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Educational Leadership Characteristics of Rural High School Principals and Graduation Rates

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Abstract

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by

Christopher M. Groves

CAS, SUNY Cortland, 2006

MA, The College of Saint Rose, 2003

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

High school graduation rates and the leadership of principals are important measures of accountability within schools. Principal leadership has been investigated through qualitative and correlational studies in mostly urban areas. Limited research has focused on the educational leadership characteristics of the high school principals and graduation rates in rural areas. The purpose of this study was to identify, describe, and categorize the leadership characteristics of veteran and novice principals with respect to graduation rates in selected rural schools. Bolman and Deal's 4 frames of leadership informed this study and helped to create the broad leadership categories of interpersonal skills, leadership and communication styles, and collaboration skills. The research questions focused on understanding the leadership characteristics and differences between novice and veteran principals. Purposive sampling was used to select 21 participants for in-depth interviews in 7 high school settings. The methodology combined interviews with a review of district data and documents. The data were thematically analyzed by a constant comparative method and category construction. Trustworthiness was ensured with member checking and triangulation. Key findings indicated that all principals had general leadership characteristics such as active listening, collaboration, a communication style, and promotion of school/home partnership. Three out of 4 high graduation rate schools tended to have veteran principals. Veteran principals focused on professional development and cultivating relationships, whereas novice principals focused on using data in decision making. Identifying and developing specific characteristics in leaders and matching them with schools will improve the instructional environment for students and strengthen the expertise of the faculty and staff.

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Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated to the loving memory of my grandparents and uncle. Words cannot express the level of support and endless life opportunities they provided. Joseph Fiorito, Nancy Fiorito, and Michael Fiorito always provided their unconditional love to me and in-turn I am forever grateful. They made me the person that I am today and lacking their guidance, support, influence, and resilience I would not be in the position to complete this process, impact society, nor to pursue all of my hopes and dreams.

To my parents, JoAnn and Steven Warner, my respect for you is infinite and my love for you both is immense. It certainly has been a long and challenging road to my adulthood and without you both, I would have never succeeded. Although not easy, we did it!

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I wish to express my deepest appreciation to Dr. Felicia Blacher-Wilson, my dissertation committee chairperson, for her lasting words, "gentle nudges", and ability to keep me grounded. I could not have accomplished this process without her. You are a true advocate for what is right and for that I will always hold you high. After all, who else would be able to tolerate me (your favorite student)?

I would like to acknowledge Michelle Groves, my best friend, lovely and passionate wife, mother of our child, and formally recognized as my editor and chief to all that is my dissertation, as the ½ PhD. She is my rock and my endless balance. You have taught me to never give up, to be the person I set out to be and to always be true to myself. Even when I am weak, you are strong. I love you endlessly and would never be here without you. You saved me long ago my dear!

I would like to thank the young man that is now standing shoulder to shoulder with me when I began this journey; he held my hand and looked up at me. Now I see the young man before me and thank him for his ability to show me how on 8-21-01 my life would never be the same. Today we stand side by side and I can only hope you look up to me differently now.

Finally, I would like to thank my dogs, who hold a special place in this process, our early morning and late night discussions about how we should proceed and what makes sense. Our engaging conversations over coffee and cookies (dog treats of course) and sorting throughout the relevance of it all. My dearest Keata (you are deeply missed my best friend of old, R.I.P.), Kaia (you too were sadly taken far too soon and I will

always hear your bark, R.I.P.), Riley (BoBo Waggins) for without you how could I ever get an interview transcription completed without being licked to death and Molly, your stoic demeanor an ability to corral kept me on track and focused. Your variety of dinner dish selections reminded me to always consider all options and that variables are the key to any situation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background to the Study

Since implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), the impact has been felt throughout all levels of education and high school graduation rates are at the forefront of scrutiny, from local districts to legislative forums (The Office of the New York State Comptroller, 2015). This study investigated the educational leadership characteristics of the high school principal and graduation rates in the rural school system. The term "rural education setting" generally would suggest that rural schools are characterized by many of the same sociodemographic and institutional features as urban schools (i.e. high poverty and limited resources). According to the Office of Management and Budget OMB (2006), rural classification can be divided into three subcategories; fringe rural (a rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster). distant rural (rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster), and remote rural (a rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster). Subsequently, an urbanized area consists of densely developed territory that contains 50,000 or more people, while an urban cluster consists of densely developed territory that has at least 2,500 people but fewer than 50,000 people. All schools in this study met the criteria for a rural classification. The specific schools were placed into sub categories of classification later in this study.

Some challenges faced by rural schools differ greatly from those of urban schools and, as such, may require different leadership strategies. Commonly, a serious challenge that rural school districts are faced with is to their educational viability (Marzeski, personal communication, May 20, 2015). According to reports found on the New York State Department of Education website, from the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance and The Office of the New York State Comptroller, given the diminished tax base and low tax cap limits on rural schools, communities have suffered a loss of property wealth and many districts no longer have the same enrollment levels they had a decade ago. Typically, these areas are rich in farming and livestock, but residents are moving away, leaving farms and businesses vacant and reducing the population. The result is fewer job opportunities. Family farms and local businesses are closing and causing members of these small communities to relocate. As shown by Governor Cuomo's 2016 annual executive budget, limited funding and reallocating state aid has forced rural schools in New York State to operate on limited budgets and resources, but still be held to the same levels of accountability and standards in New York State Education. Rural schools typically have been left to roll over costs from current years, essentially moving expenses from one year to the next. This often results in cuts and losses to programs and services, forcing each year to begin with a rebuilding phase meant to stabilize their educational programs. Rural schools often cannot offer the breadth of curriculum offered by their urban counterparts.

Graduation rates in the rural schools of New York State are reported in the media as a national crisis (Bridgeland, DiLulio, & Balfanz, 2009; Diplomas Count, 2013). The

Editorial Projects in Education Research Center uses the Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI) method to calculate graduation rates. The CPI represents the high school experience as a process rather than a single event, capturing the four key steps a student must take in order to graduate: three grade-to-grade promotions (9 to 10, 10 to 11, and 11 to 12) and ultimately earning a diploma (grade 12 to graduation).

The rural northeast region of New York State is undergoing a slow process of demographic change and economic restructuring. Over the past 25 years, prosperity, property values, and populations have declined; while levels of poverty have increased (Chenango-Delaware-Otsego Workforce Investment Board, 2015). Eberts (2005) documented a shift from manufacturing and agriculture to service-sector jobs. New York State's traditional jobs in manufacturing and the financial industry were down significantly for the years of 2007 to 2010. Although national and state unemployment statistics have fluctuated, state and national unemployment rates for 2014 demonstrated 9.6 million unemployed people in United States and 606,000 in the state. In 2015 the unemployment data indicated 8.3 million unemployed in the United States and 513,000 in the state. Unemployment rates ranged from 5.2 % to 6.2%, with rates for the counties in the region following suit (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2016).

In the northeast region, there are four main employment sectors: manufacturing, healthcare, finance/insurance, and retail tourism. Of all nonfarm jobs, 25% are in manufacturing while 22% percent are professional and technical (CDO Workforce Investment Board, 2012). Opportunities for earning in this area are declining and students

need to position themselves for the world ahead. This can be achieved only by successfully completing graduation.

In order to establish an understanding on successful graduation rate completion, this study used the graduation cohort model and graduation cohort rates. At the time data were collected it was based on the most current cohort years of 2007-2010 reported to the New York State Department of Education. Over the past three years, graduation cohort rates in the United States and New York State have been unstable. Specifically, New York State has consistently demonstrated lower graduation rate percentile scores when compared to the United States national average. Seemingly, the data reported that the United States national average reliably increased as the New York State average rate continued to fluctuate. According to a cohort rate formula used as an indicator of graduation rates, a data summary reported that, in 2007-2008, the New York State rate was 71.8%, and the United States national average was 71.7%; 2008-2009 New York State rate was 69.6%, and the United States national average was 72.9% and lastly in 2009-2010, the New York State rate was 73.3% and the United States national average was 74.7%. Data from the New York State school report cards, student information repository system 309 annual outcomes, for the northeast region of New York State (consisting then of 10 school districts) showed that 77% of the 2007 cohort graduated with Advanced Distinction, Regents diploma, or local diploma. Of the 2008 cohort, 80% graduated; of the 2009 cohort, 78% graduated; and of the 2010 cohort (after merger activity resulting in 9 schools) 80% graduated (New York State Education Department (2015). The data were important to this study as it demonstrated the regional graduation

rates found in the northeast region of New York State. These cohort years were selected and reported as they are the most current at the time of the study. These cohort years demonstrated an unstable and inconsistent trend in graduation rates.

Problem Statement

In the past decade, researchers have investigated how high school principals can impact instructional practice, student learning (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2009), academic achievement (Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010; Nettles & Herrington, 2007), other student outcomes (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003; Coelli & Green 2012), school climate (Velasco, Edmonson, & Slate, 2012), family engagement (Auerbach, 2009), teacher retention (Grissom, 2011), and teacher professional development (Youngs & King, 2002). There is little research focused on the potential impact that rural high school principals may exercise on graduation rates.

The initial outcome and the defined purpose of this study were to identify, describe, and categorize high school principals' leadership characteristics with respect to high school graduation rates in rural schools in the northeast region of New York State, so that strategic efforts can be made to improve graduation rates. The study focused specifically on the characteristics of high school principals and the multiple case school settings. These principals have a major responsibility; they make all the building-level decisions for staff and students in their schools. In addition to the principals in these settings, the schools differed by other identifiable variables, such as: rural classification,

demographic factors, free and reduce lunch eligibility rates, organizational structure, poverty levels, income status, minority levels, total student enrollment, advanced placement course offerings, advanced distinction levels, and limited English proficiency.

The secondary outcome of this initial study was to describe the direct or indirect effect the high school principal has on graduation rates. This study proposed that a principal's leadership characteristics could have direct effects on school outcomes. This approach assumes that these effects can be measured reliably apart from other related variables (Hallinger & Heck 1998). Research assumptions are built from both perspectives on the premise that the principal's effect on students is almost entirely indirect (Day et al., 2009; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). Conversely, others provide substantive support for the premise that the principal's effect on students is direct (Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, & Thomas, 2007; Silins & Mulford, 2004).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to identify, describe, and categorize high school principals' leadership characteristics with respect to high school graduation rates in rural schools in the northeast region of New York State. So that strategic efforts can be made to improve graduation rates. The 21 participants in this multiple case study were members of the leadership team in the region's high schools. These principals were responsible for all building-level decisions for staff and students in their schools.

Participants involved in the study included both males and females. The information and data from the 21 participants were collected using individual face-to face interviews with open-ended questions.

Research Questions

The multiple case study research questions were as follows:

Research Question 1: What are the educational leadership characteristics of high

school principals in high schools with high graduation rates in the northeast

region of New York State?

Research Question 2: What are the differences in the educational leadership

characteristics between novice and veteran high school principals?

Conceptual Framework

This qualitative, comparative case study aimed to identify, describe, and

categorize high school principals' leadership characteristics with respect to high school

graduation rates in rural schools of the northeast Region of New York State. This study

explored the perceptions of faculty and staff of the high school principals' leadership

characteristics, school climate, and effectiveness of the school system. The study rested

on the working hypothesis that there are specific educational leadership characteristics of

high school principals that relate to high school graduation rates. In addition to years of

experience, other factors derived from the literature included; honesty, communication,

commitment, empathy, trustworthiness, decisiveness, professional growth, and promotion

of program coherence.

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Bolman and Deal's (2013)

four frames of leadership to assess leadership styles from structural, human resource,

political, and symbolic frames. Regardless the frame or lens leaders of an organization

represent or build the design and structure of their frame is not enough. The four frames

further delineates from broad frames of leadership style to concepts, behaviors, and characteristics that support each frame: organizational ethics, central lenses, focus and filters, images of leaderships, key leadership assumptions, leaderships tasks, and leadership logic.

The organizational leaders and all of their stakeholders must find ways to continuously improve communication, increase transparency, reevaluate their structures, engage staff, increase innovation, and create organizational culture that is inclusive. In other words, leaders must be adaptive, flexible, and open to ways of meeting their mission and vision. Astute leadership style was one that could quickly and easily navigate throughout the four frames with little effort. This conceptual framework was the foundation for the emergent design of this study.

It is important to understand that school culture was also related to the high school principal's leadership characteristics and graduation rates. Sergiovanni (1995, p. 95) commented that the culture is the "powerful socializer of thought and programmer of behavior." All stakeholders in any system have issues, beliefs, and attitudes that impact attempts at improvement. "School culture is a key factor in determining whether improvement is possible" (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 46). Changing a school's culture is challenging work because staff, faculty, and principals often view conditions and circumstances differently. Their different perceptions of reality cause tension and conflict. It was here that identifying and categorizing the principal's leadership characteristics become critical in order to examine the principal's impact on graduation rates. Other research suggested that the principal's function on behavior was imperative

for the development of positive school culture, thus resulting in increased student achievement as it related to successful completion of graduation (Stolp, 2015). In this study, I used a combination of personal interviews and formal document review for data collection.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative, comparative, case study sampled seven high schools (all names are pseudonyms) in the following school districts in northeast New York State: Benjamin Central School District, Clay Central School District, Edison Central School District, Franklin Central School District, Great Wind Central School District, Harrington Central School District, and Ivory Central School District. These schools were categorized into two main groups: high or low graduation rate schools (HGRS or LGRS). I considered both the HGRS (estimated at three to five schools) and the LGRS to as they relate to the research question. They were arranged according to rural classification, demographic factors, free and reduce lunch eligibility rates, organizational structure, poverty level, income status, minority level, total student enrollment, advanced placement course offerings, advanced distinction levels, and limited English proficiency. For the purposes of this study the HGRS were considered to be 80% or higher for the successful completion of graduation and LGRS were considered to be 79% or lower for the successful completion of graduation. I collected and organized data into categories around principals' activities such as, but not limited to: instructional leadership, professional development, recruitment and retention, and fiscal resource management. It is understood that there are several areas of research that have been conducted on the

impact on high school graduation rates, however in this study the research conceptualized how the educational leadership characteristics of the high school principals in selected rural schools impacted graduation rates. This information will be noted in Chapter 4 results section of the research study.

The findings of this study are expected to add to the field of research in educational leadership and provide data for rural school districts in the northeast region of New York State to strategically plan goals that will address their graduation rates. Additionally it is expected to support further inquiries interested in explaining the function and impact of the principal on graduation rates in a more randomized sampling of New York State. The study sought to provide further perspective on educational leadership in the high school setting, student learning, and a service that is useful to leadership as a construct in the field of educational leadership in rural schools.

Therefore, by using a comparative case study approach, this research is expected to fill a gap in knowledge, focusing on the seven selected educational institutions of the northeast region in New York State. The study explored the characteristics of the high school principal in schools with high and low graduation rates, by identifying how the schools differ in other measurable variables, while also looking for commonalities in their high school principal's leadership characteristics. These characteristics were identified and placed into categories. High school principals were also sorted by these characteristics and placed into defined categories. The idea was that schools at different stages of development needed different leadership emphases dependent upon their current stage (Robinson et al., 2008).

Studies have shown that school leaders can have positive effects on student learning, outcomes, goals, school completion, and other important outcomes. These studies have opened the door to additional research and have resulted in a focused effort for many leadership researchers to include questions about how those effects occur. Assumptions have also been made that leadership can exercise impact both directly and indirectly on student outcomes as related to graduation (Leithwood et al., 2010).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Census Bureau has created a new locale classification system. The revision capitalizes on improved geocoding technology and the 2000 OMB definitions of metro areas that rely less on population size and county boundaries than proximity of an address to an urbanized area.

Referred to as the "urban-centric" classification system—to distinguish it from the previous "metro-centric" classification system—the new classification system has four major locale categories; city, suburban, town, and rural. Each of these categories is also subdivided into three subcategories.

NCES has classified all schools into one of these categories based on the actual addresses of each school and their corresponding coordinates of latitude and longitude. Not only does this mean that the location of any school can be identified precisely, but also that distance measures can be used to identify town and rural subtypes. The Census Bureau designates rural areas as those areas that do not lie inside an urbanized area or urban cluster.

The rural classification has three subcategories: fringe rural, distant rural and remote rural (OMB, 2006). Although the issues of rural schools have been well

documented in both scholarship and popular media over the last several decades, the actual impact of the principal is still an important issue. Research focused on rural education generally would suggest that rural schools are characterized by many of the same socio-demographic and institutional features as urban schools (e.g., high poverty, limited resources, and low levels of resources). However, some of the challenges faced in rural schools differ from those faced by urban schools and may require different strategies to be used by leadership.

According to T. Marzeski (personal communication, May 20, 2015), Deputy Executive Director of the Rural Schools Association of New York (NYRSA), rural school districts are faced with serious challenges on their educational viability. According to source reports from the New York State Department of Taxation (2015) and Finance and The Office of the New York State Comptroller (2015), given the diminished tax base and low tax cap limits on rural schools, communities have suffered a loss of property wealth and many districts no longer have the same enrollment levels they had a decade ago. Rural schools in New York State operate from limited budgets and resources, while still being held to the same levels of accountability and standards within New York State Education, as demonstrated by Governor Cuomo's annual executive budgets. Rural schools typically are left to roll over costs from current years, essentially moving expenses from one year to the next. This often results in cuts and losses to programs and services, forcing each year to begin with a rebuilding phase meant to stabilize their educational programs. Rural schools often cannot offer the breadth of curriculum available by their urban counterparts. Rural schools are often at the forefront of school

merger discussions, having to tuition students to larger and more urban districts, and regional high school efforts.

According to T. Marzeski (personal communication, May 20, 2015), these high schools struggle with recruiting and retaining highly qualified educators and principals. In rural areas a record of starting and stopping programs not only hurts student performance, but makes the district less attractive to viable teachers and administrators. One of the many problems of rural schools is having just enough money to make it through one more year of diminished curricula, which does little to afford students a competitive future. This notion suggests that students are less likely to receive the skill sets necessary to meet the requirements of graduation.

Research suggested that successful leadership can play a significant and frequently underestimated role in improving student learning and outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2004). School principals may affect student outcomes through a variety of paths. School leaders impact aspects of the school such as: teacher supervision and retention, curricula, teaching techniques, student discipline and student allocation to teachers and classes (Coelli & Green 2012). Given these areas, the impact of principals on student outcomes, such as graduation, is potentially substantial.

Researchers who used systematic quantitative inquiry to investigate leadership team characteristics in formally designed leadership positions suggest that the principal can affect student outcomes through a variety of paths, with the goal to estimate the effect of principals on graduation and standardized test results (Hulpia et al., 2009) and (Green & Coelli 2012). Existing research indicates there is still a need to focus on specific

leadership characteristics and to better identify the impact of such principals on graduation. This research may result in strong prediction data and contribute to the field of research regarding educational leadership within specific rural school systems.

The research indicated that themes and relationships might be evidenced between educational leadership characteristics and student achievement. Van Ameijde, Nelson, Billsbery & Van Meurs (2009) completed a qualitative study in education, exploring how distributed patterns of leadership could be used to determine the distribution of leaders based upon their characteristics. It has been noted that the distribution of leadership characteristics can better identify leadership successes and student achievement (Hulpia et al., 2009; Van Ameijde et al., 2009). One of the key factors contributing to the proper leadership distribution alignment has been the limited ability to operationalize leadership characteristics (Leech & Fulton, 2008). When leadership characteristics can be identified, they can be associated to school systems and serve as patterns for prediction data of educational leaders with school system types (Hulpia & Devos, 2009). It is also noted that as principals leave, creating turnover, new hires are drawn randomly from a distribution; therefore turnover and quality deviations was related to the distribution of principal effects in a school system (Coelli & Green, 2012).

The literature reflected some qualitative and comparative case studies describing leadership characteristics of high school principals and graduation rates. These were mostly in urban areas and none in this area of rural New York State. Limited research has focused on the impact of the high school principal on graduation rates.

Educational leadership is at the core of education and as paradigms continue to change, continuous learning from gathered data will be critical in helping others put the dynamics of leadership into perspective. The findings of this study added to the field of research in educational leadership and provided data for rural school districts in the northeast region of New York State to strategically plan goals that can address their graduation rates. Additionally it can serve to support further inquiries interested in explaining the function and impact of the high school principal on graduation rates in a more randomized sampling of New York State. The study was conducted with the aspirations to provide further perspective of educational leadership in the high school setting, the effects on student learning, and develop a service that is useful to strategic planning for leadership as a construct in rural schools.

The impact of leadership characteristics and graduation rates should be consistent with an empirical and conceptual framework. This study used comparative case study approach to investigate the impact of the high school principal and graduation rates of the selected seven rural schools in the northeast region of New York State.   It employed a sampling strategy that deliberately used selection criteria, using data to create two main groups within the seven districts. It defined those districts as High Graduation Rate Schools (HGRS) and Low Graduation Rate Schools (LGRS). Each school system was further defined, grouped, and identified into distinctive subgroups (i.e. HGRS, rural, high minority, and low income). I was mindful of both the HGRS (three to five schools) and the LGRS to as they related to the research questions. A series of three interviews occurred. Each high school building principal, district superintendent, and a randomly

selected teacher leader (selection criteria was established as most districts have multiple)

were interviewed to collect leadership attribute data, explore similarities, and categorize.

If such data were resulted the study operationally defined similar measurable leadership

characteristics, defined impact of the principal, and associated them with differently

defined school systems. The research was conducted in one specific region of New York

State and focused specifically on seven school systems within that region. The study was

isolated to that area alone and limited in scope. One concern in choosing this

methodology was the concept of "particularity competes with the search for

generalizability" (Stake, 2000, p. 439). Generalizability refers to the applicability of the

findings to other population samples, indicating the extent to which larger populations are

represented by the data (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Therefore the research focused attention

on understanding the individual and school system specifics. It is with this specificity that

I understand this study is situational and can be impacted by diverse issues and contexts

(Stake, 2000). This study did not seek to generalize beyond this region therefore future

study could be required. Data were collected through interviews and document review.

