the importance of implementing core leadership practices to collaborate on building partnerships between the teachers and parents to ensure students are prepared to compete in a global society. The results of this study will contribute to positive social change by providing school leaders in urban charter schools with leadership practices to provide all students with a world-class education to compete in a global society.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

Chapter 1 began with an introduction, coupled with a discussion of the background of the study, to show that this study filled a gap in the literature. In the study, I explored the experiences of school principals and teachers who have successfully advanced from a priority school to a focus school by using core leadership practices. Chapter 1 included the problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions. Some leaders in urban charter schools may lack leadership practices needed to address

the achievement gaps and meet the minimum academic performance measures mandated by NCLB (Jacobson, 2011; Tricarico and Yendol-Hoppey, 2012). I discussed the nature of the study, scope, delimitations, assumptions, and conceptual framework of the study, and provided operational definitions of key terms. The core leadership practices model (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003) served as the conceptual framework for this qualitative multiple case study. The chapter concluded with limitations and significance of the study. Many school leaders assigned to urban charter schools can benefit from the development and design of the core leadership practices. The development of a leadership system is needed to assist school leaders working in urban charter schools to close achievement gaps and use effective and efficient core leadership practices to create a high performing urban charter schools (Yang, 2014).

In Chapter 2 I provide an in-depth review of peer-reviewed research articles and seminal works on the past and present school reforms, characteristics of schools. The emergence of charter schools, charter schools in the district serving as the research site and challenges of urban charter schools are in chapter 2. Chapter 2 provides a detailed discussion of a change to the role of leadership, effective leadership practices, and a brief summary.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The research problem was that the gap in the literature regarding the leadership practices successful leaders of urban charter middle schools uses to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation. My purpose in this multiple case study was thus to fill this gap by exploring strategies leaders of urban charter middle schools use to improve student performance. However, little research exists on strategies and leadership practices developed to improve academic achievement in urban charter schools.

The limited research addressed the significance of the relationships between educational reform and school conditions (Ramberg, 2014). Ahmad et al. (2013) investigated the effectiveness of leadership wisdom of principals based on the perceptions of their senior assistants. The senior assistants had high perceptions of the principals' leadership effectiveness (Ahmad, Salleh, Awang, & Mohamad, 2013). Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, and Reeves (2012) evaluated Waters and Marzano's six correlates of effective leadership practices that linked to leadership practices of rural superintendents in disadvantaged areas. Forner et al. found seven core leadership practices consistent with Waters and Marzano's six correlates. Bouchamma (2012) examined leadership practices in economically disadvantaged areas of three Canadian provinces. According to Bouchamma (2012), the five dimensions of leadership practices are as follows: (a) establishing goals; (b) strategic resourcing; (c) curriculum planning and evaluation; (d) promoting teacher development; and (e) ensuring order and support. The NCLB Act has guidelines regarding accountability for postsecondary institutions; therefore, educational

leaders in higher education should develop effective leadership practices for successful student outcomes.

Additional researchers have focused on practices used by leaders in higher education. Kantabutra and Saratun (2013) conducted a study on the leadership practices used at the oldest university in Thailand. Kantabutra and Saratun (2013) identified six core sets of practices including communicating the vision, building strong business culture, developing environmental and social responsibility, promoting staff development and ethics. Al-Karasneh and Jubran (2013) investigated Islamic social science and education teachers' perceptions of leadership practices. According to Al-Karasneh and Jubran (2013), the findings of their study revealed that teachers had positive perceptions of themselves. Another example is the research of Sheppard and Brown (2014) who examined the distribution of leadership for twenty-first century learning while transitioning teacher-directed school classrooms toward technology-enhanced classrooms. Sheppard and Brown contributed to the understanding of the leaderships' adaptation to transform public school classrooms to student-centered and technology-enhanced learning environments.

In Chapter 2, I review scholarly literature related to the key concepts in the study. Chapter 2 focuses on the past and present educational reforms policies affecting teaching, and student achievement. I also include a discussion regarding the challenges faced by urban school leaders to meet the achievement goals of NCLB. Chapter 2 includes a brief discussion of the rise of charter schools and the evolving role of school leaders working in urban charter schools.

Literature Search Strategy

Several selected electronic databases have contributed to researcher's review of literature on effective leadership practices, in low performing urban charter schools, including the following databases: (a) Education from SAGE, (b) Oxford Education Bibliographies, (c) Education Research Complete, (d) Education Research Starters, (e) Google Scholar, and (f) ProQuest Central database. The first search for relevant literature in each database consisted of using keywords and terms. *Charter schools* represented the initial keyword I used in all searches. The search strings I used to gather literature on the research topic consisted of the following keywords: *educational reform*, *educational policies*, *educational systems*, *school leaders*, *urban school leaders*, *academic achievement*, *educational practices*, *leadership practices*, *effective leadership*, *urban schools*, *private schools*, *charter schools*, *charter school effectiveness*, *accountability*, *student achievement*, and *charter school advancement*.

The literature search included select topics regarding leadership in charter schools: (a) accountability issues for charter schools, (b) political implications in regards to charter schools, (c) education reform for charter schools, (d) student achievement issues regarding charter school, and (e) the future of charter schools. I established parameters to limit my results to peer-reviewed articles from 2011 to 2015. The second stage of the search comprised researching articles referenced in the initial articles. As a result, the literature review includes citations of 90 peer-reviewed journal articles published from 2010 to 2015 within this literature review. The literature search strategy was to initially focus on peer-reviewed journals, but I extended the scope of the search to

include government websites and seminal works in instances where there was little current research.

The Foundation of U. S. Educational Leadership

The origin of the U.S. education system began with the founding fathers of the country and the establishment of the Declaration of Independence. Some of the founding fathers believed that the citizens of a democratic-republican society needed an education system producing men and women who possessed the intelligence to share the rights and responsibilities of freedom and self-governance (Public Education, 1955). By the laws of the U.S. Constitution, state governments have the authority on education, whereas state officials delegate to local governments the majority of the administrative responsibility (Spillane & Kenney, 2012). By 1870, state control of student enrollment was weak in many communities because only 6% of the states had laws regarding student attendance resulting in an enrollment rate of only 58% of U.S. children (Meyer, Tyack, Nagel, & Cordon, 1979). Enrollment rates were lower in the southern and border states in comparison to the northern and western states (Meyer et al., 1979). The transition to industrialization caused many organizations to realize the need for skilled workers, thus leading to the need for better education for U.S. citizens.

Before the industrial revolution, children did not attend school every day because they worked on the family farm. During the 19th century, most of the U.S. population lived in rural nonindustrial areas, which changed with the rise of new forms of commerce and industry (Meyer et al., 1979). The industrial revolution and new forms of mechanized agriculture lessened the need for children to work on the family farm, resulting in more

time for children to attend school. The school systems in the north and west had longer school terms than the southern states (Meyer et al., 1979). The changes in the U.S. educational system led to federal and state legislation of several educational leadership policies.

Leithwood and Riehl Core Leadership Practices

Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) core leadership practices, which link to sustainable student achievement, served as the conceptual framework for my study. According to Leithwood and Riehl, a set of core leadership practices including setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization are necessary for success regardless of the school context. Jacobson (2011) added that the key concepts of Leithwood and Riehl's core leadership practices model represent a logical progression of leadership practices that educational leaders can use to translate ideas into meaningful frameworks. To demonstrate the core leadership practices, leaders should create shared meanings about the school's vision, and then progress towards that vision (Thomas, Herring, Redmond, & Smaldino, 2013). Researchers (Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Jacobson, 2011; Jean-Marie & Sider, 2014) have conducted studies related to the core leadership practices model.

Researchers have examined the leadership practices of teachers with roles such as teacher mentors, coordinators of special programs, or heads of departments (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). For example, Handford and Leithwood (2013) conducted research on the practices that teachers associate with leadership characteristics. Jacobson (2011) used Leithwood and Riehl's core leadership practices model to examine the relationship

between student achievement and principal leadership. Additionally, Jean-Marie and

Sider (2014) explored the leadership practices of eight Haitian school leaders by using

the work of Leithwood and Sun as the theoretical framework. The objective of their study

was to gain an understanding of the impact of specific leadership practices and effective

school leadership in Haiti. Handford and Leithwood identified competence, integrity,

consistency, reliability, and respect as the top characteristics teachers associated with the

trustworthiness of school leaders. Jean-Marie and Sider identified a challenge faced by

educational leadership in unsettled states was the tendency to replicate policy and

practice from the developed world such as curriculum priorities, teacher performance

appraisal, and standardized assessment practices. Further research includes Thomas et al.

(2013) outline of a collaborative ongoing process and blueprint that leaders could use

when developing plans for the integration of content knowledge into their schools.

Leaders articulate the school's vision, identify the performance expectations for

achieving the vision, develop members to move in the set direction, and provide support

to members (Thomas et al., 2013). Consequently, school leaders require specific core

leadership practices to lead schools.

Leithwood and Riehl's core leadership practices model was relevant to this study

because it emphasizes the core functions of leadership for educational leaders to meet the

accountability requirements outlined in NCLB and improve academic outcomes in urban

charter schools. Leaders work with diverse student populations and help identify and

implement the appropriate instructional methods that are beneficial for the diverse

populations they serve (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Jacobson (2011) asserted that

principals in high-poverty schools exhibit the core leadership practices by encouraging

positive involvement from parents and the community, and by creating safe learning

environments. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) argued that school leaders strengthen family

educational cultures through promoting trust and communication between families and

schoolteachers. Leithwood emphasized that successful leaders should respond to the

different school contexts and communicate reliant replies to their context-specific

challenges (Forner et al., 2012). Educational leaders use of core leadership practices was

important to this study because students in urban charter schools who are at risk for

academic failure struggle to master assessments and standardized tests, and often have

difficulty building positive relationships with teachers and peers. Therefore, Leithwood

and Riehl's core leadership practices offer a framework that supports educational leaders

using different approaches and measures to set direction, develop people, and design the

organization.

Setting Direction

Setting direction entails developing goals and vision for the school, as well as

articulating the vision through effective communication to inspire others. According to

Leithwood and Riehl (2003), providing direction and exercising influence are the two

core functions of leadership. Core leadership practices linked with consistency and

reliability include pressing for outcomes, setting standards, and being persistent with

actions (Handford & Leithwood, 2013). The core leadership practice of setting direction

includes: (a) articulating and communicating a vision, (b) creating shared meaning, (c)

creating high-performance expectations, (d) fostering the acceptance of goals, and (e)

monitoring school performance (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Identifying and articulating a vision. The school leaders handle shaping the

vision of the school and student success. To set direction within an organization, effective

educational leaders identify and articulate the vision for helping schools leadership

support visions that represent the preeminent approach for teaching (Leithwood & Riehl,

2003). Korach (2012) argued that hierarchical power would not provide leaders with the

ability to challenge systems or change the emerging needs of a diverse student

population.

Creating shared meanings. Effective leaders create shared meaning and

understanding within the school organization to support and promote the vision of the

school. Educational leaders with goals of fostering shared meanings pursue positive

interactions with students, teachers, and communities to obtain resources and support for

establishing positive inter-organizational relationships (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). The

two main branches of traditional methods of school management are operational and

instructional, in which operational leadership focuses on the principal as the most vital

factor in a school (Petrides, Jimes & Karaglani, 2014). Petrides, Jimes, and Karaglani

(2014) conducted a study to contribute to the knowledge base on the ways in which

assistant principals view their roles using a narrative capture method of 90 stories from

45 assistant principals. According to Petrides et al., assistant principals viewed their roles

regarding instructional-focused leadership. Ahmad et al., 2013 asserted that

administrators need knowledge and skills in social and interpersonal communication and

presentation, group dynamics, goal setting, and conflict resolution to perform their work. Some effective leadership practices involve building support for reform by using practical and effective confrontations and terminating low-performing teachers and principals (Forner et al., 2012).

Creating high-performance expectations. Education leaders should communicate the expectations for teachers and students to meet the requirements of high quality and performance under NCLB. A measure of a leader's competence is a functional work-related skill such as developing an accurate timetable reflecting the priorities of the learning environment (Handford & Leithwood, 2013). The principal set new goals, choose different behaviors for individuals, and play a significant role in promoting the improvement of the schools (Yang, 2014). In fact, principals should not hesitate to express expectations or set high goals (Stockdale, Parsons, & Beauchamp, 2013).

Fostering the acceptance of group goals. An effective education leader creates a culture that promotes collaboration and co-teaching to work toward achieving goals. Yang (2014) posited that the principals should create conditions to stimulate school members' morale to achieve a consensus on the school objectives. Principals should focus on the positive by building cultures of enthusiastic celebration (Stockdale et al., 2013).

Most teacher candidates learning occur during student teaching where novices plan lessons for students under the supervision of an experienced teacher (Norman, 2011). Hodgman (2012) noted that novice teachers need the support of school leaders and

faculty. For example, teacher education students spend an excessive amount of time learning the craft of instructional teaching but do not allot a lot of time to developing their reflection skills and emotional understandings (Day, 2012). Teacher education programs should provide student teachers with a guide to understand the process of learning to teach (Ajayi, 2011).

Monitoring organizational performance. School leaders use data to drive the school academic mission and monitor organizational performance. Principal leadership practices focus on daily assessments of student work, observations of classroom functions, and assessment data for monitoring teaching (Lee, Walker, & Chui, 2012). Therefore, the principal need to improve his transformational leadership skills for school improvement, which include creating ideas, sharing the vision, sharing power, and experiencing success (Yang, 2014). According to Alobiedat (2011), an outstanding educator prepares teachers to provide students with an academically rich background. Tricarico and Yendol-Hoppey (2012) posited that to link theory and practice provides new teaching professionals the experience needed to learn lesson planning applicable to students' needs and grade level requirements.

Developing Educational Leaders

Effective school leaders affect the development of human resources, which are the most important asset in their schools. To develop people, successful educational leaders show respect for staff by providing individualized support, incentives, and opportunities for individual learning (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Thomas et al., 2013). Professional development of staff and structures to facilitate workplace initiatives depend on leaders'

trustworthiness (Handford & Leithwood, 2013). Bifuh-Ambe (2013) defined teaching as an endeavor that requires professional development and expert knowledge of issues both within and outside the classroom. Teaching consists of a complex process and numerous contributors and contributing contexts in becoming a teacher (Faltis, 2011). Hodgman (2012) asserted that teachers are the educational system's most valuable resource. Teachers in successful systems have a great deal of professional autonomy (Henwood & Featherstone, 2013).

Offering intellectual stimulation. Effective school leaders consistently offer opportunities for professional growth and enhancement. Effective school leaders are an optimizer; motivating their team to reach their academic goals and maintain academic achievement. In addition, educational leaders influence staff development by employing intellectual stimulation and encouraging reflection as a challenge for their staff to examine assumptions regarding their work (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Leaders foster self-managed professional development among staff, implement induction programs to adopt inclusion-based teaching strategies, and promote inclusive education (Pihie & Asimiran, 2014). One valuable way to prepare preservice teachers for fostering student learning consists of analyzing and reflecting to improve teaching and promote student learning (Sandholtz, 2011). To ensure sustainability over time, classroom teachers and principals need continuous training (Schumacher, 2011). Ludlow (2011) stated that supervisors and principals earning advanced degrees in educational leadership are instructional leaders.

Before NCLB, qualifications for new teachers included a bachelor's degree and certification, as well as the ability to demonstrate subject matter knowledge (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010). Faltis (2011) noted that some alternatives teacher programs are shorter with minimal attention to the components that contribute to the quality of teacher preparation. New programs enacted by states allow alternative certification of teachers to talented college students unwilling to complete the mindless education courses mandated by states (Peterson, 2014). Ajayi (2011) asserted that each state has a different model of alternative teacher certification including cohort groups, non-traditional coursework schedules, and the appointment of in-school cooperating teachers. Tricarico and Yendol-Hoppey (2012) agreed that many states have developed alternative certification programs to recruit individuals as teachers earning their certification while taking classes and teaching full time. In addition, universities in several states developed advanced certificates and programs in teacher leadership (Ludlow, 2011).

Providing individualized support. Educational leaders provide their staff individualized support by showing respect and concern for each person based on his or her feelings and needs to foster educational improvement. Furthermore, leaders display respect through behaviors such as recognizing the role teachers play in a child's education and acknowledging the contributions colleagues make toward accomplishing organizational tasks (Handford & Leithwood, 2013). Principals' competence includes problem-solving, visibility in the classroom, engagement in the observing classroom activities, involvement in instructional planning, and communication of feedback to teachers about their instructional methods (Handford & Leithwood, 2013).

Teacher preparation programs are not providing teachers with the relevant knowledge and skills to be sufficient practitioners (Hodgman, 2012). Beare, Marshall, Torgerson, Tracz, and Chiero (2012) investigated the effect of a selection of extrinsic variables had on collected survey data for determining teacher preparation programs efficacy. The results indicated that the factors that contribute to an individual being a qualified teacher and that preparation programs produce teachers generalized across all areas of teaching (Beare, Marshall, Torgerson, Tracz, & Chiero 2012). According to Day (2012), development disruption results from teachers changing educational institutions, teaching a new grade level, and learning a new role or ways to work in the classroom.

Teachers respond to working conditions including salary, job stability, performance, and learning opportunities when deciding whether to commit to a school (Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2010). Henwood and Featherstone (2013) stated that turnover rates are higher for teachers in charter schools than traditional public schools. Hanushek and Rivkin (2010) noted that school leavers are usually the higher qualified teacher distribution, resulting in higher turnover costs for high-poverty and lower achievement schools.

Providing an appropriate model. An effective leader leads by example and possesses the wisdom to demonstrate actions that are consistent with the school's vision. Ahmad et al. (2013) stated that being a principal requires a professional leader who possesses the wisdom to make creative ideas and combine practical and emotional intelligence to demonstrate the core leadership skills. The success of a school is the responsibility of a school's leadership team (Ahmad et al., 2013). Alobiedat (2011) stated

that schools' efficacy depends on school leadership's understanding of the attitudes, outlooks, and student behaviors. According to Belcastro (2015), an indicator of education quality is educators providing students with the skills needed to engage in the knowledge and critical disciplines positively as members of society within the democratic process. Erickson, Larwin, and Isherwood (2013) expressed that a link exists between educational success and improved of student learning, teachers' professional development, and teaching.

Teacher effectiveness and quality. Teacher effectiveness has become a visible policy issue, leading to changes in standard approaches salary and tenure decisions (Howell, Peterson, & West, 2013). Alobiedat (2011) described the effectiveness of teacher and school as the ability to demonstrate the lifelong growth of student learning. Day (2012) found that teachers' commitment and effectiveness varied between six professional life phases. Education takes on a new meaning when student teachers focus on their initial determination to become a teacher (Gentry, 2012).

Teacher education programs use a variety of criteria including the average learning gains in class to evaluate teacher's effectiveness (Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2010). Ramberg (2014) investigated teachers' perceptions of a national curriculum reform effect on changes in their teaching. Ramberg (2014) also stated that numerous researchers characterize teachers as individuals resistant to change. Another notable study is the mixed method research of Costa e Silva and Herdeiro (2014) who presented results of an investigation with Portuguese teachers. Costa e Silva and Herdeiro (2014) revealed that the teachers believed that some educational policies may negatively affect their work,

weaken their professional relationships and the quality of their teaching. In consensus, Ramberg (2014) found a positive relationship exist between teachers' discernments of school-based conditions and their outlooks towards change.

Gentry (2012) argued that producing competent teachers to staff schools is one challenge faced by educational leaders, because teachers play a major role in the educational process, and qualified teachers are not necessarily quality teachers. Teacher quality depends on the teacher, the school, and the specific educational policy (Costa e Silva & Herdeiro, 2014). Hodgman (2012) identified the best characteristics to assess teacher quality as interpersonal skills, reflection on practice, professionalism, and willingness to address societal power issues. Educators and policymakers reward teacher quality based on experience, certification, or advanced degrees (Alobiedat, 2011). Gentry expressed that a professor knows that he or she is producing teachers that care when the teacher candidates demonstrate commitment and achievement, as well as show enthusiasm.

Ludlow (2011) argued that success in adult teacher leadership was important for all children to achieve desired outcomes during the school years. Salinas and Blevins (2013) found three bodies of teachers' knowledge including experiential and disciplinary knowledge, whereas teachers have certain beliefs about the purpose of their control in their subject areas. Educators continually improve their communal skills to provide the best possible education for all students (Hill, 2013). Teachers should possess a specific mindset and skill set to teach in schools and communities, as well as have competent teachers to provide instruction that will help students (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013). Bifuh-Ambe

(2013) stated that teachers should recognize the structural forces that influence their students' lives and know they are in a position to act upon them. Teachers are required to understand their roles and professional responsibilities as educators who may use their classrooms to address community concerns (Ediger, 2013).

Developing the Organization

The roles and responsibilities of educational leaders have changed with the implementation of the requirements of accountability and adequate yearly progress. Public accountability has an effect on the work of educational leaders, whereas superintendents and principals face having a high profile job and leading a uniquely public life (Forner et al., 2012; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013). Many educational leaders attend to internal processes and external relationships with all stakeholders. Successful leadership consists of matching the appropriate response to each challenge such as the contextual challenges faced by many school leaders, which are poverty and economic loss (Forner et al., 2012). A teacher educator faces challenges such as closing the gap between practice and theory, as well as solving issues of curricular fragmentation (Hauge, Norenes, & Vedøy, 2014). School classrooms have become places of struggle in the lives of teachers because of externally imposed curricula (Day, 2012). Another challenge has been the general lack of acceptance of teachers as leaders who rule, guide, and inspire both in and out of the classroom (Ludlow, 2011). Teachers' perception of threats to their professional identity as experts in their field is also a hurdle (Sheppard & Brown, 2014).

Strengthening school culture. School leaders develop the school cultures and promote trust among community partners, teachers, staff members, and students.

Mobilize policy instrument and compliance policies with external performance standards represent an extensive departure from the status quo inside schools (Spillane & Kenney, 2012). Principals should work hard to ensure optimized instruction and encourage student learning and remove barriers from teachers with whom they work (Stockdale et al., 2013).

Modifying organizational structure. School leaders are responsible for monitoring the structural organization of the school and making adjustments regarding task assignment and acquisition and allocation of resources. Forner et al. (2012) mentioned that school leaders need to address virtually every district-operational decision, because of the absence of middle management to share the administrative duties. School leaders attend to internal processes and external relationships to sustain the performance of all workers (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). The responsibilities of leaders include engaging staff and local communities, communicating a strategic vision, and diffusing daily crises (Petrides et al., 2014).

Building collaborative processes. Educational leaders empower the staff by allowing the teachers with opportunities for staff to participate decision-making processes. Leaders face the burden of responsibility to ensure inclusive practices that empower teachers and students by using collaborative non-linear human interaction (Jäppinen, 2014). In addition, overcoming the challenges of inclusive education requires well-trained leaders proficient of empowering teachers to embrace new instructional methods realizing the organization's core objectives (Hauge et al., 2014). According to Hands (2014), collaborative practices are an avenue for leaders to solicit the perspectives

of teachers and students and allowing them to participate in decision-making. Furthermore, educational leaders need sufficient time to reflect on their collaborative practices and the effect the practices have on students' learning (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013).

A common objective of many teacher education programs is better teacher preparation for classroom realities (Ajayi, 2011). Sandohltz (2011) argued that teacher education programs continue to be a significant factor in helping novice teachers develops skills to participate in a systematic analysis of their teaching and enhance learning for all students. Norman (2011) argued that collaborating teachers might not give apprentice teachers access to the intellectual work or provide guided support in developing student learning plans. During the teacher preparation program, teacher educators can help student teachers develop their skills for reflection and assessment of student learning (Sandholtz, 2011).

Managing the environment. Effective leaders work to create shared meanings, gathering resources and support from those within the school environment and the community. Leaders engage their staff and local communities, diffuse daily crises at their school sites, and communicate a strategic vision for teaching and learning (Petrides et al., 2014). Marsh, Strunk, and Bush (2013) addressed the gap in research on the school turnaround and portfolio district reforms of Los Angeles Unified School District's Public School Choice Initiative. The findings of this study indicated educators experienced success in several areas including supporting plan development, ensuring transparency, and attracting diverse stakeholders (Marsh, Strunk, & Bush, 2013). Data indicated educators experience challenges with engaging parents, attracting a sufficient number of

applicants, maintaining neutrality, and avoiding unintended consequences of competition (Marsh et al., 2013). Teacher education programs should focus on the preparation of teachers to resolve conflict and participate in training focused on collaboration with parents, colleagues, and cultural partners (Reardon, 2013)). To nurture families' educational cultures school leaders provide families with resources connected to parenting and schooling (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Educators are living in an era of policy activism around the world (Louis & Robinson, 2012). Litke (2013) suggested educational leaders would need to frame their work and use several dimensions to adapt to globalization. Furthermore, Korach (2012) stated that principals require a model of leadership producing students equipped to engage in a global knowledge economy. More specifically, school leaders should have the ability to identify global forces and ultimately recognize that complexity of globalization (Litke, 2013). To improve schooling efforts, educators should implement democratic principles (Belcastro, 2015).

Education Reform and Educational Leadership

Education reform in the U.S. began in the early 1900s with the introduction of new advancements during the industrial revolution; education was a fundamental component to build social and economic status of U.S. in comparison to countries such as Russia, Japan, Britain, and China. Since the launch of Sputnik in 1957, education has been in a state of nearly constant reform (Detrich, 2014). O'Brien and Roberson (2012) added that the Soviet Union's launching of Sputnik in late 1957 caused the U. S. federal government to expand its role in education reform and enact the National Defense in

Education Act of 1958. The Soviet launch of Sputnik increased the federal governmental investment in education because of a fear of American pre-eminence in the international arena (Spillane & Kenney, 2012). Legislative policy regarding the evolving purposes of the U. S. educational system began with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1964 (McAndrews, 2013). Loeb, Valant, and Kasman (2011) asserted that Milton Friedman's *The Role of Government in Education* ushered in one of the debates in American education. The new debates regarding education in America led to an in-depth analysis of the U.S. education system by the National Commission of Excellence in Education.

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education provided the Secretary of Education with the *A Nation at Risk* report defining the problems afflicting American education and solutions to address the problems (Department of Education, 2015a). The A Nation at Risk of 1983, which the Reagan administration commissioned, signaled that the equity movement in American schooling might be losing ground and reflected a collective loss of confidence in public schools (O'Brien & Roberson, 2012). In 1983, the release of the *A Nation at Risk* report invoked national panics about U.S. declining standards of education and initiated a series of reform efforts (Brass, 2014; McAndrews, 2013; Klar & Brewer, 2013). As a result, the U.S. established education reform laws to remain competitive among the developed countries because the U. S. is no longer the global leader in education. The U.S. faces challenges with global competitiveness because of low academic achievement causing policymakers, taxpayers, and parents continue to scrutinize the K-12 education policy (Gray, 2012; Koyama &

Cofield, 2013; Prescher & Werle, 2014). The U.S. began to focus on ensuring individuals

received a quality education that provided them with the ability to compete in the global

environment.

The federal and state governments focus changed from the initial principles of the

U.S. education system to education quality. Gray (2012) mentioned that one possible

reason that math and reading scores of the U.S. tends to lag behind other countries is

lower educational quality, which leads to lower wages for American workers. In 1994,

the Clinton administration reauthorized ESEA as the Improving America's Schools Act

(McAndrews, 2013). According to Boykin (2014), the Goals 2000: Educate America Act

and the Improving America's Schools Act redefined the state's responsibility for ensuring

educational equity and ability to receive federal funding. O'Brien and Roberson (2012)

argued that the Goals 2000: Educate America Act caused further involvement of the

federal government in the role of setting goals and outlining a framework for

accountability. Furthermore, the U.S. government has established and amended several

education reform policies. For example, the recent amendment of ESEA was the NCLB

Act of 2001 and President Obama's Race to the Top.

The No Child Left Behind Act

Since 1994, the federal government has become more involved in the

establishment of guidelines regarding accountability and positive academic achievement.

The objective of NCLB is the assurance that all children have equal access to a quality

education and achievement of the minimum aptitude on state academic achievement

assessments (Department of Education, 2015c). The George W. Bush's administration

enacted the NCLB Act of 2001 as a direct extension of the Improving America's Schools Act (O'Brien & Roberson, 2012). The aim of NCLB is to reduce achievement disparities, racial achievement gaps, improve high school graduation rates and college completion trajectories (Jahng, 2011; Koyama & Cofield, 2013). The NCLB Act is a nationwide accountability measure used to assess the school choice initiatives and the U.S. *neoliberal* educational policies (Dempster, 2013). The NCLB Act originated from federal education policy in the post-World War II era (O'Brien & Roberson, 2012). Since the 21st Century, the focus of the educational dispute has been the NCLB Act (Louis & Robinson, 2012). Consequently, the goal of NCLB created a course of action to improve education, increase the number of students graduating from high school, and prepare students for the rigor of college.

No Child Left Behind established school accountability for the educational performance and academic outcomes of students. No Child Left Behind requires every school to release on student performance in grades three through eight, as well as in high school (Peterson, 2014). Hanushek and Rivkin (2010) asserted that NCLB first established criterion based on test pass rates for schools. The contextualization of NCLB requirements is within the state and district policies relating to accountability and reform initiatives (Louis & Robinson, 2012). The most prominent components of NCLB set a new standard in privileging audit over inspection, which changed the analysis and focus of educational performance from schools to students (Derthick & Rotherham, 2012; O'Brien & Roberson, 2012). Moreover, NCLB requires that all schools have exceptionally qualified teachers versus relying on student performance accountability

analysis (Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2010). Louis and Robinson (2012) agreed that NCLB added to the school accountability hierarchy. Thus, NCLB created a universal accountability law to narrow the achievement inequalities, racial achievement gaps, and prepare high school students to transition to the rigor of college and complete college.

Another significant aspect of NCLB is acceptable student academic outcomes on standardized testing. The NCLB Act policy focus on student academic outcomes not on leadership practices that lead to the specification of the achievement targets (Louis & Robinson, 2012). According to Gomez-Velez (2013), NCLB requirements are rigid, unattainable counterproductive and has led to a change in the NCLB Act provisions. In opposition, Koyama and Cofield (2013) argued that the NCLB does not improve academic engagement, provide a robust curriculum, and promote critical thinking for low-income Black Latino youth. Policymakers accept that the NCLB has not helped provide a quality education to African Americans and other underserved students or improve teacher morale (Thompson & Allen, 2012). To address the issue of lack of lack of provisions to promote academic achievement among minorities, the Barack Obama's administration introduced an initiative known as the Race to the Top.

Race to the Top

The Race to the Top is the second most common 21st-century education reform policy. The District of Columbia and 46 states submitted a comprehensive reform plan to compete in President Obama's Race to the Top initiative, which focuses on raising standards for aligning policies and structures regarding the students' state of college and career readiness (White House, 2015). Obama's administration implemented Race to the

Top in 2009, which is an educational fund initiative through a federal grant competition (Gomez-Velez, 2013). The Race to the Top initiative and goals created changes in education law and policy without evidence that changes would improve outcomes (Gomez-Velez, 2013; Severin, 2013). Educators should emulate the tortoise in the children story *The Tortoise and the Hare* as they proceed toward implementing the ideals of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant project (Stoltz, 2014). Whereas, educational leaders should not create and implement programs without proper assessment of the possible challenges and benefits associated with the programs.

Race to the Top led to the adoption of the common core standards and the federal government's role in K-12 education. Concerns spread as states that won Race to the Top policy funding began to implement the common core state standards, because there was a lack of a new curriculum to go along with the new standards or teachers used the new standards with old curricula and tests (Russo, 2015). Corporate creators benchmarked the common core state standards with emphasis on analysis, argument, and specialization; districts implement common core state standards in rigid fashion without empowering their teachers (Endacott & Goering, 2014). However, the views of Hispanic adults do not differ from those of whites or African Americans regarding common core standards, teacher recruitment, and retention policies (Howell et al., 2013). Gomez-Velez (2013) added that the common core standards adoption in 45 states increased the federal involvement in K-12 education. In addition, the teacher unions expressed their support for the common core state standards during competition for Race to the Top funds

(Russo, 2015). Thus, the state educational leaders should focus on guidelines for accountability as outlined in NCLB and Race to the Top.

Education Reform Accountability Measures

Accountability is an individual's obligation to accept responsibility for one's actions. Accountability is the means to share information with families about the quality and achievement performance of schools (Hart & Figlio, 2015). Halqachmi (2013) defined accountability as an answerability approach resulting from the deployment of administrative procedures, performance measurement, and budget reviews. Over the last 25 years (1990 to 2015), dramatic changes in the institutional environment have occurred in U.S. schools, in which curriculum standards and test-based accountability are staples (O'Brien & Roberson, 2012; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). To address the transformation of education standards, educators use two approaches for addressing accountability issues, which are accountability as answerability and accountability managing expectation (Halqachmi, 2013). In 1990, states began enforcing accountability standards for student performance (Hanushek, Peterson, & Woessman, 2012). In addition, the federal government developed a national school accountability program (Hanushek, Peterson, & Woessman, 2012). The government presented a state inspection agency that has freedom of local school board control (Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013). According to Wang, Walters, and Thum (2013), urban school districts in large city school districts are under public and federal pressure to have an accountability system in place to monitor and acknowledge improvements in academic achievement. Marsh et al. (2013) agreed that school districts throughout the country continue to face mounting accountability pressures to improve

students' academic achievement and their lowest performing schools. Therefore, all schools are required to comply with the same standards of performance measures regardless of the schools achievement outcomes.

The landscape of educational accountability has changed because of the governmental achievement standards for all children learning (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). For example, education policymaking and reform discourses in several countries include high accountability and performance measures based on students' academic success (Spillane & Kenney, 2012). Since the early 2000s, U.S. educational institutions have functioned under like accountability pressures and publicly reported yearly testing (Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013). Spillane and Kenney (2012) mentioned that the pressure accountability in each country's education sector differs in form, focus, and function. According to Spillane and Kenney, state and local governments introduced accountability mechanisms linked with the NCLB Act of 2001. Accountability, as outlined in NCLB, is an attempt to change existing incentives in schools focusing on the objective of all students meeting standardizes performance (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010).

Ample evidence exists that school accountability has the potential to improve school quality for students (Hart & Figlio, 2015). With this in mind, the pressure to reach mandated achievement standards and performance outcomes for students has increased the accountability measures for schools. Gomez-Velez (2013) reviewed the structural policy changes in New York City public school governance. Gomez-Velez focused on the New York City's shift in education spending from the public to less regulated charter schools. In addition, Gomez-Velez considered and analyzed the existing oversight and

accountability of the New York City charter schools. Louis and Robinson (2012) examined U. S. school leaders' perceptions of external mandates and the school leaders' understanding of state and district accountability policies. Principals and teachers served as participants in a survey to examine the relationship between discernments of external policy and instructional leadership behaviors. Louis and Robinson determined a positive relationship between external accountability policy and instructional leadership exist (Louis & Robinson, 2012). Thus, a definite relationship coexists between external mandates and instructional leadership.

Accountability mandates have reshaped the responsibilities of teachers and school leaders in improving student achievement. Alobiedat (2011) stated that the next step in the accountability movement is the training of teachers, whereas people outside of education continue to drive the standards and accountability movement. The introduction of NCLB Act and state accountability programs altered the landscape that shapes teacher and school decisions (Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2010). To enhance the ability for continuous improvement, learn from past issues, and establish accountability for expectations and empowering staff, educational leaders must develop transparent and consistent goals to keep all stakeholders informed (Schumacher, 2011). Whereas, the accountability policy forces educational leaders to respond to the school's individual needs, adhere to benchmarks, and comply with reporting mechanisms (Lee et al., 2012). In contrast, Hanushek and Rivkin (2010) argued that accountability increases the importance of quality in teacher hiring decisions, whereas the absence of accountability enabled administrators in less competitive districts to focus on personal relationships and qualities

unrelated to classroom performance when hiring. Due to increased accountability mandates teachers employment is no longer based on personal relationship. Teacher employment is contingent on the merit of their quality and the ability to improve and sustain student achievement, not on personal relationships.

Regarding accountability in charter schools, Halqachmi (2013) explained the evolving management strategy used by state and local governments that contributes to increasing productivity. Halqachmi found that the partnership between public and private charter schools was conducive to the execution of a public entrepreneurial strategy. Charter schools contribute to increasing productivity by stretching resources utilization, improving service quality, and diffusing elementary and secondary education accountability issues (Halqachmi, 2013). Gawlik (2015) used a qualitative case study design to identify charter school leaders meaning of accountability relating to professional development and instructional practices. Gawlik found that school leaders used frameworks that enforce and support the policies most important at the school level. Although researchers studied various aspects of accountability, few studies address how charter schools leaders in urban charter schools demonstrate leadership practices to meet the requirements of NCLB.

The Effects of Education Reform

Although the aim of education reform is to improve the U.S. education system, the results of changes in educational policies vary. Jahng (2011) stated that the mission of the educational reform policies was to improve education and equally serve all children. Past and present school reforms have changed the non-traditional role of charter school

leaders in urban charter schools. The NCLB has caused concerns for school leaders

regarding job risks and turnover rates. School leaders such as principals are significant

agents of change who encounter job risks by attempting to shift the school's cultural

norms and advocating changes in instructional delivery to provide students with access to

high-quality instruction (Hesbol, 2012; Sharija & Watters, 2012). More specifically, the

NCLB Act affects staffing schools throughout the nation (Tricarico & Yendol-Hoppey,

2012). Moreover, each of the 50 states within U.S. has implemented alternative teacher

certification programs to allow non-traditional candidates to obtain certification (Ajayi,

2011). Ajayi (2011) examined the use of teaching methods courses as an alternative

licensed strategy to raise the number of literacy teachers. Although U.S. universities have

a large number of education graduates, an estimate of one-fourth of novice teachers exit

the profession within the first 3 years of teaching (Tricarico & Yendol-Hoppey, 2012).

Alternatively certified literacy teachers bring specific life experiences and high academic

records into the teaching program, as well as provide students different perspectives

(Ajayi, 2011).

Research indicated that education reform policies have both positive and negative

effects on student academic achievement outcomes. Previous research focused on the

effects of reform policies, student-learning results, and standardized examinations

(Spillane & Kenney, 2012). The two main problems with the NCLB and Race to the Top

are the U.S. risks losing a large cross-section of students and the strict top-down manner

in which the U.S. conduct education reforms (Prescher & Werle, 2014). Jahng (2011)

argued that the NCLB and Race to the Top represent and serve as the framework for the

21st century U.S. educational systems. Gomez-Velez (2013) agreed that Race to the Top and changes to NCLB serve as a catalyst for changes in state education standards and policies. The states have less governance of education policies because of the intervention and increase involvement of the federal government.

No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top initiatives has changed accountability policies. Before NCLB and Race to the Top, states had more authority to set policies for the operation of schools and local school districts operated schools with more flexibility authority over school curriculum and instruction (Prescher & Werle, 2014). Spillane and Kenney (2012) stated that NCLB and state policies inflict pressures on school districts leaders based on the student populations and the school district's position in the broader institutional sector. In contrast, Prescher and Werle (2014) argued that NCLB initiatives reward high-performing schools while penalizing students, teachers, schools, and states. Race to the Top has affected teacher evaluation and tenure status placing pressure on the states to continue administrating high stakes standardized test for schools, as well as students and teacher effectiveness (Gomez-Velez, 2013). The U.S. government built education reforms on the assumption that U.S. public schools were in crisis, and that standardize testing was the best approach to improving public schools and teacher effectiveness (Rose, 2015). Although educational reform policies inscribe and embody citizenship learning, education reform policies using economic incentives based on the Race to the Top and NCLB has pushed states toward a data-driven system (Jahng, 2011; Severin, 2013).

School Reform

Initially, the structure of the U.S. education system was similar to the England. Although the colonists established public elementary and secondary schools based on the time-honored ways of the European school systems, most of the early schools were private schools (Public Education, 1955). Individuals who attended the schools paid tuition, and some schools offered free education to those who could not afford the tuition. Enrollment was low because the schools were private schools in which individuals paid tuition to attend (Public Education, 1955). Further development of the education system by Horace Mann and others led to the establishment of public education free to all citizens. Horace Mann and a host of other leading citizens led the movement to demand a program of universal public education and press for public schools (Public Education, 1955).

American citizens agree that all children need to obtain a good education, but African Americans and Whites continue to express less enthusiasm about the nation's schools (Gentry, 2012; Howell et al., 2013). The American desire is for every student to have equal opportunity for success, which requires collaboration combining the observations of adults and students regarding suitable instruction (Strom, Strom, & Beckert, 2011). Meyer (2012) added that every child in the U.S. should get a fair opportunity to the American dream; regardless of what neighborhood you were born in, what color your skin or who are your parents. Therefore, Americans must intervene on their behalves and challenge the government policies to redesign ESEA (Belcastro, 2015).

School reform began with the earliest initiatives in the 19th century to provide free and equal education to all citizens. Public education has a history of failed reform attempts related to ineffective leadership and school culture change (Schumacher, 2011). In the 1980's and early 1990s, past piecemeal reforms were ineffective, and many non-profit organizations, universities, and educators nationwide began developing and implementing new American schools and success for all specific whole-school reform models (Marsh et al., 2013). To guide school reform efforts, school leaders have used the organizational change theory and school-centered turnaround to improving district-wide student performance is portfolio management (Marsh et al., 2013; Schumacher, 2011). Belcastro (2015) argued that the market-based school reform agenda has jeopardized the quality of education in the U.S., as well as the integrity of democracy. Portfolio reforms unlike school-centered turnaround strategies treat districts as key units of change, encourage districts to allow a diverse set of service providers to operate schools, and make a future selection of school operators (Marsh et al., 2013). Social-economic changes and contextual challenges have made the quest for academic reform a challenge for superintendents whereas school districts look for school reform models to address the accountability mandates of the NCLB Act (Forner et al., 2012; Schumacher, 2011). The federal government deemed the responsibility of school reform as a responsibility of each state based on the U.S. Constitution.

The U.S. Constitution provides the guidelines for federal and state governments regarding the governance of the education system, whereas the state government is responsible for education regulation. In all 50 states, a large underfunded set of regulators

exists in the traditional public-education system, and school reform laws require that children in K–12 receive schooling without outlining the method of educational delivery (Dempster, 2013; Gustafson, 2013). Derthick & Rotherham (2012) argued that it is impossible to construct the same laws for 50 states that include urban, suburban, and rural communities to fit every situation without some modification. More specifically, educational reform efforts involve the district offices providing educational goals, but the teachers in local schools decide the actual processes for reaching the mandated goals (Ramberg, 2014). For example, the nation has implemented reforms such as year-round schools, performance pay for teachers, and school choice including the charter school option as a potential remedy to improve the quality of education (Gray, 2012). More so, creating, designing and running schools that are flexible for innovative people may not only benefit students but benefit the education system in general (Loeb, Valant, & Kasman, 2011). The educational reform movements have placed a great deal of pressure and accountability on school leaders to demonstrate core leadership practices for promoting positive student achievement outcomes (Klar & Brewer, 2013). Thus, some schools systems converted from traditional public schools to district charter schools to sustain success, which required ongoing efforts to support and reward organizational learning (Jacobson, 2011). Regarding educational attainment, the value of school choice programs including charter high schools may have a positive impact on the economy and society (Booker, Sass, Gill, & Zimmer, 2010).

The U.S. School Choice System

From 1991 to 2011, the U.S. has introduced the popular education reform strategy of parental school choice, which includes thousands of privately managed charter schools and school voucher initiatives enabling families to select schools across inter- and intra-district choice programs (Loeb et al., 2011). Gray (2012) defined school choice as a form of systemic reform, which includes across district public school choice, vouchers, and charter schools. Dempster (2013) asserted that school choice provides K-12 parents with the flexibility in determining the content of their children's educational experiences. The school choice policy has failed to ensure parents and youth make decisions based on the quality of the school, which include highly effective teachers and the number of students graduating from high school each year (Condliffe, Boyd & DeLuca, 2015). K-12 public school students that choose to leave the traditional public school system are innovative and alternative education models (Almond, 2012). Parents and students do not utilize the information on teacher effectiveness to select a school. Rather parents and students make decisions based on the priority of safety and social context, which supersedes everything else when parents and students choose the school they attend (Condliffe et al., 2015).

Limited research exists on solutions such as parental school choice to low performance; however, change to the education system provided an opportunity to examine potential systemic effects (Brining & Garnett, 2012; Gray, 2012). For example, Brinig and Garnett (2012) addressed two dramatic shifts in the American educational landscape, which were the rapid disappearance of urban Catholic schools and the rise of charter schools. Loeb et al. (2011) examined the rationale for school choice by using data

from a survey of Milwaukee principals, in which the school leaders who experienced competitive pressures improved their marketing efforts. Since 1984, the change in the American educational landscape was from the closing of 148 Catholic elementary and secondary schools to a growing number of charter schools (Brining & Garnett, 2012). For instance, more than 1.7 million children attended 5,400 charter schools in the U.S. s in 2010 (Brining & Garnett, 2012).

Private schools

Similar to the first U.S. schools in the 18th and 19th centuries, some educational institutions are private schools funded by organizations. According to Belcastro (2015), the privatizing of public education is the result of federal policy and legislation, the absence of teacher voices and narrowing the curriculum the last twenty years. Loeb et al. (2011) stated that the two most available school choices are residential school choice and private school choice, which happens across and within cities and towns. Brinig and Garnett (2012) mentioned that the similarities between private schools and charter schools are private entrepreneurs create both types of schools. Loeb et al. agreed that private school choice and residential school choice are similar, because both choices require families to pay a portion of tuition costs for their children's private schooling. Although the first schools in the U.S. were private institutions in which students paid tuition or received charitable donations to attend, the establishment of public education began in the 19th century.

Public schools

During the 19th century, activist such as Horace Mann, Henry Barnard, and Calvin Wiley started a movement to demand a program of universal public education. In public education, leaders work to achieve shared goals centered on student learning (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Public-school choice options consist of the practices that allow student enrollment in a school throughout the district or other districts (Dempster, 2013). Sheppard and Brown (2014) posited that public schooling is relevant for children to develop twenty-first century skills. To improve the standards of secondary education, all stakeholders must assist with identifying and applying appropriate expectations (Strom et al., 2011). For example, in 2004, two-thirds of Louisiana's schools did not meet the accountability standards, and the New Orleans public school system had been graduating students incapable of passing elementary mathematics and reading (Horne, 2011). Horne (2011) added that the number of students in New Orlean's attending a low-performing public school decreased from 67% to 34%. The quality of public schools student learning and academic achievement is a concern for educators and policy makers resulting in the establishment of charter schools (Hung et al., 2014).

Charter schools

Charter schools are an alternative school choice. Charter schools are public schools designed to increase learning opportunities for students (Hung et al., 2014). Charter schools resemble public schools since they are tuition-free and secular, yet charter schools portray more accountability than private and public schools (Brinig & Garnett, 2012). Since the first charter school opened in 1992, advocates for charter

schools expected that the competition between charter schools and local school districts would foster improvement in traditional public schools (Pearson, McKoy & Kingsland, 2015; Peyser, 2014). The rise of charter schools posed a threat to public school's organizational lawfulness when enrollment drops to result from the school losing students to a charter school (Spillane & Kenney, 2012). In 1996, the establishment of charter schools offered parents an alternative to low-performing urban schools (Pearson et al., 2015). Parents who are skeptical about school reform efforts flocked to the new charter schools to guarantee their child's admission (Horne, 2011). Charter schools encourage and depend on parental involvement in the students' education (Halqachmi, 2013).

In 2011, states lifted the capitation rates on charter school growth (Gustafson, 2013). The number of charter schools has increased to 112 schools managed by 61 nonprofit organizations (Pearson et al., 2015). Many urban neighborhoods support charter schools and their mission to improve the quality of public education (Erickson, Larwin, & Isherwood, 2013). For example, the first charter school, which opened in Minnesota, focused on school reform advocates (Gustafson, 2013). In 1995 Congress passed legislation for charter schools in the District of Columbia; however, the public schools had decrepit buildings, high truancy levels, low test scores and the lowermost graduation rates in the nation's (Pearson et al., 2015). In fact, compact cities such as New Orleans fully embrace charters as reform partners (Peyser, 2014). In 2003, the state of Ohio changed its charter school law allowing charter schools to expand to other geographical areas and the number of charter school authorizers (Gray, 2012). In September 2011, the leaders of the Boston Alliance for Charter Schools signed an agreement with the district

leaders to provide all Boston students with an improved and broader school choice (Peyser, 2014). Waters, Barbour, and Menchaca (2014) added that online charter schools have grown since the mid-1990s to the 2000s resulting in the emergence of for-profit companies. Waters et al. added that online charter schools offer an alternative to providing free K-12 learning full-time.

Charter Schools have grown in the U.S. and expanded choice public, private and charter school choice to many students especially minority students. Charter schools, which mainly serve elementary students, comprise the largest share of the voucher programs (Peterson, 2010). Charter schools usually have a median enrollment of 242 students in comparison to public school enrollment of 539 students, whereas one out of five students attends charter schools in a dozen of US cities (Halqachmi, 2013; Pearson et al., 2015). Charter schools serve a larger proportion of Black students in contrast to a smaller population of White students (Almond, 2012). In 2011, 6,000 charters nearly served two million students, and 4% of the U.S. public-school population (Peterson, 2014). In 2011-2012, one-quarter of Philadelphia's students attended charter schools instead of public schools (DeJarnatt, 2012). In 2015, charter schools served nearly 38,000 students, and public schools will serve 44% percent of the students in the District of Columbia (Pearson et al., 2015). Furthermore, approximately 2.3 million students attend charter schools, whereas the 2013 waitlist consisted of more than 600,000 students (Gustafson, 2013). School choice policy provides low-income minority students with educational options beyond their residential districts. The absence of school choice policy

has long isolated and trapped low-income Black and Latino high school students in challenging under-performing and under-resourced schools (Condliffe et al., 2015).

Charter school governance has been instrumental in K-12 education reform. Katzman (2012) argued that charter schools serve as one reform initiative of the past three decades to address the issue of K-12 education governance. Halqachmi (2013) stated that charter schools governance is not the same as public schools, because many of the public school regulations do not apply to charter schools. In contrast, the governance of Commonwealth charters follows the same state laws and regulations as public schools except some teacher certification and tenure regulations (Peyser, 2014). Furthermore, the financial accountability and governance of the charter schools, which are growing entity of the nonprofit sector, receive minimal attention from regulators or scholars (DeJarnatt, 2012).

Charter schools receive per-pupil funding as their primary funding source. DeJarnatt (2012) noted that funding for a vast majority of charter schools consists of private donations, state reimbursements, and the department of education grants. Stakeholders (e.g., parents, taxpayers, and policymakers) need to understand the impact of charter school policy on public schools because the U.S. spends billions of dollars on funding education (Gray, 2012). Gomez-Velez (2013) noted that the basis of school budgets created on per-pupil expenditures are categorical funding formulas and program dollars that follow each student, whereas large transfers of funding deplete funding from struggling schools. Loeb et al. (2011) added that high-demand schools will thrive with

per-pupil funding while low-demand schools face closure unless there is an improvement and increase their appeal to families.

Charter schools go through a review process before they can exist as a public school. The business world provides the crucial political support for charter schools, whereas authorizers evaluate charter school applications, manage charter schools, and decide whether to renew or revoke the schools' charter based on various performance measures (Gustafson, 2013; Henwood & Featherstone, 2013). Private groups of people can submit a petition for approval to run their charter school, whereas well-intentioned people with good hearts run charter schools (DeJarnatt, 2012; Halqachmi, 2013). In contrast, private educational management companies who receive full or partial state funds to manage online charter schools chartered by a state agency play a notable role in transforming the American education system (Spillane & Kenney, 2012; Waters, Barbour, & Menchaca, 2014). Thus, charter schools contribute to the academic success and improvement of public school education.

Student Academic Achievement

Student academic achievement continues to be the focus of policymakers. U. S. local, state, and federal policymakers have directed their focus on classroom curriculum, teaching practices, and student achievement levels (Spillane & Kenney, 2012). Traditionally, expectations were that teachers would follow prescribed curriculum, comply with official regulations, and use prepared materials (Ludlow, 2011). State policymakers continue to comply with the letter of the law for reporting student academic achievement of state assessments in core subjects (Spillane & Kenney, 2012). Thus,

government agencies and policies that seek to increase school choice and completion might influence student achievement and the core work of schools such as English language arts and mathematics, classroom teaching, and student learning abilities (Loeb et al., 2011; Spillane & Kenney, 2012).