Personal interviews were conducted to gather perceptions about the principals' leadership

characteristics. The data collection procedures section in Chapter 3 supported this

procedure. Following the interviews participants were asked to review their responses

briefly as part of the post-interview conversation. Each participant was informed that the

interview would be transcribed and that he/she would be provided with a copy of his/her

interview session to review for accuracy. When participants received the transcriptions of

their interviews, they were directed to examine the information and make any changes or

additions deemed necessary to ensure that the information most clearly represented their

thoughts and ideas. All study participants were asked to return their examined

transcriptions within two weeks of receiving it. If the information was recorded and

transcribed accurately, the participants were further requested to return the transcriptions

indicating data was accurate. As the participants returned transcribed interview

documents, they were examined for changes or additions that were incorporated into the

original document. This member checking process was used on all 21 transcriptions to

ensure that the data gathered was an accurate portrayal of the respondent's thoughts and

provided a clear and trustworthy representation for data analysis (Merriam, 2009).

This qualitative inquiry was approached from a comparative case study

perspective, understanding that the realities are socially constructed to a degree; my

relationship with participants may have affected the work and thus was acknowledged, it

was not be isolated from its context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Eisner, 1998). The focus

of this research was also limiting, I conducted an embedded analysis of the role of the

high school principal in rural high schools of a northeastern region in New York State.

There were other important impacts on graduation rates available in these selected school

systems, however I did not choose them for analysis.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined to help the reader understand how they were used

in the study.

Leadership characteristics: Waters and Cameron (2007) identified 21 leadership

responsibilities into three main areas: focus, magnitude, and purposeful community.

These main areas recognize the responsibility of leaders by operationally defining similar measurable leadership characteristics. Responsibilities identified through their research included: communication, culture, ideas/beliefs, relationships, discipline, order, flexibility and monitoring.

Leadership distribution: According to Gronn (2002) and Spillane et al. (2008), both have conveyed that distributed leadership is a leadership style where interaction among teaching staff has been empowered; leadership is not only distributed to others who would like to share their knowledge and expertise, but also to teachers holding certain positions within the school. Other researchers, such as Shelley (as cited in Harris 2008) describe the term as a type of leadership advocating leadership hierarchy within a school system.

Leadership team: This term is defined as the people in place with influence and supervision to make decisions in each particular school. This team may include the following members: Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, High School Principal, Assistant High School Principal, Dean of Students, and Lead Teacher.

Student achievement: this term is defined in context by this research to mean a successful completion of the graduation requirements as indicated by the New York State Education Department (2015). Each student earned 22 units of credit by successfully demonstrating a proficiency of required state assessments (i.e. 1 Math Regents, 1 English Language Arts Regents, 1 Science Regents and 1 Social Studies).

Novice high school principals: According to the New York State Department of Education (2015) and for the purposes of this study, this a term used to define a person

who holds the New York State Department of Education Provisional Certificate, passed the New York State School Leadership Examination (SLA) within the past 5 years, and is a current High School Principal with 5 years or less experience.

Veteran high school principal: According to the New York State Department of Education (2015) and for the purposes of this study, this a term used to define a person who holds the New York State Department of Education Permanent Certificate, passed the New York State School Leadership Examination (SLA) within the past 5 years, and is a current High School Principal with more than 5 years of experience.

Assumptions

This multiple case study was based on five assumptions.

- The participants were assumed to be honest in their responses during the data collection process and their responses were based on valid and reliable interview questions.

- It is assumed that the participants wanted to be on the leadership team because they provided direction to the faculty and staff and supported the mission/vision of the school system.

- All participants were given the opportunity to review the questions prior to the interview and to review their transcriptions following the interview. They were additionally offered the opportunity to make corrections on the interview transcription. It is assumed that this member checking process, used with all 21-interview session transcriptions helped to improve the

accuracy, credibility, validity, and transferability of the data. In addition

to providing a check for the authenticity in the participant responses.

- ▪ The participants were only minimally impacted by the interview sessions.

- ▪ Lastly, the document review process in the study is assumed to be
  accurate, current, comprehensive, and that the sources of information are
  accurate.

Scope, Delimitations, and Limitations

The scope of this study was limited and isolated to a region of New York State

and focused specifically on seven school systems within that rural region; therefore, it

was difficult to project to a more generalized population. The study sample was small and

based on the responses of the leadership team. The documents that were reviewed and the

information that was provided were through direct interviews and reviews of a single

researcher. The rationale for the scope of this study was that the study focused on the

impact of the principal on graduation rates.

This study was further delimited or narrowed in relation to time, resources, and

location. The time of this study was narrowed to the 2015-2016 school year and the

months during which the building leadership team was in operation and available. This

study was also narrowed in scope by the resources that were used and the location since I

selected sites that are in close proximity to each other and to my residence.

Researcher bias is also a possible limitation of this study due to the case study

design. Because I was the sole person responsible for data collection and analysis, it is

possible that I might have selected only data that were in direct support of the conceptual proposition. In addition, I may have limitations in my interviewing techniques and the analysis of the document review may have been skewed. The limitation of researcher bias will also be addressed in the researcher's role section in Chapter 3.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study includes the practical contributions to research on the topic, to practice in the field, and to social change in education. Since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001(NCLB), the impact of educational reforms is being felt throughout all levels of education. These reforms have had both positive and negative effects on the educational system. Graduation rates are at the forefront of scrutiny from local districts to legislative forums. However, these reform plans have yet to address the problem of declining graduation rates in many rural high schools and the impact of the high school principal.

This research is unique because it addresses a gap in the literature for an under-researched area of secondary education. This study is expected to contribute to the existing literature by expanding on current knowledge about the impact of the high school principal on graduation rates. It may also add to existing literature on educational leadership characteristics that may impact the way high school principals meet contemporary challenges related to improving graduation rates.

There is much knowledge to gain about the impact of principals on graduation. There is, in fact, a substantial relationship between principal leadership and student achievement (Waters et al., 2010). Further evidence exists for certain principal behaviors

to have a direct relationship with student achievement as it applies to graduation rates (Nettles & Herrington 2007).

The results of this study provided much-needed insights to defined leadership characteristics of high school principals within specific rural high school settings. This study aimed to make a contribution to the research and was accomplished with the purpose of identifying, describing, and categorizing the leadership characteristics of the high school principal in schools with upper quartile graduations rates.

One of the researched identifiable problems to this process has been the limited ability to operationalize leadership characteristics (Leech & Fulton, 2008). When leadership characteristics can be identified, they can serve as prediction data to support educational leaders within school system types (Hulpia & Devos, 2009). The insights from this study should aid in understanding district wide educational leadership distribution. Educational leadership distribution may be one of the major factors resulting in increased graduation rates. The distribution of leadership characteristics can better identify leadership success and student achievement (Hulpia et al., 2009; Van Ameijde et al., 2009). This supported the notion of understanding the impact of the principal in graduation rates.

This study is expected to provide information to school systems to assist in the development of building level leadership, creating a list of defined leadership characteristics associated with high graduation rates, create systems of professional development, and support decision-making processes regarding the leadership distribution. These findings could be of particular value to school leaders who are

confronted with the challenge of increasing graduation rates within the contexts of a rural and economically disadvantaged region.

A general understanding of the similarities in the educational leadership characteristics on graduation rates and school systems may present an opportunity to increase graduation rates in the future. A major responsibility of high school education is to prepare students to be college and career ready. In doing so, a student must successfully fulfill the requirements associated with high school completion.

Education has long been tasked with influencing social change by being responsive to the needs of society. Understanding the impact of high school principals as related to graduation rates is critical. Increasing graduation rates ensures students are better equipped to become active members of a skilled workforce, thus influencing society and pro-active social change. As a point of historical reference, Dewey (1907) found that the implications for social change are endless in scope as with the development of a stronger educational institution comes a stronger work force and contributing members of society.

Summary

Chapter 1 of this study described the background of the study as well as explained the problem; the purpose of the study; the research questions; the conceptual framework; the nature of the study; definitions, assumptions, and limitations; and the significance of the study. Most schools in New York State have a high school principal. Rural schools are no different. However, these schools also have problems concerning declining graduation rates. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge needed to address

this problem by determining the educational leadership characteristics of the high school principal as they relate to graduation rates.

In Chapter 2, a thorough examination will be presented on the current research on the following two major topics: high school principal leadership characteristics and their role on influencing student achievement as it relates to graduation completion. Advanced searches were completed using topics: principal and characteristics, student achievement, rural schools, leadership, leadership teams, leadership distribution, leadership characteristics, graduation rates, impact, and impact of high school principals. This literature review closed with a summary and conclusion, which will describe the most important studies in relation to this topic as well as the gaps in the literature and the limited research in this specific area. It will further indicate how this research extended the knowledge of the field.

Chapter 3 will describe the methodology of this study, including the tradition, paradigm, design, and role of the researcher. Additionally, this chapter will describe the participants, setting and case of the study, the researcher's role, the data collection and recording instruments, the data collection plan, and the data analysis plan, threats to data quality, trustworthiness, feasibility, and ethical procedures.

Chapter 4 will provide a description of the results and findings for this study. The chapter also will describe the data analysis process. The first stage of data analysis will involve a comprehensive document review for each data source and a process of category construction, including data evidence sources gathered from participant interviews. The second stage of data analysis will involve the examination of high school principal's

characteristics, similarities, patterns and relationships within the data. The conclusion of this chapter will describe the strategies that were used to enhance the validity and reliability of this study.

Chapter 5 will present the purpose, nature of the study, and why it was conducted. The chapter will concisely summarize the key findings and presented an interpretation based upon the two main research questions. The limitations of the study will be highlighted and recommendations for future research will be identified while describing the potential impact for positive social change. The conclusion will allow for me to provide reflection and describe the research process used for this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter I present a scholarly review of the literature related to the research problem. The literature review was focused and organized on two topics: (a) current research on high school principal leadership characteristics, and (b) the role of the principal on influencing student achievement as it related to high school graduation.

As stated in Chapter 1, critical studies on the impact of the rural high school principal on graduation rates were absent from the existing literature. The literature revealed some qualitative and comparative case studies describing leadership characteristics of high school principals and graduation rates. Most studies were set in urban areas and none were set in northeastern New York. Also, limited research has focused on the impact of the principals on graduation rates. Furthermore, as indicated by both the literature and my preliminary data collection, graduation rates appear to be higher in some northeastern rural high schools than in others, where some principals exhibited certain specific leadership characteristics. For these reasons, I focused my review of the literature upon high school principal's impact on graduation.

I searched the literature using electronic education databases including ERIC, EBSCO, Academic Search Premier, and Sage. To ensure saturation of the literature, other domain-specific databases with advanced searches, traditional printed books and peer-reviewed journals were also searched. Advanced database searches were completed using two to three of the above terms together (i.e., *principal and characteristics; student achievement, high school graduation, rural schools, and leadership*). The search yielded

over 13,000 articles that analyzing various forms of leadership practices and constructs of school leadership, coupled with volumes related to student achievement. However, in narrowing the scope to filter the advanced search fields to include only the terms; rural high school principal, graduation rates, and educational leadership characteristic; only around 30 articles were tied to rural high school principal's leadership characteristics and graduation. Whenever possible, the most current scholarly works were consulted on the subject. However, given the lack of current research on rural high school principals, some earlier scholarly sources were consulted.

This literature review section will define high school principal leadership and discussed the role(s) of that leadership influencing student achievement. Specific studies are reviewed and core themes of high school principal leadership practices are identified and explained. The review of these practices reveal there are components or characteristics of the high school principal in school systems that, when employed, can impact student achievement and ultimately graduation.

Leadership Characteristics

Since the inception of the educational institution, educational leadership has been examined, and more currently, those same inquires have been tied to measurable student achievement. Leadership has been investigated through testing a conception of how leadership impacts student learning from four paths: rational, emotions, organizational, and family. Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi (2010) used teacher responses to an online survey (1,445 responses) that measured distributed leadership practices in their schools (N = 199) with variables mediating leaders' effects on students. Working from the

premise that school leaders are capable of having significant positive effects on student

learning and other important outcomes the researchers describe a new conception of how

leadership impacts student learning in their premise of four distinct paths along which

leadership impacts flows to improve student learning: rational, emotions, organizational,

and family paths. Distinctively different sets of variables and potential mediators of

leadership impact populate each path. Leadership was conceptualized and measured as a

set of practices distributed among staff rather than enacted only by those in formal

leadership roles. This study used data collected via comparable surveys and phone

interviews with principals and a sample of their teachers in both the fall and spring. This

resulted in 1,200 principals from 72 school districts across a Canadian province and

evidence came from 1,445 teachers in 199 school, which response were provided by at

least 3 teachers in leadership roles ($M = 6$; $SD = 4.08$). The online survey was composed

of several multi-item scales and teachers responded to a 5-point Likert-type scale. The

review of this study provides for a number of leadership variables that impact students

learning.

In order to review educational leadership from an organizational perspective

Youngs and King (2002) examined the extent to which principal leadership addresses

three aspects of the school's organizational capacity: (a) teacher's knowledge, skills, and

disposition; (b) professional community; and (c) program coherence (dimensions). The

study indicated that effective principals maintain characteristics that sustain high levels of

establishing trust, help to create teacher professional growth, understand shared norms

and values among their faculties employ a professional learning community, and promote

program coherence. The study was rooted in the understanding that there is a relationship

of capacity to instructional quality and student achievement; as the principal's leadership

directly affects the school capacity (e.g., technical resources, program coherence,

professional community, and teacher's knowledge, skills, and dispositions). These are all

related, and everyone has the potential to affect one or more of the others and where as a

whole affect the institutional quality of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This

research study depicted a direct link from the professional development of principal

leadership to the school capacity, to the instructional quality, and to student achievement.

The sample of this study included nine public schools selected from a national search of

schools seeing large proportion of low-income students, had a history of low

achievement, and were located in urban districts. Data collection involved fieldwork,

interviews, observation, and collection of documents regarding student achievement,

demographic and fiscal information. Interviews included teacher, staff, and principal.

Data were synthesized and two main areas rated schools; the nature of principal

leadership related to professional development and the nature of what the principal's

leadership addresses school capacity. Other areas of focus included the nature of

principal leadership and quality of technical resources, as well as each of the previously

mentioned dimensions. The study found principal leadership qualities that enhanced the

school capacity had a strong effect on student achievement. Such principal qualities that

focused on substantial and schoolwide change, structured common teacher planning time,

fostered teacher collaboration, conducted strategic and meaningful professional

development surfaced. This study was pertinent to the understanding of school capacity and principal leadership (Youngs & King, 2002).

To revalue educational leadership characteristics, the school as a growing institution, and student achievement, Hallinger and Heck (1998) explored the principal's contribution to school effectiveness. They examined the body of empirical research on principal effects that emerged during the period from 1980–1995, a significantly active time in educational policy, research, practice, and reform. They conducted a critical synthesis of the literature and focused specifically on the substandard findings and interpreting their meaning for the field. They were interested in three major areas of review: the school principal's belief and leadership behavior, school performance as a dependent variable, and lastly the impact of principals on student outcomes. Their review included 40 published journal articles, dissertation studies, and papers presented at peer-reviewed conferences. Researchers employed variations to administrator effect models: direct-effect, antecedent effects, mediated effects, reciprocal effects, and moderated effect models. They also looked at where the principal's actions impact school outcomes, where actions affect outcomes indirectly through other variables, the principal's effects on teachers, and the teachers' effect on the principal. This included how processes and outcomes are affected. This review provided several paths that begin to describe how the principal's leadership impacts student outcomes.

Scholars researched educational leadership characteristics and the relationships associated with student learning and progress. Robinson et al. (2008) examined the relative impact of different types of leadership on students' academic and

nonacademic outcomes. The study analyzed the findings of 27 published studies on this relationship including comparisons of the effects of transformational and instructional leadership on student outcomes. They revealed five sets of leadership practices or dimensions: establishing goals and expectations; resourcing strategically; planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching in the curriculum; promoting and participating in teacher learning in development, and ensuring orderly and supportive environment. The researchers used meta-analysis to examine the impact of particular types of leadership on student outcomes. Results provided data demonstrating that the closer educational leaders are to teaching and learning the more likely they are to have a positive impact on student's outcomes. Data supported a transformational leadership style as it was more focused on the relationship between leaders in 5 hours than on the educational work of school leadership. The quality of these relationships is not predictive of the quality of student outcomes. Researchers suggest that schools at different stages of development will need different leadership emphasis. This research study helps to support leadership characteristics and the impact leadership styles have on student outcomes.

The importance of the principal's work is multifaceted and can serve as a foundation for improving instructional practice. The value of principal leadership and peer teachers on instructional practice and student learning has also been explored. Supouitz et al. (2010) investigated the nature of the principal's direct and indirect effect on student learning. Researchers used teacher surveys and student achievement data (2006–2007) to employ a multilevel structural equation. They examined the structural relationship between student learning in theorized dimensions of principal leadership,

teacher peer impact, and changes in teachers' instructional practice. The study demonstrated strong significance of direct relationships that mediate educator leadership and student learning, demonstrating the importance of principal's work for student learning because of their indirect impact on teacher's practices. This study supported empirical evidence of the impact on student learning indirectly through teacher's instructional practices, made by the principal. The findings of this study indicate that the principal working with and through a range of other school actions and exerting impact on teachers does affect the instructional practices of teachers that produce improvement in student learning and outcomes. They conceptualized principal leadership as a construct made up of leaders' emphasis on mission and goals, community and trust, and a focus on instruction. They suggested that principal leadership has a second primary construct, peer impact. This was referring to the act of teachers influencing their colleagues rather than its leadership quality. The researchers stated peer impact was composed of latent factors such as; instructional conversations, an interaction among faculty members around issues of teaching and learning, and instructional advice network. They hypothesized that principal leadership un-directionally effects the extent to which teacher's impacted their peers inside of schools; they found this to be directly related to student outcomes. Data were collected in mid-sized urban district in the southeastern United States. The study used two data collections methods; a teacher survey which provided an 81% response rate and student achievement data from 2006–2007. The final sample included 38 elementary, middle, and high schools and 721 teachers. The dependent variable included 2 years of student records (i.e., standardized test scores, administrative data, race, sex,

English proficiency status, and free or reduced lunch). The independent variable, a 29

item teacher questionnaire measuring seven areas of school climate in teaching practices:

three related to principal leadership, three related to peer-teacher impact, and one related

to change in instructional practice. Responses were scaled and demonstrated a positive

association between both principal and peer impact with teachers' change in instructional

practice. These data suggested that principals who focus on instruction, fostering

community and trust, and clearly communicate the school's mission and goals are

associated with teachers who report making a greater degree of changes in their

instructional practice. Researchers summarized their examination in that educational

leadership of the principal impacts instructional practice, which changes student

performance and outcomes.

Researchers studied the connections between educational leadership

characteristics of high school principals and student achievement. Systematic

quantitative research, across various school settings was used to investigate leadership

team characteristics informally designed leadership positions (Hulpia et al., 2009). The

Distributed Leadership Inventory (DLI) was developed and used to further examine this

inquiry. The purpose was to best determine if specific leadership characteristics could be

centralized. The DLI was presented to a sample of 2,198 respondents in 46 secondary

schools. The results of the administered DLI indicate that leading school systems involve

multiple individuals, with several supporting characteristics, which will differ by

leadership function (Hulpia et al., 2009). This research study provided insight for

understanding specific leadership characteristics and to better identify potential correlations in those characteristics and school settings.

Leadership distribution is important to understand when investigating the educational leadership characteristics of the high school principal. Van Ameijde et al. (2009) conducted a qualitative study, exploring how distributed patterns of leadership within a higher education institution occur. The authors recognized the importance of distributed leadership and identified several factors to enhance and inhibit its occurrence and effectiveness. Designed in an integrated framework, both theory and practical implications for distributed leadership are indicated. The study determined how to distribute leaders based upon characteristics. The study provided a focus on how to enhance the process of leadership distribution and recognizing patterns of leadership at the higher education level. This qualitative study explored distribution patterns of leadership within leadership teams inside the educational institution. It further examined how leadership is distributed and the factors that enhance and inhibit its occurrence and effectiveness (Van Ameijde et al., 2009). The outcomes of this study provided for a more robust understanding of leadership in an organizational context. The study analyzed five different project teams by comparing and contrasting terms of leadership distribution. Data were collected from participants at a large United Kingdom based university, using a combination of casual mapping and semi-structured interviews. Participants were identified by purposive and referral sampling.

The study based research questions on the premise that leadership distribution can play a major role in the future of the knowledge-base in society as it combines strengths

of various individuals and balance their weaknesses (Van Ameijde et al., 2009). Through both an emergent and top-down approach, a process of analysis and coding transcripts was conducted. Two main levels were identified (e.g., organizational; and team levels). In the organizational level, the involvement of stakeholders impacted factors and outcomes at the team level. The team identified five factors that impacted how they operated within themselves, critical internal conditions, and processes.

The focus of the study by Hulpia and Devos (2009) was to map school leaders' perceptions concerning the cooperation of the leadership team, distribution of leadership function, decision-making, and assess their relative weight to predict school leaders' job satisfaction. Specific content areas such as; seniority, job experience, school size, leadership team size and school type were examined to indicate job satisfaction. Using a self-report questionnaire, a sample of 130 school leaders of 46 large secondary schools indicated results that school leaders are highly satisfied with their job. Strong correlations were evidenced for cooperation of the leadership team and school type. The results of this study provided for foundational data in understanding job satisfaction, yet failed to provide continuity with student achievement. There was evidence of strong prediction data to support "best match" of educational leaders with the school system types. The study focused on overall job satisfaction of school leaders and examines antecedents to school leaders' job satisfaction. The study also took into consideration potential variables; leadership, cooperation of leadership teams, distribution of leadership functions, participative decision-making, context variables, and structured school variables. The study was built on a theoretical model and the results indicated that school

leaders are highly satisfied with their job. Multiple regression analysis revealed that job

satisfaction was significantly related to the cooperation of leadership teams and the

school type. The amount of formal distribution of leadership functions and participative

decision-making of teachers in school policy did not have a significant impact on school

leaders and job satisfaction (Hulpia & Devos, 2009). Descriptive statistics for

independent variables suggest respondents supported a highly distributed leadership team

and more centralized supervision. Multiple regression analysis indicated that members of

leadership teams perceive their team to be highly cooperative with a moderate amount of

participative decision-making in the school systems, which indicated a high level of job

satisfaction. The data continue to support the identification of educational leadership

characteristics and leadership distribution within a school system.