Improving student achievement is a major focus for schools and educators. Hodgman (2012) argued that the teachers and school leaders' primary concern should be student achievement. According to Angrist, Pathak, and Walters (2013), the school districts and educators are under pressure to improve student achievement. Hanushek, Peterson, and Woessman (2012) asserted that elementary school students in the U. S. performance have improved. In contrast, Peterson (2010) stated that 30% of ninth graders do not complete high school within 4 years. In constrast, students attending a charter high school are 7% to 15% more probable to earn a high school diploma than their peers attending traditional public high schools (Booker et al., 2010).

Adequate Yearly Progress for Measuring Academic Achievement

Adequate yearly progress is a measure to rate school performance and student progress toward reaching the established vision. Educational leaders use federal guidelines of NCLB to monitor individual students, examine at-risk groups, and track schools to assess schools adequate yearly progress (Strom et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2013). State educators set the standards for proficiency in reading and math, in which leaders determine when the school meets adequate yearly progress based on the proportion of students meeting set the level of proficiency (Wang et al., 2013). Since 2004, one positive result is the stabilization of the percentage of schools categorized as

needs improvement while some policymakers suggest this may result from states lowering their standards to meet the adequate yearly progress requirement (O'Brien & Roberson, 2012). Boykin (2014) agreed that some states appear to be lowering their proficiency standards to demonstrate adequate yearly progress in schools. Moreover, the total of schools not meeting the adequate yearly progress guidelines of ESEA has increased (Marsh et al., 2013). States administrators included other criteria such as college and career readiness as part of the standards because achieving adequate yearly progress remains an important criterion for elementary and secondary schools (Wang et al., 2013). Thus, the preparation of preparing students to go on to higher education institutions and entry into career paths serve as the priority for all school.

In the 1980s and 1990s, waivers, which began to appear in public policymaking, opened the possibility for suburban schools failing to achieve academic requirements to evade accountability (Derthick & Rotherham, 2012). For example, waivers to NCLB granted by the Obama administration eliminated the school accountability provision law (Peterson, 2014). Although discussions about reauthorization of ESEA and the specifics of accountability pressures, the federal policies regarding waivers will continue to hold districts accountable for student performance (Marsh et al., 2013). Therefore, school leaders will continue to be accountable for the academic outcomes of their students.

Standardized Tests for Academic Achievement

Standardized test results drive educational policy mandates. Since the passage of NCLB, educators have emphasized standards and standardized testing in K-12 schools around the country (Graff, 2011). To hold schools accountable, the federal government

use standardized test scores rely on standardized test scores to assess and guide education policy and practice (West, Gabrieli, Finn, Kraft, & Gabrieli, 2014). Policymakers changed the focus of educational policy from student achievement to performance on state tests to measurement educational effectiveness (Boykin, 2014)). Reformers cite that the problem with policies is spending increases without a noticeable gain in test scores, whereas American students have lower scores on standardized tests than their foreign peers (Gray, 2012). Louis and Robinson (2012) argued that federal funding legislation tied to state testing and public reporting for public schools fail to improve, but provided additional guidance and support creating the expectation that state leaders would assist their districts to become better school support. Federal aid to states is contingent on average test scores, yet administrators of top systems generally administer standardized tests only at major breakpoints such as the entrance to school or graduation from high school (Henwood & Featherstone, 2013). Thus, the disbursement of state aid to schools is subject to improved test scores while affluent school systems chose only to test at certain intervals to accommodate their academic needs.

Educators have emphasized standards and standardized testing in K-12 schools around the country resulting from the passage of NCLB (Graff, 2011). More specifically, educational leaders and governments use standards and assessment criteria with an emphasis on student learning to address the qualifications of beginning and experienced teachers (Sandholtz, 2011). NCLB mandates require that K-12 programs assess students' academic achievement. In 2002, only 19 states required testing in math and reading, but in 2005, all 50 states had implemented testing programs for K-12 students to meet the

guidelines of NCLB (O'Brien & Roberson, 2012). Peterson (2010) added under NCLB that students require testing in grades three through eight and grade nine in high school. Thompson and Allen (2012) argued that policymakers are obligated to focus on the best interest of K-12th students instead of test scores and other countries expectations. For example, the latest test of achievement indicates progress among 4th graders and 8th graders; yet, no improvement of students age 17 since the nationwide testing in 1969 (Peterson, 2010). The requirements of academic achievement based on standardize testing may cause students to experience pressure and discomfort. Thus, policy mandates on testing can place added anxiety and testing stress on students.

The basis for educational decisions is standardized test results not the immediate learning needs of the students in the classroom. School life has an effect on the child because decision makers' concerns are the form of education, not substance (Alobiedat, 2011). For example, the professor harmonizes facets of the learning experience making school meaningful and rewarding (Gentry, 2012). Graff (2011) agreed that teachers engage diverse students in learning and thinking, yet administrators focus on teaching that promotes better test results. Teachers make several decisions in the classroom such as suitably planned activities for different purposes, assess the needs of individual students, address questions, motivate, correct mistakes and provide feedback (Al-Karasneh & Jubran, 2013). Teachers and students face the pressure to have high scoring on standardize test for successfully achieving adequate yearly progress.

Charter School Students' Academic Achievement

Charter schools provide alternative learning options and innovations for student learning. One of the most important developments in K-12 education is the emergence of urban charter schools showing positive effects on disadvantaged students' academic achievement (West et al., 2014). Wei, Patel, and Young (2014) explored the difference between traditional schools and charter schools and their ability to sustain student achievement. Wei et al. indicated charter school leaders must create supportive teaching climates. Charter schools immersive a military theme culture that promotes using the Waldorf philosophy resulting in children begin reading by age seven (Pearson et al., 2015). Students benefit from charter school programs that provide alternative educational environments and programs, because the charter networks provide a great deal of innovation (Erickson et al., 2013; Katzman, 2012). Online charter schools provide flexible scheduling along with the opportunity for students based on their schedule, and unique attributes not stereotypically found in brick-and-mortar schools (Waters et al., 2014). Sheppard and Brown (2014) added that transitioning from a teacher-directed to a technology-smart classroom is a complicated task (Sheppard & Brown, 2014). Thus, charter schools provide students non-traditional alternative settings for learning.

Charter schools contribute to student achievement using a variety of sources. Regarding academic achievement at charter schools, authorizers assess the academic performance of charters within 3 to 5 years, in which authorizers might close the charter school if academic performance remains lower than comparable public schools (Halqachmi, 2013). According to Hung, Badejo, and Bennett (2014), ardent student-

teacher relationships, flexible school structure, support systems, rewards, and positive reinforcement were motivating factors that contributed to student achievement. To increase student success, leaders need to motivate the staff to develop the skills for the collective undertaking, as well as removing barriers that affect the creation of collaborative cultures (Jacobson, 2011). Al-Karasneh and Jubran (2013) stated that the classroom environment and effective management contribute to the development of the creative potential of students. Charter school programs contribute to increasing student performance by providing efficient learning environments, hiring knowledgeable teachers, and attracting motivated students (Erickson et al., 2013). Charter schools provide educators with a variety of instructional practices (Halqachmi, 2013). Hung et al. (2014) used a case study to find the interactions between instructional practices and learner motivation, as well as the student's perception their education at a secondary charter school. Hung et al. found that the leaders at secondary charter school employed mission-oriented instructional practices to achieve the students' educational requirements. More specifically, students were satisfied with their experiences and ability to excel to higher grades (Hung et al., 2014). Gray (2012) concentrated on charter school policy by analyzing Ohio school data to estimate the potential threat of charter schools with positive test scores to traditional public schools. The charter schools had a positive effect on academic achievement traditional public school (Gray, 2012).

Charter schools provide opportunities for minority students from diverse backgrounds to reach state performance standards. Erickson et al. (2013) conducted research using a number of charter schools variables relating to traditional public schools

that could affect student mathematics and reading achievement. Charter schools enable students from disadvantaged backgrounds who read at high levels of academic proficiency to reach college and beyond (Peterson, 2014). Clarkson and Johnstone (2011) explored the processes and improvement of mathematics achievement at an African-centered charter school. Clarkson and Johnstone noted that school culture and African-centered education essential factors in the successful mathematics curriculum reform. Another study worthy of mention is Booker, Sass, Gill, and Zimmer (2010). Booker et al. estimated the effects of attending a charter high school on the possibility of students completing high school and attending college. Booker et al. found that attending a charter high school had a positive effect on students' high school completion and college attendance. In contrast, Erickson et al. suggested that socioeconomic status and school competition affect the performance of students in mathematics and reading achievement. Schools, teachers, principals, parents, and students could incorporate the key characteristics of Effective Schools Research Movement to improve students' academic performance (O'Brien & Roberson, 2012).

Summary and Conclusions

My review of the literature revealed that the development of existing leadership practices grounded in 20th-century research is through meta-analyses requiring further insights into school leaders' practices. Some school leaders may lack a core leadership practices that provide guidance for school leaders working in urban charter schools to meet the current challenges, close achievement gaps, and apply core leadership practices to create high performing urban charter schools. Educational reforms changed the role of

the school leader creating a great deal of pressure and accountability on school leaders to ensure students are college and career ready. School leadership and leadership practices indirectly link to student achievement; thereby, school leaders, in low performing urban charter schools, can no longer operate schools without effective leadership practices if they expect to sustain and improve student achievement.

Chapter 3 provides the methodological framework for the study. The research method used for this study will be present, and discuss, including the rationale for selecting such methods. In Chapter 3, the study will detail both the selection procedure and the criteria for the selecting the study's participants. The selection procedure and the criteria used to select the participants are important, as it will provide those seeking to expound on the current research in-depth knowledge of the protocols used to gather data for the research. Lastly, the significance of the interviews and direct observations will be discussed, and the process of analyzing the data to detail within Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore practices that leaders of urban charter middle schools have implemented to advance their schools from a priority school to a focus school designation. I explored the leadership behaviors that influenced the improvement of student achievement outcomes and resulted in my study site schools' advancements from priority school to focus school designation. Further, I explored the real-life experiences that urban charter middle school leaders and teachers had with implementing the following leadership practices: setting direction, developing people, and reorganizing the organization. The responsibility of the leaders changed the daily operations of enforcing school policies and rules.

Chapter 3 includes the methodological framework for this study, the rationale for the study, the problem, and the research questions. Chapter 3 contains several subsections focused on the research design, procedures, selection criteria, and the rationale for the selection of participates. Additional subsections include the interview process and data analysis procedures. I have also included in Chapter 3 is an in-depth discussion of the study's participants and my data collection procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

I designed this qualitative multiple case study answer to the following research question: What leadership practices do successful leaders in urban charter middle schools use to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation? Educational leaders develop the staff by evaluating them based on predetermined criteria for quality, as well as the success of teachers using the common core state standards to improve student

outcomes. In addition, leaders redesign the organization or implement leadership practices and effectively communicate the vision and expectation that students achieve passing scores on standardized testing.

Research Method

Limited research on leadership practices used in urban charter middle schools to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation and address the challenges to achieving NCLB accountability measures has prompted the need for research. In addition, changes in the roles of charter school leaders have prompted the need to explore effective leadership practices in urban charter schools. The significant focus of the study was the successful implementation of core leadership practices for advancing from a priority school to a focus school designation under the guidelines of NCLB.

I considered using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed research methods before deciding on a qualitative approach. Maxwell (2013) stated qualitative research studies that are exploratory and descriptive in design provide a depiction of complex social processes and facilitate understanding through detailed descriptions. Qualitative research designs provide an in-depth, holistic understanding of the participants' experiences (Yin, 2014). The qualitative method was the most appropriate for my study, because the aim of this study was to explore the phenomenon from the experiences of the participants. Additionally qualitative data focuses on naturally occurring events in the natural settings of the participants involved in the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016), and allows researchers to explore the meanings of human experience (Moustakas, 1994). Qualitative studies provide a means of exploring sociological, psychological, and anthropological

phenomena hard to capture using quantitative measurements (Murphy et al., 2014).

Researchers using the qualitative method explore the phenomena from within, using the

perspectives of the participants to begin to explore the phenomena (Marshall & Rossman,

2016). Qualitative studies provide flexibility and are a "do it yourself" as opposed to an

"off the shelf process" (Maxwell, 2013, p.3). A qualitative researcher focuses on

exploring and gaining insight and knowledge from the participants to make a difference

in people's lives (Merriam, 2014). Using qualitative research allows researchers to learn

from the actions and experiences of the participants through the social and cultural

contexts in which people live (Stake, 2006).

For this study, the other methods I considered were quantitative and mixed-

methods. Researchers use the quantitative method for testing and examining the

relationship between variables by allowing the researcher to test particular hypotheses

and generalize the findings to larger populations (Tajdini & Nazari, 2012). Because the

objective was to gather research based on the actions and experiences of the participants,

quantitative research was not suitable for this study (Bölte, 2014). Quantitative research

involves the use numbers, charts, and graphs and does not permit the researcher to gather

data based on the participants' experiences and knowledge (Bernard, 2013). Quantitative

methods require distinctive, numerical data, analyzing occurrences and numerical

associations (Boeije, Wesel & Slagt, 2014). Mixed method research was likewise not

suitable for this study. Mixed methods incorporate quantitative and qualitative research to

generate data needed to analyze complex interventions (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala,

2013). Researchers using mixed method research combine quantitative and qualitative

methods in a concurrent cross-study (Murphy et al., 2014). However, mixed method research was not appropriate for this study, because the purpose of the study was to understand the participants' experiences without statistics.

Research Design

Qualitative methods consist of five research designs: case study, phenomenology, narrative, grounded theory, and ethnography. To examine the research questions in depth, I used a multiple case study. Case study research originates from an interpretive paradigm in which the researcher seeks to answer how and why questions (Singh, 2014). Researchers employing the case study design also introduce suspicions and provide insight into the phenomenon by offering rich descriptions of processes and individuals' experiences that the researcher could not obtain using quantitative data (Yin, 2014). Thus, researchers employ the case study design to explore a phenomenon within the real-life context through in-depth data collection (Singh, 2014; Yin, 2014).

The purpose of a multiple case study is to examine or explore a phenomenon in different environments (Stake, 2006). In the case study inquiry, a case or unit of analysis may be an individual, group, business, or organizational process (Yin, 2014). Multiple case studies enhance the validity and reliability of collected data (Singh, 2014). The multiple case study begins with recognizing what concept or idea binds the cases together, which may be model cases, incidental relationships, or a phenomenon (Stake, 2006).

Considered Qualitative Designs

Additional qualitative research designs I considered using included

phenomenology, ethnography, narrative, and grounded theory. A phenomenology design

focuses on the participants lived experiences with a given phenomenon (Moustakas,

1994). In a phenomenology design, the purpose is to portray the phenomena and the

human experiences, as they appear (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). A phenomenology

design was not germane to this study since I was not seeking a narrative description of

people's lived experiences to analyze patterns and causes of behavior. A

phenomenological design reduces experiences to a universal theme and removes the

participant's personal connection to the experience (Warner, Director, & Goffnett, 2015).

The goal for grounded theory is the discovery of a theory (Walsh et al., 2015).

Researchers employ grounded theory to establish a new theory on a broad conceptual

level (Bourgeault, 2012). Since the focus is not to discover a theory, the grounded theory

design was not relevant to this study.

Narrative research design was not appropriate because I did not focus on the story

or autobiographical reflection of a single person or group regarding the phenomenon.

Narrative researchers focus on an autobiographical or biographical perspective of events

from one person or a group of people (Paschen & Ison, 2014). Narrative research

involves storytelling and personal accounts of human experiences (Bell & Waters, 2014).

Narrative research encompasses telling stories through a reflective autobiography

(Bernard, 2013). An ethnography design was not appropriate for this study since

ethnography researchers seek to explain a cultural group's behavior, shared beliefs,

language, and the experiences of the members over time (Balyer, 2014). Researchers using the ethnography design focus on people and a particular culture from the member's perspective (Compton-Lilly et al., 2014). An ethnography design was not suitable since I focused on a holistic approach. Ethnography portrays the interaction and intermingling of members of a group with each other within a cultural setting (Agar, 2014). The ethnography design is inapplicable for this research study because my goal was to gain an understanding of the core leadership practices used to enhance students' academic achievement, not the group members' interrelations with each other within a particular group.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I established the selection criteria for participants, collected data through face-to-face and focus group interviews, and coded, themed, and analyzed the data. I served as a nonparticipant providing an outside view from an objective lens. As the researcher, I conducted face-to-face interviews and facilitated focus group interviews to explore urban charter middle school leaders' and teachers' experiences regarding the core leadership practices for advancing from a priority school to a focus school designation. Yin (2014) stated that the researcher's role is essential, because the researcher possesses skills such as being a good listener, being flexible, and having the ability to grasp the pertinent issues of the study. During the focus group interviews, I served as a moderator by assisting the participants, encouraging participant interaction, and guiding the conversation (Liamputtong, 2011). Data analysis included the

summarization and presentation of the research findings using ideas and theories from a wide variety of sources.

A limitation of this study was the need to address possible researcher bias, because of my role as a current school superintendent of a charter school district in Southfield, Michigan. The researcher may be apt to rely on their instincts and abilities; thus causing a challenge for the researcher to remain free of biases through the data collection and analysis process (Yin, 2014). Although participants may have known me as the superintendent of Crescent Academy, I included a statement in the letter of invitation to differentiate my role as a student researcher. I have no supervisory relationships with any of the schools or employees intended to participate in the research study. While this research study focused on charter schools in the other school districts serving as the research site, I did not have any affiliation with the participants nor did I have any power over the participants in this study. I mitigated biases by bracketing my knowledge and experiences so that my personal views and perspectives did not affect data collection and interpretation. I mitigated bias by using reflexivity, in which I reflected on his or her actions, reflexive observations, discourses, language, and the world (Cumming-Potvin, 2013). In addition, I used reflective field notes to help monitor researcher biases and prejudiced perspectives (Clancy, 2013). Since biases tend to occur more frequently in a non-participation role, I identified, clarified and monitored biases regarding how they may have shaped data collection and interpretation (Yin, 2014).

I explained to all participants that I would maintain their confidentiality in the study. To hide their identities, I used pseudonym names for the participants and the

schools in which they work to protect the confidentiality of the participants in the study. I securely maintained and locked collected data in a safe place in my home. After 5 years, I will destroy the collected data by deleting information from personal computers and shredding hard copies of transcripts.

Methodology

Research is a process of defining the objective, managing the data, and communicating the findings within established frameworks and existing methodological guidelines (Sreejesh, Mohapatra, & Anusree, 2013). This section consists of a discussion of the selection of participants. Additionally, I provide a discussion of measures to adhere to the established ethical guidelines for conducting research involving human beings.

Participant Selection Logic

The population available within the three urban charter schools included school principals and teachers. The participants consisted of three school principals and one focus group per school comprised of six teachers from three urban charter middle schools in the district serving as the research site for 21 participants. The participants consisted of a purposeful sample based on the following criterion: (a) school principals with a minimum of 3 years of leadership experience and (b) a teacher at an urban charter school that progressed from a priority school to a focus school designation. Thus, the selection process did not target vulnerable populations. I searched the state department of education website to identify urban middle charter schools. A telephone call and letter of permission (See Appendix A) served as the initial contact with school leaders to explain the intent of the study, and requesting permission to perform research.

Upon approval from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I submitted a copy of the IRB approval letter to three school leaders to gain access to the schools and permission to recruit participants. I discussed with the school leaders details to visit the school to introduce myself to school leaders and teachers without interrupting daily workflow processes. In addition to making sure that the interview process works, researchers should establish good connections with the potential participants to ensure they share more of their experiences (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). School principals received a letter of invitation for participating (See Appendix B), and I provided teachers with an invitation to participate (See Appendix C). Participants responded expressing interest in participating in the following ways: (a) email or (b) telephone. Once participants responded expressing interest in participating, I scheduled interviews with the leaders and focus group interviews with teachers.

Purposeful sampling served as the method to select the participants and schools to generate the most information about the successful practices used by leaders in urban charter middle schools to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation. In this study, the use of purposeful sample size allowed me to solicit participants with specific characteristics concerning the study and knowledge of the topic explored (Suri, 2011). Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and the applicability of the findings to the participants' experiences (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). The rationale for purposive sampling is to obtain responses, which can help assure the reliability of the study, from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Selecting participants that are

knowledgeable about the topic adds to the trustworthiness of the study and provides a sense of trustworthiness in the analysis of the data. Participants with experience with the topic help legitimize the study (Garside, 2014).

Three middle school principals and 18 teachers participated in this case study research serving as the purposeful sample population of urban charter schools. Selecting an appropriate sample size is essential for credibility. Stake (2006) stated that a limitation of the benefits of multiple case study includes having either not enough cases or more than 10 cases. The researcher can increase the sample size during data collection as a measure to ensure validity and creditability of the study (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014). The researcher confirms that the contributors have knowledge of the topic when determining the sample size (Elo et al., 2014). One focus group comprised of six teachers from each of the three middle schools represented the larger population of teachers within the school district. Case studies using focus groups render valid results with 6-10 members and a facilitator (Yin, 2014). Focus groups allow researchers to collect data, observe, and record the data from multiple participants at one time through discussion, on a particular topic as group dynamics unfolds (Kitchen, 2013). The qualitative focus group approach uses data from the participants' reflection on shared experiences (Liamputtong, 2011).

According to Suri (2011), a sufficient sample size is the number of individuals needed to achieve data saturation. The researcher achieves data saturation when further collection of additional data does not add any new insights resulting in the research ending the data collection process (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). The researcher may experience trouble in assembling the data and creating themes without

reaching data saturation, which guarantees duplication of categories. Researchers confirm

saturation to ensure the data is accurate and complete because analysis with incomplete

data is difficult (Elo et al. 2014).

Ethical Procedures

Ethical considerations such as maintaining confidentiality and anonymity are an

essential requirement for research. Ethical considerations include collecting data,

interviewing participants, presenting the research findings, and ensuring accuracy when

reporting the research information (Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2013). Before I initiated

the data collection process, I gained IRB approval to conduct research. After receiving

IRB approval, I submitted a copy of the IRB approval letter to school leaders to gain

access to the schools and permission to recruit participants. With any study there is

always ethical concerns; therefore, I took into account that the participants may be

apprehensive about their participation because of fear of any ramifications or reprimands

and assurances. I followed the Belmont Report regarding the use of human beings in

research, and secured letters of consent from the participants. The 1979 Belmont Report

provides the basis for the IRB ethical standards that outline the requirements of informed

consent by research subjects (Thomson et al., 2013).

I solicited participants by contacting school leaders via telephone to discuss the

details to visit the school to introduce myself to school principals and teachers without

interrupting daily workflow processes. Thus, the selection process did not target

vulnerable populations. During my visit to each school, school principals received a letter

of invitation for participating (See Appendix B). I provided teachers with an invitation to

participate (See Appendix C). Participants responded expressing interest in participating in the following ways: (a) via email or (b) telephone. Before commencement of semistructured interviews, I notified participants of the rationale for recording the interview, confidentiality agreement, and their choice to withdraw without penalty via email or telephone. A researcher's methodology and procedures to gather data can inflict risk of harm on the participants (Thomson et al., 2013). There were no incentives for participation. I explained to all participants that they were to maintain their confidentiality in the study. To hide their identities, pseudonym names such as *James* for school leaders and *Amy* for lead teachers in the focus groups. Researchers should ensure the confidentiality of the participants' personal information by stressing that participants will not disclose private information nor will the researcher link the evidence to the participants (Killawi et al., 2014).

In the event of participant reveals personal information such as a student or teachers' name, I deleted this information from my interview transcripts and reflective notes. An adverse event did not occur; therefore, I did not stop the study at the point or notify the Chair of my committee. I did not complete and submit an adverse event notification form to the IRB. I did not seek the counsel of the Chair regarding the appropriate course of action to take. I did not make any needed modifications to the interview protocol. I would then submit the Request for Change in Procedures to Walden's IRB.

I analyzed the collected data, which remained confidential. I used a password-protected computer in my home for storing the collected data for five years. After 5

years, I will destroy the collected data in keeping with the fidelity of the study and confidentiality of the participants in the study.

Instrumentation

As the researcher in this multiple case study, I was the primary data collection instrument conducting face-to-face interviews, facilitating focus group interviews, and reviewing archival school records. I recorded interviews to ensure the accuracy of participants' responses to establish reliability. For case studies, the six data sources can include: (a) interviews, (b) direct observation, (c) participant-observation, (d) documentation, (e) archival records, and (f) physical artifacts (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2014). All questions used during the interview were open-ended and designed to encourage the respondents to share effective leadership practices, processes, and procedures used to guide their school, sustain student achievement, and address the accountability challenges. Open-ended questions allow the participants the flexibility to respond to the questions without limited restrictions (Yin 2014). Researchers use qualitative research to gain insight from the participants' experiences by using open-ended questions (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

The focus group discussion is a qualitative data collection method, in which the researcher uses structured, semistructured, or unstructured interviews (Boateng, 2012). Data collection using focus groups consists of either one technique or a combination of techniques as the only data source or as a supplemental source to enrich data from other sources (O'Neill, 2012). The strength of focus groups is that researchers can modify the topics covered during the sessions (Sagoe, 2012).

I used school district documents including leadership strategies, leadership practices, and school guidelines as the third instrument for data collection. Company documents corroborate evidence from several data sources (Yin, 2014). Thus, the researcher conducting a case study uses a combination of data collection resources such as documentation and interviews (Singh, 2014).

I developed an interview protocol, which guided the interview process (See Appendix D). An interview protocol is a procedural guide that researchers use for directing the interview process (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Interviewers need minimal experience when using a more standardized interview protocol (Stake, 2006).

Procedures for Recruitment and Participation

I submitted an application for Walden University IRB approval. Upon approval from IRB, I submitted a copy of the IRB approval letter to school leaders to gain access to the schools and permission to recruit participants. Building trust between the researcher and the interviewees is significant when relying on interviews for as the secondary data collection instrument (Singh, 2014). To establish a relationship with participants, I discussed with the school leaders details to visit the school to introduce myself to school principals and teachers without interrupting daily workflow processes. While visiting the schools, I clarified the intent of the study and the requirements of the principals and teachers of the urban charter school to participate. School principals received a letter of invitation for participating (See Appendix B). I provided teachers with an invitation to participate (See Appendix C). Participants responded expressing interest in participating in the following ways: (a) face-to-face, (b) email, or (c) telephone.

Procedures for Data Collection

Data collection instruments included document reviews of educator certification policies, school improvement guidelines, accountability guidelines, and student assessment reports, face-to-face interviews, and focus group interviews for 2 weeks at each research site. I conducted in-depth interviews with school principals to discuss school leader's experiences on practices used to advance from a priority school to a focus school to address the accountability challenges of urban charter schools. Qualitative researchers use interviews to gather data about a phenomenon that is unobservable (Stake, 2010).

Once participants respond expressing interest in participating, I scheduled 30 minutes to 1 hour for interviews with school principals at each of the three schools, and informed school principals of the requirement to participate in follow-up interviews for member checking. I followed the established interview protocol. I conducted interviews in the principal's office at each urban charter middle school. If participants preferred another location, I reminded participants of the need for privacy and sought the most private location amenable to the participant. Scheduling interviews longer than 1 hour could become a problem, because individuals have to participate without compensation, whereas an interview with six to 10 well-written questions might take 1 hour or more (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). School principals at each of the three schools signed the consent form at the time of the interview. Before the semistructured interviews, I shared with participants the pertinent information regarding confidentiality, interview recording, and withdrawal options. I explained to all participants that I would maintain their

confidentiality in the study. To hide their identities, I used pseudonym names such as *James* for school leaders. During the interview, I asked open-ended questions (See Appendix F) and recorded the school leaders' responses, which ensured an accurate depiction of their experiences (Yin 2014). In a case study, interviews are one of the richest sources of data that provide researchers with data from a variety of perspectives (Singh, 2014). Furthermore, individuals engage in answering questions related to their life experience to allow the individual and the researcher to gain more insight into the participants' situation (Harper & Cole, 2012). Member checking served as the debriefing process. Participants received a one-page summary of the findings via email.

The second form of data collection consisted of a focus group with six teachers at each of the three schools. The three school principals provided a list of names of the teachers. I selected six teachers to participate in a focus group interview. I used focus groups to interview teachers to gain their perspective on the topic. I followed the established interview protocol. Focus group interviews with six teachers from each of the three schools occurred in a conference at the schools. If participants prefer another location, I reminded participants of the need for privacy and sought the most private location amenable to the participant. The focus group interviews emphasize the interaction among the participants versus the interaction between the participants and the moderator (Carlsen & Glenton, 2011). The use of focus groups permits the researcher to gain awareness about the groups' perspective on the topic of effective leadership practices (Carlsen & Glenton, 2011; Yin, 2014). I scheduled 1 hour for focus group interviews with teachers at each of the three schools, informed teachers of the request to

review my interpretations of their responses for member checking, and the recording of the interviews to ensure the accuracy of their responses. The use of a natural setting, coupled with the fact that the study's participants are not random, in terms of selection makes a case study highly context specific (Merriam 2014 & Yin, 2014). I provided each member of the focus group with the consent form and the opportunity to withdraw without penalty before the interviews begin. I explained to all participants that they would maintain their confidentiality in the study by using pseudonym names such as *Amy* for lead teachers in the focus groups. The focus group participants answered open-ended interview questions regarding their experiences (See Appendix H). Member checking served as the debriefing process (Harper & Cole, 2012). The exit plan included conducting a final meeting via telephone to provide closure and allow the volunteer participates to ask questions related to their role in the research study (Yin, 2014). Member checking served as the debriefing process. Participants received a one-page summary of the findings via email.

I requested school district documents regarding leadership strategies, leadership practices, and school guidelines from the school superintendents of each of the three schools. I reviewed school districts for one day following the completion of the semistructured interviews with the three school principals. Using company documents provides insight into the contextual history and information (Watkins, 2012). Yin (2014) asserted that researchers use company documents such as meeting notes, written reports, and administrative documents in conjunction with other data sources in a case study. I used school district documents to triangulate the collected data from school leaders and

teachers' interview responses to ensure validity. According to Watkins (2012), the key advantage of using documents is they are time efficient and easily accessible. One disadvantage of using documents is the usefulness varies from case study to case study, whereas archival records can be important or only a passing relevance (Yin, 2014).

Data Analysis

In qualitative studies, the researcher typically collects and analyzes data simultaneously (Yin, 2014). The principal research question for this study was as follows: what leadership practices do successful leaders in urban charter middle schools use to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation. The first step of data analysis consisted of coding and theming of the interview transcripts and archival records data. At the second level, I used an analytical technique to identify emerging themes and discrepant data. Data analysis entailed triangulation using face-to-face interviews, focus group interviews, and school district documents to address trustworthiness.

I coded and themed the patterns that emerged from the interview transcripts and school district documents. Coding is identifying short words, phrases or a passage of text from data to help the researcher identify patterns in the research (Tolhurst, 2012). The researcher generates codes directly from the data using inductive codes (Miles et al., 2014). I used NVivo to code textual data to assess the data in a manageable format (Azeem, Salfi & Dogar, 2012). NVivo assists researchers in analyzing text to identify themes in the data using nodes (Franzosi, Doyle, Mcclelland, Putnam Rankin, & Vicari, 2013).

Issues of Trustworthiness

The issues of trustworthiness heading included the description of the processes I implemented to assure the study's reliability and validity. The term *qualitative rigor* is associated with the means for establishing trustworthiness in the findings of a research study (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). For this qualitative multiple case study, I addressed the four components relevant to the trustworthiness of qualitative research (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability.

Credibility

In the qualitative case study, credibility refers to the development of a set of operational measures for concepts used in the study (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011; Singh, 2014). Thomas and Magilvy (2011) identified six strategies to establish validity including triangulation, member checks, prolonged observation, and cross-researcher examination. To ensure the credibility of this case study, I used member checks and triangulation. Stake (2010) defined triangulation as a process that qualitative researchers use to ensure creditability by using multiple sources of evidence. I used multiple methods of data collection including face-to-face interviews, focus group interviews, and school district documents for methodological triangulation. Triangulation consists of using multiple sources of evidence including interviews and company documents (Yin, 2014). The use of a triangulation strategy enables the researcher to create a credible report (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). By using a multiple case study approach, researchers can validate constancy of construct across situations to improve credibility (Singh, 2014). For example, methodological triangulation involves multiple data collection methods and

across different information sources to strengthen the validity, reliability, and generalizability of qualitative research (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011; Wilson, 2014). Further, the data triangulation strategies for this study further included multiple perspectives (e.g. school leader and lead teacher), multiple locations, and a robust literature review (Yin, 2014). Incorporating several qualitative methods (e.g., case studies, focus groups, and interviews) from multiple data sources and settings enriches the data, as well as serves as cross-assessment to ensure credibility and reliability (Mitic, 2012).

Credibility results from efficient documentation of the data collection processes, the data collected, and the researcher's interpretations. Participants received a transcribed copy of the interview transcripts to review and verify the accuracy of my interpretations. Rubin and Rubin (2012) argued that interview transcripts serve as a process to help researchers analyze data and strengthen the validity of the research study. I used member checking or respondent validation to eliminate contradiction, fill in detail, and establish robust connections in data (Singh, 2014). Member checking is a central quality control process researchers use in qualitative research, whereas participants receive the occasion to review the researcher's interpretations of their statements for accuracy (Harper & Cole, 2012). The member check strategy helps to confirm that the researcher interpreted the participants' responses correctly (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2014).

Walker (2012) stated that saturation is the process of gathering data until no new themes emerge. To ensure data saturation, I collected data using multiple sources such as focus group interviews and semistructured interviews. I retrieved school district

documents to verify the accuracy of the interview response to ensure data saturation.

Forms of saturation are theoretical, data saturation and thematic (O'Reilly & Parker,

2012).

Transferability

To address transferability, I provided rich descriptions on of the research

procedure. Researchers develop a case study databank including the interview

transcriptions and the documents, which allows other researchers to follow the research

procedures (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011; Yin, 2014). Transferability refers to other

researcher's ability to follow the research process used in one study to obtain the

understanding of a phenomenon in other contexts through analytical generalization

(Goffin, Raja, Claes, Szwejckzewski, & Martinez, 2012).

Dependability

Reliability refers to the possibility that another independent researcher can follow

a researcher's audit trail to replicate the study and produce the same findings (Ihantola &

Kihn, 2011). To address dependability, I documented research procedures of this case

study to enable others to replicate the process (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011; Singh, 2014). I

used an interview protocol to ensure the dependability of interview data procedures.

According to Jacob and Furgerson (2012), researchers conducting interviews with an

efficient interview protocol can obtain essential data from the participants. Researchers

should detail the research process including data collection, coding, and analysis as

accurately as possible to assess reliability (Goffin et al., 2012).

Participants reviewed a transcribed copy of the interview transcripts to ensure dependability. Member checking entails that the respondents review and verify the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation of the empirical material (Singh, 2014). After an interview, the researcher summarizes information and the participants verify the authenticity representation of what he or she conveyed during the interview (Harper & Cole, 2012).

Confirmability

I employed reflexivity to establish confirmability. I recorded reflective notes after each interview to establish confirmability and eliminate researcher's bias. The reflexive process is exhausting and disruptive, but necessary to create meaning as the researcher employ self-questioning and self-understanding (Cumming-Potvin, 2013). Confirmability or reflexivity allows the researcher to identify all of the contributing opinions to the data and the researcher's voice through the researcher's notes (Cumming-Potvin, 2013; Yin, 2014). Applying reflexivity allows a researcher to discuss his or her role in the study, share the researcher's experiences, and discuss how the researcher's interpretations shaped the discussions (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

I coded and themed collected data for analysis to ensure confirmability. After each interview, I transcribed the interviews using Microsoft Word and stored the transcripts using Evernote software. Participants reviewed the transcripts for member checking. I used NVivo computerized software program to code textual data. NVivo assisted with helping to identify common patterns and emerging themes from the collected data.

Summary

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore practices that leaders of urban charter middle schools have implemented to advance their schools from a priority school to a focus school designation. Chapter 3 detailed the research methodology to answer the research questions. The rationale for the research design covered the rationale using supportive literature. Chapter 3 also provided the systematic procedures for recruitment and participation. The final section of Chapter 3 focused on the instrument, procedures to collect the data and analyze the data. Issues of trustworthiness concluded Chapter 3.

Inclusive in Chapter 4 is an explanation of the sample size, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis processes. I included a detailed account of the planned methodology for this proposed research study. Chapter 4 contains data collected for the study and qualitative analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore practices that leaders of urban charter middle schools have implemented to advance their schools from a priority school to a focus school designation. I used a multiple case study design to answer the research question: What leadership practices do successful leaders in three urban charter middle schools use to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation. To provide students with a quality education, educators wish to understand the complexities of effective leadership practices, education reform, school reform, school choice, and students' activities in the classroom. Research on the perceptions of educational leaders can help identify what leadership practices successful leaders in three urban charter middle schools used to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation. Chapter 4 begins with a brief review of the research question and consists of a description of the setting and demographics, the data collection process, the data analysis processes, and evidence of trustworthiness. I present the findings in relation to the analysis of the leader interviews, focus group interviews, and the review of school district documents. Presentation of the results is by the emerging themes in relation to the research question.

Research Question

This qualitative multiple case study answered to the following research question: What leadership practices do successful leaders in three urban charter middle schools use to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation? From this question, I developed (a) open-ended interview questions to gain insight from the participants about their experiences, and (b) a strategy to select and analyze documents from the three

schools. Qualitative methods require focusing on the role of interpretation, subjectivity, and creativity from the participants' perspective (Knoblauch, 2013). During data collection, the school leaders and teachers provided data pertaining to leadership practices implemented to advance from a priority to a focus school. The selected school district documents provided data for corroboration of the interview responses. Using reflexivity after the first semistructured interview, I noted a need to ask more probing questions to gather detailed information from participants, both in interviews and in the focus group, and to align with the research question.

Settings

The study was a qualitative multiple case study that included three urban charter middle schools. The data I obtained include descriptions of school principals and teachers' experiences with implementing leadership practices to address challenges in schools, and insight from school district documents for corroboration of sources. The scope of this study focused on charter schools operating for 3 or more years that had progressed from a priority school to a focus school designation in Michigan. This study was limited specifically to the middle school educational level and did not include urban traditional public schools, parochial schools, magnet schools, or alternative schools.

Data collection occurred while the school principals were preparing for next year's school budgets and spring break, which may have influenced the participants' experiences at the time of the study. Upon returning from spring break, school leaders become overwhelmed with end-of-the-year reports and budget development for the following school year, whereas teachers are often fixated with administering state

summative assessments and closing up remaining achievement gaps. The traditional end-of-the-year compliance practices and hectic school schedules in the spring placed constraints on the availability of both the leaders and teachers in schools. In addition, I had to be considerate and sensitive to the timing of the request to come into the schools during this time to conduct research and member checking without adding any additional stress to the participants.

Demographics

The urban charter middle schools selected for this study were in Michigan. Each school had advanced from a priority school to a focus school designation on the Michigan Top-to-Bottom List. Two of the urban charter schools acquired authorization for establishment in 1998. The third school received charter authorization in 2006. More than 85% of the students attending the selected charter schools are from low-income areas with educational institutions failing to meet AYP (school principals, personal communication, March 2016).

Kent Academy (pseudonym) has been in operation for 18 years. The school was located in an urban community in Midwest Michigan. The school set in what appeared to have once been an affluent community. The large stately homes built in the late 1940s and early 1950s appeared to be in need of structural improvements. The front of the buildings did not appear inviting from the main street as I drove up. It was difficult to determine if I had arrived at the correct school since there was no school signage on the front of the school building. It was not until I drove down further past the front of the school that I saw a school sign on the fence of the parking lot.

Chippeham Academy (pseudonym) has been open since 1998, which would be 18 years. Chippeham Academy is in a 1970 urban subdivision one block over from a major road. Within this subdivision, I noticed two other schools within a one-to-two block radius before I reached the second participating school. As I entered the school grounds, I saw the sign on the front lawn of the school.

Academy of Eastwood (pseudonym) has been open for 10 years. Academy of Eastwood's location is off a major thoroughfare within a heavily populated business community made up of small businesses and manufacturing industries. Academy of Eastwood is a converted 1970s manufacturing building with an interior structure that provides a maze of hallways leading to the grade level wings of the classrooms. The school sign stands out among other business signs along the business and industry strip.

The population for this case study consisted of three school principals with a minimum of 3 years of leadership experience each, and 16 teachers from three urban charter middle schools in Michigan that advanced from a priority school to a focus school designation. The number of teachers involved from each school ranged from four to six. To identify participants while ensuring confidentiality, I have used pseudonyms such as *James* and *Amy* for school principals and teachers. The selected leaders were school principals with 3 or more years of experience with implementing leadership practices to address challenges in schools to meet the guidelines of NCLB. Alice's leadership experience consists of 18 years as a principal at charter schools, including 6 years at Kent Academy. James has been a school leader since 2009 and the leader at Chippeham Academy for over 5 years. Bob has been a school leader mainly in public schools for 16

years, and the executive director at Academy of Eastwood for 10 months. Each leader

had experience with developing strategies for advancing the priority charter school to a

focus school to achieve AYP within 3 years.

Teachers had experience with implementing leadership practices to address

challenges in student academic achievement. Each teacher worked as a lead teacher

assisting the leaders with the development of core leadership practices to improve the

educational programs. In addition, the teachers participating in the focus group interviews

had experience in leadership positions for training new teachers.

Data Collection

Data collection included recruitment, consent, semistructured interviews, focus

group interviews, school district document review, and follow-up interviews for member

checking. Upon receiving IRB approval number 03-11-16-0038930, I submitted a copy

of the IRB approval letter to three school leaders to gain access to the schools and

permission to recruit participants. The population for this case study consisted of a

purposeful sample of three school principals with a minimum of 3 years of leadership

experience and 16 teachers from three urban charter school middle schools that had

progressed from a priority school to a focus school designation. During the

semistructured interviews with the principals and focus groups, I was able to build a

trusting relationship with the participants. The three principals participating in

semistructured interviews shared insights, which the focus groups confirmed. Because I

was doing continuous coding and no new information emerged by the end of the third

focus group interview, I perceived that data saturation occurred, and data collection ceased.

Recruitment

Upon approval from Walden's IRB, I contacted the school leaders via email and phone to set up a date and time to come into the three participating schools and conduct research. Within a couple of days, I confirmed all my appointments to come into each school and begin my research. To establish a relationship with participants, I discussed with the school leaders details to visit the school to introduce myself to the principals and the teachers without interrupting daily workflow processes. The school principals informed the middle school teachers of my scheduled visit and the reasons for it. While visiting the schools, I clarified the intent of the study and the requirements of the principals and teachers for participation. School principals received a letter of invitation for participating (See Appendix B), and I hand-delivered an invitation to participate to teachers (See Appendix C). The letters of invitation included my contact information, including an e-mail address and phone number. Participants responded to express interest in participating in the following ways: (a) email, or (b) telephone. The participants consisted of three school principals and 16 teachers (4 from Kent Academy, 6 from Chippeham Academy, and 6 from Academy of Eastwood) for 19 participants from three urban charter middle schools in the district serving as the research site. Once participants responded expressing interest in participating, I scheduled interviews with the leaders, and focus group interviews with teachers. Participants signed the consent form at the time of the interview.

Principals' Semistructured Interviews

I conducted in-depth interviews with school principals to discuss school leaders' experiences with practices used to advance from a priority school to a focus school to address the accountability challenges of urban charter schools. Once principals respond expressing interest in participating, I scheduled 1 hour for interviews with school principals at each of the three schools, and informed school principals of the requirement to participate in follow-up interviews for member checking. Two of the principals spent more time with me than I had initially allotted (e.g., Alice's interview lasted 1 1/2 hours and James' interview lasted 2 hours). After the principals had signed the consent form, I read directly from the interview protocol to ensure fidelity of the research and aid in guiding the interview process.

Before the semistructured interviews, I shared with school principals the pertinent information regarding confidentiality, interview recording, and withdrawal options. I explained to all principals that I would maintain their confidentiality in the study. During the interview, I asked open-ended questions (See Appendix F) and recorded the school principals' responses, which ensured an accurate depiction of their experiences. I took hand-written notes during the interviews to help fill in any missing gaps. I conducted interviews in the principal's office or the room designated by the principal at each urban charter middle school. If principals preferred another location, I reminded them of the need for privacy and sought the most private location amenable to the participant. School principals at each of the three schools signed the consent form at the time of the interview. After each of the school leader interviews, I requested copies of school district

documents including leadership strategies, leadership practices, and school guidelines. The school district documents served as the third data instrument for data collection and supporting evidence used in the triangulation of my data analysis.

Kent Academy Principal Interview

The first principal interviewed was Alice of Kent Academy. The first interview lasted approximately 1 1/2 hours. Alice arrived at the resource room and apologized for being late. I explained that I understood the responsibilities facing school leaders at the start of the school morning. Alice explained how hectic the week had been with preparing to close the school doors for spring break and the increased level of student behaviors coming to the office. Alice also discussed the laundry list they faced in preparing for the coming school year once returning from spring break, which included the daunting task of creating the school budget. I experienced Alice as being very open and honest about their experience and practices implemented. Alice explained that it took a lot of work for the school as a whole to move in a positive academic direction and to move from a priority school to a focus school. Alice stated at the end of the interview, "I hope I was able to answer all of your questions". Alice invited me to contact them prior to the school closing for spring break if I needed anything else. After I completed the interview, I provided the Alice with a list of documents that I needed to help me triangulate the data collected. Those documents included. Alice stated that my request for artifacts, policy manuals, training manuals, parent newsletters, school improvement plans, and professional development schedules would be ready upon my return to school to conduct the focus group interviews. I thanked Alice again for her time and proceeded to exit the

resource room. Alice walked me out into the hallway and again assured me all of the documents requested would be ready for pick up upon my return back to the school to conduct the focus group interviews after school hours.

Chippeham Academy Principal Interview

The second principal interviewed was James of Chippeham Academy. As I sat in the school's main office, I began to observe what was occurring in the office, what I saw on the walls in the office, and the interaction and communication between the office staff, teachers, and students. I observed that communication was a key aspect of the culture and climate of the school. Furthermore, I noticed there were many awards and certificates of accomplishments hanging on the wall. What stood out for me was the staff and student Cultural Universal Achievement certificate hanging on the wall, display of all the honor assemblies schedules, and pictures of students and staff on the office counter. James came out to greet me with a big smile and invited me into his office. James explained prior to the start of the interview he was preparing the school budget for the following school year coupled with preparing to close down for spring break. James disclosed the period through the end of the year would be very stressful and busy with budget preparation, end of the year reports, completing state summative and local school assessments.

Prior to the start of the interview, James received a call, which he needed to answer. The interview last longer than expected due to James requiring time to gather his thoughts after receiving the phone call. During the time James was on the phone, I surveyed the school leader's executive office, which was organized. I could tell James

was an instructional leader based on the books about leadership, instruction, data interpretation, professional learning communities, and improving student achievement. There were pictures displayed on the wall in the leader's office of students, staff, and parents participating in different activities over the years. James finished the call and returned to the conference table, and the interview began.

James proceeded to answer my questions, but could not gather his thoughts effectively to finish the sentence. James asked me to cut off the recorder and to allow him a few minutes to gather their thoughts. Once the recorder was off, the James explained that he was experiencing a bad day overall. I told James that I could come back on another day to conduct the interview; however, James preferred to continue the interview. James stated "The important concern is making sure I provide insightful and meaningful information during the interview for the intended research." After a few minutes, the James was ready to proceed with the interview. James answered all of the questions openly and candidly discussed the resources and training positively impacting student achievement throughout the interview. James shared information about the practices and strategies the staff used to improve student academic achievement, the importance of parent involvement, and communicating the mission and the vision of the school with all stakeholders. At the end of the interview, I thanked James for taking time out of his busy schedule to participate in the interview. James reminded me of the spring break schedule and encouraged me to follow up before the end of the week if I need additional information.

Academy of Eastwood Principal Interview

The third school leader interview with Bob of Academy of Eastwood occurred on a scheduled half day, allowing me to complete the semistructured interview and the focus group interview within the same day. I met with Bob during the morning, and the interview lasted 1 hour. During the interview, Bob shared prior business experience to expound on some of the practices and strategies used to move from a priority school to a focus school. Bob emphasized that he had only been with the school for 10 months and wanted to continue to follow the established programs at least until the end of the year. Bob added some practices and beliefs needed revising such as practices to demonstrate having more faith in the students. My observation was that Bob has a passion for the students' learning because he always smiled when talking about the students and ensuring their success. Throughout the interview, Bob stated "I apologize for talking so much, but I want to share how faith in the students significantly changed the teachers' attitudes coupled with staying focused on the academic goals and strategies". At the end of the interview, Bob offered me a quiet room away from the classrooms to work in while I waited for the teachers participating in the focus group. While waiting for the focus group, I wrote my reflective notes and transcribed Bob's interview.

Focus Group Interviews

The second form of data collection consisted of focus group interviews. The three school principals designated the focus group interview date and time and provided a list of names of the teachers who volunteered to participate. The study included the intent to conduct focus group interviews with six teachers from each of the schools. At one school,

only four of the volunteering teachers were available to participate because of prior

obligations as afterschool mentors. Before the focus group interviews, I shared with

participants the pertinent information regarding confidentiality, interview recording, and

withdrawal options. I explained to all participants that I would maintain their

confidentiality in the study.

During the focus group interviews, I asked open-ended questions (See Appendix

F) and recorded the teachers' responses, which ensured an accurate depiction of their

experiences. I followed the established focus group interview protocol. Focus group

interviews with teachers from each of the three schools occurred in a conference room at

the schools. I scheduled 1 hour for focus group interviews with teachers at each of the

three schools, informed teachers of the request to review my interpretations of their

responses for member checking, and the recording of the focus group interviews to

ensure the accuracy of their responses. I provided each member of the focus group with

the consent form and the opportunity to withdraw without penalty before the interviews

begin.

Kent Academy Focus Group Interview

The first focus group interviewed was at Kent Academy, which four teachers

participated. While I was signing in on the clipboard in the main office, one of the

teachers standing behind the counter greeted and acknowledged me. The teacher who was

one of the focus group participants informed me the group would use the resource room.

The teacher escorted me to the resource room. After a few minutes, the participating

teachers entered the resource room. The teachers congratulated me, told me my research

was interesting and needed because so many schools are looking for a plan to improve

student achievement. The teachers were very professional and showed a great deal of

respect for each other. They were very complimentary of each other and the support they

provided to one another in the academic endeavor and pursuit of the school goal.

During the interview, the teachers shared strategies and procedures they used to

improve student achievement. As each teacher answered the questions, other participants

would transition in and expand the previous participant comment to ensure I gained an in-

depth understanding of the strategies or practices discussed. I noted the participants

would say to the member expounding on a particular response "yes, thank you". I noted

the synergy of the group and the respect they had for one another. According to Belzile

and Öberg (2012), group synergy in a focus group may generate more views and answers

from individuals. Group synergy can stimulate participants to share and compare

processes and experiences (Acocella, 2012). They all expressed pride in their

accomplishments and gladly shared with me the practices for professional development

used to help move the school from a priority school to a focus school. The empathy and

compassion I felt in the room were heartwarming as I listened to the teachers talk about

the steps and measures used to move from a focus school to a priority school.

After the focus group interview, I thanked the teachers for taking time out of their

busy schedules to meet with me. I told the focus group members I would send the

transcript of the interview for review as a part of the follow-up interviews and member

checking. As I was preparing to leave, the school leader came into the resource room

with all of the requested documents. Again, I thanked the Alice for her time and

willingness to participate in my study, and I told Alice I would be in contact with her to conduct a follow-up interview and member checking.

Chippeham Academy Focus Group Interview

The second focus group interviewed was Chippeham Academy in which six teachers participated. I met with the focus group in the teachers' lounge at 7:00 a.m. prior to the start of school due to the time constraints of the teachers' schedule. The interview took 1 hour and provided me an in-depth perception of the measures they used to become a focus school. The participants' demeanor was very professional, whereas they all exhibited respect for each other by allowing other members complete their response before answering the question. If they wanted to expound on another participant's comments, they would credit their colleague by saying "just to expound on what my colleague said…" I felt the willingness and the pride the teachers took in working and collaborating with one another on the practices and strategies used to move from a priority school to a focus school. I felt a sense of community between the teacher and mutual respect as professionals. The interview was very serene and positive in regarding the amount of work required to improve students' academic success. Based on the feedback during the interview, I gathered that the teachers believed academic failure was not on the shoulders of any one particular teacher but the responsibility of teachers as a group.

Academy of Eastwood Focus Group Interview

The third focus group interviewed was Academy of Eastwood, which consisted of six teachers. At the end of the half-day school schedule, I met with the teachers after their

lunch and prior to their scheduled professional development session. We met in a large

conference room that contained several smaller conference tables. The teachers stated

they felt honored to be a part of my study and were impressed with my research topic.