The relationship between teachers' perceptions of the principal's leadership

behaviors and the level of shared decision-making in their schools links with student

achievement (Leech & Fulton, 2008). This study operationalized the participant

responses to the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) and the Shared Educational

Decisions Survey- Revised. The sample consisted of 646 participants from 26 school

systems. The study indicated that principal preparation institutions should focus on

developing educational leadership programs. These programs serve to provide

experiences that enhance leaders' skill in creating empowered learning organizations, thus

indicating the role of the educational systems in society. This correlational study explored

perceptions of faculty members regarding shared decision-making and the principals'

leadership behavior in secondary schools of a large urban district. The general purpose

was to explore the relationship between teachers' perceptions of leadership behaviors of secondary school principals and their perceptions of the level shared decision-making practiced in their schools (Leech & Fulton, 2008). Leadership behavior was operationalized by the response to each of the five practices of the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI). The sample was selected from all secondary school (grades 6-12) in this large urban public school system. The sample consists of 646 participants from 26 schools. Each participant was requested to complete two separate survey instruments; LPI and Shared Educational Decision Survey (SED-R). The researchers framed their study around the guided researcher question: Is there a relationship between the leadership behaviors of secondary school principals and the level of shared decision-making in the following: planning policy development, curriculum and instruction, student achievement, pupil personnel services, staff development, and budget management; all as perceived by teachers. There was very little relationship between the leadership behaviors of the Principal and the level of shared decision-making in schools.

The researchers were looking to demonstrate that the school principal could have an impact on the level of shared decision-making. They believed that shared decision-making was an important aspect of the school system. They were interested in exploring how the faculty perceived a principal's leadership behavior as it applied to shared decision-making. They were looking to see if it had any impact on the process of shared decision-making.

Scholars have struggled with many concepts and definitions of leadership and the styles associated with educational leadership and characteristics. Similarly leadership

style, session, and school transformation have been investigated. Baker (2009) performed a qualitative, longitudinal, and retrospective case study utilizing the Felix Holt School to explore leadership succession and the impact on school transformation. Over a 10-year period the student enrollments (rolls) rose from 560 to 1109, while the percentage of pupils achieving a composite higher grade point average increased from 13–57%. The 5-year case study involved themed interviews with systematic samples of governors, teachers, administrators, as well as lesson observation. A second phase of the data collection process included retrospective, semi structured interviews with an opportunity sample of participants; governors, teachers, assistants, and students to demonstrate diverse perspectives.

The case study's research question was to consider how different leaders, styles, succession, and strategies have contributed to and impacted school transformation. The study found that a school could move from one level to the next level of transformation. Over a 5 year period student grade point average had risen from mid 20's to mid 50's in aggregate, as pupil enrollment doubled. Leadership was found to be contingent upon internal and external forces. The leader's ability to overcome obstacles and seize opportunities to enhance school development was noted. The leaders shared themes of first falling rolls followed by rapid expansion in enrollments numbers, deteriorating buildings followed by sustained investment in new facilities; inherited and possibly inert faculty and staff followed by high levels of turnover and recruitment.

Baxter (2009) identified change as leadership succession and the impact of such succession upon school transformation. He was interested in knowing if as leadership

change how would the school change. He was successful in finding that risks of leadership succession compromise the work of successful leaders and implicate sustainability of reform and school improvement.

Leadership succession and style development play a role in the school system. There is existing value in extracting data from the field, as leaders have reported that key elements are described in developing a leadership style: communication styles, asking compelling questions, preparing for subject matter, staying connected to hidden agendas, making decisions for the greater good of the organization and keeping the balance between personal and professional life (Hummell, 2007). These generalized characteristics help to foster the development of a unique and personalized leadership style. The information collected in this study was limited, therefore, difficult to project to a more generalized population. The results were provided through direct observations of single researchers. There was no mention of any detailed information regarding the four frames of leadership. It was not possible to correlate specific leadership characteristics with any of the four frames. The study describes leadership styles within meeting forums, which does provide relevant information regarding educational leadership characteristics. The data provided applicable information that showcased communication styles, shared-decisions making actions, interpersonal skills, and the relationship style of the leaders in meeting forums. The information found in this case study would provide for supportive research as a secondary source and should be considered as a springboard to additional research. Although the information can provide a contributing source relevant to leadership characteristics, it lacks significant depth and would require further exploration

to determine solid evidence based support to leadership distribution and educational leadership characteristics.

The application across contextual educational settings in a comparative review comparing and contrasting leadership styles, Hummell (2007) observed leadership at various levels in the United States Department of Education. The qualitative research examined leadership styles at local, state, and national levels of education. The author's direct observations noted comparisons of leadership style and further reports that continuity was detected. In all meeting forum observations of this qualitative case study, leaders presented themselves in a manner that characteristics were evidenced. Leaders were observed abiding by open meeting policies. The environment created a risk-free mentality of inviting questions and evoking responses. According to the study, the leadership posed an outstanding set of public speaking skills and was able to engage their audience on command. Interactions among the leadership introduced a strong set of skills to quickly assess one another's dominant style of leadership and to then re-adjust one's own style. The leadership at all levels described this as a meaning mechanism to ensure the establishment and maintenance of solid relationships. Observed actions in the study indicated leadership at all levels displayed a significant interest in developing strong relationships with subordinates, colleagues, and supervisors. In all cases, leaders presented information concretely with concise data that drew linkage to decision-making and infused the impact placed upon the global organization. Hummell (2007) indicated clearly that leaders were concerned with how their decisions would affect the

organization as a whole. Strong correlations were noted in leaders that had distinctive speaking and articulation skills while conveying their messages in an engaging manner.

The study conducted by Hummell (2007) revealed that in national and state level meetings strict protocol was enforced. The leadership in these settings demanded control, showed no toleration for disruption and interruptions and concluded with formalized questions and answer sessions. A significant level of caution was placed on the discussions of controversial topics. A clear distinction was noted in the facilitation of meetings at various levels of education and the culture created within that environment. The ability to clearly articulate was considered to be highly supportive of strong leadership styles.

From a critical point a view there are several common themes to leadership style and defining associated characteristics. Bolman and Deal's (2013) four frames of leadership to assess leadership styles from structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frames. Reports indicate leaders at local levels displayed strong characteristics identified in the human resource frame. Further inquiry informs that leadership at state and national levels were more likely to function within the political and structural frames. In addition, the study reports the most astute leadership style was one that could quickly and easily navigate throughout the four frames with little effort.

Navigating through the frames of leadership and having the ability to maintain a level of social interaction was found to be an important part of leadership behavior. Spillane & Zuberi (2009) used the Leadership Daily Practice (LDP) log as a method of conducting research in the school system. Data were collected at the completion of the

LDP, observations, and open-ended cognitive interviews. Formally designated leaders, who might work on instruction, selected the members including: principals, assistant principals, and curriculum specialists for math and literacy. One-on-one training was provided to the participants to familiarize them with the log and definitions of key terms. Thirty-four school leaders and teachers were asked to complete the LDP log for a 2 week period.

Spillane & Zuberi (2009) investigated participant responses entered into LDP logs and which interactions participants considered to be leadership orientated as a social interaction. They were further interested in how the participants defined leadership constructs in the study, alignment, and agreement between participants when using the LDP logs to describe the same social interaction.

The study found that LDP log captured school leadership interactions as recorded by independent observers. It also demonstrated that study participants were not biased toward reporting certain types of interactions with others. The researchers proposed methods to improve the LDP and sampling scheme (Spillane & Zuberi, 2009).

A second synthesis of the literature on the relationship between school leadership practices and student outcomes was conducted by Waters et al., (2003), who synthesized 70 research studies relating principal leadership to student achievement that were conducted from the early 1970s through the early 2000s. The studies they examined looked at a wide array of leadership responsibilities, including a focus on school culture, faculty motivation, instructional support, and emphasis on accountability. They produced effects sizes for each of the different dimensions of leadership that were examined.

Across these disparate studies, they found an average effect size of .25 and concluded that a substantial relationship exists between leadership and student achievement. In their systematic review of the literature, researchers provided a list of more than 20 leadership activities that they found were statistically related to student learning. These included such diverse activities as setting maintaining order and discipline; fostering shared belief and cooperative community; securing resources; involvement in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices; monitoring the effectiveness of school practices; and recognizing and awarding accomplishments.

Student Achievement

The effects of school principals' leadership on student outcomes have been studied from various lenses. One inquiry used two estimators of principal impacts on student outcomes, which are based on two different assumptions about the dynamics of the principal effect (identified by sets of variables associated with specific principles) and coupled with a time invariant effect (Coelli & Green, 2012). Data came from administrative records for students enrolled at the start of November in grade 12 of standard public British Colombia high schools from 1995–2004. The final sample covers 334 schools, 33 single principal schools, 77 two principal schools, 87 three principal, 29 four principal, and 9 five principal schools. 504 separate principals were observed; 127 were observed in more than one school (114 in two schools, 13 in three). Results indicate that individual school principals can matter in terms of affecting high school student outcomes. Principals have a stronger impact on English exam scores then on grade rates. This could arise as graduation rates may be more difficult of an outcome for principals to

impact; whereas raising average English exam scores may simply involve directing teachers to place a stronger emphasis on test content.

Student achievement is often paired with graduation rates and educational leadership continues to be investigated. The effects of leadership on student achievement were examined by Louis et al., (2010), using survey responses from a national sample of United States teachers. The researchers investigated school leadership behaviors and instructional practices. Using a mixed methods approach with a qualitative focus data for this study was collected from 2005 to 2008. The sample design involved respondents in 180 schools in 45 districts across nine states. Two surveys were issued and each contained items from established instruments, all variables were measured with a six-point Likert scale. Survey results came from 4491 teachers in 43 districts in 157 schools with a response rate of 67% in 2005-2006, and 3900 teachers in 40 districts in 134 schools with a response rate of 55% in 2008. Review of this study provides for a number of leadership variables that are positively related to student learning. There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that the exercise of leadership and its effects are deeply embedded in national, as well as, organizational school systems.

Nettles & Herrington (2007) explored the direct effects of school leadership on student achievement. They explored the indicating evidence that certain principal behaviors produce a direct relationship with student achievement. A three level Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) growth curve model was used to determine the amount of student level variants that can be explained by five dimensions; measured by the Principal Implementation Questionnaire (PIQ). The results from four of the

dimensions; professional development, leadership, assessment, and intervention were

analyzed based on statistical validation tested for growth scores over time, student-level

variables (i.e. gender, social economic status, free and reduced lunch eligibility, as

necessity, English proficiency, and disability status) and lastly modeled variables

associated with the principal. Specifically principals' response on the PIQ was used to

define and categorize principal behavior. Results demonstrated some significant

relationships between the implementation practices of the principal and student

achievement.

Testing leadership in the school system, researchers Gordon and Louis (2009)

used exploratory factor analysis and regression, to study several areas of leadership. The

researchers analyzed survey data of 157 principals and 4,491 teachers, results indicated

that principals with more diverse leadership teams (positive or negative) impacted both

the community and student achievement. The study selection was based upon examining

leadership characteristics in a globalized manner, specifically the effect of multiple

members of the leadership team within the school system. Investigation revealed

diversity could be a significant factor in student achievement, parental involvement,

student achievement/outcomes, and community involvement. Linking stakeholder

involvement with student achievement, Gordon and Louis used a mixed methods

approach to the investigations. The researchers used both qualitative data for survey

results and quantitative data from student learning. By using exploratory factor analysis

and regression they explored the gap between school and community. The following

questions were posed: How does leadership style affect principals' openness to

community involvement? Is a principal's openness to community involvement related to student achievement and how was participatory and shared school leadership structures related to student learning (Gordon & Louis, 2009). Based on a participatory democratic conceptual framework, surveys of principals and teachers focused on factors associated with increased levels of outside stakeholder involvement and impact in schools, as well as factors positively associated with student learning (Gordon & Louis, 2009). The large stratified random sample included 180 schools in 45 districts across nine states. The sample population included 157 principal surveys, 4,491 teacher surveys, and the 2005-2006 Math and English achievement data. The major findings identified principals' perceptions of parent impact as moderately weak positive but significantly correlated with principals' openness to community involvement. Poverty level and district support for community involvement only explained nine percent of the variance in the diversity of membership on building leadership teams. The results show that principals with more diverse leadership teams were more open to community involvement, which has a direct impact on student achievement in math and English (Gordon & Louis, 2009).

In a qualitative study, Van Houtte (2006) examined teacher satisfaction as it relates to tracking, culture, and trust. Much like the work of Hulpia and Devos (2009) teacher and principal job satisfaction, pupil satisfaction and student achievement can be linked. Using a multileveled analysis of data from 711 teachers and 3,760 pupils in a sample of 34 Belgium secondary schools (19 technical/vocational and 15 general schools), the study attempted demonstrate a relation between tracking and teachers' job satisfaction. The researcher was concerned with exploring whether teachers in lower

tracks were less satisfied with their jobs than the teachers in higher tracks. The researcher

determined that trust and culture played a significant role in the study. He determined

that the culture of the pupils, teacher trust in pupils at the teacher level, and faculty trust

in pupils at the school level, significantly had an impact on job satisfaction. The sample

consisted of 15 general schools (320 teachers) and 19 technical/vocational schools (391

teachers). Each principal randomly distributed 25 questionnaires to grade level teachers.

The response rate was 83%. The questionnaire was also presented to all 5th year pupils

while in class, and the data yielded 3,760 total completed questionnaires. The results

indicated a rather weak relation between tracking and teacher satisfaction. Teachers in

technical/vocational schools tended to be slightly less satisfied with their jobs than

teachers in general education. Also the relation between study culture and teacher

satisfaction appeared, to a small extent, to be attributable to the faculty trust in pupils.

The faculty trust in pupils was associated with school type and both the study culture, and

teacher satisfaction (VanHoutte, 2006). Results showed the pupils' study culture affected

teacher satisfaction by its impact on teacher and faculties trust.

Student achievement is affected in many ways; scholars have wrestled with the

many aspects associated with student achievement. Leithwood and Jantzi (2008)

examined school leader efficacy and impacts on student learning. The framework of the

study conceptualizes district leadership and organizational conditions as two important

categories of school leader efficacy antecedents. The school leader's impact on such

efficacy moderated by a small number of organizational and individual leader

characteristics is also explored. The framework takes the form of a causal model with

hypothesized relationships among a series of variables. These variables form a chain that is linked to student learning. To address the researchers identified gap, they focused this study on the following questions: What is the relationship between leaders' efficacy and leader practices or behaviors, as well as school and classroom conditions? What is the contribution of leaders' efficacy to variations in student learning? Are the relationships between leaders' efficacy and student learning significantly moderated by personal or organizational characteristics (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008)?

96 principals and 2,764 teacher's respondents to two separate surveys provided evidence for this study. Stratified random sampling was used to select 180 schools within 45 districts within 9 states and addressed considerable variations (i.e., curriculum standards, leadership policies, diversity, student performance, and school grade levels). The study found that school leaders' collective efficacy was an important link between district conditions. Results were based on responses from 96 schools and administrators with an 83% response rate and 2,764 teachers with a 66% response rate. Data did not show strong cause and effect relationships. However, a strong impact from the several sources of variables suggests that the effects of district leadership are largely indirect; they help create district conditions that are viewed by school leaders as favorable.

Summary

In summary it became evident that the accumulated literature indicates a major confirmation that the principal can have a detectable effect on student learning outcomes and learning as it relates to successful completion of graduation, this relevant body of literate demonstrated identifiable and definable educational leadership characteristics of

high school principals. The study presented additional information for readers to

understand general educational leadership characteristics of principals in rural school

settings. It further built on the foundation of acknowledge for both novice and veteran

principals in schools with both high and low graduation rates. Hence, similarities and

differences can be determined and principals in HGRS generally display an identifiable

and definable set of characteristics, with principal's years of service playing a significant

role. It is critical to understand this concept in the rural school systems of the northeast

region in New York State.

Moving forward, Chapter 3 provides an overview of the methodology consisting

of several subsections including qualitative research design and approach, research

rationale, sample population, and ethical considerations. Chapter 3 concludes with a

discussion of the collection and analysis of qualitative data. Chapter 4 lays out the results

of the study; where the setting and demographics were identified, the data collection and

analysis was reported and evidence of trustworthiness were discussed in detail. Chapter 5,

the final section of the study, encompasses my interpretations, limitations,

recommendations, and conclusions as they related to the potential impact of social

change.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

This study utilizes a multiple case design with a qualitative approach to identify, describe, and categorize high school principals' leadership characteristics as they relate to graduation rates in rural high schools of the northeast region in New York State. School principals can affect the following outcomes in a variety of ways: teacher supervision and retention, curricula, teaching techniques, student discipline and student allocation to teachers and classes (Coelli & Green 2012). Given these areas, the impact of principals on student outcomes, such as graduation, is potentially substantial.

This study was focused on the commonalities of leadership characteristics of rural high school principals in schools that demonstrate HGRS and LGRS. The study placed seven schools into high or low graduation rate categories, to identify, describe, and categorize high school principals' leadership characteristics as they relate to graduation rates. Each of these schools represented its own case in this multiple-case design. These schools differed by not only graduation rates, but by other variables such as: rural classification, demographic factors, free and reduce lunch eligibility rates, organizational structure, poverty level, income status, minority level, total student enrollment, advanced placement course offerings, advanced distinction levels, and limited English proficiency. These factors were useful in describing each school as its own case and were taken into consideration when analyzing the data. These differences were reviewed in this qualitative multiple-case study.

In this chapter, the methodology and procedures will be presented in six sections: setting, research design, the role of the researcher, methodology, threats to validity, and issues of trustworthiness. The physical setting section will include an explanation for why the selected setting/location was relevant to this study and described the context of the setting (i.e. locations, size and scope of sample, key subject/participants of the study, and the rural classifications). The research design section will restate the research questions, as well as stated and defined the central concept(s) of this study. This section will also demonstrate a rationale for the multiple case study approach and explain why other possible choices were less effective. The methodology section will describe the participants and the procedures for selecting and recruiting them, the data collection procedures including instrumentation and the data analysis including the coding procedures. Subsequently this chapter will close by identifying the potential threats to trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study. The findings of this study will add to the field of research in educational leadership and provided information for rural school districts in northeast region of New York State to strategically plan goals that can address their graduation rates. Additionally, it will support further inquiries into the function and impact of the high school principal on graduation rates in rural settings of New York State. The study was conducted with the goals to provide further perspectives on educational leadership in the high school setting, there effects on student learning, and the ability to develop a service that is useful to strategic planning for leadership as a construct in rural schools.

Research Design and Rationale

The two research questions explored in this study were:

Research Question 1- What are the educational leadership characteristics of high school principals in high schools with high graduation rates in the northeast region of New York State?

Research Question 2- What are the differences of the educational leadership characteristics between novice and veteran high school principals?

To answer these two main research questions, I interviewed members of school leadership teams and conducted a formal document review at seven school sites. In this case study, data from these multiple sources were converged in the analysis process rather than handled individually. Each data source constituted one piece of the "puzzle," each contributed to the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon. This convergence added strength to the findings as the various strands of the data were braided together to promote a greater understanding of the case (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This is defined later in the study.

If a study contains more than a single case then a multiple-case study is required. A multiple case study enabled me to explore differences within and between cases, while allowing me to analyze within each setting and across settings. Because comparisons are drawn, it is imperative that the cases were chosen carefully so that I could predict similar results across cases, or predicts contrasting results based on a theory (Yin, 2014). In a multiple case study, several cases are examined to understand the similarities and differences between the cases. Yin (2014) stated that multiple case studies can be used to

either, "(a) predicts similar results (a literal replication) or (b) predicts contrasting results but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication)" (p. 47). Overall, the evidence created from this type of study is considered robust and reliable, but it can also be extremely time consuming and expensive to conduct.

In the comparative case study, using a multiple-case approach, the inquiry explored a social issue in its natural setting. The qualitative focused research aimed to provide a rich and multifaceted description of the targeted phenomena with minimal disruption of the natural setting (Yin, 2014). Creswell (2009) defined comparative case/qualitative study research as collecting and analyzing data in a natural setting inductively with attention to particulars, a focus on the perspectives of participants, and description of the process using expressive language. Attempting to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context is a cornerstone of comparative case study research, as such research questions are developed that reflect a researcher's thinking on the significant factors of a study (Merriam, 2009). Since schools and their principals, even those with similar graduations rates, vary so much in rural settings, a contextualized, descriptive study that focused on participants' perspectives and the details of each school environment is the appropriate method for this study.

Schools were selected to represent a range of graduation rates. By comparing the activities of principals across these multiple sites, I explored differences within and between groups of cases. The seven selected schools were sorted into two main groups: high or low graduation rate schools (HGRS or LGRS). They were then arranged within groups based how the school systems differ in various ways. The description of case

context, issues, definitions, characteristics, participant's perceptions, and behaviors of the high school principal are what this research study sought to profile from the seven high schools in the northeast region of New York State. The goal was to identify commonalities and differences in principal characteristics across cases and also to shed light on leadership practices that are more or less effective related to graduation rates. The study took the seven schools, ranked them by graduation rates, and then drew a comparison between principals at high and low graduation rate schools to see if there was a systematic difference.

Other research traditions considered were: quantitative experiments or quasi-experiments, phenomenology, grounded theory and single case study. Each of these traditions were not appropriate in this case because they were designed to test particular theories or the effectiveness of interventions and simply do not allow for a multiple site approach.

Quantitative research designs can be difficult, expensive, and require a lot of time to perform. They must be carefully planned to ensure that there is complete randomization and correct designation of control groups. They typically require extensive statistical analysis, which can be difficult. In addition, the requirements for the successful statistical confirmation of results are very stringent, with very few experiments comprehensively demonstrating a relationship between variables; there is usually some ambiguity, which requires retesting and refinement to the design. This means another investment of time and resources must be committed to fine-tune the results. Implementation of a quantitative research design is focused on explaining phenomena by

collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematically based methods. Whereas, Grounded Theory is a research tool which enables the researcher to seek out and conceptualize the latent social patterns and structures. Grounded theory refers to a set of systematic inductive methods for conducting qualitative research aimed toward theory development and this study did not aspire to create theory.

The single case study is used when a researcher wants to gain a better understanding of the one phenomenon and distinguishing between the phenomenon studied and its context. Typically it is employed to study one specific case in its totality or holistically. Single case studies are rooted in having a primary decision made prior to data collection   Typical rationales for choosing single case studies include critical test inquiry for a significant theory, extreme or unique case, documenting the precise nature of a phenomenon this is not well understood, representative or typical case, capturing the conditions of a commonplace situation, revelatory case, previously non-accessible phenomenon, longitudinal case, establishing change over time, causal mechanisms, and patterns of transition.

A phenomenological research design, which describes the meaning for individuals of their lived experiences of a phenomenon, was considered for this study and rejected. Creswell (2009) stated that the purpose of phenomenology is "to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (p. 58). Even though this study described the individual characteristics of the high school principals, I also wanted to include data that is related and relevant to student achievement (i.e. high school graduation). Phenomenological research is not appropriate because it is rooted in

the interpretative belief that reality can never be fully realized, only represented; in fact it assumes the existence of multiple realities and holds that social realities have no existence apart from meanings that individuals construct. Interpretivists also believe that scientific inquiry should focus on the study of the different social realities that individuals in social situations construct as they participate in them. The multiple case study is the most appropriate research design to explore and describe principals' effects on graduation rates because this approach is necessary to present a contextual view of this issue across the environment of seven schools. The multiple case study with a qualitative focus research best defines this study because that design involves the study of a contemporary phenomenon explored within a bounded system. The case study being proposed for this investigation is problematically the impact of the high school principal on graduation rates, as associated to the characteristics and impact of high school principals.

Role of the Researcher

I conducted interviews and collected documents for analysis, but did not participate in any leadership activities. Each member of the leadership participant team was asked to partake in this study and was presented consent forms before the interviews were conducted. Consent was given either electronically via the email correspondence, by indicating "yes I consent to participate" or by signing the consent form and presenting to me. I informed those chosen that participation in this study was strictly voluntary and that personal identifiable information was not shared. The participants were also informed that pseudonyms were used to protect their identity and the name of the school

and of the district remained confidential. If some members of the leadership participant team chose not to participate in this study, they were excluded.

Methodology

This section includes a discussion of the setting for the study, the participant and case selection logic, the data collection procedures and the data analysis.

Setting and Cases

The setting consisted of seven schools in the northeastern region of New York. The county was in central New York State and east of Syracuse. The northern part of the county is in the Adirondack Park. The Mohawk River flows across the south part of the county. The county was created as one of three counties split off from Montgomery (the other two being Otsego and Tioga counties) as New York State was developed after the American Revolutionary War. Its area was much larger than the present county, however, and was reduced subsequently as more counties were organized.

Participant Selection Logic

Twenty-one members of school leadership teams from seven schools were invited to participate in the study. Participants included both males and females. The data was collected from the participant group at each high school setting, and consisted of the superintendent, assistant superintendent, director of educational services, high school principal, assistant high school principal, K-12 principal, and teacher leaders; as appropriate, willing and available. The exact number of participants and their roles varied from site to site, but I interviewed a minimum of three people per site. If the minimum number of participants was not achieved, I was prepared to seek additional participants

by selecting new members from each school system. It is of value to have three participants at each case site, as the focus is on the high school principal. It is critical to have participants above and below the high school principal in the administrative structure. In the nature of organizational administrative hierarchy, the superintendent or assistant superintendent is above the high school principal. The high school principals as participants are directly related to the inquiry, and the teacher leaders represent the perspectives below the high school principal. I also confirmed the high school principals' years of service during the interview process. The data categorized high school principals as either novice or veteran based upon the study definition and the responses of the participants. If both novice and veteran high school principals were not represented in the sample selection, I was prepared to adjust the sample selection to ensure representation from both categories.

I believed that the number of participants was achievable due to the access and availability of each school district and the potential participants. The school districts selected for the sample are in close in proximity to the researcher.

Since the focus of this study was on the educational leadership characteristics of the high school principal and graduation rates, it was appropriate to include the perceptions of school superintendents, assistant superintendents, assistant high school principals, and lead teachers in their views on the high school principal's leadership characteristics. The students in these schools were considered lower to low middle class populations with low-to-low middle socioeconomic status based on the percentage of students participating in free and reduced lunch programs.

These schools were purposefully selected because of their rural classification by The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Census Bureau and because of their demonstrated high and low graduation rates. Each of these schools selected fit one of the rural classification sub categories (fringe, distant, & remote). Purposeful sampling is the most common form of sampling used in qualitative research. This type of sampling, according to Merriam (2009), is based "on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and, therefore, must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 61). Therefore, the basic criteria that was used to select participants for the study sample included: (a) school superintendents employed by school boards of education in rural school districts of the northeastern region in New York State; (b) assistant school superintendents employed by rural school districts in the northeastern region of New York State; (c) high school principals employed by rural high schools in the northeastern region of New York State; (d) assistant high school principals employed by rural high schools in the northeastern region of New York State; (e) teacher leaders employed by rural high schools in the northeastern region of New York State. Participants were eligible for participation in this study if they were employed by school boards of education in rural school districts of the northeastern region of New York State in any of the previously defined capacities. In each school setting sample the rules of rural classification were maintained as described in the setting section of this chapter. All leadership participant team members met the above criteria and were invited via email to participate in the study (Appendix D). I followed up with a phone communication to confirm their participation.

The participants for this study were purposefully selected because they are employed by rural high schools situated in the selected study region of the northeastern region of New York State, and these high schools have demonstrated high and low trends in graduation rates. The participant grouping was based on the rationale that each of the high school settings has a distinctive administrative organizational structure, such as a demonstrable hierarchy of administration; each may be slightly different in each case (superintendent, assistant superintendent, high school principal, assistant high school principal, dean of students, and lead teachers). The participants of this study were in place through the duration of the data collection period to current.

<div align="center">**Data Collection Procedures**</div>

For this study, I collected data using two processes: participant interviews and a formal document review with data collection occurring between November 2015 and February of 2016.

Interviews

The data collection instrument used for interviews was an oral questionnaire developed by the researcher, based on the research questions for this study. Merriam (2009) defined these interviews as "conversation with a purpose where one obtains a special kind of information to find out what is in and on someone else's mind" (p. 71). In qualitative investigations, interviews with more open-ended questions and less structure are suggested for a case study research. The open-ended questions used during the interviews were designed to ensure that participants were given the opportunity to describe/express their perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of the practices and

leadership characteristics that have shaped the principals leadership styles. The interview

questions for this study were included and followed a stringent interview protocol in

order to ensure the reliability of the data. I made initial phone contacts with each district

superintendent followed by an email correspondence (Appendix E) to obtain written

permission to conduct these interviews and gain visitor access to each school building

within the sample selection. I arranged a time and place for the interview that minimized

disruption. This also included a signed Letter of Cooperation. At this time I confirmed

the principal's years of service. This was used to categorize the principal as either novice

or veteran. I also requested that the superintendent identify a minimum of two teacher

leaders. This allowed for me to have at least two identified teacher leaders as potential

participants. In the event that the first identified teacher leader declined participation I

moved on to the next identified teacher leader. Participants were interviewed according to

the protocol attached in Appendix A-C.

　　　　After contacting the districts, I connected with potential participants. The study

was explained to the participants, and they were sent an invitational email (Appendix D),

a consent form and copies of the interview questions prior to the scheduled interview

session.

　　　　 Each of the 21 interviews was approximately 20-60 minutes in duration and was

conducted, either during site visits or phone conferences. It should be noted that the

interview process was similar, if not identical, for all 21 participants. I arrived at the pre-

determined interview location at the designated time to complete the interview. A voice

recorder was placed on the desk near the participant. There are three basic ways to record

interview data, the most common is to tape record the interview (Merriam, 2001). This practice ensured that everything said was preserved for analysis.

The interviews were conducted at each high school building and in an office designated by district personnel, face-to-face or via telephone. Immediately preceding the interview, an additional copy of questions was given to each interviewee. All interviews were audio-recorded with the prior permission of each participant. In addition, I took written notes during the interviews and through the post-interview conversation. Each participant was given a transcription copy of his/her interview session to review for accuracy. When participants received the transcriptions of their interviews, they were directed to examine the information and make any changes or additions deemed necessary to ensure that the information most clearly represented their thoughts and ideas. All study participants were asked to return their examined transcriptions within two weeks of receiving it. If the information was recorded and transcribed accurately, the participants were further requested to return the transcriptions indicating data was accurate. As the participants returned transcribed interview documents, they were examined for changes or additions that were incorporated into the original document. This member checking process was used on all 21 interview session transcriptions to ensure that the data gathered was an accurate portrayal of the respondent's thoughts and provided for a clear and trustworthy representation for data analysis.

Document Review

Administrative data was collected for following variables (all from 2011-14 school years): graduation rates, district enrollment data, census reports relating to

poverty, property tax and tax cap informational reports, New York State Fiscal

Accountability Supplemental Reports (demonstrates educational cost per student/per

district), advanced placement courses by district, free/reduced lunch status reports, and

limited English proficiency reports. These additional data sources helped distinguish

differences and similarities within HGRS. All data was accessed using source reports

from the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance, The Office of the New

York State Comptroller, New York State OMB, and the New York State Department of

Education.

In addition, specific document artifacts were requested prior to the interview

session and were collected from the members of the leadership participant team on the

scheduled day of the interview, including: printed agendas for faculty meetings, minutes

from the meeting, and professional development plans for the building. If provided, these

documents delivered an informational context related to how high school principal

communicates, plans, and engage with their building faculty and staff. The building

professional development plans clearly outlined the professional development for the

faculty and staff as whole. They showcased the value the high school principal's place on

professional development and the specific areas of focus related to student achievement.

These documents helped to identify characteristics of the high school principal.

Data Analysis

In order to properly understand, operationalize and analyze the data, it was

organized to demonstrate a connection of facts. It was important to identify a rural

classification prior to additional data organization. The rural classification has three

subcategories; fringe rural (a rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to two and a half miles from an urban cluster), distant rural (rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster), and remote rural (a rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster)(New York State's OMB, 2006).

A hallmark of case study research is the use of multiple data sources; a strategy which also enhances data credibility (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2014). Potential data sources may include, but are not limited to: documentation, archival records, interviews, physical artifacts, direct observations, and participant-observation. Although the opportunity to gather data from various sources is extremely attractive because of the rigor that can be associated with this approach, there are dangers. One of them is the collection of overwhelming amounts of data that require management and analysis.

As Merriam (2009) noted, the data collection process for case study research creates an abundance of raw material from a range of sources, and data management becomes critical. In this study initial data was first transcribed from the audio recordings and my notes for each participant were categorized according to each interview format question. The coding process was used to categorize participant responses into themes, categories, and lists. The first level of analysis is category construction. The data were analyzed by constructing categories that capture reoccurring patterns. The participant interview response data provided categories and subcategories, which was coded using

the constant comparative method of data analysis. Merriam (2009) defined the constant comparative method as the continuous comparison of incidents, respondents, and remarks, sorted into groupings, that have something a common factor and as a meaningful unit of data. Data must meet two criteria: (a) the unit should reveal information relevant to the study and stimulate the reader to think beyond the particular bit of information, and (b) the unit of data must be interpretable in the absence of any additional information. The task of using the constant comparative method is to compare one unit of information with the next in looking for recurring regularities in the data Merriam (2009). Merriam noted that the names of the categories and the scheme used to sort the data should reflect the focus of the study. Once completed, the categories were compiled into a master list to reflect the patterns in the data responses. Categories were developed using the constant comparative method, and a review was conducted of the categories for patterns, themes and potential impact relationships between the principal and graduation rates gradually evolved. I developed specific categories based upon the data collected.

The formal document review procedure allowed for a comprehensive analysis of data from 2011-2014. This review produced a regional understanding of rural high schools located in the northeastern region of New York State and as such allowed for a focus on the commonalities of leadership characteristics of principals in schools that demonstrate high or upper quartile graduation rates. Schools were sorted by identifiable variables such as: rural classification, demographic factors, free and reduce lunch eligibility rates, organizational structure, poverty level, income status, minority level,

total student enrollment, advanced placement course offerings, advanced distinction

levels, and limited English proficient. The rural high schools in this study were

categorized into two main groups; high or low graduation rate schools (HGRS or LGRS).

For the purposes of this study the HGRS are considered to be 80% or higher for the

successful completion of graduation and LGRS are considered to be 79% or lower for the

successful completion of graduation. I considered both the HGRS (four schools) and the

LGRS (three schools) to as they related to the research questions. The research study

profiled a description of case context, issues, definitions, characteristics, perceptions, and

behaviors from the seven high schools in the northeastern region of New York State and

their principals. This research suggested that the principal's practices could have direct

effect on school outcomes, while identifying a phenomenon based on the development

characteristics in principals of HGRS and LGRS.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, both internal and external threats to validity must be

identified and mitigated. There are several core areas of ethical issues to anticipate. In

component areas of the study, ethical pitfalls can arise as problematic; the research

questions, purpose, questions, data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, writing

and disseminating the research (Creswell, 2009). One cannot possibly predict all potential

risks to contaminate the research with bias, however, a critical eye and a strong plan can

lower the probability of such ethical issues developing. As with any logistical situation, it

is critical to plan and to anticipate situations.

Merriam (2009) suggested that there are six basic strategies to enhance internal validity in qualitative research, three of which were applied to this study, including: triangulation, member checks (building into the process the opportunity for participants to ensure the data collected is plausible and accurate), and researcher biases which includes clarifying the researcher's assumptions and beliefs about the topic.

Validity is critical to both the research design and measurement processes. For the purposes of research design validity, the premise is to select a research design that shall account for threats to validity, while maintaining the constructs of the design. Both internal and external validity factors focus on the details of the design (i.e. selection, history, maturation, instrumentation, representativeness of the sample, reactive arrangements, etc.). Measurement validity is concerned with the measurement of what is intended to be measured and operates under three constructs; content, empirical and construct validity.

Threats to credibility as they relate to internal validity include: distorted responses due to personal bias, anger, anxiety, politics, and lack of awareness. Interview data can also be subject to recall error, reactions of the interviewee to the interviewer and self-serving responses. The variability of the participant interview response poses a threat that potentially could lead to skewed results. It is possible that participant interview responses could change during the interview data collection due to the researcher's or other participant's impact on the setting. For the purposes of this study; validity was considered as relevant to the development of the participant interview protocol and questions, categories, and subcategories. The interview questions were developed in a

manner that defines the data unit and ensure it is measuring what it is supposed to be
measuring. The interview items were constructed in a way that the items facilitate an
adequate representation of the operational defined factors associated with educational
leadership characteristics.

Empirical validity must also be ensured, as the interview item questions must be
structured to produce meaningful results in the data. The participant responses on the
interview demonstrated a relationship between educational leadership characteristics and
graduation rates, as previously defined. The internal validity of this study was addressed
by using triangulation and member checks. Multiple sources of data were collected and
include interviews, administrative data analysis and document review. The interview data
were strong as it was developed from a well-designed interview protocol, sequential and
logistic interview questions, thoughtful planning, and organization, as well as the
establishment of trust, researcher creditability, and rapport with participants. A well-
developed interview protocol helped support the previous factors and additionally
addressed both reflexivity and saturation.

External validity concentrates on the extent to which the research findings can be
applied to other situations. For the purposes of this study, I identified the generalizability
of the results as the potential threat to validity. There are several strategies to consider
when enhancing the external validity of a qualitative study. I addressed external validity
in the context of transferability by using comprehensive descriptions to describe
questions and the findings of the study. I selected multiple sites of rural high schools with
typical leadership organization (i.e. administrative organizational model of teacher leader,

assistant high school principal, high school principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent).

As the researcher, I must first recognize my own environmental conditions and cultural background that shaped my role as the researcher. I acknowledged and separated the characteristics of my personal and professional make-up and cultivated an awareness of my own experiences, historical perspectives, cultural background, diversity, family composition, political viewpoints, religious ideologies, child rearing practices, and affirmations on education. These are the mechanisms that produce researcher bias. I considered my age, social economic status, ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation, and environmental location. The target audience was a representation to the field of high school principals in rural school systems and was carefully selected.

Other potential threats of validity exist in this study. The variability of the participant interview response poses a threat that potentially could lead to skewed results. Regression may occur as participant interview responses could change during the interview data collection due to the researcher's and/or other participant's impact on the setting. I would need to replicate the study at a later time to see if results were consistent. Some limitations can be evidenced through the development and implementation of the design. Specifically, methods of inquiry such as the interview protocol and questions can be very time-consuming and rigorous for the researcher. As part of the data collection process, I ensured that the instrument is being used for its intended purpose, by following the interview protocol.

Although there is much gained from conducting this study, potential threats, strengths and limitations to validity exist. These research designs, these constructs of validity, and measurement instrument have been selected to address these concerns. Potential threats to the validity include; researcher bias, generalizability, selection, instrumentation, additive and interactive effects, and in all situations mitigation was controlled but difficult as participants experience events through varied perspectives. Controlling to ensure all participants experienced the same external events was impossible and to account for their interpretation of these events was an unachievable task. This study categorized similarities in responses. This study provided the opportunity for practical contributions to the field of education, specifically educational leadership.

Ethical Procedures

In case study research, the researcher plays an important role and is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. The subjectivity of the researcher can pose issues related to reliability, validity, and generalizability.

Walden University requires each researcher to submit an application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The purpose is to describe the possible impact of a study on the participants. The IRB's objective is to protect the participants, while holding the researcher responsible.

All participants were provided their rights to privacy for the study in the informed consent form. Throughout the data analysis process, the contents of the interviews were presented in ways that would not reveal the participants' identities. Assigning a

pseudonym to replace each participant's name and district location at the start of the data

collection process protected individual confidentiality.

I was previously employed by the board of education as a superintendent at one

district in the region where this study was conducted. I did not have personal

relationships with any participants in this study.

Leedy and Ormrod (2001) believed that most ethical issues could be categorized

by one of the following: (a) protection from harm, (b) informed consent, (c) rights to

privacy, and (d) honesty with professional colleagues (p. 107). These four categories

were addressed in this study. Participants received clear and specific information

regarding the interview process. Participants were informed that they do not have to

answer any questions they felt uncomfortable addressing and that transcripts of the

interviews were provided. All participants were provided with the opportunity to review

their responses and make any corrections they feel were in order. All participants were

provided an informed consent form prior to conducting the interviews. I took into

consideration the work of Leedy and Ormrod (2001) to provide recommendations for

creating informed consent documentation to conduct research. I issued an informed

consent document to each of the potential participants in the study. This document

provided participants with my name and contact information, as well as detailed

information about the study. The document also provided a guarantee that all responses

remained confidential and would have no impact upon their employment. A statement

was included to indicate that their participation was voluntary and could be dismissed at

any time without penalty. Lastly, there was a place for the participant to sign and date the letter, indicating agreement to participate in the study.

Summary

Chapter 3 presented a detailed description of the purpose of the study, while providing rationale for a comparative case study with a qualitative approach to the inquiry. In addition, the methodology of the study was described including: participants, setting, research design, the data collection plan, the data analysis plan, potential threats to validity and trustworthiness. The study aimed to identify, describe, and categorize high school principals' leadership characteristics with respect to graduation rates in rural schools in the northeast region of New York State. So that strategic efforts can be made to improve graduation rates. I used a multiple case study design for this inquiry and data were collected from three main sources: a sample of 21 leadership team participants and official documents. Data was triangulated to increase the validity of the study. I used a purposeful sampling technique to recruit participants. I conducted both face-to-face and telephone interviews as well as all document review and analysis. Interview sessions were recorded and transcribed. I returned all transcriptions to interviewees and implemented a member checking process to ensure accuracy of participant responses and my transcriptions. All participant responses were coded and patterns emerged. Once a response was repeated twice or more it was considered a general educational leadership characteristic and recorded. I developed lists of common responses and identified general leadership characteristics. Broad categories of leadership began to emerge and general educational leadership characteristics logically began to fall into these categories.

Once completed I then organized them by the principal's years of service as well as if they were a HGRS or a LGRS. I then looked for similarities and differences between the two main groups of HGRS and LGRS coupled with the principal's years of service. Data analysis was completed solely by hand; transcriptions of audio recordings were organized by case, participant, interview protocol question, and their response using word processing spreadsheets and category construction concepts. The analysis process was intended to reiterate redundancy in a way that I was able to identify the common responses and patterns as they related to the two research questions. Documents were reviewed and notes provided for additional source data. All data were kept confidential and securely stored.

In response to the research questions, the findings supported the inquiry to identify, describe, and define educational leadership characteristics and to support the notion that there is a difference in general educational leadership characteristics between novice and veteran principals. These results further gave way to understanding general educational leadership characteristics of the principal in HGRS. Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive explanation of how the data were organized, analyzed, and interpreted to answer the question proposed by the study. Chapter 5 summarizes the results of the study, an interpretation of the findings, recommendations using the findings and further study, and implications for social change.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to identify, describe, and categorize high school principals' leadership characteristics with respect to graduation rates in rural schools in the northeast region of New York State, so that strategic efforts can be made to improve graduation rates. In this chapter, the findings of the study are presented. The study focused specifically on the characteristics of high school principals. These principals were responsible for making building-level decisions for staff and students (Grades 9–12). They were charged with educating all students, including their educational plans—inclusive of their curriculum, content areas, long- and short-term goals, and standardized assessments. Ultimately, principals were charged with achieving all graduation requirements.

The study was also concerned with research and theory about the principalship, for example: educational leadership characteristics, school culture, the teachers' perceptions of the principals, and their perceived impact on graduation rates. The study explored the differences in the educational leadership characteristics between novice and veteran principals.

This research used interviews and document review for staff and faculty to describe their perceptions of the principal's leadership characteristics, graduation rates, school climate, and effectiveness of the school system. The study was conducted with seven separate cases. If a study contains more than a single case then a multiple-case study is required. A multiple case study enables the researcher to explore differences within and between cases, while allowing analysis in each setting and across settings. The

goal is to replicate findings across cases. Comparisons will be drawn so it is imperative

that the cases are chosen carefully to allow me to predict similar results across cases, or

predict contrasting results based on a theory (Yin, 2014). Overall, the evidence created

from this type of study is considered robust and reliable. In qualitative research, Merriam

(2009) noted that a set of research questions are generally developed in reflection of the

researcher's thinking on the most significant factors to study. Attempting to understand

situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context is a cornerstone of

comparative case study research.