The Academy of Eastwood focus group lacked professionalism I witnessed in the other

two settings. Even though I explained the procedures for the focus group, I had to remind

one teacher to be mindful of the other participants attempting to answer the questions and

the guidelines initially discussed prior to the interview. I noticed two of the teachers in

the group opted not to give an answer to certain questions. Although the group

complained about the work required for improving the school culture and student

academic achievement, overall the group agreed the practices, research-based strategies,

and professional development training each week were a benefit for advancing from a

focus school to a priority school. At the end of the interview, the group said "thanks to

me for allowing the group to vent". I acknowledged the statement by smiling and

remaining professional in my role as an unbiased researcher. I reminded the teachers of

the follow-up interviews and member checking, and send the transcripts within 2 days

after the interview.

School District Document Review

The third form of data collection was the review of school district documents

regarding leadership strategies, leadership practices, and school guidelines from the

school superintendents of each of the three schools. I reviewed school districts'

documents including student-parent handbooks, employee handbooks, leadership policies

manuals, school newsletters, annual education reports, and school improvement plans

following the completion of the semistructured interviews with the three school principals. The school district documents related to the leadership strategies, leadership practices, and school guidelines to implement Leithwood and Riehl's core leadership practices.

Data Collection Summary

The data collection methods and protocols presented in Chapter 3 guided data collection for this study, in which I relied on my instincts and abilities such as interpersonal and professional skills and trustworthiness as well as the semi-structured interview questions. I attempted to maintain an unbiased position throughout data collection and a level of professionalism as a student researcher while expressing understanding and compassion. I mitigated biases by bracketing my knowledge and experiences using reflexivity so that my personal views and perspectives did not affect data collection and interpretation. Reflexivity consists of the researcher reflecting on his or her actions, reflexive observations, discourses, language, and the world (Cumming-Potvin, 2013). Data collection included listening to the experiences of participants who have successfully improved student learning, program effectiveness, and school success by using leadership development and a systematic approach, guided by interview questions.

I was able to follow the data collection process outlined in Chapter 3 without encountering any unusual circumstances occurred during data collection. Immediately after conducting the each interview with the school principals and focus groups, I returned to my car and wrote reflective notes to help aid in analyzing the data results. The

reflective notes helped me connect some of the salient points of the interviews in order to provide the reader with a clear understanding of the setting, the participants, the culture, and climate from the my perception. After transcribing interviews, I e-mailed the transcriptions to the school principals and focus group teachers for review of my interpretations of their responses. Because the school was preparing to close for spring break, member checking occurred immediately after transcribing the interview. The transcription of the first principal's interview served as the initial point for coding and analyzing subsequent data. Throughout the data collection process, the participants shared experiences and my reflexivity and careful data analysis process led to the development of five major themes and five subthemes. Five main themes emerged from all collected data: (a) leadership practices, (b) professional development, (c) student achievement, (d) parent involvement, and (e) redesigning the school.

Data Analysis

Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) suggested a four-step strategy to interpretive analysis for qualitative researchers to analyze collected data. The four steps are: (a) familiarization, (b) data condensation, (c) data display, and (d) drawing and verifying conclusions. In addition, Miles et al. stated data analysis overlaps with data collection, which allows researchers to take advantage of flexible data collection. Using Miles et al.'s interpretive analysis approach to create a set of analytic manipulations for measuring data from participant interviews, five main themes emerged from the data. In this section, I presented the interpretation methods, the keywords and codes that emerged from the data, and the themes that evolved from the codes. To emphasize the importance

of the codes and themes, I provided quotations from the participants' interviews and focus group interviews. Descriptions of the material outlined in the school district documents provided data to corroborate the codes and themes from the participants' responses. The data analysis section concludes with a brief discussion of discrepancies and transitions into the section on the trustworthiness of the study. Presentation of the results is by the emerging themes in relation to the research question.

Methods of Analysis

I used Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) four-step strategy to interpretive analysis, reflexivity, and NVivo10 qualitative data software for coding data and analyzing emerging themes. In addition, I mitigated biases by bracketing my knowledge and experiences so that my personal views and perspectives did not affect data collection and interpretation. Tufford and Newman (2012) suggested using bracketing to hold researchers' prior knowledge or belief about the phenomena under study in suspension to perceive the phenomenon more clearly. Analysis began during the first semistructured interview and continued throughout data collection. After completion of data collection, I coded and analyzed data to interpret the themes and patterns drawing conclusions to answer the research question to arrive at the five main themes and five subthemes. The following is the four-step strategy consisting of familiarization, data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions used for my data analysis process.

Familiarization. To incorporate familiarization, I carefully listened to each individual school principal during the semistructured interviews. Interpreting data by bracketing my own experiences and knowledge began while conducting the interviews. I

took notes, which consisted of my impressions, notable body language, and the tone of the participants during the interview sessions. After each semistructured interview and focus group interview, I recorded reflective notes in a journal and later transcribe the notes to use when I reviewed the transcripts.

Transcription of the interviews into a Microsoft Word document occurred immediately following the interviews and focus group interviews. Participants received an e-mailed copy of their transcripts for review of my interpretations and clarifications to ensure reliability and validity. Although data saturation occurred during the analysis of the initial interviews and focus group interviews, I requested a date and time to conduct the follow-up interviews for member checking to ensure data saturation. Member checking consisted of telephone interviews because the schools were not in sessions during spring break. Although I conducted eight follow-up interviews, the participants did not elaborate to add additional information in which the participants reiterated the information from the first interview. Six teachers responded via e-mail stating "the interpretations were accurate, and I have no additional comments". Data analysis commenced and development of the emerging themes solidified after completion of the data collection.

Data condensation. According to Miles et al. (2014), data condensation is a method of discovery in which the researcher read and reflects on the core content of the collected data to determine the codes by using a two-cycle process. Data coding in the first cycle consisted of reading the first school principal's interview transcript and identifying keywords and phrases followed by the review of the first school's focus group

transcript for similarity and differences. I conducted the review by hand to assist me with preparing the documents for vivo coding using NVivo11 software. I uploaded the data into NVivo11™ for coding textual data in a manageable format. Coding of the data consisted of identifying keywords and phrases to identify emerging themes. The first step in the analysis was to identify the 100 most frequently used terms by conducting a word search. I reviewed the terms to identify the keywords and stem word phrases that most frequently reoccurred.

For the second cycle of data condensation, I employed a two-level process. The first level consisted of grouping the collected keywords from principals' interview and focus group interview responses for themes relating to the research question explored in this study. Table 1 shows the keywords and stem word phrases that most frequently reoccurred. I refined the word search to review phrases and sentences using the 34 most frequently used keywords, which became the codes. For example, keywords *school* and *students* became code *school students* and keywords *effective, leadership, and practices* became code *effective leadership practices*.

Table 1

Most Frequently Used Keywords in Interview and Focus Groups

Keywords	Frequency Count
school	165
students	120
training	88
teachers	70
vision	64
leader	52
reading	52
achievement	49
parents	41
classroom	38
effective	38
practices	38
leadership	30
learning	25
mission	25
professional	22
programs	21
support	17
academic	16
skills	16
attendance	15
information	15
practice	15
behavior	14
communicate	14
curriculum	14
writing	14
climate	12
classrooms	10
development	10
lesson	9
meetings	9
scores	9
successful	9

At the second level, I identified emerging themes from the review of school district documents by marking the significant data relating to the emerging codes by hand. After I reviewed the school guidelines provided by the each principal, I continued the analysis using Microsoft Excel to construct a list of key terms for coding and theming in Table 2.

Table 2

Coding of School District Documents

School District Document	Key Codes	Theme
Student-parent handbooks	vision statement, parent engagement, collaborating for success, student attendance, academic achievement, academic skills, student behaviors, parents' education, socioeconomic status, test scores	Collaborative practices, Parent involvement, Student assessment, Student academic achievement, Setting direction
Employee handbooks	professional development, continuing education, instructional flexibility	Professional development, Collaborative practices, Student academic achievement
Leadership policies manuals	learning environment, school culture, classroom management, communication, stakeholders, student success, solicit feedback	Leadership practices, Communication with stakeholders, Collaborative practices
School newsletters	vision statement, parent meetings, communication, stakeholders	Setting direction, Communication with stakeholders, Parental involvement
Annual education reports	student testing, standardize test, MEAP score, M-Step data, Top-to-Bottom Listing, academic achievement, adequate yearly progress	Student academic achievement, Student assessment, Redesigning the school
School improvement plan	vision statement, student academic achievement, communicate, stakeholders, instructional staff, student learning outcomes, collaborative, student learning needs, formative and summative assessments, research-based practices, technology	Student academic achievement, Student assessment, Collaborative practices, communication with stakeholders, Setting direction, Redesigning the school

Data display. The next step of the interpretive analysis process was data display. Data display is an organized assembly of the information such as keywords, codes, and themes. Miles et al. (2014) proposed five primary purposes of data display, which include exploration, description, order data collection, explanation, and prediction of results. For this study, I used data display for description, order data collection, and prediction of results. Table 3 shows the frequency of the emergent themes from the school principals' interview responses, and Table 4 shows the frequency of the emergent themes from the focus groups interview responses.

Table 3

Emergent Themes and Subthemes form Coding Principals' Interviews

Themes	Number of Participants	Number of Responses
Leadership Practices	3	14
Collaborative Leadership	3	6
Communication with Stakeholders	2	6
Setting Direction	3	5
Student Academic Achievement	3	13
Assessment of Student Progress	3	4
Contributing Factors	3	11
Professional Development	3	12
Redesigning the School	3	9
Parental Involvement	1	2
Total	3	82

Table 4

Emergent Themes and Subthemes from Coding Focus Group Interviews

Themes	# of Focus Groups	# of Responses
Professional Development	3	29
Leadership Practices	3	28
Collaborative Leadership	3	15
Communication with Stakeholders	3	11
Setting Direction	3	18
Student Academic Achievement	3	18
Assessment of Student Progress	3	10
Contributing Factors	3	22
Parental Involvement	3	12
Redesigning the School	3	9
Total	3	172

Drawing and verifying conclusions. The final step consisted of analysis of the

data display for prediction of results to draw and verify conclusions. Researchers may use

the data display to draw conclusions regarding the issue and participants' perspectives to

enhance the literature on the phenomenon (Miles et al., 2014). The explanation of the

findings relating to the conceptual framework and literature are in the Interpretation of

the Findings section.

Themes

Five main themes emerged from all collected data: (a) leadership practices, (b)

professional development, (c) student achievement, (d) parent involvement, and (e)

redesigning the school. Additionally, three subthemes emerged from the leadership

theme, and two subthemes emerged from the main theme student academic achievement.

I provide a brief description of the four main themes in this section. The first theme

includes the fundamental aspects of leadership practices that the principals used to advance from a priority to a focus school. The second theme represents the expertise the participants believed they needed to achieve their goals. The third theme indicates the importance of improving student academic achievement to meet education reform guidelines. The fourth showed the significance of all stakeholders in the involvement of education for student academic achievement. The fifth and last theme provided relevant information regarding the principals and teachers' beliefs and significance of redesigning the school culture to improve student academic achievement. The presentation of findings is by the emerging themes and subthemes in relation to the research question are in the Results section.

Leadership practices. The first theme focused on the identification of the core leadership practices implemented by the principals. During the interviews, the teachers shared principals were accessible and visible to the staff for guidance and direction within the urban charter school environment. A review and analysis of school district documents included leadership policies manuals, and new leader training manuals and employee handbooks. Further reviews included professional development books focused specifically on leadership and strategies.

Professional development. This theme focused on the identification of the skills and training principals and teachers believed that would assist teachers with providing quality classroom instruction. The school principals shared that they employ professional development to support and improve the teaching and learning practices of their teachers. Teachers shared information regarding the focus specific training used to arm teachers

with the best practices of teaching and learning and the benefits in helping the teachers

obtain the achievement goals. A review of the employee handbooks focused and

teamwork and promoted working together as a team to reach a common goal, within the

first chapter of the school employee handbook. The teachers expressed in their responses

that the various professional development trainings were a benefit for enhancing their

knowledge. Teachers shared information regarding the focus specific training used to arm

teachers with the best practices of teaching and learning and the benefits in helping the

teachers obtain the achievement goals.

Student academic achievement. The third theme emerged as the participants

answered each interview question. The principals and teachers agreed student

achievement is a priority in their schools. In addition, the school principals confirmed

that student achievement is a constant central focus that drives the practices of teaching

and learning in the classrooms. Student academic achievement is an essential component

for meeting the education reform guidelines. School principals and teachers provided data

on how classroom instruction and curriculum links to student achievement. Teachers

discussed the specific support to improve and maintain student achievement throughout

the school year and reflected on the support in their responses.

Parental involvement. Parental involvement emerged as the fourth theme during

the semistructured interviews, focus group interviews, and document review. School

principals and teachers emphasized that parent involvement was essential to their schools

reaching their goals. As I waited for Alice to arrive to resource room across from the

main office for the interview, I used the time to reflect on the setting in an effort to gain a

sense of the culture and climate of the school. While sitting in the resource room clearly

set up for parent use, my assessment of the school climate and culture was, parents play a

vital role in the school community. I observed a dedicated a computer area for parents in

the room in the resource room. There was a typed sign above the computer area stating,

"The computer on the table is a resource for parents. So that everyone has a chance to use

it, please limit your time to 30 minutes. Thank you". For example, Kent Academy

provided parents with a bookcase filled with a host of literature in the resource room.

Some of the books in the bookcase focused on how to help parents deal with their child's

behavior, and how to build a successful family unit. The room and the resources located

in the room served as evidence that the school wants parents to be involved in the school

community and the schools interest in their parents own professional growth and

enhancement.

Redesigning the school. The fifth and final theme that emerged was redesigning

the school. Principals emphasized the importance of developing strategies to redesign the

school for school improvement and increasing student academic achievement. The

teachers concurred with the principals that redesigning the school would be beneficial for

continuous improvement of student academic.

Discrepant Cases and Non-Confirming Data

The participants shared experiences and perspectives to provide insight into the

core leadership practices implemented to advance from a priority to a focus school. The

principals had discrepancies in their responses. For example, Alice described having

teachers and support staff that have been at Kent Academy since the school opened as an

attribute for success, she also stated those individuals that have been with Kent Academy a significant amount of time cannot adjust to the changes and cannot grow. Although James expressed that Chippeham Academy has evolved over time, James stated that redesigning the organization is a challenge when there is a decrease in funding. Furthermore, Bob stated "I believe the leadership practices established by the authorizers for the Academy of Eastwood has been best practices, but I believe the school requires new practices for success".

The second set of discrepancies emerged during the analysis of the school leaders and focus group interviews for consistency of themes. For example, Alice stated "We get into the effectiveness of the research-based programs, which are highly effective, based on how the teachers implement and use them in the classroom setting". There was a consensus among three of the teachers who agreed with Alice on the effectiveness of the research-based programs and implemented leadership practices. "I say the programs and practices are highly effective because of implementation is across every classroom, whereas we all on the same accord with moving those students forward in those deficit areas they need assistance in" Alex stated. In constrast, Amy felt the research-based programs were moderately effective because of the difficulty to implement all of the practices.

Furthermore, Bob said "I have been very effective at employing the established procedures and making sure that the staff follows the procedures with fidelity". In contrast, several of the teachers expressed mixed sentiments regarding the communication of the vision for setting direction and professional development offered

for enhancing the teachers' skills. For example, Blake said "The staff is talking about the vision, but somewhere in between we forgot that students need leadership to tell them other than their teacher". Blaine expressed having a new administrator that present a different vision and ideas annually creates a challenge for teachers to meet expectations. Bailey added "We do have a lot of practices implemented and frequently changed; therefore, many of professional development programs are pointless when we could be implementing these strategies to improve student achievement". Blaire expounded on Bailey's data by sharing "I have asked for professional development for the past three years on smart board training, which I have not received. The use of a smart board could increase the student climate in my classroom as well". Beverly agreed that a lack of follow-up exists regarding the request for professional development and feedback regarding completed professional development programs. Within the theme of Professional Development, many of the teachers at Academy of Eastwood expressed the professional development programs were effective for improving instructional practices in the classroom and student achievement. Bentley mentioned "The curriculum crafter training was effective for me but ineffective for others because some teachers do not use the program". Blaine and Blaire describe the IReady training that specific program as being effective because using IReady inside of our classroom and the parents can use IReady at home on their personal computers for their children. The next section consists of the evidence of trustworthiness of the information discovered in this study, which supports adding to the gap in knowledge by exploring the experiences and perspectives of the principals and teachers.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Data analysis included triangulation of responses to the research question from semistructured interviews with three school principals, focus group interviews with 16 teachers, and school district document review to enhance reliability and validity of the collected data. Trustworthiness encompasses the researcher accurately representing the participants' experiences (El Hussein, Jakubec, & Osuji, 2015). To achieve trustworthiness, researchers analyze data based on the concepts of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Hassel, Andersson, Inga-Lill Koinberg, & Wennström, 2016).

Credibility

To ensure the credibility of this case study, I used member checks and triangulation. I used multiple methods of data collection including face-to-face interviews, focus group interviews, and school district documents for methodological triangulation. Participants received a transcribed copy of the interview transcripts to review and verify the accuracy of my interpretations. I used member checking or respondent validation to eliminate contradiction, fill in detail, and establish robust connections in data. I triangulated the results of the interview responses, focus group response, and school document review to evaluate consistency and credibility. To ensure data saturation, I collected data using multiple sources such as focus group interviews and semistructured interviews. I retrieved school district documents to verify the accuracy of the interview response to ensure data saturation.

Transferability

To address transferability, I provided rich descriptions of the research procedure. Additional measures included using rich, thick descriptions to convey findings and reporting negative and discrepant information to satisfy transferability. I employed measures to clarify research bias by providing my experience with the phenomenon.

Dependability

To address dependability, I documented research procedures of this case study to enable others to replicate the process. I used an interview protocol to ensure the dependability of interview data procedures. Participants reviewed a transcribed copy of the interview transcripts to ensure dependability.

Confirmability

I employed reflexivity to establish confirmability. I recorded reflective notes after each interview to establish confirmability and eliminate researcher's bias. After each interview, I transcribed the interviews using Microsoft Word and stored the transcripts using Evernote software. Participants reviewed the transcripts for member checking. I used NVivo computerized software program to code textual data.

<div align="center">

Results of Analysis

</div>

The foundation of the analysis was the research question for this study: What leadership practices do successful leaders in three urban charter middle schools use to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation. Presentation of the results is by the emerging themes in relation to the research question. The five main themes gathered from the principal interview response, teacher focus group interviews,

and school district documents were leadership practices, professional development, student achievement, parent involvement, and redesigning the school. Additionally, three subthemes emerged from the leadership theme including collaborative practices, communication with stakeholders, and setting direction. The two subthemes that emerged from the main of theme student academic achievement were contributing factors and student assessment. I will review the findings for each of the five main themes and the subthemes.

Theme 1: Leadership Practices

Evidence of the core leadership practices used to improve student achievement manifested throughout the participants' responses. The leadership policy manuals from all schools provided information regarding leadership practices and expectations for experienced leaders and new leaders. Some of the reoccurring leadership practices mentioned were setting direction, communication through collaborative practices, and redesigning the school culture for success. For example, Alice stated "I focus on ensuring teachers have the professional development needed to address the deficit areas and giving the teachers the tools needed to be success". James employs employee empowerment practices through staff meetings, leadership teams, teachers, and school improvement chairs.

The school principals voiced that setting direction for the school constitutes clearly communicating to the stakeholders the vision of the school, which should be transparent. The principals use various forms of communication such as e-notes, e-mails, newsletters, and staff meetings. Alisa shared that Alice focuses on effective

communication and an open door policy in which the leader is always accessible to the

staff. Amy added "The staff gets weekly notes that restate the school's vision". Jessica

mentioned that Chippeham Academy staff and teachers have a staff meeting during the

summer to discuss the academic results from the current academic year and the goals for

the new academic year prior to the students returning in September. During the focus

group interview with Academy of Eastwood, Bailey shared "Preparation over the summer

when we discuss what the school climate should be and what it should look like is the

strategy Bob implemented to set the direction for school goals".

School principals used their leadership practices to develop people by providing

teachers with focus specific training to improve the teachers' teaching and learning skills.

Alice also implemented a teacher mentorship program for with less than 5 years of

experience. The third core leadership practice revealed was redesigning the school for

school improvement based on the NCLB guidelines. "As a new executive director at

Academy of Eastwood, the first practice I implemented was to actively listen to the needs

of the staff, participate in research-based activities and made data driven decisions" Bob

stated. Each principal implemented leadership practices to move from a priority school to

a focus school designation. Further analysis consists of reviewing the subthemes related

to leadership practices.

Collaborative practices. **Collaborative practices**. The results of this study

revealed that the participants' responses indicated that the collaborative practices were

the most significant aspect of leadership in the school environment. Teachers used

examples throughout the interview of how communication is horizontal and vertical in

the school, whereas principals communicate from a top-down structure while teachers communicate with each other at the same level. According to Janet, James meets with the staff a couple of times a year to find out how the school year is going, where we need more support, what training we feel we need to better improve our practice. Alisa stated "I think collaborative practices also helps us as lead teachers to better communicate with our teams that not only are we relaying to them what is expected of them but the same thing that is expected of them is also expected of us. Alex added "Communication and collaborative practices are fundamental when you realize at 10:00 p.m. you forgot something and you can contact a team member, in turn you have a sense of comfort knowing that they're working on the same agenda and goal". My review of the employee handbooks revealed teamwork was a recommended aspect for reaching a common goal within the first chapter.

The support includes professional learning communities (PLCs). Two of the schools conduct PLCs after school hours or during the summer to prepare for the next calendar school year. Professional learning communities, which are an open forum, allows teachers to discuss research-based practices, topics based on their specific interest and disciplines, and explore students' work to gain insight into the progress of students' learning (Christiansen & Robey, 2015). James shared that Chippeham Academy has PLC teams, which analyze data and discuss what they want to talk about and learn. For instance, "I have held this year a professional development program called Chippeham Academy University through the schools Conquerors, which is a 6-8 week program for new teachers where we meet once or twice a week to talk about teachers' concerns

regarding instructional practices" James said. Jessica's response "We have PLC's which has helped give our teachers the time they need to have discussions about those things that are relevant to teaching". Bob also shared "Academy of Eastwood staff participates in PLCs, which are very important for us". Using the information from the schools' newsletters, I found the leaders scheduled PLCs throughout the school year.

Communication with stakeholders. The results of this study revealed communication with stakeholders is relevant for ensuring the students to achieve their academic goals. School principals expressed the importance of communicating the roles stakeholders will play in executing the plan of improvement. To achieve goals, school leaders promote healthy relationships through extended school community and partnerships (Lingam & Lingam, 2015). Principals discussed the importance of regularly updating stakeholders on the overall status of student achievement and the effective practices used to reach their goals.

Principals discussed their specific procedures and the sources used to communicate the vision and student achievement with parents. Forms of communication with stakeholders including school administrators, teachers, parents, and students are by using newsletters, staff meetings, shared annual academic results, and on the crest of the school uniform. "One meeting is our parent Recognizing Our Ability to Revolutionize (ROAR) meetings, which we basically give all the parents all the information that we think parents need to know to make their child successful" Alice stated. Amy shared Kent Academy provides parent newsletters that the students take home monthly to inform the parents of the scheduled events and the importance of the students meeting the academic

goals. Jamie said "We discuss various ways to communicate the vision to the parents, students, and staff". Jessica added "The parents are invited in prior to the start of school, and the leader discusses the vision and the mission with the parents as well the expectations of the school". Janet concurred "During parent conferences, the leader encourages us, to work the vision and mission of the school into conferences".

I reviewed and analyzed the school newsletters, electronic school newsletters, school flyers, and letters from the school leaders. All of the schools use their newsletters as a source of communication. A review of the online school newsletters confirmed evidence of transparent communication available to all stakeholders. The schools used their school websites to communicate to a broader population of community stakeholders. Janet expressed "Teachers, students and parents, as well as other stakeholders, have to have those opportunities in the school to work together towards a common gold". In addition, the school principals and teachers use the school newsletters to communicate with stakeholders with information about schools achievement gains over the years, the targeted achievement goals, the school vision statement, and opportunities for parents to participate in the school activities and functions within the schools.

Setting direction. The school principals provided instances of the leadership practices they used to set the direction of the school and clearly communicate the vision of the school. "One of the most important things for the faculty and the students is to understand the direction of the school" Alice stated. The school principals voiced that the vision of the school need to be transparent and clearly communicated to the stakeholders.

James shared his staff usually develop the vision statement as a team, whereas Bob has followed the established practices of the school's authorizers.

The school principals provided examples of how they communicate the vision to all the stakeholders, as well as practices used to incorporate the vision into the daily school environment. Teachers from each urban charter middle school shared the staff display the vision statement in the classrooms and hallways by using signs, banners, and posters. Aaron noted "We also physically embody the mission and the statement in our classrooms and the hallway". "In addition to the weekly notes as leads, Alice gives us e-notes to effectively communicate the vision" Alex added. Jo shared "Our vision is communicated on our letterhead and all communications that go home to parents and the community by embroidering our student's uniforms even have a small part of the vision *changing the future* on their uniform shirts". Jessica stated "The vision is presented to all of the staff and discussed at that time to ensure we are all focus on the same goals prior to the start of school". "During morning announcements, the school leader discusses the vision and mission over the intercom" Jill mentioned. Jamie and Janet agreed that the school's vision statement is an aspect of the daily culture for Chippeham Academy. Bob shared "We have a school climate committee to set the tone for the Academy of Eastwood".

The participants shared that setting direction by establishing a positive school culture is a fundamental aspect for success. Alice stated she focused on the culture and climate of the academy to ensure teacher and student success. The role of instructional leader for teachers entails and is acknowledged by school leaders as life-long learning

(O'Donovan, 2015). The participants' sentiments regarding school culture were consistent with previous researchers' perspectives. "I believe that culture and climate begin with the head of the school and this practice is one that is practiced throughout the school each day" Jean shared.

I reviewed and analyzed documents promoting the vision of the school. The review included the schools handbooks, the school improvement plan, the annual education reports, the schools transitions plans, and the school newsletters. The vision statement appeared within in the first couple of pages of all of the schools handbooks, annual education reports, school transitions plans and the front of the school newsletters. Further reviews of the vision statements revealed that the schools use a host of marketing materials to reinforce the vision of their schools. The marketing materials containing the vision of the school included, school stationery, the school website, marketing materials such as pencils, hats, book bags, bumper stickers and a host of clothing items. A close assessment and review of the schools handbooks educational achievement documents and marketing materials collaborated that the focus of the school and the importance of setting direction for success.