The two main research questions guide the inquiry of this study and determined

how the data was collected and analyzed. In addition, Yin (2014) argued that "how" and

"why" questions are more likely to be appropriate for case study research design.

Therefore, the multiple comparative case study research questions that were explored in

this study were:

Research Question 1- What are the educational leadership characteristics of high

school principals in high schools with high graduation rates in the northeast region of

New York State?

Research Question 2- What are the differences of the educational leadership

characteristics between novice and veteran high school principals?

In the first few sections of Chapter 4, I will describe how the data were collected

and note any variations from Chapter 3. I will discuss the data analysis process that was

used to move inductively from coded units to larger representations, including categories

and themes. At the conclusion of Chapter 4, I will summarize the results of the research

questions.

Setting/Demographics

In the previous chapter both the setting and demographics were clearly identified

as rural schools in the northeastern region of New York. The county is located in central

New York State and east of Syracuse. The northern part of the county is in the

Adirondack Park. The Mohawk River flows across the south part of the county. The

county was created as one of three counties split off from Montgomery (the other two

being Otsego and Tioga counties).

Any personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants or their

experience at the time of study have been illustrated for the interpretation of the study

results. This included participant demographics and characteristics relevant to the study. I

did not experience any participant-disclosed personal or organizational conditions that

influenced their experience at the time of the study or that may influence the

interpretation of the results. All 21 participants were members of the educational

leadership teams of each district. Each participant in this study held an educational

institution title (i.e. superintendent, high school principal and teacher leader). High school

principals were defined, by New York State Education Department definition, as either

novice or veteran based on their years of service. According to the New York State

Department of Education (2015) a novice principal is a person who holds the New York

State Department of Education Provisional Certificate, passed the New York State School

Leadership Examination (SLA) within the past 5 years, and is a current principal with 5

years or less experience. Whereas, a veteran principal is a person who holds the New

York State Department of Education Permanent Certificate, passed the New York State

School Leadership Examination (SLA) within the past 5 years, and is a current principal

with more than 5 years of experience. The participants for this study included: seven

school district superintendents, seven teacher leaders, and seven principals. Of the

principals, there were four veteran and three novice principals.

Data Collection

I followed a strict protocol for the interview process in order to help ensure the

reliability of the data. Initially the study intended to use 10 school districts or cases,

however only seven districts or cases provided consent to participate in the research

study. The remaining three districts or cases were removed from the potential participant

pool and the sample of this study, thus resulting in a total of seven cases and 21

participants. The 21 participants in this multiple case study were members of the

leadership team in secondary education in the high schools of a rural northeast region of

New York State. I sent a letter of cooperation to each potential research partner and once

agreement to participate was received an initial email was sent to each potential

participant to explain the purpose of the study. At that time, if the participants agreed to

be a part of the study, they were sent a consent form and the interview questions. I

conducted an individual interview with each of the 21 members of the leadership

participant team. The study sample included: (a) school superintendents employed by

school boards of education in the northeastern region of rural New York State; (b) high

school principals employed by school boards of education in the northeastern region of

rural New York State; and (c) teacher leaders employed by school boards of education in

the northeastern region of rural New York State. Before collecting any data, I gained

approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB approval 01-13-16-

0185075) and the local school district superintendent. The approval from the

superintendent was gained by initial phone contact followed by an email correspondence

(Appendix E). At the time of the initial phone contact, I confirmed the principal's years

of service. I provided the superintendent with the definition of both novice and veteran

years of service as defined by The New York State Department of Education. I then

asked the superintendent which definition best described their principal. This was used to

categorize the principal as either novice or veteran. A letter of cooperation (Appendix G)

was then obtained for written permission to conduct these interviews and gain visitor

access to each school building within the sample selection.

> After receiving approval of cooperation from the districts, I then connected with

the participants. The study was explained to the participants and they were sent an

invitational email, a consent form, and copies of the interview questions (Appendix A-C)

prior to the scheduled interview session.   Interviews were conducted either in a private

location at the research site of the principal being studied or via private phone interview.

Each interview ranged between 20-60 minutes. This duration was dependent upon the

level of detail and specificity in each of the participant's responses to a particular

interview protocol questions. In some cases, participants responded to interview

questions with single word replies and in other cases responses were very lengthy. I noted

that typically the principal interviews took the most time to conduct. The principal

responses tended to be more elaborate and extended deeper into the questions. They often

took the opportunity to expound on or offer more information than requested. The

interviews were recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. Participants were asked

to review the researcher's interview transcription notes for accuracy of information.

Participants were offered the opportunity to correct, add, or delete any information from

the transcript if they felt it was inaccurate or required more information.

In this study, administrative data and documents were collected for the following

variables (all from 2011-14): graduation rates, district enrollment data, census reports

relating to poverty, property tax and tax cap informational reports, New York State Fiscal

Accountability Supplemental Reports (demonstrates educational cost per student/per

district), advanced placement courses by district, free/reduced lunch status reports, and

limited English proficiency reports. These additional data sources helped to distinguish

differences or similarities within HGRS and LGRS. All data was accessed using source

reports from the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance, the Office of the

New York State Comptroller, New York State OMB, and the New York State

Department of Education.

In addition, specific documents were collected, as available, prior to the interview

session and from the members of the leadership participant team on the scheduled day of

the interview. The documents collected included: printed agendas from faculty meetings,

minutes from faculty meetings, and professional development plans for the building.

These documents provided evidence or lack of evidence regarding the emphasis of team

meetings on issues related to student achievement and outcomes. These documents

delivered informational context related to how the principal communicates, plans, and engages with their building faculty and staff. The building professional development plans clearly outlined the importance of professional development for the faculty and staff as a whole. They showcased the value the principal's place on professional development and the specific areas of focus related to student achievement. These documents helped to identify some characteristics of the principal.

<div align="center">**Data Analysis**</div>

Data analysis was broken down into interview and document review procedures. I transcribed the data from the interview audio recordings into Word documents (referred to as transcripts). To analyze the data, I used Merriam's (2009) defined constant comparative method to break the data down into analyzable parts, incidents, respondents, and remarks, and then sorted into groupings that have something a common factor and as a meaningful unit of data. The next step was to create categories based on the principal's years of service. Once I identified the main categories a list was created to acknowledge all participant responses that identified general educational leadership characteristic. These characteristics were sorted into the corresponding principal list (i.e. veteran or novice).

Next, in an initial examination of the interview data, I reviewed the responses from each group of participants, looking for similarities and differences. In multiple re-readings of the responses, I looked for patterns and relationships in comparison and contrast of the responses from all participants. A sub list containing the raw data was created for each principal in each case setting. This sub list captured all educational

leadership characteristics mentioned by each participant for each individual principal. I found that across cases and participant responses patterns emerged. Participant responses to interview protocol questions fell into a certain set of categories. Participant responses appeared to be aligning in areas that would later draw relationship to educational leadership characteristics. A sample of these patterns included broad categories in communication, collaboration, acknowledgment of faculty and staff, formal and informal team members, relationship building, organization, and promotion of school and home partnership. As the data were further analyzed, relationships began to emerge between these patterns, the principals, and specific case settings.

The process of manual coding was used to categorize participant responses into patterns. The patterns identified in the interview responses were placed into a master list. This list contained the individual participant responses to interview questions that were categorized. This section reports the findings based upon the participants' responses to the interview questions.

Frequent patterns from the interview data revealed four broad categories of educational leadership characteristics: interpersonal, leadership style, communication, & collaboration. Conceptualized educational leadership characteristics emerged and resulted in identifying general educational leadership characteristics that fell within each category. The 21 interview sessions allowed the participants to share their experiences and interpretation of the educational leadership characteristics displayed by their principals. The interview questions fell into these categories and the participant's responses were analyzed.

The literature review demonstrated a robust amount of general educational leadership categories. I approached the data with that in mind and the data in this study unveiled four broad categories that linked to the literature reviewed. In the interest of data reduction, I distilled the data by only focusing on the four broad categories. Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, organizing, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written up field notes or transcriptions (Yin, 2014). Not only does the data need to be condensed for the sake of manageability, they also have to be transformed so they can be made intelligible in terms of the issues being addressed. Data reduction often forces choices about which aspects of the assembled data should be emphasized, minimized, or set aside completely for the purposes of the project at hand. A common mistake many people make in qualitative analysis, in a vain effort to remain "perfectly objective," is to present a large volume of unassimilated and uncategorized data for the reader's consumption. In qualitative analysis, the analyst decides which data are to be singled out for description according to principles of selectivity. While initial categorizations are shaped by pre-established study questions, I sought to remain open to inducing new meanings from the data available. "Everything looks important, especially at the outset, and the analyst wants to get it all (Yin, 2014, p. 47)." Ultimately, however, extensive of pages of interviews and observations must be reduced to a short report. Valid counting techniques are essential. Otherwise interesting, vivid or observer-preferred data distort the conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In this process, identifying a theme or pattern, it was important to isolate responses or data that repeated a number of times and consistently happened in a specific

way. I was looking for data that demonstrated redundancy. Once something was labeled or defined as important, significant, or recurrent, it has achieved that estimate in part by making counts, comparisons and weights. But, researchers warned, "don't let the computations get unhinged from the raw data, keep the words and the numbers or scales together throughout the analysis" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.174).

Although approximately 52% of the interview protocol questions fell outside the range of the research questions, they were critical in the data collection process. These questions provided me with the ability to build rapport with the participants. More importantly, they provided for additional context and details supporting the research questions. The categories and patterns that were identified are discussed in the results section of Chapter 4.

The next step was to color-code the phrases or words within the data to identify the characteristics that appeared more than twice in each case. I determined that if educational leadership characteristics appeared at least twice out of the possible three participant responses, for each participant within a case of this multiple case study, it was coded as a common response and thereby considered a general educational leadership characteristic. After this step, I searched for patterns by looking within and across each case for commonalities.

The final two steps in the interview analysis process involved creating a master list of general educational leadership characteristics of both novice and veteran principals and then going back to the data to find examples that demonstrated similarities and differences between novice and veteran principals. I discovered recurring patterns

through this process by highlighting the participants' responses on the transcripts and creating lists. This procedure facilitated the identification of emergent general educational leadership characteristics describing the veteran and novice principals while working in rural school setting in the northeast region of New York State.

After completing the final two steps, I used the document review data to determine the graduation rates for the seven rural schools. As determined in the earlier planning stages of the study, I used an average graduation rate score of the selected school districts based on the cohort graduation years of the study and established a cut off score as defined. Schools that demonstrated a graduation rate of 80% or higher (HGRS) were placed into one main category and the schools that displayed a graduation rate of 79% or lower (LGRS) were placed into the other main category. These would remain as the main categories and each school would represent its own case for study, allowing for a case-by-case analysis. Documents were collected in relation to graduation rates and school setting profiles. I examined 3 years of graduation percentiles, demographic factors, free and reduced lunch eligibility rates, poverty level, income status, minority level, total student enrollment, advanced placement course offerings, and limited English proficiency levels for all cases in the study. This was completed to better provide a context for each case, and once obtained; I placed each case into a main category, as defined as high or low graduation rate schools. In each school system, the principal associated with that school was defined as novice or veteran, based on years of service and placed in the corresponding category in which they were employed.

Additional documents, including some printed faculty meeting agendas, meeting minutes, and building improvement plans, were gathered. The documents that could be obtained provided for additional insight and supporting evidence or lack of evidence regarding the educational leadership characteristics of the principal and graduation rates. The data analysis did not yield any discrepant cases to be factored into the analysis. A comprehensive approach was taken to ensure all data segments were clearly understood and used accordingly. The raw data was rich and robust and required me to make decisions that would connect the data to the research questions and the purpose of the study. Utilizing both a formal document review and a stringent interview process the study revealed general educational leadership characteristics of principals in a rural area of the northeast region of New York State.

Review of the data analysis found that principals in HGRS acknowledged their faculty and staff, were active listeners, and used key formal and informal team members. They tended to be collaborative in their decisions making. These principals displayed communicative skills both within and outside in their schools and promoted a culture that improved the partnership between the school and the home. Their leadership style tended to be facilitative, visionary, and managerial. High school principals in HGRS demonstrated organizational skills, they were flexible and visible to their faculty and staff, and they were motivational and professional in their value of relationships.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this study was enhanced by the use of a number of strategies to guard the internal and external validity. Additional measures were also put in

place to protect the reliability of the study. In regards to internal validity, this study used a number of strategies to protect the quality of the data. Merriam (2009) suggested six basic strategies to enhance internal validity in qualitative research. I used triangulation with member checks, administrative data analysis, and document review as a form of cross verification from these sources to facilitate the validation of the data. Additionally to enhance internal validity these multiple sources of data were used to confirm the findings, support findings plausibility, and clarify the researcher's assumptions and beliefs about the topic at the beginning of the study to prevent researcher bias.

Credibility strategies stated in Chapter 3 remained in place without adjustments. Validity was considered as relevant to the development of the participant interview protocol and questions, categories, and subcategories. The interview questions were developed in a manner that defines the data unit and to ensure it is measuring what is intended. The interview items were constructed in a way that they facilitate an adequate representation of the operationally defined factors associated with educational leadership characteristics.

The study used triangulation and member checks with multiple sources of data collected and included interviews, administrative data analysis and document review. Interview questions identified four broad categories based on participant responses. Administrative data analysis demonstrated how novice and veteran principals valued specific areas of educational leadership. Document review supported specific educational leadership characteristics. This was seen through organized meeting agendas, meeting minutes, and requests for feedback, etc. The sample of documents demonstrated sections

of agendas that held time for professional development, teacher/ parent communication, building goals and strategic alignment. Formal meeting minutes demonstrated the value of communication and sharing of information. In some cases, sample feedback documents were obtained that specifically requested for input from faculty and staff members. The interview data was developed from a well-designed interview protocol, sequential and logistic interview questions, thoughtful planning, and organization, as well as the establishment of trust, researcher creditability, and rapport with participants. In this study, saturation occurred as I reached a point in the analysis of data that sampling more data would not lead to more information related to the research questions.

The study implemented strategies to support transferability, as stated in Chapter 3, using comprehensive descriptions to describe questions and the findings of the study. I selected multiple sites of rural high schools with typical leadership organization (i.e. administrative organizational model of teacher leader, high school principal, and superintendent).

Validity was addressed through the multiple sources of data that were collected using two main procedures including interviews and documents. The documents continued to provide for supporting information as they relate to educational leadership characteristics in the four broad categories of: interpersonal, leadership style, communication, and collaboration. These categories emerged from the data and all seemed to fit into these broad areas and supported by previous literature review. These categories demonstrated a link between the research questions, literature review, and emergent data. This was found by utilizing the meeting agendas, minutes, memos, and

newsletters, to demonstrate organization, planning, feedback, communication, collaboration, long term planning, etc. I used the member checking process by asking all participants to review the interview questions prior to the interview session. They were also asked to review their own transcriptions of this study for plausibility. This allowed for corrections and additions to be made that best represented their thoughts and statements. I clarified prior assumptions and beliefs about the study in earlier sections about the researcher's role, study assumptions, scope, delimitation and limitations.

The reliability for this study was enhanced by clarifying the researcher's role to the participants in the study at the initial meeting and through follow up invitational letters, consent forms, and a detailed email correspondence. In addition, using multiple methods of data collection and analysis from interviews and document review ensured reliability. Lastly, strict interview protocols were developed for this study, which are found in the appendix.

Results

This section reports the findings based upon the data analysis. The study was guided by two main research questions: (a) What are the educational leadership characteristics of principals in high schools with high graduation rates in the northeast region of New York State?; and, (b) What are the differences of the educational leadership characteristics between novice and veteran principals?

The data collection process resulted in a wealth of rich data and through the analysis process, frequent patterns emerged and broad leadership categories appeared. The principals, lead teachers, and superintendents were coded as numbers on the

participant list (Appendix F) and their responses were analyzed and fell into these

categories of leadership. These categories of characteristics were; interpersonal

leadership, leadership style, communication, and collaboration. I will discuss the results

of the data in this order as they related to each broad leadership category.

Interpersonal Leadership Characteristics

The interview questions across all three protocols addressed the first broad

category of interpersonal leadership (Appendix A-C). The patterns for the interpersonal

category are discussed in further detail, based on the conceptualized educational

leadership characteristics that emerged from the participants' responses. They focused on

interpersonal leadership that tied in directly with the research of Youngs and King

(2002), which noted the extent that principals' leadership addresses student growth and

achievement fostered in such educational leadership characteristics that sustain high

levels of establishing trust, support, integrity and professional development. The

interpersonal leadership category was based on the analysis of the participant interview

responses. As such, all participants identified acknowledging faculty/staff, relationship

building, and trust as characteristics found in the interpersonal leadership category.

Principal responses supported these characteristics. Participant P2 provided this example

of how acknowledging faculty and staff is a characteristic of interpersonal leadership:

When praise is deserved it should be given and I don't think in the education

realm teachers are praised enough. I would say principals and superintendents are

not praised enough, many times it's a thankless job and many people outside of

education don't realize the challenges that teachers face and have no clue what

they are doing on a day to day basis so it's important for us as the leaders to make

sure teachers and staff are hearing that praise from us so that they know their

work is not going unnoticed.

A similar response was offered by participant P5, who focused on recognizing faculty

and staff talent as part of leadership style and philosophy:

Again it kind of goes back to my leadership style and my philosophy, its putting

the talent you have on a pedestal and recognize them, if people are doing an

amazing job in the classroom I am going to recognize them, I am going to point

them out and brag about the things that person does. I am going to recognize

them at board meetings and say so and so is doing a great job, I have created a

monthly teacher recognition award where they get a little plaque and a picture and

it is put on our district Facebook page, we do a little bio about the person just

recognizing them and spotlighting the job they are doing. To me it is creating that

competition where this is the talent this is where people are doing a great job and

those people are being recognized for doing a great job and the people that are not

doing as good of a job are going to want that, they are going to want that same

recognition and they are going to get aboard and that friendly competition of

being recognized and doing it become that is a big part of it, acknowledging your

staff and their hard work.

Trust and building relationships with faculty and staff are critical characteristics of

interpersonal leadership. Participant P17 noted:

That is easy: honesty and integrity. They need to trust you and know that you are

there for the right reasons. And as long as you have relationships with honesty

and integrity, you're going to be good. Mean what you say and say what you

mean.

There is a demonstrable trust when educational leaders carry themselves in this manner.

Participant P20 further explained the importance of developing relationships with faculty

and staff. Participant P20 explained, "I think it's that facilitator. I think it's that

relationship builder, I think it's that person that is always willing to step up and say I'm

not going to ask something of you that I am not willing to do myself or ask of myself.

You really need to build on relationship after relationship after relationship, and the

power of a relationship is really extremely important. So I guess that's pretty much my

method with people in regards to getting them to do what they need to do."

Similarly lead teachers expressed the importance of trust, acknowledging faculty

and staff, and building relationships as critical characteristics of interpersonal leadership.

Participant P3 reflected on the principal's ability to be fair, consistent and to demonstrate

integrity. As an example of trust P3 shared:

I think he is fair and consistent, but ultimately we need to know that the principal

is the one in charge. He collaborates with the team members and facilitates the

discussion I think that if its true collaboration and there truly is openness to

conversations and the willingness to go down the path that is right and reached by

consensus by the team.

Participant P6 understood the importance of trust but further exemplified the value of building relationships:

> This is critical; he must maintain a positive and pro-active relationship. I believe he does this by sharing information and asking for input/feedback.

Participant P13 agreed and offered this example:

> He started to do faculty awards during our faculty meeting so during every faculty meeting there is a different award and a different person gets a teacher gift and acknowledgement recognition, he speaks highly of us and the things that we are doing, at board meetings and in the public, he tries to highlight things that the teachers are doing on our social media pages and even verbally to tell everybody hey when you see her you are doing a great job.

Participant P9 also concurred and provided this example:

> Many times he will come to visit your room, and let you know that you have done well on something, you will get positive email responses from him, he will share with the superintendent often what is going well in the building and he will also present to the board of education what his teachers are doing in the building, what they are having success with.

Superintendents and assistant superintendents believed that principals should foster an open relationship with their faculty and staff. They should empower their teams

by building relationships, establishing trust, and providing on-going praise. Participant

P1 explained by offering this example:

> Again I will go back to the term empowering others to become leaders. I would
>
> also say having a goal or a mission to focus on, always having our focus on the
>
> mission that's imperative, understanding to be readily available and highly visible
>
> and have an open door policy, knowing people so that they can feel relaxed. I
>
> think that the principal should be collaborative, communicative, approachable,
>
> caring, and respectful to other ideas.

Building relationships is demonstrated by acknowledging the work of other

people and providing praise in multiple forum through several methods. Participant P7

agreed:

> Routine praise that could be through email or a note, just by passing someone in
>
> the hall I have often heard him say great job, can we talk about that I want to hear
>
> more about that, I think he is all about the communication.

Participant P4 offered:

> Every board meeting he recognizes a particular staff or a group of staff that has
>
> gone beyond the call of duty and their job, and also puts it out in the text and
>
> emails and on his blog and on the website.

A similar reasoning was noted by Participant P19, who focused on interpersonal

communication as a means of acknowledging faculty and staff:

He does a lot of it personally, a lot of interpersonal communication between the two. Quick notes, quick memos that he sends, unofficial, official memos that he sends get copied to me or the board of educations, and certainly newsletters.

When the three characteristics (acknowledges faculty and staff, trust, and relationship building) are taken holistically, a category emerges. Interpersonal leadership style was identified and a broad category was constructed.

Leadership Style Characteristics

The interview questions across all three protocols addressed the second broad category of leadership style (Appendix A-C). The patterns for the leadership style category are discussed in further detail based upon the conceptualized educational leadership characteristics that emerged from the participant responses. The respondents' statements focused on leadership support the research done by Robinson et al., (2008), which noted the relative impact of different types of leadership on students' academic and nonacademic outcomes. They revealed five sets of leadership practices or dimensions: establishing goals and expectations; resourcing strategically; planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching in the curriculum; promoting and participating in teacher learning in development, and ensuring orderly and supportive environment. The leadership style category was based on the analysis of the participant interview responses.

All participants identified facilitative, flexible, managerial, motivational, organized, professional, visible, and vision as characteristics found in the leadership style category. Principal responses supported those characteristic as they reflected on their

practices. Participant P20 provided this example of how motivating faculty and staff is an essential characteristic of leadership style:

> I think I empower the people around me, I think that my active decision philosophy is to be, sort of behind the scenes, I empower and motivate my teachers to make the best choices they can and I try and support them, same thing with my students, I think that is the best way to get a school to turn itself around and for everyone to feel ownership as opposed to just me being the only one up front and doing the talking, so I think my leadership is more empowering those around me and giving them the authority to get things done.

Another way to be a motivational leader is to lead by example and empower people to make decisions. Participant P17 exemplified the need to empower faculty and staff as a means of motivation. Participant P17 explained:

> I think that the technical definition of my leadership style is a transformational leader. I'm a person that believes in leading by example, you know, I am not a big into inspirations speeches and stuff like that I lead by example, I want to be the first one here in the morning and the last one to leave, I'm not going to ask my staff to do anything that I would not do myself, so I try to set a good example, try to show a good work ethic and try to motivate and inspire my staff to do the best possible job that they can.

Taking the time to listen and acknowledge other points of view is essential to maintaining a flexible leadership style. Flexibility in leadership is central to the success

of the school and building relationships with faculty and staff. Participant P12 reflected

on the importance of listening to the opinions of others and being flexible in making

decisions:

> So I would say that it's probably collaborative for the most part I feel like I
>
> certainly can make a decision when I need to make a decision when the situation
>
> calls for it and I have no problem doing that. I guess in general terms I feel that I
>
> collaborate with others I bring other people's opinions in to the discussion and
>
> actively seek out other people's opinions, I want to hear others and I try and
>
> weigh and balance that and look at it for various perspectives and try to make an
>
> informed decision.

Participant P8, who recognized that being flexible is a part of actively listening and

collaborating with the ideas of others, offered a similar response:

> I would say I think I mentioned collaborative before so I think collaborative
>
> would be a word to describe my leadership, I listen, I try to get other people's
>
> point of view and be flexible about their ideas. Then it's really about consensus
>
> building. It's about being open minded, willing to change, and consistent.

As for managing faculty and staff, every principal agreed that having strong

communication and building relationships with faculty and staff are key supports to their

leadership style. Participant P8 offered:

My leadership style is more of a relationship based leadership style. I believe the quality of relationships will determine the success of the people around you, there's a difference between managing, which is something that has always come very easy to me, you know, dotting the Is and crossing the Ts, you do what you need to do in order to manage the building and manage people, that's one thing. Leadership on the other hand is bringing it to a whole new level, and that is where that relationship piece comes in.

Making decisions that involve others is imperative to school success. Participant P6 further noted a managerial style that "places students at the center" of good decision-making and a managerial approach.

Well I guess there is an easy answer but it's a complicated question because you have a lot of things that you want to achieve and accomplish in a fast moving environment. It's important no matter what decision you make it has to make it in terms of what is best for the kids, so I would say that I guess one of my strengths that help me achieve my goals in a fast environment, is to give our kids the best possible environment that they can have so making decisions based on what's good for kids allows me to achieve those goals no matter how fast we are moving.

Principals repeatedly as characteristics supporting their leadership style expressed organization, vision, being visible, and a facilitative style. Participant P5 showed that by saying:

Like I said, building relationships, communication that's something that you get

better with over time and you have to start out strong with it in the first place, and

I am a visionary.

Principals continued to discuss the strong ethics required and the organizational skills

needed to be successful. Being visible and available to faculty and staff are important, as

participant P2 explained:

That's a great question, I think it's got to be your work ethic, number one, you

can't expect to be here at 8 and leave at 3, there is no way that's going to happen,

I have at least one day a week that I am here well until the mornings, last night I

was here until 12:30 at night and I still have a pile of stuff I have on my desk that

I need to get at, you have to have a good work ethic, be visible, and the second

thing is you got to empower the talent that you have within, every single school

every single district has great people in it, empower the talent that you have and

put those people on a pedestal, to create a friendly completion amongst each

other and use those people to really help change the culture. Planning,

organization and forward thinking are also very important.

Similarly lead teachers expressed the importance of facilitation, flexibility,

management, motivation, organization, professionalism, visibility, and having a sense of

long-term vision as key characteristics of the principal's leadership style. Participant P3

reflected on the principal's professionalism. As an example, participant P3 shared:

> I would consider him to very professional, to be hands on as he's involved and I
> also consider him to be very fair and honest, and a person of integrity.

Participant P6 understood the importance of honesty and further exemplified the value of professionalism:

> He is very honest, he is a man of professionalism, integrity and he is very
> consistent.

Lead teachers understood that principals must be good managers of people and tasks, while still maintaining good collaborative relationships. Participant P18 shared:

> Thinking about these things he's attempting to be collaborative but there is still
> the managerial side to things.

There is an observable process of organization of the day-to-day activities of the principal and lead teachers noted that being organized allows for a level of visibility in the building. Participant P15 offered:

> He is always very visible, in hallways, classrooms, events, etc. He is very
> organized, articulate, & open-minded.

Lead teachers also noted that the principal's ability to be organized allowed principals to be present. Participant P9 agreed and offered this example:

I would say he is approachable, he is attentive to the characteristic of the whole

child, I do think he looks at the circumstances in which children come to school.

He is present, he is visible and present, in the hallways with students.

Superintendents and assistant superintendents believed that principals should lead

by example. They should motivate their teams and should place students at the forefront

of their decision-making. Superintendents and assistant superintendents agreed that

passionate principals create an environment of success. Participant P1 explained, offering

this:

I think his biggest strength, is rolling up his shirtsleeves and getting right in with

his staff and working with them on a personal basis.

Participant P4 agreed that working with people was the best way to get others motivated

to do good work. Participant P4 noted that:

I would say he likes to facilitate and collaborate with people. He has an

interpersonal focus; he follows through, and is energetic.

A similar reason was offered by participant P19, who focused on the managerial

approach as a means of leadership style:

She engages her staff in the work and then allows them to take direction and

facilitates next steps, this is her process with most of everything.

There are eight characteristics (facilitative, flexible, managerial, motivational,

organized, professional, visible, and visionary) identified by a majority of participants for

the leadership style category. Each of these characteristics fall in the leadership style category, a broad category that was constructed.

Communication Characteristics

The interview questions across all three protocols also addressed the third broad category of communication (Appendix A-C). The patterns for the communication category are discussed in further detail based upon the conceptualized educational leadership characteristics that emerged from the participant responses. The respondents' statements focused on communication characteristics tie directly with Hummell's (2007) research, which noted leadership at various levels. Hummell rooted her research in the notion that the leadership posed an outstanding set of public speaking skills and was able to engage their audience on command. The leadership at all levels described this as a meaningful mechanism to ensure the establishment and maintenance of solid relationships. Interview data collected in the study indicated leadership at all levels displayed a significant interest in developing strong relationships with subordinates, colleagues, and supervisors. According to Hummell leaders have reported that key elements are described in developing a leadership style; communication style, asking compelling questions, preparations to subject matter, stay connected to hidden agendas, make decisions for the greater good of the organization and to keep the balance between personal and professional life. The communication category was based on the analysis of the participant interview responses.

As such, all participants identified active listening, communication, and the promotion of the school and home partnership as characteristics found in the

communication category. Principal responses supported these characteristics. Participant

P5 provided this example of how internal and external methods are characteristics of

communication:

> Internally I would say mostly through emails, faculty meetings, you know, going
>
> to the classrooms, I like to go see the teachers, I like to see the kids, and I like to
>
> go where they are at, right into their environment, so I don't have a problem with
>
> that. Externally, if I am reading that right, it would be more into the communities
>
> and with the parents and things like that, once again I like to be visible and I like
>
> to be at lots of the community things so I can talk to parents and gauge that but
>
> newsletters, I like to put a newsletter out, we have a web site we like to put stuff
>
> out on so that way parents can pull it up at their leisure and parents can get the
>
> communication from that, and I will be honest with you, I like to reach out to
>
> parents, I like to pick up the phone and give them a call and say Hi it's me, where
>
> some of my colleagues may prefer to have somebody else do that, well I don't
>
> have a problem with making a visit to the homes and going to where they are at.
>
> But communication is critical to every facet of my day.

A similar response was provided by participant P2, who continued to focus on methods

and systems of communication, both inside and outside of the school system:

> Internally by phone, email, and face to face. Externally, using the same methods
>
> but include social media, press releases, community forum, newsletters, and
>
> website. A great deal of my time is spent on communication.

Principals supported a personalized approach to their communication, imbedded with active listening skills. Participant P20 offered:

> I do like to have a face to face conference with parents depending on the situation because sometimes I think face to face is better than phone because number one I can read their body language and be able to get where they are coming from and the phone is somewhat difficult sometimes.

Principals agreed that a strong relationship between the home and the school was critical for students' success. Participant P8 provided this example:

> I think we need to really connect with the families that are what it comes down to, you know, their priorities may not necessarily be our priorities. So I think if we as a district make the connection with the families more of a priority, I think they would make it more a priority too.

Principals understood the value of this relationship and identified a disconnection, as referenced by participant P2:

> Students sometimes fall through the cracks. I think they get disenfranchised and they get frustrated. I think the biggest reason is the supports aren't there from home; the glue is not keeping things together outside of here.

Participant P16 agreed:

> Not having support at home, the thing we do really well here is support kids and try to get them through but I think one of the things being a rural district is you

have the constant cycle of parents who didn't graduate and their parents didn't

graduate.

Similarly, lead teachers expressed the importance of communication and the

home and school partnership. Participant P21 stated:

Internally there's a lot of communication. It seems to be one of his priorities.

Emails and memos are usually posted, he also communicates verbally. As far as

externally, he sends out newsletters and memos, he also makes phone calls to

people. Because we are rural he tends to hold several community forums to be

sure our community has information.

There is a demonstrable communication process that principals maintain to ensure

a constant flow of information. Participant P15 explained:

Within our school, there is a lot of conversation, person to person, he also

communicates via email, and he also speaks with us as a large group, as a matter

of fact in meetings that are held monthly, externally he has a page in our district

newsletter and also sometimes contributes to the district Facebook page.

Participant P13 agreed and further explained the importance of active listening and

communication:

One on one communication and active listening with the student and their parents

but early interventions as soon as we see they are starting to lose that gleam in

their eyes.

Superintendents and assistant superintendents reinforced the importance of clear and consistent communication methods. They believed principals should be personable and work with people directly. Participant P1 explained the comprehensive communication methods, offering this example:

> Internally he communicates in person, he communicates by phone, he communicates via email, and he has faculty meetings and all those different ways internally, externally he communicates through our school messenger system and also through a quite lengthy column through the quarterly newsletter that we send out from the district, those are the primary ways. He uses several methods to ensure good fluid communication. It's a must for him.

Personal communication that fosters a sense of relationship and active listening skills was identified as an important component of communication. Participant P7 offered:

- His preferred method is in person, he would rather deal with people directly as opposed to the use of technology, but as we know sometimes that is not possible, so the use of emails, memos, written communication certainly takes place, phones calls, but he does prefer the interpersonal piece…He really prefers the person contact and frequent communication.

Participant P14, who focused on systems of communication, offered a similar response:

I would say most of his communication is verbally, secondly would be emails internally. Externally would be through text, we have a program here called remind that we can send one way texts to parents about things, other ways are a newsletter article and certainly by phone, if there is an issue to be dealt with right away.

In the end all superintendents and assistant superintendents identified methods of communication and systems that enhanced the home and school partnership as key characteristics of the principals. Participant P10 provided this example of how the partnership between the school and home is essential:

Again the number one thing I think is the enhancement of the learning partnership between parents, students and the school, there is a lot we can do to facilitate that and the connections between what we do in school and what happens outside of school in terms of what the future may be for them.

Participant P11 agreed and shared:

I think that comes down to informing parents and students the values of what an education and a high school diploma means I think it also focuses on that it is not always an academic component but it's a component about learning lifelong learning skills.

Each of the characteristics for the communication category was supported by a majority of the participants and when taken holistically a category emerged. Communication was identified and a broad category was constructed.

Collaboration Characteristics

Lastly, the interview questions across all three protocols also addressed the fourth broad category of collaboration (Appendix A-C). The patterns for the collaboration category are discussed in further detail based upon the conceptualized educational leadership characteristics that emerged from the participant responses. The respondents' statements focused on collaboration tie directly with Leech and Fulton's (2008) research, which noted the relationship between teachers' perceptions of the leadership behaviors of secondary school principals and the level of shared decision-making. Leech and Fulton's research spent considerable time investigating the actions associated with shared decision-making from the constructs of collaboration, teaming, input, and feedback. The collaboration category was based on the analysis of the participant interview responses.

As such, all participants identified collaboration and having key formal and informal team members as characteristics found in the collaboration category. Principal responses supported these characteristics. The majority of principals understood the importance and value from the input of others. Participant P8 provided this example of how involving people are critical to success:

I am not afraid to get everyone involved I think it's extremely important to have people with different views involved, I don't like having everyone sit down at the table in the high school office and nod their head with me and say yeah let's do

that, I want to hear other opinions I want to hear what's wrong with what we are

proposing I want to hear every possible angle so that we can tweak it to make it

the best we can. And I think that is a huge part of the collaborative process that

you referred to, it is critical that no one is afraid to share their opinions as long as

they are doing it in an appropriate way of course.

Principals found value in the experiences of their faculty and staff. They

understood that with varied levels of experience collaboration was needed. Participant

P5 offered:

Well, I think collaboration is huge because I don't think anyone can really do this

job alone, I take the input of all those around me, any of the other leadership

personnel and teacher leaders before making final decisions, I value their input. It

is crucial in making long and short term decisions, collective buy–in is necessary.

Principals took time to develop teams that would help guide the practices within

the school system. Building both formal and informal teams strengthened the

collaboration and success of the school. Participant P17 provided this example:

A lot of times we have both a building level planning team and I have a

department chair group of the head of each of the departments, we have seven of

them. I meet with them, I am constantly bouncing ideas off of them, A lot of time

I present things to them first and get their feedback then make a decision of how I

might roll things out to the entire faculty based on that so when I think of

collaborative practices I think of having people that I count on and are asking for input.

According to participant P12, who agreed with having both formal and informal teams and offered this example:

I have talked about my department chairs and I would say that they are part of the team and my assistant principal and guidance counselor they tend to be, I have an inner circle, they tend to be in the inner circles and next would be the department chairs and outside of the circle would be the building planning team because that tends to include more people CSCA and those kinds of people kind of thing, so you know, those are the formal members. Knowing who the power players are in the district knowing who has the biggest influence on your school knowing who your key people are in the community makes a big difference.

The majority of lead teachers agreed that including many people into the decisions of the school was of great value. They believed that having multiple groups involved in various committees would support student learning. Lead teachers felt strongly that collaboration and being a part of the principal's team was imperative. Participant P21 reflected on the principal's ability to be collaborative:

He allows for the different departments at the school to be a part for the scheduling process what courses we are going to offer, the rigor of the program he really leaves the departments a lot of the opportunity to develop what we need

to do in our classrooms. He really pushes teams to be collaborative and he

demonstrates this in his own leadership.

Participant P18 agreed and offered the reference to a team approach:

He uses team approaches. He has several teams that work on various projects in

the school.

Collectively lead teachers expressed a very distinct grouping that principals

recruited and constructed as their key formal and informal team members. Participant P5

shared the team membership of the principal:

Our superintendent, the other principals in our building, elementary and middle

school, the high school guidance counselor and our special ed coordinator. These

would be his formal members. His informal would be individual teachers that he

goes to for advice, for input, but I think that if you were to talk to anybody else

on staff, most of us here feel that we are informal members of his team, if that

makes sense.

Participant P2 also concurred and provided this example:

I would say superintendent, the high school principal, the guidance personnel,

and the, I think, my observation, he relies on the high school resource officer a

bit. His secretary would be informal team member.

Superintendents and assistant superintendents believed that principals should

foster a collaborative relationship with faculty and staff. They should create workgroups

that would inform and drive the decisions within the school system. Participant P14
explained offering this example:

> He is very collaborative with other members of the staff as well, our non-
> instructional staff for example, like those working in the custodial department,
> food service department, transportation department, just to make sure that
> everyone's on the same page. He is a very hands-on collaborative person.

Strategic planning for short and long term program goals involves a shared team
approach. Participant P16 agreed:

> He shares his beliefs and values. He shares resources and practices that he has
> tried to gain by in and share strategy.

Successful leaders understand the importance of having strong teams with a clear
and shared vison. Participant P1 discussed the need for teams and identified them as they
relate to collaboration:

> He meets frequently with teams and teachers, they could be curriculum area
> teams, they could be grade level teams, and certainly administratively he is a part
> of the administrative team. He meets frequently with parents, either individuals or
> in groups, reaches out to the community a lot. He is very engaging in the areas of
> curriculum and shared decision making and working in a collaborative matter and
> he works well with department chairs.

These two characteristics (collaboration and key formal and informal team members) identified by the majority of participants created the broad collaboration category.

Table 1 shows the specific interview protocol questions covered in the interview sessions and arranges them into the four leadership categories. This table identifies the interview protocol questions for each specific participant and only the questions used for data collection purposes are listed. Other data was collected however it was outside the scope of the research questions. In the interest of data reduction, I focused only on these interview protocol questions and the corresponding participant responses that arranged themselves into the four broad categories. The participant responses to the interview questions provided the data for analysis. The table demonstrates interview protocol questions as they relate to each educational leadership category. The interview questions are associated with each category and referenced by the specific participant interview protocol.

Table 1

Leadership Category Interview Questions

Participants	Interpersonal	Leadership style	Communication	Collaboration
Teacher leaders	11,12	2, 8, 18	3, 21, 22	4, 7, 10
High school principals	17, 23	6, 8, 10, 16	14, 28, 29	11, 19, 24
Superintendents	10 , 11	2, 12, 18	3, 21, 22	4, 7, 9

As data were collected and further analyzed, participant responses to certain interview questions fell into these categories. Table 2 demonstrates how the data

addressed the first research question (What are the educational leadership characteristics of principals in high schools with high graduation rates in the northeast region of New York State?) educational leadership characteristics fit within each leadership category.

Table 2

General Educational Leadership Characteristics Listed by Leadership Category

Interpersonal	Leadership style	Communication	Collaboration
Acknowledges faculty/staff, Relationship Building	Facilitative, flexible, managerial, motivational, organized, professional, visible, and visionary	Active listener, communicative, promotion of school/home partnership	Collaborative, has key formal/informal team members

Based on the selected questions for data analysis the following are samples of quotes from interview sessions that justify and support the educational leadership characteristics in each of the four broad leadership categories. In the first broad leadership category of interpersonal leadership characteristics, two general educational leadership characteristics of a principal emerged. The first pattern highlighted was *acknowledging faculty and staff.* These principals demonstrated actions that supported the acknowledgement of their faculty and staff. They understood the importance of praise and celebrations of achievements. This was brought up by a number of participants. Their responses support the notion that the principal spent considerable time recognizing the efforts of their faculty and staff. A sample of a large number of participant responses included:

- Many times he will come to visit your room, and let you know that you have done well on something, you will get positive email responses from him, he will share with the superintendent often what is going well in the building and he will also

present to the board of education what his teachers are doing in the building, what they are having success with.

- She sends morning messages and posts information on our website. This goes to all faculty and staff first thing every morning.
- He writes a weekly newsletter that highlights several new initiatives and recognizes the hard work of everyone from the building custodial team to the administration.

The second pattern highlighted was the value placed on *relationships*. Principals in HGRS were found to have methods and practices that lead them to healthy and meaningful relationships within their schools. These principals understood the balance required to ensure a working school system. A large number of participants supported this pattern as a sample of their responses emerged:

- I think going back to the ability to cultivate relationships with people, I think is one of my strengths and at the end of the day it's all about relationships, I think the ability to prioritize, in the category of time management is extremely important, utilizing every bit of your day effectively and spending time on the things that really matter is extremely important and one of my strengths, and lastly I would say I am a learning leader, I feel that I am the person to go to for help for my teachers I want to continue to be a learning leader and get into the classrooms and be the support for professional development that people need.

- I'd say relationship building and I know that those things can be sometimes a slow process with everything that going on but I make it a priority and some of the other things, you just put aside, and I just believe that the relationship piece should always be that priority whether it's with the kids, the family or the faculty and staff. (This participant quote will also appear in support of the educational leadership characteristic of communicative).

These characteristics, in the interpersonal leadership category were found to be similar in rural principals serving in their region of New York State.

In the second broad category, leadership style characteristics, eight general educational leadership characteristics of a principal emerged. The first pattern highlighted was to be facilitative. This was brought up by a number of participants. Their responses support the belief that the principal engaged in actions and behaviors that fostered direction, action, collaboration, and process. These principals created and supported a risk-free environment. A sample of participant responses included:

- He is facilitative in nature.

- I believe that I facilitate systems and processes very well.

- As far as the facilitative or collaborative, I would say he is collaborative as he talks to everyone and works with us and he is also facilitative as well.

- She engages us in the work and then allows us to take direction and facilitates next steps, this is her process with most of everything

The second pattern highlighted was the ability to be *flexible*. These principals were found to be open-minded and have a willingness to change. Their approach was collegial in nature and was supported by a sense of vison. A majority of participants supported this pattern as a sample of their responses emerged:

- Listening, flexibility, and vison. (This participant quote will also appear in cross-reference support of the educational leadership characteristic of visionary).

- Open minded, willing to change, and consistent.

- Open, present, and willing to learn.

- Collegial, open minded, flexible, and respectful

The principal's ability to *manage* was the third highlighted pattern noted. These principals maintained actions and behaviors that supported a managerial leadership style. They were viewed as having the ability to manage people and tasks. They dealt with people and made timely decisions. The majority of participants supported this pattern a sample of their responses were:

- He makes decisive decisions for the whole group and good of the order.

- His involvement, his management of the day to day, and his communication.

- He can be manager when necessary and ensure everything is accomplished. (This participant quote will also appear in cross-reference support of the educational leadership characteristic of collaborative).