Theme 2: Professional Development

Analysis of the principals' interview responses, focus groups responses, and documents revealed that leaders and teachers valued professional development. The school principals shared that they employed professional development to support and improve the teachers' learning and teaching practices. According to Alice, professional learning and professional development are important for the success of students and

teachers. The teachers mentioned two levels of professional support as leadership

practices employ by the principals such as providing provisions to ensure the success of

new teachers and the success of the school. Effective professional development activities

should align with the needs of the teacher and the school (Bayar, 2014). For example,

Amy mentioned "We have a consulting company to enhance our instruction in Math and

guides for reading, science, and social studies".

The school principals provided content and non-content teachers with specified

training to improve further their instructional practice and increase student achievement.

Jean noted that other training provided focus on our teachers with specializations in art,

music, gym, computers, and Spanish. The school leaders also provided a list of outside

workshops available to teachers teaching the following specials art, gym, music,

computers, and Spanish to support these teachers in teaching and learning in the

classroom. James stated "We have had Conquerors, which has been our focus over the

years, and Success for All training which is a reading program that we have". Jessica

concurred "All of our new teachers have been involved in Conquerors training, which is

something our school leader has set up here, to ensure that all new teachers in our school

can be successful".

The school principals purchased equipment and resources to support teaching and

learning in the classroom. For example, James shared that the teachers at Chippenham

Academy received training in technology equipment. Jo stated "We have received in

technology and how to use technology such as smart boards in our classrooms".

According to Jean, "The leader has worked hard to create a climate and culture of being

lifelong learners and garnering knowledge from books and the people you work with. In turn, this practice has become common in our classrooms where our students are learning from each other as well as from the books and resources in all of our classrooms". Jamie expounded on Jean's reply "Each year we are required to read four to five professional books for discussions. James reads the same books right along with us and poses questions from the readings to stimulate professional discussions through emails". "To elaborate on what Jamie said, James is not just asking teachers to read a bunch of books over the school year, and this is important because the leader is truly a part of the professional growth and improvement process and serves as the model" Jo stated.

Beverly at Academy of Eastwood shared they had training with using new technology based programs such as curriculum crafter in which we develop our lesson plans. Blaine added "We have had training so that way each teacher is able to review and understand their data, as well as know how data drives their instruction". Blaire withdrew from providing an answer to the question regarding professional development at the time. Bentley shared the teachers had training on IReady, which is an online program that allows the students to practice their skills the computer. Blake asserted "We learned about different things like brain-based learning for students in Novi".

To enhance professional development, school principals promote mentoring programs. Bob stated "We do teacher mentoring". My analysis and review included a review of the employee handbooks, staff schedules for teachers, mentorship programs, and the employee calendar. The employee school calendar illustrated the planned topics for the school year. I reviewed the staff school calendars and noted the calendars

emphasized activities to promote teamwork in the schools such as icebreakers throughout the month of August. A review of the lead teacher schedules indicated the days and times of scheduled mentorship with novice teachers. Additional forms of professional development included training on the use of technology, analysis of data from student assessments, development of math and reading lesson plans, and development of teacher instructional skills. Jessica shared that James supports the staff by providing mentorship programs, professional learning communities, and professional development to help us improve our test scores. Peer mentors assist mentees with issues related to the workplace (Bynum, 2015). Jamie concurred with Jessica "New teachers need support and every new teacher receives mentoring from the experienced teacher so that the new teacher feels supported". Jill stated "Pairing new teachers with experienced teachers has really helped, because our new teachers are unable to help reach our academic goals because some new teachers may lack the experience and research-based strategies".

The participants indicated that the knowledge garnered through ongoing professional development focused on student data has been very effective for moving from a priority school to a focus school. A further review and analyses of school district documents revealed all of the schools in this study have a professional development calendar focused specifically on results of the teacher survey and student assessment data. My review further disclosed that teachers are required to have a professional plan with set goals and recommended training needed to improve their practice. The review of guidelines in the employee handbooks revealed teachers are required to complete 15 credit hours of continuous education and recertification courses annually.

Theme 3: Student Achievement

The results of this study revealed that principals implemented practices to focus on improving student academic achievement. The school principals confirmed that student achievement is a constant and central focus that drives the practices of teaching and learning in the classrooms. According to Al-Zoubi and Younes (2015), students have to excel in academic achievement to transfer from one grade level to another. The review of the student-parent handbook, school improvement plan, and annual education reports revealed the principals clearly state student achievement goals and academic expectations and provide all stakeholders access to relevant school information.

The school principals provided examples of the tools, programs, and resources used to improve their students' academic deficit areas. Teachers mentioned various research-based practices used to monitor student achievement including focused-specific training aligned to the student data results they receive prior to school and throughout the school year. For example, Alice emphasized the use of observation through making sure we have data walls and data and actual samples of students work are accessible in our PLC's. During the focus group interview, Alisa mentioned the implementation of the war room, which has all of our students' pictures posted for teachers to have the ability to put the student's face with the score. Amy stated "The students were able to see that there were pictures and how the system works, which were powerful, coupled with the student conferences".

Each urban charter middle school offers tutoring programs for their students. Alisa answered "The in-school tutoring, the after-school tutoring, the intervention classes

are resources for improving student academic achievement". Aaron expounded Alisa's response "Kent Academy also has in school tutoring in which students selection is based on their Global Scholar testing scores". Alex asserted "Kent Academy also has *Blackboard Configuration* and an intervention class, which include listening centers for students to hear language in Reading". James stated "Chippeham Academy have an 80% retention rate of students, because we have ensured our curriculum is consistent. Furthermore, Jessica responded in the focus group discussion that the teachers are required to meet with our grade level teams to discuss best practices we are using in the classroom, the projects that we want to incorporate into our lessons or units, and look at students work so that we can learn how our students are learning.

Bob provided information about the practices used at Academy of Eastwood including a student study team, data digs, response to intervention programs, common planning time for teachers, center-based learning. In addition, Bob mentioned the after school program language arts and math, which is supplemental for the tier II students in particular. Although members of the focus group shared information, Beverly declined to answer stating "no input". According to Blaine, the teachers have specific goals for each student to increase their scores for Northwestern Evaluation Association (NWEA). Blake added "Some of the strategies are excellent such as using Marzano's 9 and graphic organizers".

Practices implemented by the teachers include having staff meetings to discuss student progress, providing awards to reward students for achieving goals, and developing measures to assess students. Alice stated "The other big idea is to effectively

communicate with parents". The review of the school newsletters listed meetings for planning the student assessment testing and school budget as upcoming events. Teachers at one urban charter middle school have grade level meetings to discuss best classroom practices, lesson projects, and student assignments. "We as teachers have to post our Global Scholars data and have individual conferences with our students, as well as data conferences when we are talking about their scores and their goals" Amy said.

In addition to practices implemented, the principals and teachers share the responsibility of improving student achievement. The principal serves as an academic motivator who conveys and model high expectations for student achievement (McKinney, Labat, & Labat, 2015). My review of the annual education reports and school improvement plan revealed academic improvement for students at each urban charter middle school based on the implemented practices. For example, one report showed the student test scores before and after implementation of response to intervention programs. The consensus among the participants was the implemented leadership practices to improve academic achievement were effective for advancing from a priority school to a focus school. Additional analysis of the collected revealed the two subthemes as contributing factors and assessment of student progress in which I discuss in the following sections.

Contributing factors. The results of this research indicated that the teachers and principals agreed school culture was an essential contributor to student academic achievement. In addition, the participants expressed that having a school culture with quality teachers and small numbers of students in the classroom contribute to the

improvement of students' academic progress. "I believe that the lack of ineffective

teaching and consistent teacher turnover impact student achievement as well" Jean

shared. "I think that if you have an environment that's safe to learn in and engage in, they

take the chances they need to grow" Bob stated. Bentley stated "The two that come to

mind is classroom environment and student motivation". Blaire agreed praising the

students for their achievements was a significant factor. "Moreover, the experience of the

teacher and involvement of the leaders in the classroom" Blake argued. Blaire agreed the

climate in the classroom, because with smaller classes teachers have to influence more

students. Blaine concurred that having large classroom sizes in which some classes could

have 19 or 25 students.

Additional factors mentioned were student accountability, attendance, and

behavior. Alice stated "One of the things that affect us is the attendance of our students

and some of the social issues that they have". "Accountability for students for teachers

and for the administration" Bailey noted. For instance, Jessica said "Behavior and

attendance because some of my students that are in the bottom 30% are there because of

behavior, whereas they are consistently off task and do not finish their work".

The teachers' perceptions of factors that affect student academic achievement

included attendance, behavior, and social-economic status. According to Gordon and Cui

(2014), residing in a high poverty community has an adverse effect on school-related

parental involvement and students' academic achievement. Teachers and principals

shared that many students attending the selected urban charter middle schools transfer

from low-income neighborhoods and underperforming schools within the district. The

consensus among teachers was a lack of parental engagement and poor home lifestyles significantly influenced academic achievement.

Principals and teachers agreed that improvement of academic achievement requires involvement from all stakeholders including leaders, teachers, parents, and students. School principals shared information regarding the sources used to communicate the vision and mission of the school, school expectations, and the student achievement goals to the parents. Parent involvement emerged as a theme based on the participants' responses. School principals and teachers emphasized that parent involvement was essential to their schools reaching their goals. School principals and teachers provided insight into the methods and practices used to create a school environment, which incorporates parents' encouragement to work with the schools as partners in the classroom. Teachers emphasized the importance of parent involvement to motivate their children to reach their highest academic potential. According to Alice, parent engagement and partnership with the school faculty and staff is fundamental to the value of the students' academic achievement.

Assessments of student progress. The schools carefully monitor student achievement assessments and use the results of the student assessments to help maintain their student achievement levels. The results of indicated that the various assessments used to help the school principals and teachers measure student achievement are the Scranton Performance, NWEA, Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP), and M-STEP results. Amy stated "The staff at Kent Academy has received the Littman Wellman training that is designed to help teachers analyze data. Aaron added their

benchmark assessments in either Math or Reading. "One of the big areas for the school

from our transformation plan is to effectively use data to inform instruction, and

understand specifically our M-Step data allowing teachers to address those deficits area

for improvement" Amy continued. I reviewed the annual education reports posted in the

teacher conference rooms at each school, as well as the state department of education

website. The review comprised of the schools past and present local student assessments

included the last 3 to 5 years of the student achievement assessments or results from the

Scranton Performance test, NWEA, MEAP, and M-STEP results. Using the documents, I

found student assessment is a fundamental aspect within each urban charter middle

school, whereas at one school students take mock assessment exams two weeks before

the actual testing date. James stated the staff at Chippeham Academy monitors data to

verify if they students are showing progress. Blaine shared "We have had a couple of

professional development programs about different ways to view the NWEA and what

you do with it from there".

The school principals provided examples of the tools, programs, and resources

used to improve their students' academic deficit areas. For example, James stated "We

have math assessments 1-8 in the Scranton, district test, and a Ruth assessment at the

first-grade level". Jean said "One of the professional development trainings that we

revisit each year is Developmental Reading Assessment, which allows teachers to

properly place students at the appropriate reading levels". Janet shared "We teach our

students how to read for information especially if the passage that our students are

reading is information text. I can see the difference in our quarterly assessments and the Developmental Reading Assessment scores".

My review of the student assessments revealed that the results of the assessment data helped the schools predict in advance the achievement outcomes of the state assessments, which closely align with the local assessments tools. My analysis revealed how the schools leaders tailor professional development in alignment to their student assessment results in which the teachers used the student assessment results to drive data digs, structure professional development training, and establish topics in learning communities. Data-driven instruction is a combination of setting up a classroom community and assessment-centered techniques (Brown, 2015). Further review of the school's annual education reports outlined the achievement goals, targets, and results for the last three years. My analysis of school documents related to student assessments revealed that all three of the schools were initially a priority school with continuous failure in math and reading assessments. However, each school has progressed from a priority school to a focus school designation. The consensus among the participants was the continuous review of student assessments allowed the principals and teachers to establish a school-wide plan of improvement and tailor the plan to the individual needs of the students.

Theme 4: Parent Involvement

The results of this study showed that school principals and teachers emphasized that parent involvement is an essential component for their schools to reach their goals. School principals and teachers provided insight into the methods and practices used to

create a school environment, which incorporates parents' encouragement to work with the schools as partners in the classroom. Alice informed me that students, staff, and parents have the opportunity to take three types of surveys: Five essentials, Advance Ed., and a school created survey to evaluate the school practices. Alice added the teachers discuss the published survey data through various meetings such as Title 1 meetings with parents. Alice gave me a copy of a survey that parents previously received via the newsletter. Upon reviewing the survey, I noticed the questions not only focused on students' academic achievement and rating the school programs but on the parents providing insight into strategies to increase parental involvement.

Two of the selected urban charter middle school principals shared they have parent meetings, Title I meetings, and parent-teacher conferences to promote parental involvement. I noticed that Kent Academy had flyers on the table for parents regarding the next parent ROAR meeting. Another example is the principals invite parents to participate in school activities such as fundraisers, assemblies, and orientations. The teachers at Chippeham Academy expressed that parent involvement was an essential component for improving student academic achievement. Jessica shared that James emphasizes the importance of parents sending their children to school on a regular basis during parent orientation. Jessica added that the school has awards assembly to highlight students after each marking period for academic achievement and attendance. According to Jamie, many of our parents participate by sending candy and bake goods for birthday celebrations and special events, but we do not have the parent engagement, which requires that each parent volunteer for at least one hour in the school during the year.

"Students need to know that parents and the school are on the same page about academic achievement" Jill added.

My review and analysis included the parent-student handbooks, school flyers, school calendar, school field trip form, school improvement plan, and transition plans. The school's parent student handbooks detailed the parent involvement policy for each of the schools. The parent participation policy in the handbooks described parent expectations and parents role in the school. The parent-student handbooks contained a blank volunteer form requiring parents to volunteer in the school before the end of the year. The parent-student handbook review also revealed a parent commitment page at the end of each handbook stating the expectation of parents to work in partnership with the school to help improve their child's education. My review of the school flyers requesting parents attend Parent Teacher Organization monthly meetings confirmed the schools promote and encourage parent involvement. My evaluation of the monthly school calendar and the scheduled parent workshops provided supporting evidence of practices used to engage all parents in the school communities. My review of the student field trip forms inviting parents to serve as chaperones on the school-sponsored field trips serves as further evidence the schools promotes and encourages parent involvement. The overall review analysis disclosed that the schools use a variety of resources and practice to encourage and promote parent involvement in their schools.

Theme 5: Redesigning the School

My review and analysis of the school district documents assisted with identifying the leadership practices for redesigning the school. The handbooks, transition plans, and

school improvement plan provided information on redesigning the school or school improvement. The principals update the school improvement plans for redesigning the school each year based on the review of past archived parent student handbooks, transition plans, and school improvement plans. My further review of the schools' annual education reports outlined the achievement goals and targets for the next three years. "We have our school improvement plan, so I pretty much have followed the school improvement plan because we had a structure that was already in place. We put in place the Response To Intervention process in place, and we follow that with fidelity" Bob said. Furthermore, Blaine explained the teachers spent a lot of time in the summer since we are under new administration discussing non-negotiables as a component of the school improvement plan. Alice plans to continuously use data effectively to monitor student achievement for redesigning the school. Amy shared that Alice provided *reciprocal teaching* as a professional development course to redesign the school. Jean at Chippeham Academy mentioned that the staff talks about the vision during our school improvement team meetings because we believe everything we do to educate the student links back to our vision and our mission.

Each of the three urban charter school leaders has successfully implemented practices to advance from a priority school to a focus school on the Michigan Top-to-Bottom List. "Since we have become a focus school and being forced to put systems in place to make the achievement and really change the lives of some of the students" Alice stated. James said "We are actually getting everything done, which is amazing having a great school year and the kids are progressing, whereas we have progressed from the

lower percentile to the middle percentile of the Top-to-Bottom List. Bob shared

"Interestingly enough when I came to the Academy of Eastwood the school was a priority

school, and the staff is trying to prevent school closure for not meeting the accountability

guidelines of NCLB".

Summary

Chapter 4 focused on the results of the study. This chapter consisted of an

overview of the data analysis process used for coding and identifying the emerging

themes, the research question, setting of the study, demographics, and the data analysis

procedures. Inclusive in this section was an analysis of the emerging main themes and

subthemes that aligned with the research question. I provided an analysis of the school

district documents, discrepant cases, nonconfirming data, and evidence of

trustworthiness.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the conclusion and recommendations, a summary and

interpretation of the findings. Inclusive in Chapter 5 is an outline of the limitations of the

study and recommendations. I conclude Chapter 5 with an in-depth discussion of the

implications, contribution to social change, and recommendation for practices.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore practices that leaders of urban charter middle schools have implemented to advance their schools from a priority school to a focus school designation. The school leaders in the urban charter middle schools used the core leadership practices to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation. Three school leaders and 16 teachers in Michigan from a purposeful selection process agreed to participate in this study. I collected data from multiple sources including one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, and school district documents that included leadership strategies, leadership practices, and school guidelines. The interview questions and district documents provided information about the successful practices used by leaders in urban charter middle schools to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation. Over the course of data analysis, eight themes emerged. I compared the themes resulting from the interview responses with those from my review of school district documents, and confirmed the results by crosschecking the literature review, review of school company documents, and interviews conducted with the school leaders and teachers.

Summary of Findings

This study's findings provide a body of evidence regarding how effective school leadership practices link to improving student achievement, specific professional leadership development processes, and school leadership training needed to create an effective leadership prototype for urban charter schools. School leaders' duties include sustaining and improving teacher quality, overseeing and enforcing student discipline,

and ensuring proper implementation of the curriculum (Dhuey & Smith, 2014). The findings further indicate that school leaders should have wisdom and knowledge coupled with the professional development to make necessary organizational changes to improve student achievement. School leaders' use of a cooperative leadership style increases teachers' self-efficacy and performance (Arbabi & Mehdinezhad, 2015).

Educational institutions may use various leadership practices to meet the accountability measures of NCLB. Principals and teachers have the responsibility to implement practices necessary to administer standardize tests and assess student scores in the core subjects. Principals can influence academic achievement by manipulating the size of the classroom and ratio of teachers assigned to students, and by monitoring instruction practices and student assessments (Dhuey & Smith, 2014). To improve student achievement, the school leaders in my study used the NWEA and M-STEP assessments. Moreover, the classroom reading assessments and math classroom assessments assisted the school leaders in monitoring the performance of the school organization. Classroom activities and observations served as sources for monitoring student achievement. Teachers utilized the results of the student assessments to guide their instructional practice for teaching and learning.

The results of this study show that principals and teachers believed that parental involvement is an essential factor for encouraging students to excel academically. Additional components identified were student attendance, social-economic status, and teacher-student relationships. Further, this research has expanded the body of research

that explores schools' leadership practices, in regards to achieving effective leadership practices for urban charter schools.

Interpretation of the Findings

The core leadership practices model of Leithwood and Riehl (2003) formed the conceptual framework for this study. The holistic view of Leithwood and Riehl's core leadership practices model is that core leadership practices are necessary for improving student achievement. A significant outcome of this study was evidence of the use of Leithwood and Riehl's core leadership practices throughout the collected data. Moreover, the findings revealed that the leaders had to incorporate a combination of leadership styles to develop effective leadership practices. For example, Bob expressed how he was employing the servant leadership style as a new executive director at AWC with plans to redesign the school culture using the transformational leadership style during the next school calendar year.

The leaders in this case study communicated a clear vision and set the direction for their schools using the core leadership practices. The results of the study align with the findings of previous research in which participants have reported that principals communicate the vision and direction for the school by using newsletters, crests on the school uniforms, staff meetings, and announcements. Setting academic objectives, designing curriculum, evaluating the instructional practices of teachers, and reviewing opportunities for instructional improvement are the focus of leaders using effective leadership practices in schools (Bellibaş, 2015). Visionary leaders communicate the

vision and promote an environment of quality education by having a positive school culture (Lingam & Lingam, 2015).

The findings of this study indicate that leaders established a culture that promoted collaborative practices toward a common goal, which is to improve student achievement and meet the NCLB guidelines. Although the principal is the primary agent in the school, they rely on collaboration with staff members for addressing change within the organization (Bouchamma & Brie, 2014). School leaders create the school culture to allow dissemination of leadership practices throughout the school (O'Donovan, 2015).

Once the leaders establish the school vision and goals, they can effectively promote collaborative practices (Stahl, 2015). The significant sources that leaders used to promote collaborative practices included staff meetings, school functions, and activities centered on improving the academic achievement and direction of the school. Ethical leaders use the support of team members with decisional control when making decisions (Bouchamma & Brie, 2014; Lingam & Lingam, 2015). During this era of continuous educational reforms, being a positive role model is the most important function of a school leader (Lingam & Lingam, 2015). Leadership standards in the United States require engagement, effective design of instructional practices, and focus on students' needs (Bellibaş, 2015). To demonstrate core leadership practices to adhere to the guidelines of NCLB, the school principals reported using student assessments and research-based data to evaluate AYP. Furthermore, the teachers reported that they received professional development training through the Littman Wellman program and outside organizations for understanding data-driven evaluations such as M-Step and

NWEA. To assess student achievement, educators should have knowledge of data analysis for decision-making (Lingam & Lingam, 2015).

The findings indicated that school leaders used the core leadership practice of developing people by providing the teachers with the provisions and opportunities for professional development and gaining new knowledge both as individuals and a group. The first level of professional development was support according to individual teachers' needs to advance practices of teaching and learning in the classroom. The second level of professional development focused on the needs of the group as a whole to sustain student achievement. Teachers should have the skills to support the diverse needs of the students and provide them with educational opportunities (Baldiris Navarro, Zervas, Fabregat, Gesa, & Sampson, 2016). The design and plan for professional development require teacher involvement and continuous cycles of training activities (Bayar, 2014). Training specifically focused on student assessments, teaching, and learning allowed the teachers to reach the academic goals of the school, maintain student achievement, and thus moving from focus school to priority school.

In consensus with the information provided by teachers, Bayar (2014) stated that professional development is comprised of traditional and non-traditional activities. Continual patterns of professional development emerged when teachers talked about the focus specific training provided over the summer and throughout the school year. For example, the participants mentioned traditional conferences, meetings, and mentorship programs for novice teachers. Traditional activities include workshops and conferences, while non-traditional professional activities include peer observation, mentoring, and

coaching (Bayar, 2014). Evans (2014) noted that professional development may include traditional workshops, evaluation meetings, and formal mentoring, as well as daily work interactions that trigger creative ideas.

A significant finding from the analysis of the data was that redesigning the organization was critical to the schools moving from a priority school to a focus school. Effective leaders seek to achieve excellence by working toward the goal of changing the educational and teaching behaviors of their staff (Lingam & Lingam, 2015). In alignment with the findings of this study, Dhey and Smith (2014) noted changes within the school culture may affect teachers-student interaction during class, which in turn affects student academic achievement. The results of this study indicate that principals focused on redesigning the organization by promoting PLCs within the school environment. To successfully initiate a PLC, leaders should ensure they have the necessary resources required for implementation (Christiansen & Robey, 2015). According to Thessin (2015), district leaders, administrators, and teachers in schools are obligated to engage in the development and implementation of the PLC process. Another process to redesign the school environment was the enlistment of parental involvement by administering surveys regarding school practices, student assessments, and student academic achievement. The findings are consistent with previous research indicating that parental involvement affects student academic achievement. Parental involvement, which consists of interactions between parents and teachers, has a positive effect on adolescent academic achievement (Gordon & Cui, 2014). Al-Zoubi and Younes (2015) recommended that parents should pursue their child's academic achievement by using educational activities to motivate

students. According to Meshram (2013), parents who understand their role in their children's education may lead to increased educational attainment and improved academic achievement.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of the study included using a qualitative exploratory multiple case study design. In this study, the limitations included the availability of school principals and teachers, and the number of school principals and teachers available willing to participate that can hinder the study's generalizability to a broader population. Three school leaders from urban middle charter schools and three teacher focus groups from each of these urban middle charter schools volunteered to participate in the research study, resulting in a total of 19 participants. Several teachers expressed interest in participating in the focus group interview; however, not everyone was available at the scheduled time for the interview. Although I offered to reschedule the interviews at more convenient times, the school leaders explained that several teachers had to teach afterschool tutoring courses.

The second limitation was data collection using focus groups. The teachers at each school demonstrated professionalism and respect for other teachers, which may have resulted from their knowledge of the interview record and I was a guest. Some of the teachers were resistant to providing responses because of the presence of other teachers. I informed all teachers that the information shared during the focus group interviews should remain confidential. Although some teachers expressed they trusted me as the

researcher, they emphasized a lack of trust with some team members. To address the concern, I allowed the teachers to share their information during member checking.

Recommendations

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore practices that leaders of urban charter middle schools have implemented to advance their schools from a priority school to a focus school designation. However, little research existed on strategies and leadership practices developed to improve academic achievement in urban charter schools. The findings of this research established that school leaders require specific core leadership practices to lead school urban middle charter schools and advance from a focus school to a priority school designation.

To further expand on this research, a multiple case study on school leadership preparation programs focused on theory and practical application of core leadership practices would be beneficial in effectively lead low performing urban charter schools. Using the conceptual framework of this study as a guide, future researchers could explore specific leadership practices that align to a specific concept (e. g., setting direction and developing people). Case studies into other aspects of leadership experiences (i.e., communication, leader-member exchange, or leadership styles) at all school levels would reveal more about the phenomenon of leadership. My second recommendation is future researchers may conduct a phenomenological study to explore teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of teacher education programs for providing student teachers with research-based strategies and practical applications to develop an understanding of teaching in low-performing urban charter schools. Finally, further research using a

quantitative methodology to examine the relationship between core leadership practices, professional development of teachers, and students' academic achievement to generalize the results to a larger population of urban charter schools would benefit school leaders and school leader preparation programs.

Implications

The findings of this study may contribute to the social change of the educational preparation of students upon completion of high school prepared for postsecondary education. Students may enter postsecondary educational programs equipped with the tools to complete challenging courses and meet the four-year graduation timeline. Students might enter the workforce to be active, contributing members of society and assume their role in helping to move society forward.