The fourth highlighted pattern in the leadership style category was the principal's ability to be *motivational*. HGRS principals found success when they were able to keep building moral and stratification high. They were able to utilize concepts that embraced a team approach, empowered others, and involved them in the decisions making process. They were grounded in concepts that fostered a sense of ownership. A large number of participants supported this pattern a sample of their responses were:

- He is caring, motivated, and respectful

- I motivate my team by acknowledging them; they are really good at what they do. I take it upon myself to make them understand and see what a great job they do, because my job is to make them understand that they do a great job, acknowledge it, see it.

- With public acknowledgement and empowering people.

- I think by involving them in decision making helps motivate them.

The principal's ability to be *organized* was the fifth highlighted pattern noted in the leadership style category. It was determined that the principals were responsible for various tasks and hold many responsibilities throughout the day. Previously in this study data emerged indicating that rural school principals were often charged with day-to-day tasks that exceed the typical roles of their urban counterparts. Their ability to remain organized and detailed while still preserving relationships and collaboration makes them unique. A sample of common response were:

- Planning, organization and forward thinking.

- Organized, articulate, & open-minded.

- I would say well-organized and detailed, clear and specific, and collaboratively

  driven.

The principal's ability to *professional* was the sixth highlighted pattern noted in the

leadership style category. Professionalism in all settings can be a challenge and

maintaining a level of professionalism and in times when frustrations occur is a skill set

that takes the time to develop. Principals in these rural schools settings were determined

to be very professional regardless of the task or role they were required to play on any

given day. A number of participants supported this pattern as a sample of their responses

emerged:

- I would consider him to very professional, to be hands on as he's involved and I

  also consider him to be very fair and honest, and a person of integrity.

- He is very honest, he is a man of professionalism, integrity and he is very

  consistent.

The seventh highlighted pattern in the leadership style category was the principal's

ability to maintain a level of *visibility*. Often in rural school settings the school system is

found to be the center of the community. Rural schools, as by definition, are vastly

removed from neighboring locations and attractions. The activities that occur in the

school often encompass the entire community. The leader in those schools must be

approachable and available to student, families, community members and stakeholders. A

majority of participants supported the notion that the principal must be visible and a sample of their responses were:

- He is always very visible, in hallways, classrooms, events, etc.

- He is always at concerts and sports events. He is active in our school productions.

- I would say that his office is always open; he never seems to be in it, wondering the halls all the time and stopping in to classrooms daily.

Lastly, in the leadership style category, the principals were found to have patterns showcasing their ability to be *forward thinkers* and to have a sense of *vision* for educational initiatives. A sample of participant responses included:

- Listening, flexibility, and visionary.

- Let's see, strengths, his ability to see the big picture, but at the same time his ability to organize the smaller pieces of the picture to work towards a goal, and I think his knowledge of classroom instructional strategies, and how to impart them to the staff members.

These characteristics, in the leadership style category were found to be similar in rural principals serving in the northeast region of New York State.

In the third broad leadership category, communication characteristics, three general educational leadership characteristics of a principal emerged. The first pattern highlighted was the principal's ability to be an *active listener*. Principals in these HGRS collectively were found to use skills that engaged them in practices of reflecting back to what other people have expressed. This practice allowed them to check their

understanding. Principals often restated the other person's communication, both the words and the accompanying feelings; i.e., nonverbal cues—tone of voice, facial expression, body posture. They tended to focus not solely on the message they send but the message their audience received. A sample of their responses were:

- Good listener, hardworking, and honest.

- I think he has to be able to clearly define the problem or concern, the goal is they are working on needs to be clearly and specifically defined, I think he has to be willing to accept, welcome, and listen to feedback and communication he receives about that or about those items I think he needs to include people in the decision making process, with plans to address those concerns are developed and implemented.

The principal's ability to *communicate* was the second highlighted pattern noted in the communication category. Much like the ability to be an active listener, rural school principals were found to have skills that demonstrated the ability to communicate. These principals were able to deliver clear and concise messages. They ensured that all members of the faculty and staff received their messages. Principals in these school settings understood the importance of fluid communication and the value to ensure that all stakeholders received the same information in a timely manner. Principals in HGRS often had systems in place to facilitate internal and external communication. A sample of their responses were:

- I would say that he is an effective communicator, I would say that he works well

  with building staff, and I would say that he effectively incorporates data into the

  effective decision making process in the high school.

- He uses emails, phone and face to face internally. Externally he uses social media,

  newsletters, & web page. He definitely has a system.

- He uses several methods to ensure good fluid communication. It's a must for him.

- Internally, emails, memos and meetings. Externally, articles in the local paper,

  emails, phone, and letters. This is an on-going process.

The last pattern highlighted was the principal's ability to understand and *promote the*

school and home partnership. Much like their active listening skills and their ability to

communicate, HGRS principals had effective systems that supported the school and

home partnership. Principals in these settings believed that the school and the home

should work together in supporting the development of their children. They believed that

creating this partnership would help students to flush and strengthen the bond between

the home and the school. The majority of participants supported this pattern. Listed

below is a sampling of their responses:

- I think they really boil down to socioeconomic I think it's a lack of importance for

  education it's a familial generational type of thing, generational poverty,

  generational you know education is not important I think it has come down to

  like we are now say 2nd or 3rd generation where mothers and fathers didn't do

well in school and may have not graduated they had children early and those

children now are a byproduct of the parents.

- I think family issues and discontent with the school. I understand what it's like for

   parents to be a part of the success like we are, however I still think that there are a

   small caveat of people that don't believe, the parents, that a high school diploma

   will work for their child and its truly in this day and age, but I think kids get

   pushback from the home and I think that sometimes that really hurts the child.

- Work is a big one in this area, family issues can sometimes be a big concern.

   They do not see the value in having a relationship with the school.

- Poor home and school connection. No value for it at home. Parents are

   misinformed or uninformed.

These communication characteristics were found to be similar in rural principals

serving in the northeast region of New York State.

In the last broad leadership category, collaboration characteristics, two general

educational leadership characteristics of a principal emerged. The first pattern

highlighted was the principal's ability to be *collaborative*. These principals understood

the value stemming from good communication skills and the importance of involving

others in the decision making process. They believed in their faculty and staff and took

into consideration the various levels of experience each of them offered. Principals were

found to be open and willing to hear differing opinions. The majority of participants

supported this pattern as a sample of their responses emerged:

- I would say that especially with the roles we have must be student centered, you

    must be responsible, a great listener, you need to listen.

- I would say, let's see, integrity, I would say relationship, and personable.

- As far as the facilitative or collaborative, I would say he is collaborative as he

    talks to everyone and works with us and he is also facilitative as well.

- He uses team approaches. He has several teams that work on various projects in

    the school." "He uses a nice strategy where he has a teacher present effective

    methodology at each of his facility meetings. He has developed a building level

    data team that includes collaboration. He also has a bullying prevention team, a

    discipline committee; those are just some examples of his collaborative practices.

The last pattern highlighted in the collaboration category included the principal's *key*

formal and informal team members. Principals in HGRS tended to have teams that

focused on specific areas of school reform, development, curriculum, professional

development, and strategic initiatives. These teams were both formal and informal, and

often consisted of organized committees and groups of faculty and staff. Rural school

principals invested time in understanding the logistics of the school system, the history,

and culture of the building and community, they ensured their understanding by engaging

informal key team members that brought forth a great deal of insight. A number of

participants believed that principals had formal and informal teams and a sample of their responses were:

- He has many teams in place, school based management team, leadership team, and he is also getting a whole bunch of different feedback form various members of the faculty.

- I work with our building planning teams, our department and team leaders.

- The assistant principal, CSE chair, guidance counselor, union president, and superintendent.

- I would say superintendent, the high school principal, the guidance personnel, and the, I think, my observation, he relies on the high school resource officer a bit. His secretary would be informal team member.

- Yes, other teachers and secretaries, custodial & transportation staff & a few parents.

- His dean of students, the athletic director, the guidance counselor, other district administrators and supervisors of different departments, depending on the agenda items or the topics that are going to be discussed.

Table 3 addresses the second research question: what are the differences of the educational leadership characteristics between novice and veteran principals?

Table 3

Differences in General Educational Leadership Characteristics Between Novice and Veteran Principals

Novice principals educational leadership characteristics (unique characteristics)	Veteran principals educational leadership characteristics (unique characteristics)
attentive, approachable, caring, coaching leader, decisive, energetic, focused, follow-through, inquisitive, learning leader, pro-active, problem solver, promotes safety, resourceful, respectful, strong work ethic, willingness to learn	accountable, consensus building, consistent, dedicated, experienced, fair, flexible, hands-on, hard worker, honest, inspirational, involved, kind, observant, organized, outcome driven, prioritized, professional, relationships, responsible, student centered, well planned

The effects of leadership on student achievement were examined by Louis et al., (2010). Their research provides for a number of leadership variables that are positively related to student learning. One of these leadership variables explored was the level of experience held by the principal.

Through the interview protocol sessions and the participant responses the terms listed above were mentioned twice or more, demonstrating a pattern of response. These terms were then identified as general educational leadership characteristics and have been associated to the principal's years of service (i.e. veteran or novice). The differences in educational leadership characteristics found between novice and veteran are identified in their response to research Question 2. The educational leadership characteristics associated with veteran principals demonstrated a pattern by appearing at least twice; whereas in their novice counterparts they did not.

This section reports the findings based upon the two main distinctive categories on high and low graduation rate schools. Table 4 shows the seven school cases

categorized by high and low graduation rates in the northeast Region of New York State

based on a three year average for the school years of 2011-2014.

Table 4

High (HGRS) and Low (LGRS) Graduation Rate Rural Schools in the northeast Region of New York State

HGRS 80% or higher	Percentile 3 year average	LGRS 79% or lower	Percentile 3 year average
Benjamin Central School District	85.2%	Clay Central School District	73.7%
Edison Central School District	80.5%	Great Wind Central School District	76.4%
Franklin Central School District	88.0%	Ivory Central School District	79.4%
Harrington Central School District	89.1%		

Note. All districts are protected by pseudonym. New York State Education Department (2015). Retrieved from http://www.nysed.gov

The next step in the process was to align both novice and veteran principals with their respective schools. Table 5 shows the seven school cases categorized by high and low graduation rates paired with each principal either novice or veteran.

Table 5

HGRS and Low LGRS Graduation Rate Rural Schools Novice or Veteran Principals

HGRS 80% or higher	Novice or veteran principal	LGRS 79% or lower	Novice or veteran principal
Benjamin Central School District	Veteran	Clay Central School District	Novice
Edison Central School District	Veteran	Great Wind Central School District	Veteran
Franklin Central School District	Veteran	Ivory Central School District	Veteran
Harrington Central School District	Novice		

Note. All districts are protected by pseudonym. New York State Education Department (2015). Retrieved from http://www.nysed.gov

   The next step was to link principals to their respective schools. I was then able to use the interview session transcription data to identify patterns of responses for both novice and veteran principals in all seven-school systems for both LGRS and HGRS. Researchers Van Ameijde et al., (2009) completed a qualitative study in education, exploring how distributed patterns of leadership occur. Patterns of leadership were developed from their work. It is with a conceptual framework that the authors assign leadership distribution and alignment with the notions of collegiality and professional autonomy to effectively managing the school system. Table 6 and 7 show the lists of educational leadership characteristics collected for both novice and veteran principals in both LGRS and HGRS by case. The data further delineated, shown as Table 6, a list of general educational leadership characteristics that emerged from the data. Educational leadership characteristics that appeared at least twice in the data analysis were considered

a common pattern and represented as such. These patterned characteristics were broken

into their respective school cases and sorted by the principal's years of service (i.e.

novice or veteran). Patterns that appeared in HGRS and LGRS both have been identified

and categorized. Table 8 reveals the general educational leadership characteristics

collectively found in both HGRS and LGRS. This arrangement of data began to

highlight similarities and differences found between principals in HGRS and LGRS. The

data on Table 9 holistically organizes all general educational leadership characteristics

found in all rural school principals working in each school case. These data provided for

a rich understanding of all general educational leadership characteristics, inclusive of

principals years of service, found in all seven cases. Table 10 collectively highlights the

similarities and the differences found in the educational leadership characteristics of

novice and veteran rural school principals in the northeast region of New York State.

Table 6

General Educational Leadership Characteristics List: of Novice or Veteran Principals in HGRS by Case

HGRS 80% or higher	Novice or veteran principal	Educational leadership characteristics
Benjamin Central School District	Veteran	accountable, acknowledges faculty/staff , collaborative, communicative, consistent, experienced, facilitative, fair, flexible, active listener, hands-on, hard worker, has key formal/informal team members, honest, informative, inspirational, integrity, interpersonal, involved, leads by example, managerial, motivational, observant, organized, personable, professional, promotion of school/home partnership, responsible, transformational, visible, visionary
Edison Central School District	Veteran	acknowledges faculty/staff, active listener, adaptable, approachable, available, collaborative, communicative, consensus building, empowering, engaging, experienced, firm, has key formal/informal team members, instructional leader, involved, motivational, open-minded, organized, promotion of school/home partnership, reflective, shared decision maker, understanding, visible
Franklin Central School District	Veteran	acknowledges faculty/staff, collaborative, collegial, committed, communicative, consensus building, data driven, empowering, facilitative, flexible, active listener, has key formal/informal team members, instructional leader, managerial, motivational, open minded, organized, outcome driven, professional, promotion of school/home partnership, reflective, respectful, supportive, visible, visionary, well-planned
Harrington Central School District	Novice	acknowledges faculty/staff, approachable, articulate, caring, collaborative, communicative, data driven, decisive, dedicated, focused on professional development, has key formal/informal team members, motivational, open minded, organized, pro-active, promotion of school/home partnership, reflective, respectful, trustworthy, visionary

Note. All districts are protected by pseudonym. New York State Education Department (2015). Retrieved from http://www.nysed.gov

Table 7

General Educational Leadership Characteristics List: of Novice or Veteran Principals in LGRS by Case

LGRS 79% or lower	Novice or veteran principal	Educational leadership characteristics
Clay Central School District	Novice	acknowledges faculty/staff, approachable, attentive, collaborative, communicative, data driven, energetic, facilitative, focused on professional development, follow-through, has key formal/informal team members, informative, instructional leader, integrity, interpersonal, lead-by-example, managerial, motivational, organized, personable, problem solver, promotion of school/home partnership, reflective, shared decision maker, visible, visionary, willing to learn
Great Wind Central School District	Veteran	acknowledges faculty/staff, collaborative, communicative, consistent, data driven, dedicated, experienced, facilitative, flexible, focused on professional development, has key formal/informal team members, informative, instructional leader, involved, kind, managerial, motivational, organized, prioritized, reflective, shared-decision maker, values relationships
Ivory Central School District	Novice	acknowledges faculty/staff, caring, collaborative, communicative, empowering, encouraging, facilitative, focused on professional development, active listener, has key formal/informal team members, informative, inquisitive, instructional leader, lead-by-example, learning leader, motivational, promotion of school/home partnership, respectful, resourceful, strong work ethic, supportive, transformational, values relationships, visible

Note. All districts are protected by pseudonym. New York State Education Department (2015). Retrieved from http://www.nysed.gov

I then reviewed both HGRS and LGRS to create a master list of each main category. Educational leadership characteristics must be identified at least twice to be considered a common response. Table 8 shows a list of the general educational leadership characteristics associated with principals in both HGRS and LGRS.

Table 8

All General Educational Leadership Characteristics of Principals in Both LGRS and HGRS

HGRS	LGRS
acknowledges faculty/staff, active listener, relationship building, collaborative communicative, facilitative, flexible, has key formal/informal team members, managerial, motivational, organized, professional, promotion of school/home partnership, visible, visionary	acknowledges faculty/staff, collaborative, communicative, data driven, facilitative, focused on professional development, has key formal/informal team members, informative, instructional leader, lead-by-example, managerial, motivational, organized, promotion of school/home partnership, reflective, respectful, shared decision maker, value, relationships, visible

Once these general educational leadership characteristics were identified, I was then able to create a master list for both HGRS and LGRS veteran and novice principals. At this point I began to look for similarities within each category of novice and veteran principal. This process unveiled a list of general educational leadership characteristics for novice rural principals in the northeast region of New York State, as well as, a list of general educational leadership characteristics for veteran rural principals. After this step, the list was then reviewed for similarities and differences that materialized. I discovered that through these processes specific educational leadership characteristics of both novice and veteran rural principals in this setting emerged.

Table 9 shows the list of general educational leadership characteristics of both novice and veteran principals in both LGRS and HGRS.

Table 9

Leadership Characteristics of Novice and Veteran Principals in LGRS and HGRS

Novice principals	Veteran principals
acknowledges faculty/staff, attentive, caring, coaching leader, collaborative, communicative, data driven, decisive, empowering, energetic, facilitative, focused on professional development, focused, follow-through, active listener, has key formal/informal team members, informative, inquisitive, instructional leader, integrity, interpersonal, lead-by-example, learning leader, managerial, motivational, personable, pro-active, problem solver, promotes safety, promotion of school/home partnership, respectful, reflective, resourceful, respectful, Shared decision maker, strong work ethic, supportive, transformational, visible, visionary, willingness to learn	accountable, acknowledges faculty/staff, collaborative, collegial, communicative, consensus building, consistent, data driven, kind, dedicated, empowering, experienced, facilitative, fair, flexible, focused on professional development, active listener, hands-on, hard worker, has key formal/informal team members, honest, informative, inspirational, instructional leader, integrity, interpersonal, involved, lead-by-example, managerial, motivational, observant, open minded, organized, outcome driven, personable, prioritized, professional, promotion of school/home partnership, reflective, relationships, respectful, responsible, shared-decision maker, student centered, supportive, transformational, visible, visionary, well planned

Table 10 shows the similarities and differences in the educational leadership characteristics of both novice and veteran principals in both LGRS and HGRS.

Table 10

Comparison of Leadership Characteristics of Novice and Veteran Principals

Similarities of novice/veteran principals educational leadership characteristics	Novice principals educational leadership characteristics (unique characteristics)	Veteran principals educational leadership characteristics (unique characteristics)
acknowledges faculty/staff, collaborative, communicative, data driven, empowering, facilitative, focused on professional development, active listener, has key formal/informal team members, informative, instructional leader, integrity, interpersonal lead-by-example, managerial, motivational, personable, promotion of school/home partnership, reflective, shared decision maker, supportive, transformational, visible, visionary	attentive, approachable, caring, coaching leader, decisive, energetic, focused, follow-through, inquisitive, learning leader, pro-active, problem solver, promotes safety, resourceful, respectful, strong work ethic, willingness to learn	accountable, consensus building, consistent, dedicated, experienced, fair, flexible, hands-on, hard worker, honest, inspirational, involved, kind, observant, organized, outcome driven, prioritized professional, relationships, responsible, student centered, well planned

Summary

Chapter 4 described the results and findings for this study. The chapter restated the purpose of the study and the process by which the data was generated, collected, and recorded, as well as how it was organized. This section also presents variations in the data collection plan presented in Chapter 3. The chapter identified the process of category construction and the constant comparative method to develop specific categories from the interview and observation data as the first level of data analysis. A content analysis was conducted in relation to the documents that were collected for this study.

The second level of data analysis required a comprehensive review of the findings. This review was anchored in the framework of the research questions. As a result of that analysis various patterns, themes, similarities and differences were found in the data. Data that supported the conceptual framework and the study hypothesis were presented. Any and all contending data or explanations that surfaced were also presented. This chapter further identifies the evidence of data quality.

The study was guided by two main research questions: What are the educational leadership characteristics of high school principals in high schools with high graduation rates in the northeast region of New York State? And, what are the differences of the educational leadership characteristics between novice and veteran high school principals? The 21 interview sessions allowed the participants to share their experiences with educational leadership characteristics of the principal in schools with either high or low graduation rates. Once interview and document data was collected and analyzed, focusing on rural schools with high graduation rates, general educational leadership characteristics emerged in such areas as: acknowledges faculty/staff, active listener, collaborative, communicative, facilitative, and flexible, has key formal/informal team members, managerial, motivational, organized, professional, promotion of school/home partnership, visible, and visionary. Placing principals into selected groups determined by years of service, identified as novice and veteran, allowed for general educational leadership characteristics to develop. I was able to extract both general similarities and differences between the novice and veteran principals. This comparison allowed me to focus on the demonstrated differences in educational leadership characteristics between the two

groups. The veteran principals in the northeast region of New York State displayed

general educational leadership characteristics such as: accountability, consensus building,

consistency, dedication, experience, fairness, flexibility, hands-on, hardworking, honesty,

inspirational, involvement, kindness, observant, organization, outcome driven,

prioritized, professional, relationships, responsibility, student centered and well planned.

Whereas their novice rural schools counterparts typically demonstrated general

educational leadership characteristics that had similarity, however differences such as;

data driven, focused on professional development, informative, instructional leader, lead-

by-example, reflective, shared decision maker, and a strong value for relationships

emerged.

Chapter 5 will summarize key findings and interpretation of the findings in light

of how they related to existing research on principal leadership. Recommendations for

action and future research will be stated as well as implications for positive social

change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter includes interpretations and recommendations based on the findings described in Chapter 4. The purpose of this multiple case study was to obtain information about the educational leadership characteristics of rural principals in schools with both HGRS and LGRS. The study was guided by two main research questions: (a) What are the educational leadership characteristics of principals in high schools with high graduation rates in the northeast region of New York State? (b) What are the differences of the educational leadership characteristics between novice and veteran principals? Based on extensive research, I was unable to find existing literature that explored the educational leadership characteristics of principals. Guided by the literature review, the study focused on two major topics: (a) the current research on high school principals' leadership characteristics, and (b) their role in influencing student achievement as it relates to graduation completion. The principals in these schools present specific leadership characteristics within those school systems. Hence, I was able to identify this gap, which allowed me the opportunity to explore the literature with these two topics in mind. The literature reflects some qualitative and comparative case studies on describing the leadership characteristics of principals and graduation rates. These studies were done mostly in urban areas and none were carried out in this area of rural New York State. Limited research has focused on the educational leadership characteristics of principals in rural high schools of a northeastern region of New York State.