Impacts to Social Change

School leaders might gain insight into practices to armed teachers with research-based practices and strategies to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation. School leaders may use the core leadership practices identified in this study to set the direction of the school and clearly communicate the vision statement for student achievement. Teachers may gain an additional understanding and knowledge of how to address teaching and learning for schools and students who perform below the state standards. Further, teachers might gain a more objective perspective of the challenges and socioeconomic issues that students bring into the classroom that may hinder the learning process.

The findings of this study may provide parents with insight into their importance to a contributing factor for improving student achievement. Parent engagement and collaboration may strengthen partnerships between the school and the parent. The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by providing school leaders and teachers in urban charter middle schools with leadership practices to provide all students with a world-class education to compete in a global society.

Implications for Methodology and Theoretical Concepts

I conducted a multiple case study using the data collection processes and procedures outlined in chapter 3. Using a multiple case study allowed me to collect relevant strategies leaders in urban charter middle schools used to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation. Reflecting back on the method and process used to collect data, I would not use a multiple case study in future research, because I believe conducting a single-case study would have resulted in the same findings generalized to similar cases. Furthermore, I would not use a focus group interviews, because some participants dominated the discussion while some teachers express they did not feel comfortable answering questions among their peers. Some important features of focus groups are immediacy of response, direct moderator involvement, and group interaction (Tuttas, 2015). Interaction and group dynamics of the focus group interviews may present communicative limits in which one participant can influence other participants' answers (Acocella, 2012). Although participant interaction is the essential component of focus group interviews, individuals may not share specific beliefs and perspectives if they feel suppressed by group dynamics (Belzile & Öberg, 2012).

The focus of this research study was on urban charter middle schools. Future researchers could expand the knowledge and gap in the literature on core leadership practices by conducting a study in the charter high school or a public middle school setting. Further research could consist of using quantitative analysis to compare the leadership practices used in charter schools and non-charter schools, as well as the urban and rural school districts. The governance of charter schools is through authorizers such as private investors, charter management organizations, educational management organizations, and local universities. Furthermore, researchers could expand the focus to leadership practices at a higher level of management. Authorizers of charter schools are postsecondary institutions, independent charter boards, for-profit organizations, or nonprofit organizations (Lake, Jochim, & DeArmond, 2015).

Recommendations for Practice

The results of the findings confirm that school leaders and teachers in urban middle charter schools consistently implemented core leadership practices to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation by setting direction, developing people and redesigning the organization. The consensus among the principals and teachers was the leadership team implemented effective core leadership practices to advance from a priority to a focus school, as well as meeting the guidelines of the NCLB Act.

My first recommendation is that school leaders continue to focus on employing core leadership practices to set direction. The participants revealed that creating a positive school culture in which all stakeholders understand the vision statement resulted

in improved student academic achievement. In addition to the current practices, I recommend school leaders and teachers create accountability measures for the students, parents, and community to promote the school's vision.

My second recommendation is that educators in traditional public schools and urban charter schools develop people by providing professional development resources. One teacher stated the support systems and practices have helped teachers to improve our practice and become effective teachers. School leaders may implement practices similar to the teacher mentorship programs to assist novice teachers in developing their instructional practices. School leaders could rely on the knowledge base within the school to provide training in specialized areas such as art, math, and Spanish.

My final recommendation is for educational leaders to create a school environment and culture that focus on student safety and well-being, as well as academic achievement. Providing students with a safe environment may improve student attendance and behavior. Having a positive school culture might provide students and parents with the assurance that students' well-being matters. Teachers could train parents how to review the assessment scores to measure the students progress, which may result in increase parental engagement.

Reflections

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore practices that leaders of urban charter middle schools have implemented to advance their schools from a priority school to a focus school designation. While I have had several years of experience in education as a school superintendent, an important aspect was for me to mitigate biases

related to my research study as a researcher rather than a school superintendent. School leaders experience pressure to reach the student achievement guidelines of NCLB and sustain student achievement. My intent and goal were to explore the strategies leaders working in urban middle schools have used to move their schools from a priority school status to a focus school designation. What I learned from the research is school leaders need core leadership practices to set direction, develop people, and redesigning the organization. Further the research confirmed leaders need wisdom and knowledge to move from a priority school to a focus school.

I would also share the interview questions with the participants prior to the start of the interview. Another suggestion is researchers should expect the unexpected when going out into the field to conduct research. While I stated in my research procedures that I would conduct the face-to-face interviews in the leader's office, the location of the interview with Alice suddenly changed without any preempted warning. A researcher should always anticipate change and allow for flexibility. The researcher has to keep in mind that the participants agree to volunteer and the objective is for the researcher to gather research without a disruption to the participants schedule or day. Being a school superintendent, I realize that mornings for any school leader can be very hectic and chaotic with the arrival of staff and students. The researcher has to plan, be flexible, and make adjustments to ensure that the participants feel comfortable.

Prior to the start of the interview with James, he received a call and stated that he needed to take the call. James finished the call and returned to the conference table to continue with the interview. James apologized but requested to stop the interview after

answering the first question. The researcher should always keep in mind that issues may arise in the field and should expect sudden changes may occur in the field. If the participant wishes to stop, the interview they can do so without any repercussions. The researcher need to respect the participants need to withdraw or stop the interview at any time upon the request of the participant. Fortunately, I was able to successful complete the entire school leader interview.

I encountered some surprises and challenges while conducting the focus group interviews; therefore, my reflection is to employ individual interviews in future research. As the facilitator, I continuously observed the interactions and body language of the lead teachers. The first significant observation was some lead teachers seemed to be uncomfortable answering questions. For example, lead teachers in each focus group declined to answer some questions. If participants feel equal, they will express their thoughts more spontaneously (Acocella, 2012). During my follow-up interviews for member checking, the same lead teachers expressed they did not wish to share their experience regarding the specific question. Based on the openness and friendliness of each teacher, my expectation was the teachers would openly and honestly share information. One focus group interview posed a challenge for obtaining in-depth data. Focus group interviews may cause slowness in the free production of an idea, which results in lack in-depth study of the phenomenon and innovative answers (Acocella, 2012). The lead teachers at AWC begin to deviate from the interview questions, whereas the teachers expressed the interview session was a great therapy session to vent their frustrations. I had to redirect the participants back to the interview questions and the

purpose of the research. The focus group consists of information gathering by using informal discussion among a group of people while the researcher acts as a moderator who leads the discussion (Acocella, 2012). Additionally, one participant dominated the focus group and continued to interrupt other participants attempting to share their perspectives and experiences.

Conclusion

Many educators experience challenges with meeting the established guideline of NCLB and President Obama's Race to the Top to report student assessment reports for AYP. School principals in charter schools do not have the leadership skills to address instructional leader roles that prevent their students from being successful. However, many school principals in urban charter middle schools have implemented a number of core leadership practices for advancing from a priority school to a focus school designation.

The findings of this study indicated that school leaders will need wisdom, knowledge, and leadership practices to advance from a priority school to a focus school designation. School leaders and teachers should have awareness of the behavior and attendance challenges of students, the lack of parental involvement in the importance of their children's education, the social-economic issues of the students, and the lack of community resources available to students that affect student achievement. Furthermore, if our urban students in middle charter schools are going to compete in a prolific global society and contribute to society as self-sufficient adults, school leaders and teachers

should implement the core leadership practices needed to meet the challenges of urban

middle charter schools.

References

Acocella, I. (2012). The focus groups in social research: Advantages and disadvantages. *Quality and Quantity, 46*, 1125-1136. doi:10.1007/s11135-011-9600-4

Agar, M. (2014). An outsider's ethnographic thoughts about design. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education, 13*, 404-411. doi:10.1177/1474022214531478

Ahmad, A. R., Salleh, M. J., Awang, M. M., & Mohamad, N. A. (2013). Investigating best practice and effectiveness of leadership wisdom among principals of excellent secondary school Malaysia: Perceptions of senior assistants. *International Education Studies, 6*(8), 38-46. doi:10.5539/ies.v6n8p38

Ajayi, L. (2011). Teaching alternative licensed literacy teachers to learn from practice: A critical reflection model. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 38*(3), 169-189. Retrieved from http://www.teqjournal.org/

Alobiedat, A. (2011). The effectiveness of the school performance, by using the total quality standards within the education district of Al-Petra province, from the perspective of the public schools principals and teachers. *International Education Studies, 4*(2), 31-40. doi:10.5539/ies.v4n2p31

Al-Karasneh, S., & Jubran, A. (2013). Classroom leadership and creativity: A study of social studies and Islamic education teachers in Jordan. *Creative Education, 4*, 651-662. doi:10.4236/ce.2013.410094

Almond, M. R. (2012). The black charter school effect: Black students in American charter schools. *The Journal of Negro Education, 81*, 354-365. Retrieved from http://www.journalnegroed.org

Al-Zoubi, S., & Younes, M. A. B. (2015). Low academic achievement: Causes and

results. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *5*, 2262-2268.

doi:10.17507/tpls.0511.09

Angrist, J. D., Pathak, P. A., & Walters, C. R. (2013). Explaining charter school

effectiveness. *American Economic Journal. Applied Economics, 5*(4), 1-27.

doi:10.1257/app.5.4.1

Arbabi, A., & Mehdinezhad, V. (2015). The relationship between the school principals'

collaborative leadership style and teachers' self-efficacy. *Palestrica of the Third

Millennium Civilization & Sport*, *16*, 125-131. Retrieved from

http://www.pm3.ro+

Arce-Trigatti, P., Harris, D. N., Jabbar, H., & Jane, A. L. (2015). Many options in New

Orleans choice system. *Education Next, 15*(4) Retrieved from

http://educationnext.org/

Azeem, M., Salfi, N. A., & Dogar, A. H. (2012). Usage of NVivo software for qualitative

data analysis. *Academic Research International*, *2*, 262-266. Retrieved from

http://www.journals.savap.org.pk/

Baldiris Navarro, S., Zervas, P., Fabregat Gesa, R., & Sampson, D. G. (2016).

Developing teachers' competences for designing inclusive learning experiences.

Journal of Educational Technology & Society, *19*(1), 17-27. Retrieved from

http://www.ifets.info/

Balyer, A. (2014). School principals' role priorities/Okul müdürlerinin rol oncelikleri.

    Eğitimde Kuram ve Uygulama, *10*, 24-40. Retrieved from

    http://www.turkegitimindeksi.com/Journals.aspx?ID=115

Bayar, A. (2014). The components of effective professional development activities in

    terms of teachers' perspective. *International Online Journal of Educational*

    Sciences, *6*, 319-327. doi:10.15345/iojes.2014.02.006

Beare, P., Marshall, J., Torgerson, C., Tracz, S., & Chiero, R. (2012). Toward a culture of

    evidence: Factors affecting survey assessment of teacher preparation. *Teacher*

    Education Quarterly, 39(1), 159-173. Retrieved from http://www.teqjournal.org/

Belcastro, A. T. (2015). Rebalancing quality education in a democratic society. *Creative*

    Education, 6, 428-439. doi:10.4236/ce.2015.64043

Bell, J., & Waters, S. (2014). *Doing your research project: A guide for first-time*

    researchers. McGraw-Hill Education: (UK)

Bellibaş, M. Ş. (2015). Principals' and teachers' perceptions of efforts by principals to

    improve teaching and learning in Turkish middle schools. *Educational Sciences:*

    Theory & Practice, 15, 1471-1485. doi:10.12738/estp.2016.1.0009

Belzile, J. A., & Öberg, G. (2012). Where to begin? Grappling with how to use

    participant interaction in focus group design. *Qualitative Research*, *12*, 459-472.

    doi:10.1177/1468794111433089

Bernard, H.R. (2013). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*

    (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Bifuh-Ambe, E. (2013). Developing successful writing teachers: Outcomes of

professional development exploring teachers' perceptions of themselves as writers

and writing teachers and their students' attitudes and abilities to write across the

curriculum. *English Teaching, 12*(3), 137-156. Retrieved from

http://education.waikato.ac.nz

Boateng, W. (2012). Evaluating the efficacy of focus group discussion (FGD) in

qualitative social research. *International Journal of Business and Social Science,

3*(7), 54-57. Retrieved from http://www.ijbssnet.com/

Boeije, H., van Wesel, F., & Slagt, M. (2014). Guidance for deciding upon use of primary

mixed methods studies in research synthesis: lessons learned in childhood trauma.

Quality & Quantity, *48*, 1075-1088. Retrieved from http://www.springerlink.com

Bölte, S. (2014). The power of words: Is qualitative research as important as quantitative

research in the study of autism?. *Autism*, *18*, 67-68.

doi:10.1177/1362361313517367

Booker, K., Sass, T. R., Gill, B., & Zimmer, R. (2010). The unknown world of charter

high schools. *Education Next, 10*(2), 70-75. Retrieved from

http://educationnext.org/

Bouchamma, Y. (2012). Leadership practices in effective schools in disadvantaged areas

of Canada. *Education Research International*, *12*, Article 712149, 1-16.

doi:10.1155/2012/712149

Bouchamma, Y., & Brie, J. (2014). Communities of practice and ethical leadership.

International Studies in Educational Administration (Commonwealth Council for

Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM), 42(2), 81-96. Retrieved

from http://www.cceam.org/

Bourgeault, I. L. (2012). Critical issues in the funding of qualitative research. *Journal of*

Ethnographic & Qualitative Research, 7, 1-7. Retrieved from

http://www.jeqr.org/

Boykin, A. W. (2014). Human diversity, assessment in education and the achievement of

excellence and equity. *The Journal of Negro Education, 83*, 499-521. Retrieved

from http://www.journalnegroed.org

Brass, J. (2014). English, literacy and neoliberal policies: Mapping a contested moment

in the United States. *English Teaching, 13*(1), 112-133. Retrieved from

http://education.waikato.ac.nz

Brinig, M. F., & Garnett, N. S. (2012). Catholic schools, charter schools, and urban

neighborhoods. *The University of Chicago Law Review, 79*, 31-57. Retrieved

from http://lawreview.uchicago.edu/

Brown III, G. (2015). What's the difference? Principal practices that support the

achievement of low-income students in demographically diverse schools.

Academy of Educational Leadership Journal, *19*(2), 11-31. Retrieved from

http://alliedacademies.org

Bynum, Y. P. (2015). The power of informal mentoring. *Education*, *136*, 69-73.

http://www.projectinnovation.biz/index.html

Carlsen, B., & Glenton, C. (2011). What about N? A methodological study of sample-
size reporting in focus group studies. *BMC Medical Research Methodology, 11*,
26. doi:10.1186/1471-2288-11-26

Christiansen, T., & Robey, P. A. (2015). Promoting systemic change through the
integration of professional learning community practices with Glasser quality
schools. *International Journal of Choice Theory & Reality Therapy*, *35*, 7-13.
Retrieved from http://www.wglasser.com/int-journals

Clancy, M. (2013). Is reflexivity the key to minimising problems of interpretation in
phenomenological research? *Nurse Researcher*, 20(6), 12-16. Retrieved from
http://rcnpublishing.com

Clarkson, L. M. C., & Johnstone, J. R. (2011). When the African-centered paradigm is
not enough: Lessons from an urban charter school. *The Journal of Negro
Education, 80*, 108-120. Retrieved from http://www.journalnegroed.org

Compton-Lilly, C., Zamzow, L., Cheng, Y. F., Yu, M., Durón, A., Goralski-Cumbajin,
B., ... & Quast, E. (2014). Qualitative research: An introduction to methods and
designs. *Educational Action Research*, *23*, 116-120.
doi:10.1080/09650792.2014.942335

Condliffe, B. F., Boyd, M. L., & DeLuca, S. (2015). Stuck in school: How social context
shapes school choice for inner-city students. *Teachers College Record*, *117*(3).
Retrieved from http://www.tcrecord.org

Costa e Silva, A. M., & Herdeiro, R. (2014). Educational policies and the quality of

    teaching: Perceptions of Portuguese teachers. *Creative Education, 5*, 940-947.

    doi:10.4236/ce.2014.511107

Cumming-Potvin, W. (2013). "New basics" and literacies: deepening reflexivity in

    qualitative research. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal, 13*,

    214-230. doi:10.1108/QRJ-04-2013-0024

Day, C. (2012). New lives of teachers. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 39*(1), 7-26.

    Retrieved from http://www.teqjournal.org/

DeJarnatt, S. L. (2012). Follow the money: Charter schools and financial accountability.

    The Urban Lawyer, 44, 37-83. Retrieved from http://www.abanet.org

Dempster, G. M. (2013). In defense of neoliberal education policy: Or, why ravitch is

    wrong about school choice. *The Independent Review, 18*, 103-113. Retrieved from

    http://www.independent.org

Department of Education. (2015a). *A National at Risk-April 1983*. Retrieved from

    http://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/letter.html

Department of Education. (2015b). Common of data. Retrieved from

    http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/

Department of Education. (2015c). *Public Law PL 107-110, the No Child Left Behind Act

    of 2001*. Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html

Derthick, M., & Rotherham, A. (2012). Obama's NCLB waivers: Are they necessary or

    illegal? *Education Next, 12*(2), 39-43. Retrieved from http://educationnext.org/

Detrich, R. (2014). Treatment integrity: Fundamental to education reform. *Journal of Cognitive Education and Psychology, 13*, 258-271. doi:10.1891/1945-8959.13.2.258

Dhuey, E. & Smith, J. (2014). How important are school principals in the production of student achievement? *Canadian Journal of Economics*, *47*, 634-663. doi:10.1111/caje.12086

Dobbie, W., & Fryer, R. G. (2011). Are high-quality schools enough to increase achievement among the poor? Evidence from the Harlem children's zone. *American Economic Journal Applied Economics, 3*(3), 158-187. doi:10.1257/app.3.3.158

Ediger, M. (2013). Oral communication across the curriculum. *Journal of Instructional Psychology, 40*, 98-100. Retrieved from http://www.projectinnovation.biz/index.html

El Hussein, M., Jakubec, S. L., & Osuji, J. (2015). Assessing the FACTS: A mnemonic for teaching and learning the rapid assessment of rigor in qualitative research studies. *The Qualitative Report, 20*, 1182-1184. Retrieved from http://www.nova.edu

Elo, S., Kääriäinen, M., Kanste, O., Pölkki, T., Utriainen, K., & Kyngäs, H. (2014). Qualitative content analysis. *SAGE Open*, *4*(1), 1-10. doi:10.1177/2158244014522633

Endacott, J. L., & Goering, C. Z. (2014). Reclaiming the conversation on education. *English Journal, 103*(5), 89-92. Retrieved from http://www.ncte.org/journals/ej

Erickson, M. J., Larwin, K. H., & Isherwood, R. S. (2013). Examining a decade of reading and mathematics student achievement among primary and secondary traditional public school and charter school students: A meta-analytic investigation. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning, 10*, 213-222. Retrieved from http://www.cluteinstitute.com/journals/journal-of-college-teaching-learning-tlc/

Evans, L. (2014). Leadership for professional development and learning: enhancing our understanding of how teachers develop. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *44*, 179-198. doi:10.1080/0305764X.2013.860083

Finfgeld-Connett, D. (2014). Use of content analysis to conduct knowledge-building and theory-generating qualitative systematic reviews. *Qualitative Research*, *14*, 341-352. doi:10.1177/1468794113481790

Forner, M., Bierlein-Palmer, L., & Reeves, P. (2012). Leadership practices of effective rural superintendents: Connections to Waters and Marzano's leadership correlates. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 27*(8), 1-13. Retrieved from http://www.jrre.psu.edu

Franzosi, R., Doyle, S., Mcclelland, L. E., Putnam Rankin, C., & Vicari, S. (2013). Quantitative narrative analysis software options compared: PC-ACE and

CAQDAS (ATLAS.ti, MAXqda, and NVivo). *Quality and Quantity, 47*, 3219-3247. doi:10.1007/s11135-012-9714-3

Garside, R. (2014). Should we appraise the quality of qualitative research reports for systematic reviews, and if so, how?. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research, 27*, 67-79. doi:10.1080/13511610.2013.777270

Garza, E., Drysdale, L., Gurr, D., Jacobson, S., & Merchant, B. (2014). Leadership for school success: lessons from effective principals. *International Journal of Educational Management, 28*, 798-811. doi:10.1108/IJEM-08-2013-0125

Gawlik, M.A. (2015). Shared sense-making: How charter school leaders ascribe meaning to accountability. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 53, 393-415. doi:10.1108/JEA-08-2013-0092

Gentry, R. (2012). Implementing promising practices to prepare quality teacher educators. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning, 9*, 179-188. Retrieved from http://www.cluteinstitute.com/journals/journal-of-college-teaching-learning-tlc/

Gibson, S., Benson, O., & Brand, S. L. (2013). Talking about suicide: Confidentiality and anonymity in qualitative research. *Nursing Ethics, 20*, 18-29. doi:10.1177/0969733012452684

Goffin, K., Raja, J. Z., Claes, B., Szwejczewski, M., & Martinez, V. (2012). Rigor in qualitative supply chain management research. *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management, 42*, 804–827. doi:10.1108/09600031211269767

Gomez-Velez, N. (2013). Urban public education reform: Governance, accountability, outsourcing. *The Urban Lawyer, 45*, 51-104. Retrieved from http://www.abanet.org

Gordon, M., & Cui, M. (2014). School-related parental involvement and adolescent academic achievement: The role of community poverty. *Family Relations, 63*, 616-626. doi:10.1111/fare.12090

Gosnell-Lamb, J., O'Reilly, F. L., & Matt, J.J. (2013). Has no Child Left Behind Changed the face of leadership in public schools?. *Journal of Education and Training Studies, 1(2),* 211-216. doi:10.11114/jets.v1i2.183

Graff, N. (2011). "An effective and agonizing way to learn": Backwards design and new teachers' preparation for planning curriculum. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 38*(3), 151-168. Retrieved from http://www.teqjournal.org/

Gray, N. L. (2012). School choice and achievement: The Ohio charter school experience. *Cato Journal, 32*, 557-579. Retrieved from http://www.cato.org/

Gullo, D. F. (2013). Improving instructional practices, policies, and student outcomes for early childhood language and literacy through data-driven decision making. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 41*, 413-421. doi:10.1007/s10643-013-0581-x

Gustafson, J. (2013). Charter authorizers face challenges. *Education Next, 13*(3), 32-37. Retrieved from http://educationnext.org/

Halqachmi, A. (2013). Charter schools in the USA. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management, 62*, 420-435. doi:10.1108/17410401311329643

Hamilton, L. S., Schwartz, H. L., Stecher, B. M., & Steele, J. L. (2013). Improving

accountability through expanded measures of performance. *Journal of

Educational Administration, 51*, 453-475. doi:10.1108/09578231311325659

Handford, V., & Leithwood, K. (2013). Why teachers trust school leaders. *Journal of

Educational Administration, 51*, 194-212. doi:10.1108/09578231311304706

Hands, C. M. (2014). Youth perspectives on community collaboration in education: Are

students innovative developers, active participants, or passive observers of

collaborative activities? *School Community Journal, 24*(1), 69-97. Retrieved from

http://www.adi.org/journal/

Hanushek, E. A., Petersin, P. E., & Woessmann, L. (2012). Is the U.S. catching up?.

Education Next, *12*(4), 24-33. Retrieved from http://educationnext.org/

Hanushek, E. A., & Rivkin, S. G. (2010). The quality and distribution of teachers under

the No Child Left Behind Act. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives, 24*(3), 133-

150. doi:10.1257/jep.24.3.133

Harper, M., & Cole, P. (2012). Member checking: Can benefits be gained similar to

group therapy? *The Qualitative Report*, *17*, 510-517. Retrieved from

http://www.nova.edu

Hassel, K., Andersson, K., Inga-Lill Koinberg, & Wennström, B. (2016). Postoperative

wound infections after a proctectomy--patient experiences. *International Journal

of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being, 11,* 1-9.

doi:10.3402/qhw.v11.30393

Hauge, T. E., Norenes, S. O., & Vedøy, G. (2014). School leadership and educational change: Tools and practices in shared school leadership development. *Journal of Educational Change, 15*, 357-376. doi:10.1007/s10833-014-9228-y

Henwood, D., & Featherstone, L. (2013). Marketizing schools. *Monthly Review, 65*(2), 58-70. doi:10.14452/MR-065-02-2013-06_6

Hesbol, K. A. (2012). Learning to lead: An examination of innovative principal leadership preparation practices. *Planning and Changing, 43*, 3-9. Retrieved from http://www.coe.ilstu.edu

Hill, A. (2013). Exploring inclusive educational practices through professional inquiry. *Canadian Journal of Education, 36*(1), 436-438. Retrieved from http://journals.sfu.ca

Hodgman, M. R. (2012). Boundaries and applications: The teacher quality debate in America. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning, 9*, 223-228. doi:10.19030/tlc.v9i3.7088

Horne, J. (2011). New schools in New Orleans. *Education Next, 11*(2), 14-24. Retrieved from http://educationnext.org/

Howell, W., Peterson, P. E., & West, M. (2013). Reform agenda gains strength. *Education Next, 13*(1), 8-19. Retrieved from http://educationnext.org/

Hung, L., Badejo, F., & Bennett, J. (2014). A case study of student achievement in a secondary charter school. *New Horizons in Adult Education & Human Resource Development, 26*(3), 20-38. doi:10.1002/nha3.20070

Ihantola, E., & Kihn, L. (2011). Threats to validity and reliability in mixed methods accounting research. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, *8*, 39-58. doi:10.1108/11766091111124694

Illinois Department of Education. (2015). About Illinois' AYP Accountability Plan. Retrieved from http://www.isbe.net/ayp/default.htm

Indiana Department of education. (2015a). 2015-2016 Indiana Assessment Program Manual Retrieved from http://www.doe.in.gov/accountability/lowest-achieving-schools

Indiana Department of education. (2015b). Definitions for lowest-achieving schools list. Retrieved from http://www.doe.in.gov/accountability/lowest-achieving-schools

Jacob, S. A., & Furgerson, S. P. (2012). Writing interview protocols and conducting interviews: Tips for students new to the field of qualitative research. *Qualitative Report*, *17*, 1-10. http://www.nova.edu

Jacobson, S. (2011). Leadership effects on student achievement and sustained school success. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *25*, 33-44. doi:10.1108/09513541111100107

Jahng, K. E. (2011). Thinking inside the box: Interrogating no child left behind and race to the top. *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy, 8*(1), 99-121. Retrieved from http://eng.kedi.re.kr/

Jäppinen, A. (2014). Collaborative educational leadership: The emergence of human interactional sense-making process as a complex system. *Complicity, 11*(2), 65-85. Retrieved from http://www.complexityandeducation.ualberta.ca/journal.htm

Jean-Marie, G., & Sider, S. (2014). Educational leadership in a fragile state: Insights from Haiti/leadership éducationnel dans un état fragile : Aperçus d'haïti. *Canadian and International Education, 43*(1), 1-15. Retrieved from http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cie-eci/

Kantabutra, S., & Saratun, M. (2013). Sustainable leadership: Honeybee practices at Thailand's oldest university. *The International Journal of Educational Management, 27*, 356-376. doi:10.1108/09513541311316304

Karuna, S., Kanokorn, S., Sujanya, S., Somjed, S., & Aduldej, T. (2014). Leadership practices of secondary school principals: A cross-national comparison of Thailand U.S. principals. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *112*, 847-852. doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.1241

Katzman, J. (2012). Putting the schools in charge. *Education Next, 12*(2), 32-38. Retrieved from http://educationnext.org/

Killawi, A., Khidir, A., Elnashar, M., Abdelrahim, H., Hammoud, M., Elliott, H., & ... Fetters, M. D. (2014). Procedures of recruiting, obtaining informed consent, and compensating research participants in Qatar: findings from a qualitative investigation. *BMC Medical Ethics*, *15(9)*, 1-13. doi:10.1186/1472-6939-15-9

Kitchen, M. C. (2013). Methods in focus group interviews in cross-cultural settings. *Qualitative Research Journal, 13*, 265-277. doi:10.1108/QRJ-01-2013-0005

Klar, H.W. & Brewer, C.A. (2013). Successful leadership in high-needs schools: An examination of core leadership practices enacted in challenging contexts.

Educational Administration Quarterly 49, 768-808.

doi:10.117/0013161X13482577

Knoblauch, H. (2013). Qualitative methods at the crossroads: Recent developments in

interpretive social research. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 14*(3), Art. 12.

Retrieved from http://qualitative-research.net

Korach, S. (2012). You are the curriculum: Participant identification of experience and

practice with impact. *Planning and Changing, 43*, 149-160. Retrieved from

http://www.planningandchanging.ilstu.edu/

Koyama, J. P., & Cofield, C. (2013). The theatre of competing globally: Disguising racial

achievement patterns with test-driven accountabilities. *The Urban Review, 45*,

273-289. doi:10.1007/s11256-012-0229-y

Lake, R. J., Jochim, A., & DeArmond, M. (2015). Fixing Detroit's? broken school

system. *Education Next, 15*(1) Retrieved from http://educationnext.org/

Lee, M., Walker, A., & Chui, Y. L. (2012). Contrasting effects of instructional leadership

practices on student learning in a high accountability context. *Journal of

Educational Administration, 50*, 586-611. doi:10.1108/09578231211249835

Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2005). A review of transformational school leadership

research 1996–2005. *Leadership & Policy in Schools*, 4, 177-199.

doi:10.1080/15700760500244769

Leithwood, K., & Sun, J. (2012). The nature and effects of transformational school

leadership a meta-analytic review of unpublished research. *Educational

Administration Quarterly*, *48*, 387-423. doi:10.1177/0013161X11436268

Leithwood, K., & Sun, J. P. (2009). Transformational school leadership effects on schools, teachers and students. *Studies in school improvement. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing*.

Leithwood, K., Tomlinson, D., & Genge, M. (1996). Transformational school leadership. In *International handbook of educational leadership and administration* (pp. 785-840). Springer Netherlands.

Leithwood, K. A., & Riehl, C. (2003). *What we know about successful school leadership*. Retrieved from http://dcbsimpson.com/randd-leithwood-successful-leadership.pdf

Liamputtong, P. (2011). *Focus group methodology principles and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Lingam, G. I., & Lingam, N. (2015). Are they fit for leading? Teachers' perceptions of leadership practices of Niuean school principals. *International Studies in Educational Administration (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM)*, 43(1), 35-47. Retrieved from http://www.cceam.org/

Litke, E. (2013). Inside the black box of classroom practice: Change without reform in American education. *Harvard Educational Review, 83*, 534-537. Retrieved from http://www.harvardeducationalreview.org/

Loeb, S., Valant, J., & Kasman, M. (2011). Increasing choice in the market for schools: Recent reforms and their effects on student achievement. *National Tax Journal, 64*, 141-163. Retrieved from http://www.ntanet.org/

Louis, K. S., & Robinson, V. M. (2012). External mandates and instructional leadership: School leaders as mediating agents. *Journal of Educational Administration, 50*, 629-665. doi:10.1108/09578231211249853

Ludlow, B. (2011). Teacher leadership: Why teachers must be leaders. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 43*(5), 6. Retrieved from http://www.sagepub.com

Margolin, I. (2013). Nurturing opportunities for educational leadership: How affordance and leadership interconnect. *Higher Education Studies, 3*(3), 77-89. doi:10.5539/hes.v3n3p77

Marshall, B., Cardon, P., Poddar, A., & Fontenot, R. (2013). Does sample size matter in qualitative research?: A review of qualitative interviews in IS research. *The Journal of Computer Information Systems, 54*, 11-22. Retrieved from http://www.iacis.org

Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. (2016). *Designing qualitative research* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Marsh, J. A., Strunk, K. O., & Bush, S. (2013). Portfolio district reform meets school turnaround. *Journal of Educational Administration, 51*, 498-527. doi:10.1108/09578231311325677

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* [DX Reader version]. Retrieved from https://books.google.com

May, D. B., Susskind, D., & Shapiro, N. S. (2013). Faculty grassroots leadership in science education reform: Considerations for institutional change, culture, and context. *Creative Education, 4*, 22-31. doi:10.4236/ce.2013.47A2005

McAndrews, L. J. (2013). Upside down: The peculiar presidential politics of No Child
 Left Behind. *American Educational History Journal, 40*, 355-371. Retrieved from
 http://www.infoagepub.com/

McKinney, C. L., Labat, M. J., & Labat, C. A. (2015). Traits possessed by principals who
 transform school culture in national Blue Ribbon Schools. *Academy of
 Educational Leadership Journal*, *19*(1), 152-166. Retrieved from
 http://alliedacademies.org

Meredith, G. F. (2013). Building and sustaining a culture of assessment: Best practices
 for change leadership. *Reference Services Review, 41*, 13-31.
 doi:10.1108/00907321311300857

Merriam, S. B. (2014). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* [DX
 Reader version]. Retrieved from https://books.google.com

Meshram, R. G. (2013). Parent's perception about there involvement in children's
 academic achievement. *Indian Journal of Health and Wellbeing, 4*, 1692-1695.
 Retrieved from http://www.iahrw.com

Meyer, J. W., Tyack, D., Nagel, J., & Cordon, A. (1979). Public Education as Nation-
 Building in America: Enrollments and Bureaucratization in the American States,
 1870-1930. *American Journal of Sociology*, *85*, 591-613. Retrieved from
 http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/

Meyer, P. (2012). "Hedge-fund guy" emails support to school reformers. *Education
 Next, 12*(1), 30-32. Retrieved from http://educationnext.org/

Meylani, R., Bitter, G. G., & Castaneda, R. (2014). Predicting student performance in statewide high-stakes tests for middle school mathematics using the results from third party testing instruments. *Journal of Education and Learning, 3*(3), 135-143. Retrieved from http://www.ccsenet.org

Michigan Department of Education. (2015). Top-to-Bottom school rankings. Retrieved from http://www.michigan.gov

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Mitic, A. K. M. (2012). Understanding challenges of qualitative research: Rhetorical issues and reality traps. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal, 15*, 354-368. doi:10.1108/13522751211257051

Moustakas, C. (1994*). Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Murphy, K., Casey, D., Devane, D., Meskell, P., Higgins, A., Elliot, N., ... & Begley, C. (2014). Reflections on the added value of using mixed methods in the SCAPE study. *Nurse researcher, 21*(4), 13-19. doi:10.7748/nr2014.03.21.4.4.13.e1225

Norman, P. J. (2011). Planning for what kind of teaching? Supporting cooperating teachers as teachers of planning. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 38*(3), 49-68. Retrieved from http://www.teqjournal.org/

O'Brien, T. V., & Roberson, T. J. (2012). Not quite "deja vu all over again": No child left behind meets effective schools research. *The Educational Forum, 76*, 356-371. doi:10.1080/00131725.2012.682200

O'Donovan, M. (2015). The challenges of distributing leadership in Irish post-primary

schools. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education, 8(2), 243-*

266. Retrieved from http://www.iejee.com/

O'Neill, J. W. (2012). Using focus groups as a tool to develop a hospitality work-life

research study. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management,*

24, 873-885. doi:10.1108/09596111211247218

O'Reilly, M., & Parker, N. (2013). Unsatisfactory saturation: A critical exploration of the

notion of saturated sample sizes in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, *13*,

190-197. doi:10.1177/1468794112446106

Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Leech, N. L., Slate, J. R., Stark, M., Sharma, B., Frels, R., . . .

Combs, J. P. (2012). An exemplar for teaching and learning qualitative research.

The Qualitative Report, 17, 16-77. Retrieved from http://www.nova.edu

Paschen, J. A., & Ison, R. (2014). Narrative research in climate change adaptation—

Exploring a complementary paradigm for research and governance. *Research*

Policy, *43*, 1083-1092. doi:10.1016/j.respol.2013.12.006

Patterson, J. A., Campbell, J. K., Johnson, D. M., Marx, G., & Whitener, M. (2013).

Using policy attributes theory to examine comprehensive school reform

implementation in two Title I middle schools. *Planning and Changing, 44*, 36-55.

Retrieved from http://www.coe.ilstu.edu

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA:

Sage.

Pearson, S., McKoy, J. H., & Kingsland, N. (2015). How many charter schools is just right? *Education Next, 15*(3), 56-62. Retrieved from http://educationnext.org/

Peterson, P. E. (2010). Charter high schools. *Education Next, 10*(2), 5. Retrieved from http://educationnext.org/

Peterson, P. E. (2014). Charter schools survive a biting 'rain of terror'. *Education Next, 14*(1), 5. Retrieved from http://educationnext.org/

Peterson, P. E. (2015). CREDO reveals successful charters' secret sauce. *Education Next, 15*(3) Retrieved from http://educationnext.org/

Petrides, L., Jimes, C., & Karaglani, A. (2014). Assistant principal leadership development: A narrative capture study. *Journal of Educational Administration, 52*, 173-192. doi:10.1108/JEA-01-2012-0017

Petty, N. J., Thomson, O. P., & Stew, G. (2012). Ready for a paradigm shift? Part 2: Introducing qualitative research methodologies and methods. *Manual therapy*, *17*, 378-384. http://www.elsevier.com

Peyser, J. A. (2014). Boston and the charter school cap. *Education Next, 14*(1), 14-20. Retrieved from http://educationnext.org/

Pihie, Z. A. L., & Asimiran, S. (2014). Entrepreneurial leadership practices and school innovativeness. *South African Journal of Education*, *34*(1), Art. #704, 1-10. Retrieved from http://www.sajournalofeducation.co.za

Prescher, T., & Werle, S. (2014). Comprehensive and sustainable? U.S. education reform from a neo-institutional perspective. *Tertium Comparationis, 20*, 81-110. Retrieved from http://www.waxmann.com

Public education and the future of America. (1955). Retrieved from

    http://www.eric.ed.gov

Ramberg, M. R. (2014). What makes reform work?-School-based conditions as

    predictors of teachers' changing practice after a national curriculum reform.

    International Education Studies, 7(6), 46-65. doi:10.5539/ies.v7n6p46

Reardon, R. M. (2013). Towards best practice in ethics education for scholarly

    practitioners of leadership: An undistorted view of reality. *Planning and Changing,*

    44, 286-307. Retrieved from http://www.coe.ilstu.edu

Reyes, A., & Garcia, A. (2014). Turnaround policy and practice: A case study of turning

    around a failing school with English-language-learners. *The Urban Review, 46*,

    349-371. doi:10.1007/s11256-013-0261-6

Rice, S., Trafimow, D., & Kraemer, K. (2012). Using potential performance theory to

    assess how to increase student consistency in taking exams. *Higher Education*

    Studies, 2, 68-74. Retrieved from http://www.ccsenet.org

Rose, M. (2015). School reform fails the test. *The American Scholar, 84*(1), 18-30.

    Retrieved from http://www.theamericanscholar.org/

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data.*

    (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage

Russo, A. (2014). Mayoral control in the windy city. *Education Next, 14*(2) Retrieved

    from http://educationnext.org/

Russo, A. (2015). Teachers unions and the common core. *Education Next, 15*(1), 36-42.

    Retrieved from http://educationnext.org/

Sagoe, D. (2012). Precincts and prospects in the use of focus groups in social and behavioral science research. *The Qualitative Report, 17*, 1-16. Retrieved from http://www.nova.edu

Salinas, C., & Blevins, B. (2013). Examining the intellectual biography of pre-service teachers: Elements of "critical" teacher knowledge. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 40*(1), 7-24. Retrieved from http://www.teqjournal.org/

Sandholtz, J. H. (2011). Preservice teachers' conceptions of effective and ineffective teaching practices. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 38*(3), 27-47. Retrieved from http://www.teqjournal.org/

Schumacher, G. (2011). Key factors for successfully implementing and sustaining quality improvement in K-12 education. *The Journal for Quality and Participation, 33*, 17-20. Retrieved from http://www.asq.org

Severin, J. R. (2013). The state of American public education. *International Journal of Arts & Sciences, 6*(2), 731-742. Retrieved from http://www.internationaljournal.org/

Shaha, S., Glassett, K., Copas, A., & Ellsworth, H. (2015). Title I schools: The student-based impact of online, on-demand professional development on educators. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research, 8*, 227. Retrieved from http://www.cluteinstitute.com/journals/contemporary-issues-in-education-research-cier/

Sharija, M. A., & Watters, J. J. (2012). Innovative leadership by school principals: Embedding information communication and technology in Kuwaiti schools.

Journal of International Education Research, 8(4), 425. Retrieved from

http://www.cluteinstitute.com/journals/journal-of-international-education-

research-jier/

Sheppard, B., & Brown, J. (2014). Leadership for a new vision of public school

classrooms. *Journal of Educational Administration, 52*, 84-96. doi:10.1108/JEA-

03-2012-0027

Singh, A. S. (2014). Conducting case study research in non-profit organisations.

Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal, 17, 77-84.

doi:10.1108/QMR-04-2013-0024

Spillane, J. P., & Kenney, A. W. (2012). School administration in a changing education

sector: The US experience. *Journal of Educational Administration, 50*, 541-561.

doi:10.1108/09578231211249817

Sreejesh, S., Mohapatra, S., & Anusree, M. R. (2013). *Business research methods: An

applied orientation*. Retrieved from http://books.google.com/books

Stahl, K. A. D. (2015). Using professional learning communities to bolster

comprehension instruction. *Reading Teacher, 68*, 327-333. doi:10.1002/trtr.1311

Stake, R. E. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis* [E-reader version]. Retrieved from

https://books.google.com/books

Stake, R. E. (2010). *Qualitative research: Studying how things work* [E-reader version].

Retrieved from http://site.ebrary.com

Stockdale, D., Parsons, J., & Beauchamp, L. (2013). Instructional leadership in first

    nations schools. *Canadian Journal of Native Education, 36*, 95-112. Retrieved

    from http://www.edpolicystudies.ualberta.ca

Stoltz, D. (2014). A smorgasbord of possibilities. *Children & Libraries, 12*(2), 21-25.

    Retrieved from http://www.ala.org

Strom, P. S., Strom, R. D., & Beckert, T. (2011). Examining stakeholder expectations for

    guiding school reform: Including students. *American Secondary Education, 39*(3),

    5-16. Retrieved from http://www.ashland.edu

Sun, J., & Leithwood, K. (2012). Transformational school leadership effects on student

    achievement. *Leadership & Policy in Schools*, *11*, 418-451.

    doi:10.1080/15700763.2012.681001

Suri, H. (2011). Purposeful sampling in qualitative research synthesis. *Qualitative*

    Research Journal, 11, 63-75. doi:10.3316/QRJ1102063

Tajdini, S., & Nazari, M. (2012). IS outsourcing decision: A quantitative

    approach. *International Journal of Business and Management*, *7*(2), p113.

    doi:10.5539/ijbm.v7n2p113

Thessin, R. A. (2015). Learning from one urban school district: Planning to provide

    essential supports for teachers' work in professional learning communities.

    Educational Planning, *22*(1), 15-27. Retrieved from

    http://www.isep.info/index.html

Thomas, E., & Magilvy, J. (2011). Qualitative rigor or research validity in qualitative research. *Journal for Specialists in Pediatric Nursing*, *16*, 151-155. doi:10.1111/j.1744-6155.2011.00283.x

Thomas, T., Herring, M., Redmond, P., & Smaldino, S. (2013). Leading change and innovation in teacher preparation: A blueprint for developing TPACK ready teacher candidates. *TechTrends, 57*(5), 55-63. doi:10.1007/s11528-013-0692-7

Thompson, G. L., & Allen, T. G. (2012). Four effects of the high-stakes testing movement on African American K-12 students. *The Journal of Negro Education, 81*, 218-227. Retrieved from http://www.journalnegroed.org

Thomson, J. J., Elgin, C., Hyman, D. A., Schrag, Z., Knight, J., & Kreiser, B. R. (2013). Regulation of research on human subjects: Academic freedom and the institutional review board. *Academe, 99*, 101-117. Retrieved from http://www.aaup.org

Tolhurst, E. (2012). Grounded theory method: Sociology's quest for exclusive items of inquiry. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *13(3), Art 26*. Retrieved from http://qualitative-research.net/fqs/fqs-eng.htm

Tricarico, K., & Yendol-Hoppey, D. (2012). Teacher learning through self-regulation: An exploratory study of alternatively prepared teachers' ability to plan differentiated instruction in an urban elementary school. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 39*(1), 139-158. Retrieved from http://www.teqjournal.org/

Tufford, L., & Newman, P. (2012). Bracketing in qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Work*, *11*, 80-96. doi:10.1177/1473325010368316

Tuttas, C. A. (2015). Lessons learned using Web conference technology for online focus

    group interviews. *Qualitative Health Research*, *25*, 122-133.

    doi:10.1177/1049732314549602

Venkatesh, V., Brown, S. A., & Bala, H. (2013). Bridging the qualitative-quantitative

    divide: Guidelines for conducting mixed methods research in information

    systems. *MIS Quarterly*, *37*, 21-54. Retrieved from http://www.misq.org/

Vogt, L. (2013). News for educational workers. *Radical Teacher, 97*, 76-78.

    doi:10.5195/rt.2013.33

Walker, J. L. (2012). The use of saturation in qualitative research. *Canadian Journal of

    Cardiovascular Nursing*, *22*, 37-46. Retrieved from http://www.cccn.ca

Walsh, I., Holton, J. A., Bailyn, L., Fernandez, W., Levina, N., & Glaser, B. (2015).

    What grounded theory is… A critically reflective conversation among scholars.

    Organizational Research Methods, *18*, 1-19. doi:10.1177/1094428114565028

Wang, A. H., Walters, A. M., & Thum, Y. M. (2013). Identifying highly effective urban

    schools: Comparing two measures of school success. *The International Journal of

    Educational Management, 27*, 517-540. doi:10.1108/09513541311329878

Warner, C., Director, D. R. H., & Goffnett, S. (2015). Leadership education and service:

    Exploring transformational learning following a tornado. *Journal of Leadership

    Education*, *14*(1), 33-54. doi:1012806/V14/I1/R3

Waters, L. H., Barbour, M. K., & Menchaca, M. P. (2014). The nature of online charter

    schools: Evolution and emerging concerns. *Journal of Educational Technology &

    Society, 17*(4), 379-389. Retrieved from http://www.ifets.info

Watkins, D. C. (2012). Qualitative research the importance of conducting research that doesn't "count". *Health Promotion Practice*, *13*, 153-158. Retrieve from http://hpp.sagepub.com

Wei, X., Patel, D., & Young, V. M. (2014). Opening the" black box": Organizational differences between charter schools and traditional public schools. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *22*(3), 1-31. doi:10.14507/epaa.v22n3.2014

West, M. R., Gabrieli, C. F. O., Finn, A. S., Kraft, M. A., & Gabrieli, J. D. E. (2014). What effective schools do. *Education Next, 14*(4), 72-79. Retrieved from http://educationnext.org/

White House. (2015). *Race to the Top*. Retrieved from https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/k-12/race-to-the-top

Wilson, V. (2014). Research methods: Triangulation. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, *9*(1), 74-75. doi:10.18438/B8WW3X

Yang, Y. (2014). Principals' transformational leadership in school improvement. *The International Journal of Educational Management, 28*, 279-288. doi:10.1108/IJEM-04-2013-0063

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research design and methods* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Ylimaki, R., & Jacobson, S. (2013). School leadership practice and preparation. *Journal of Educational Administration, 51*, 6-23. doi:10.1108/09578231311291404

Appendix A: Permission to Perform Research

Dear _____ School Leader,

Cherise Cupidore, a doctoral student at Walden University, requests your permission to conduct her doctoral research study at urban charter middle schools within your district. The study title is *Exploring the Effectiveness of Leadership Practices in Urban Charter Middle Schools*.

The doctoral study focus is to explore the effectiveness of leadership practices in urban charter middle schools needed to address the strategies leaders in urban charter middle schools use to progress from a priority school to a focus school category.

I hope that you will grant me permission to conduct a face-to-face interview with school leaders and a focus group interview with your teachers for a period of 2 weeks (i.e., leader interviews for 30 minutes to 1 hour and lead teacher focus group interviews for 1 to 1 ½ hours) at your organization. If approval is granted, you and your teachers' participation in research will entail a digitally recorded interview. The participants are advised that no penalties are enforced if they choose not to participate or would like to withdraw at any time during the researchers study. Your authorization is voluntary as well as your team members' participation in this study is strictly voluntary and any information they will provide is confidential.

Your approval to conduct this research study is appreciated. I will call, or speak to you in person and would be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have at that time. If you agree, kindly return to me acknowledging consent and permission for me to conduct this research study at urban charter middle schools within your district.

Thank you for your consideration.
Sincerely,

Cherise Cupidore
Walden University Doctoral Student

_____
Print your name and title here

_____
Signature here

_____
Researcher name and date here

Appendix B: Invitation of Participation for School Leaders

Dear School Leader

      My name is Cherise Cupidore. In the journey to complete my Doctor of Philosophy degree, I am completing a study about school leadership practices and student academic performance. My role is solely as a doctoral student researcher not as the superintendent of Crescent Academy. The primary focus of my research is to explore strategies leaders in urban charter middle schools use to progress from a priority school to a focus school category.

      I have received permission from the Walden's Institutional Review Board and school administrators to contact individuals. As a school principal who may have experience related to the purpose of this study, I would like to invite you to participate in this study and affirm your consent to complete participate in a face-to-face interview. You will be asked to answer eight interview questions regarding leadership practices and student academic outcomes.

      If you decide to participate, contact the researcher Cherise Cupidore via email (cherise.cupidore@waldenu.edu) or telephone ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. You will be asked to sign the consent form at the time of the interview. Participation is voluntary and will be confidential.

Thank you for your consideration and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Cherise Cupidore

Doctor of Philosophy-Student

Appendix C: Invitation of Participation for Teachers

Dear Lead Teacher

      My name is Cherise Cupidore. In the journey to complete my Doctor of Philosophy degree, I am completing a study about school leadership practices and student academic performance. My role is solely as a doctoral student researcher not as the superintendent of Crescent Academy. The primary focus of my research is to explore strategies leaders in urban charter middle schools use to progress from a priority school to a focus school category.

      I have received permission from the Walden's Institutional Review Board and school administrators to contact individuals. As a teacher who may have experience related to the purpose of this study, I would like to invite you to participate in this study and affirm your consent to complete participate in a face-to-face interview. You will be asked to participate in a focus group and answer six interview questions regarding leadership practices and student academic outcomes.

      If you decide to participate, contact the researcher Cherise Cupidore via email (cherise.cupidore@waldenu.edu) or telephone ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓. You will be asked to sign the consent form at the time of the interview. Participation is voluntary and will be confidential.

Thank you for your consideration and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Cherise Cupidore

Doctor of Philosophy-Student

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Interview #_____
Date_____/_____/_____

Interview Protocol

Script

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. My name is Cherise Cupidore and I am a graduate student at Walden University conducting my doctoral study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy- K-12 Educational Leadership. This semistructured interview will take about 30 minutes to 1 ½ hours and will include six to eight questions regarding your experiences and leadership practices leaders in urban charter middle schools to progress from a priority school to a focus school category. I would like your permission to tape record this interview, so I may accurately document the information you convey. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please let me know. All of your responses are confidential. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of how you and your peers view leadership practices educational leaders perceive to affect student academic achievement, the execution of client objectives, and the establishment of strong communication channels while performing, monitoring, and reporting to ensure quality performance. The purpose of this study is to increase the understanding of the strategies leaders in urban charter middle schools use to progress from a priority school to a focus school category.

At this time, I would like to remind you of your written consent to participate in this study. I am the responsible researcher, specifying your participation in the research project: *Exploring the Effectiveness of Leadership Practices in Urban Charter Middle Schools*. You and I have both signed and dated each copy, certifying that we agree to continue this interview. You will receive one copy, and I will store the other copy securely in my home, separate from your reported responses.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. If at any time you need to stop or take a break, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission, we will begin the interview.

Thank the participant for his or her participation.

Appendix E: School Leaders Interviews Questions

The school leaders will answer the following interview questions:

1. How many years has your charter school been in operation?

2. What specific leadership practices did you engage in when you first became a school leader?

3. How have you set the direction or demonstrated leadership practices to communicate the vision for your faculty, staff, and students?

4. What programs and training have you implemented to develop the skills of the staff?

5. How would you rate effectiveness of the implemented programs and training to develop the skills of the staff?

6. What practices have you implemented for sustaining and improving student achievement?

7. What do you think are two most significant factors that affect student achievement?

8. Would you like to add any additional information regarding leadership practices and student academic achievement?

Appendix F: Focus Group Interview Questions

The teachers will answer the following interview questions:

1. How has the school leader set the direction or demonstrated leadership practices to communicate the vision to the faculty, staff, and students?

2. What programs and training has the school leader implemented to develop the skills of the staff?

3. How would you rate effectiveness of the implemented programs and training to develop the skills of the staff?

4. What practices has the school leader implemented for sustaining and improving student achievement?

5. What do you think are two most significant factors that affect student achievement?

6. Would you like to add any additional information regarding leadership practices and student academic achievement?