The findings regarding educational leadership characteristics of rural principals that relate to graduation rates are discussed initially. The major findings of this study

were based on the theoretical proposition that rural principals display specific educational

leadership characteristics. The participants across the seven case settings (school

districts) included four veteran principals, three novice principals, seven district

superintendents, and seven teacher leaders. Data were collected via face-to-face interview

sessions and recorded telephone interviews with the participants. The recordings were

transcribed. Member checking was the engaged to ensure the accuracy of the findings, as

well as to increase the credibility and validity of the study.

Four broad categories of characteristics emerged from conducting 21 different

interview sessions with educational leadership team members about their perceptions of

graduation rate success and the principal: *interpersonal leadership, leadership style,*

communication, and collaboration. I used verbatim quotes from participants' responses

to develop the information presented in the findings section of this chapter. Next,

conclusions regarding the educational leadership characteristics of both veteran and

novice principals that cross school district case settings are explained as they relate to the

literature reviewed in the study. Key findings emerged and it was determined that

principals positioned in HGRS generally demonstrated similarity in their identified and

defined general educational leadership characteristics. Through the data analysis

principals working in the four HGRS case settings were found to have educational

leadership characteristics, embedded in the four broad leadership categories, which

supported a *communication style* that embraced active listening. These principals'

leadership style was to be very visible in their schools; *interpersonally* they took the time

to ensure that the proper acknowledgment was provided to their faculty and staff. Their

collaborative leadership style placed a high value on the work of others and the importance of varied perspectives and opinions. These principals had key formal and informal team members who shared in their vision and decision making process. Principals in HGRS actively engaged in *communication* behaviors that promoted the school and home partnership.

The study further investigated the differences in educational leadership characteristics between veteran and novice principals. This data were found to be further compelling as the five veteran principals positioned in the school cases tended to have an appreciation for consistency. They created systems that supported accountability and were outcome driven. Veteran principals typically were experienced and responsible to the organization. They developed situations that would allow for consensus building when making decisions and placing students at the center of their rationale.   These principals maintained a hands-on approach and were found to be inspirational, honest, and hardworking to ensuring a professional practice. Veteran principals created environments that were open and fair to their faculty and staff.

In addition to answering the research questions, additional data emerged; novice principals in these rural high schools generally maintained a coaching leadership style that encompassed behaviors that positioned them to be approachable, caring, and attentive to their faculty and staff. These principals were generally inquisitive and focused in their decision-making. They typically demonstrated a level of decisiveness and follow-through on their initiatives. Novice principals paralleled their leadership with a coaching style that promoted problem–solving and the promotion of school safety.

They demonstrated behaviors that were pro-active and resourceful, with a strong ethic of work and a willingness to learn and grow as a professional.

The emergent data from this study demonstrated similarity in comparison to the literature reviewed. This study's findings compared directly with much of the literature and supported the best guess list of educational leadership characteristics from Chapter 1, including; honesty, communication commitment, empathy, trustworthiness, decisiveness, professional growth, and promotion of program coherence. The connection to the literature is strong with little contrast or variation, finding direct links with educational leadership characteristics associated with dimensions in student learning and achievement (Leithwood et al., 2010), establishing direct relationships with trust, professional development (Youngs & King, 2002), ensuring orderly and supportive environments with leadership styles that address students' academic and nonacademic outcomes (Robinson et al., 2008). Deepening the breadth of understanding and focusing on the gap between the school and the community (Gordon & Louis, 2009) has been evidenced in both novice and veteran principals. The conceptual framework and the defined research questions guided this study. Emergent data resulted in four broad leadership categories that were rooted in the four frames or leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The data analysis determined that principals in HGRS maintained structures that engaged their staff and consistently found ways to improve communication. These principals were found to be able to navigate throughout the four frames of leadership and maintain a blend of educational leadership characteristics that crossed sections of all four broad educational leadership categories defined by this study. The study further supported the

notion that principals in HGRS and those determined as veteran with similar educational leadership characteristics were successful in their practice as related to graduation.

This study continued to produce results that indicated the need for principals in both LGRS and HGRS to maintain positive relationships at all levels (i.e. subordinates, colleagues, and supervisors), to be proficient in public speaking, and communication skills (Hummell, 2007). It is with these underpinnings that this study continued with the mindset of strong evidence supporting that leadership can be distributed in school systems with the goal to obtain the best match between the school system and the educational leader (Hulpia & Devos, 2009).

The chapter closes with a summary of all recommendations and further actions, implications, and a conclusion.

Interpretation of the Findings

Based on the review of the literature in Chapter 2 and the multiple case study design, both veteran and novice principals (including those in HGRS) demonstrated general educational leadership characteristics. Principals in HGRS similarly demonstrated unique educational leadership characteristics. It also became clear that similarities and differences between veteran and novice principals emerged from the findings. The purpose of this section is to interpret the findings and to describe specific conclusions that address both of the research questions in relation to the data analysis that was conducted in Chapter 4. In particular, this section will relate the findings of this study to the literature review conducted in Chapter 2 and to the conceptual framework. The research questions and interview protocol were vital in the development of the

identified categories, including patterns based upon the participants' responses and the

document review. The results were presented in Chapter 4 and a discussion of the

findings, recommendations, and conclusions pertinent to the research questions are

presented in this chapter.

Common patterns from the interviews provided insight into the perceptions of the

21 participants who contributed to this study. Common educational leadership

characteristics were categorized and those duplicated remained as demonstrating

consistency across participant responses. I then color-coded the phrases or words within

the data to identify the characteristics that appeared more than twice in each case. I

determined that if educational leadership characteristics appeared at least twice out of the

possible three participant responses within a case of this multiple case study it was coded

as a common response and thereby considered a general educational leadership

characteristic. According to Van Ameijde et al. (2009), exploring how distributed

patterns of leadership within a Higher Education Institution occur, patterns of leadership

can be evidenced by similarities in leadership behaviors. I reviewed the responses from

each group of participants, looking for similarities and differences. I found that across

cases (seven school districts) and participant responses patterns emerged. Participant

responses to interview protocol questions fell into a certain set of categories. Participant

responses appeared to be aligning in areas that would later draw relationship to

educational leadership characteristics. A sample of these patterns included broad

categories in communication, collaboration, acknowledgment of faculty and staff, formal

and informal team members, relationship building, organization, and promotion of school

and home partnership. As the data were further analyzed, the defined educational leadership characteristics of each principal were identified, defined, and then categorized; each was placed into one or more of the broad leadership categories. Patterns were identified by the principal's demonstrable similarities in their characteristics while in each specific case setting.   It became clear that principals in HGRS and LGRS, as well as, the defined veteran and novice, each had a set of general educational leadership characteristics. The general educational leadership characteristics of both veteran and novice principals began to naturally fall into these categories exposing similarities and differences between the two as well as align themselves with either HGRS or LGRS.

The findings of this study indicated that there are general educational leadership characteristics of both veteran and novice principals in rural high schools in a northeast region of New York State and, in fact, there are differences between novice and veteran principals. The findings further identify the general educational leadership characteristics of principals in schools with HGRS. Participants consistently stating similar responses indicating that principals share similarity in their vision for defining educational leadership characteristics evidenced this. Coelli & Green (2012) indicated the presence of educational leadership characteristics in principals and the findings of this study clearly demonstrate those found in principals in a rural area of New York State. After a comprehensive review of the literature in Chapter 2, I extracted and developed a first best guess at identifying educational leadership characteristics of both novice and veteran principals. That first best guess list of characteristics included; honesty, communication commitment, empathy, trustworthiness, decisiveness, professional growth, and promotion

of program coherence. As seen by the results of the study there is much agreement to previous research found between the literature review on educational leadership characteristics and those found of principals in a rural area of New York State (Coelli & Green, 2012; Grissom, 2011; Harris, 2008; & Louis et al., 2010). Additionally, the findings in this study uncover the educational leadership characteristics of principals in rural school setting and expand the scope of that list (Gordon & Louis, 2009). Surprisingly, in addition to general educational leadership characteristics, the principal in the rural school setting placed a large focus on the school and home partnership in almost each case.

Limitations of the Study

There are no distinct limitations to trustworthiness that arose through the execution of the study, as both internal and external validity were maintained. The member checking process described in Chapter 1 was seamless. It built in the opportunity for participants to make final corrections and provide approval of the data prior to researcher analysis, thus mitigating researcher bias. The study design remained consistent with the proposed structure. A slight sample modification was required as the sample size was reduced from the original 10 cases to seven cases as three schools declined participation. This reduced the participant sample size from 33 potential participants to 21 established participants. Measurement validity remained in place as intended. The interview protocol was not altered; thereby trustworthiness was maintained as defined in Chapter 1.

The research sample size was small and specific to one rural area in the northeast region of New York State and the interview data results are subjective to the participants' responses. The study placed a significant focus on the veteran principals in HGRS and there was little consideration given to the novice principals and graduation rates. Novice principals placed in LGRS or HGRS were not authentically represented due to their lack of years of experience in that school. The two main categories were determined from the cohort years that were under the leadership of a prior high school principal. Although the general educational leadership characteristics are clearly identified for both veteran and novice principals in LGRS and HGRS, further inquiry is needed to expand on these results. Equally challenging was the selection of target audiences to report the results and findings of the research. This is a critical piece of the research process. The selection of presentation mediums is significant to ensure the results are used by the appropriate groups and will have the greatest effect on social change. The information found in this multiple case study would provide for supportive research as a secondary source and should be considered as a "springboard" for additional research.

Although the information can be contributing source relevant to educational leadership characteristics of principals in rural high school settings, it lacks depth. It would require further exploration to determine solid evidence based support to generalize educational leadership characteristics across other regions. The study describes educational leadership characteristics within a specific sample and region, which does have a sense of usefulness.

Recommendations

The results achieved through this research study provide insight into educational leadership characteristics and practices that may strengthen the leadership capacity of principals. An initial recommendation is for superintendents to consider having principals in HGRS conduct monthly workshops at their schools for both novice and veteran high school principals. During these workshops there could be discussions of different strategies with examples of effective strategies provided for the other high school principals to try in their own buildings. The principals could keep reflective journal logs about the implementation of the various strategies paired with specific educational leadership characteristic styles.

The second recommendation is to create a potential match between rural principals and rural high schools, by using both a principal placement and a school leadership condition survey. Current and new principals could be surveyed by using research-based and designed measurement instruments to determine the specific educational leadership characteristics they hold. Similarly, the faculty and staff could take a school leadership condition survey to determine what type of educational leader is most needed in their high school. The design could be used to assess various principals' interactions with others, problem-solving skills, leadership styles, characteristics, and other management competencies. The school leadership condition survey would act as a needs assessment based on what the faculty and staff believe is needed in their principal. The goal of this process would be to help determine if a potential match could be obtained between the needs of the school systems and that of the potential principal.

Additionally, it could also help principals compare and reflect on their own perceptions of leadership tasks, practices, styles, and characteristics they believe to be important.

Another recommendation for further study might include a deeper review on specific educational leadership characteristics and more intimately the behaviors associated with each of these characteristics. Future researchers may wish to consider utilizing this study and the data within as a platform to expand on further understanding of educational leadership characteristics. It may be practical to increase the sample size and cover a larger rural region for generalizability.

In reflection on the interview protocols it became clear in the data collection phase that refining and limiting the protocol questions might have better served the data collection process. I found that there were some questions that fell short of providing meaningful data in participant responses. Therefore it might be prudent to streamline interview questions to better link with the research questions. A suggestion might include mapping out which question(s) will be used to answer support the data collection phase as they related to the two main research questions. Consideration may be given to an "evaluation crosswalk" table, typically used to link research questions with data collection methods, however similar process may be beneficial (O'Sullivan, 1991, p. 46).

This study was designed to foster a sense of positive social change. In doing so, it would contribute to the topic and the field of educational leadership by describing and defining educational leadership characteristics of rural principals, both novice and veteran, in HGRS and LGRS. The implications for social change can be deliberated through the contributions of this study to the research topic, practice in the field of

educational leadership, and assist in the positioning of principals into best suited school systems. This study presents general educational leadership characteristics of principals, both novice and veteran and both in HGRS and LGRS. The study appears to expose similarities and differences in these characteristics across case settings and within both HGRS and LGRS categories. Further study could build upon the outcomes of this research to increase the understanding of educational leadership characteristics and widen the sample size to larger rural regions. The findings of this study could be used to improve principal leadership practices and to better positon principals with a matching school system. This is found to be consistent with Hulpia and Devos (2009) who examined the link between distributed leadership and the evidence of strong prediction data to support "best match" of educational leaders with the school system types.

In relation to the contributions of this study to the practice in the field and to the breadth of research, the implications for social change also emerge. The study provides for a rich understanding of the educational leadership characteristics found in both novice and veteran principals in schools that demonstrate high and low graduation rates. It is recommended that further inquiry be conducted for novice principals in both LGRS and HGRS. This understanding would be beneficial for both veteran and novice principals working in similar settings across the rural school selected in this study. The study indicates that responses from the school leadership team are pertinent to identify and describe educational leadership characteristics. I believe that this type of data collected presents a hierarchy within the school structure, allowing for rich and robust data to be

collected and analyzed from participants that are situated above and below the principal in the administrative structure.

Finally, the study may also provide contributions to positive social change in educational leadership by increasing levels of administrative collaboration and professional development. In turn the study further fosters the opportunity to explore options for placing principals in school systems that support a match between the principals and the needs of the school environment. The findings might further inform members of the leadership team of educational leadership characteristics and actions that might improve school climate and the operation of school systems. Additionally, the study allowed for principals to reflect on their own educational leadership characteristics and to identify their own strengths and weaknesses.

Conclusion

The results of this multiple case design with a qualitative approach determined that principal educational leadership characteristics could be generally identified, defined, and categorized across seven rural high schools in the northeast region of New York State. It has provided: (a) an interpretation of the findings, (b) limitations set forth in the study, (c) recommendations for how results can be used and for further action, and potential impact for positive social change. This study was guided by its exploratory purpose that directly linked with a micro-conceptual framework of a working hypothesis. I believe that there are specific educational leadership characteristics of principals that relate to graduation rates and that the years of experience of the principal is one of those factors.

After a comprehensive review of the literature I extracted and developed a first best guess at identifying educational leadership characteristics that principals, novice and veteran, may poses and successful graduation completion. That first best guess list of characteristics include honesty, communication commitment, empathy, trustworthiness, decisiveness, professional growth, and promotion of program coherence. The literature review found and established the working hypotheses: that there are specific educational leadership characteristics of principals in high schools with HGRS and LGRS in the northeast Region of New York State. The years of experience of the principal and graduation rates in the northeast Region of New York State supported this hypothesis.

The findings revealed the development of four broad educational leadership categories in which educational leadership characteristics fell into place: (a) interpersonal, (b) leadership style, (c) communication, and (d) collaboration categories. The analysis of the data collected from participant interviews and document review emerged. The data fit into the defined categories and patterns were developed. This multiple case study found that principals in rural schools in the northeast region of New York State that have high graduation rates generally demonstrate a set of educational leadership characteristics. The data produced other emerging results in that the veteran principals in the northeast region of New York State clearly maintained a defined set of general educational leadership characteristics. Whereas their novice rural schools counterparts typically demonstrated general educational leadership characteristics that had similarity, however differences were clearly noted.

Having made these conclusions, as a researcher in the field, I am provided with the opportunity to have an impact on society and help shape social change. In the evolving field of education, the educational community has the ability to have a great impact on the direction of our culture. Through the process of research, scholars are able to best logistically identify gaps.

It would be beneficial for institutions of higher education to build upon the findings collected in this study, specifically rural high school educational leadership. Expanding the sample size and implementing a pilot study designed to further the understandings of the educational leadership characteristics of rural highs school principals could eventually have a positive impact on the development of educational leaders. This could allow for beneficial distribution within or across a region of schools by better aligning educational leadership characteristics to the needs of school systems. A strengthened regional framework that improves administrative distribution may provide a valuable change for making needed adjustments and improvements overtime.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol for High School Principal/Assistant Principal

Introduction: The purpose of the study is to identify, describe, and categorize high school principals' leadership characteristics with respect to graduation rates in rural schools in the northeast Region of New York State. Determining similarities in the functions of high school principal leadership attributes on graduation rates is significant. This study will focus specifically on the commonalities in leadership attributes of high school principals, in schools that demonstrate high graduation rates (HGR), yet differ by other identifiable variables. The study will sample a of group schools that have high or low graduation rates, but are different in other ways. High and low graduation rate schools are defined in the study and considered rural by nature of defined geography. The design of the study is a qualitative study conducted across multiple sites. Data will be collected through in-depth interviews and document analysis. The projected findings that emerge from this exploratory study will provide valuable insights about educational leadership attributes, similarities in schools with high graduation rates, and identifiable patterns in behavior of the high school principals found in the 10 selected high schools of the northeast region of New York State. The study will create a list of constructs based upon similarities in these patterns within categorized school systems.

Educational leadership characteristics of rural high school principals and graduation rates in the northeast Region of New York State.

1. Including the current school year, how many years have you been a high school principal?

   Interview Prompt Question:

   If interviewing Assistant Principal

This question will be excluded

2. Currently what level of state certification do you currently have?

   Interview Prompt Question:

   If interviewing Assistant Principal

   This question will be excluded

3. Why did you enter into the profession of secondary school leadership in a rural

   high school setting?

   Interview Prompt Question:

   What do you like most about secondary school leadership?

   Interview Prompt Question:

   Is that why you haven't gone into central administration?

   Interview Prompt Question:

   So would you say then that it's a personal decision for you to remain in secondary

   leadership and not move anywhere else?

   Interview Prompt Question:

   What do you dislike most about the requirements for secondary school leaders?

4. How has your role as a secondary school leader changed over the last 3 years?

   Interview Prompt Question:

   Could you put a number on the increase in leadership roles over the last 3 years of

   your leadership?

   Interview Prompt Question:

   Do you find that most of the tasks that have changed detrimental or beneficial to

your leadership and explain your positon?

5. Did the current superintendent hire you?

6. How would you describe your leadership style?

    Interview Prompt Question:

    So, would you say it's _____?

    _____(Facilitative, collaborative, managerial, or another?)

7. How have you maintained your leadership style over the past 3 years in the midst of the accountability and the other educational reform initiatives that have transpired?

8. What are the three best words that describe your leadership?

    What are the three best words that describe the leadership of your high school principal?

    Interview Prompt Question:

    So, you would say they are _____, _____, _____?

9. As you reflect on your entire career, are there any lived experiences or leadership practices that have contributed to your leadership style?

    Interview Prompt Question:

    What are the most important daily practices of leadership for you?

    Interview Prompt Question:

    Is a mission, vision, and goal statement important to your leadership?

10. What would you say are your top 3 strengths as an educational leader?

    What would you say are the top 3 strengths of your high school principal?

Interview Prompt Question:

So, you would say they are _____, _____, _____?

11. What sorts of collaborative practices do you implement within your leadership?

12. Are you most comfortable with verbal or written presentations?

13. What are the techniques that you use to clarify the meaning of unclear messages?

14. What are your communication methods? Specifically how do you communicate internally (i.e. emails, memos, and verbal)? Secondly how do you communicate externally (newsletters, memos, letters, emails, and phone)?

15. When beginning a new project, can you outline the steps you implement? Can you outline a project from beginning to end that you finished and the specific steps used?

16. What are your strengths that allow you to achieve your goals in a fast moving environment?

17. How do you conduct meetings?

18. How do you acknowledge the work of your faculty/staff?

19. How do you motivate your team?

20. How do you best use your time and what methods do you use?

21. How do you approach complex problems?

22. How do you facilitate/maintain a positive discussion?

23. What relationship do you believe you should have with faculty and staff members in order to effectively implement team decisions?

24. Define your formal key team members?

Interview Prompt Question(s):

Why have you identified them as key formal members?

Would you say there are key informal members of your team and if so who would they be?

25. How often do you consult team members?

26. Could some of your team members assist you with meeting a difficult deadline?

27. What percentage of students do you think leave your high school without a diploma?

28. What do you think are some of the most significant reasons that students do not graduate?

29. What do you suggest might be done on a school or district-wide level to increase high school graduation rates?

30. What role do you think you should play in improving student achievement in general?

31. How effective do you think you have been in improving student achievement in general?

32. How do you think you should evaluate your own effectiveness in relation to improving student achievement?

33. What role do you think you should play in helping the building leadership team to improve student achievement and in creating a shared vision of learning?

34. How do you think building leadership team members should evaluate their own effectiveness in relation to improving student achievement?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol for Superintendent/Assistant Superintendent

Introduction: The purpose of the study is to identify, describe, and categorize high school principals' leadership characteristics with respect to high school graduation rates in rural schools in the northeast region of New York State. Determining similarities in the functions of high school principal leadership attributes on high school graduation rates is significant. This study will focus specifically on the commonalities in leadership attributes of high school principals, in schools that demonstrate high graduation rates (HGR), yet differ by other identifiable variables. The study will sample a of group schools that have high or low graduation rates, but are different in other ways. High and low graduation rate schools are defined in the study and considered rural by nature of defined geography. The design of the study is a qualitative study conducted across multiple sites. Data will be collected through in-depth interviews and document analysis. The projected findings that emerge from this exploratory study will provide valuable insights about educational leadership attributes, similarities in schools with high graduation rates, and identifiable patterns in behavior of the high school principals found in the 10 selected high schools of the northeast region of New York State. The study will create a list of constructs based upon similarities in these patterns within categorized school systems.

Case Study of educational leadership characteristics of rural high school principals and graduation rates in the northeast region of New York State.

1. Did you hire the HS (or Asst.) principal(s)?

2. How would you describe your HS (or Asst.) principal(s)'s leadership style? Facilitative, collaborative, managerial, or another?

   Interview Prompt Question:

   So, would you say it's _____?

3. What are the communication methods of your HS (or Asst.) Principal(s)? Specifically how does your HS (or Asst.) principal(s) communicate internally (i.e. emails, memos, and verbal)? Secondly does your HS (or Asst.) principal(s) communicate externally (newsletters, memos, letters, emails, and phone)?

4. What sorts of collaborative practices does your HS (or Asst.) principal(s) implement within his/her leadership?

5. What are the techniques that your HS (or Asst.) principal(s) uses to clarify the meaning of unclear messages?

6. How does your HS (or Asst.) principal(s) conduct meetings?

7. Who would you say are the key members of your HS (or Asst.) principal(s) team?

8. How often does your HS (or Asst.) principal(s) consult with team members?

9. How does your HS (or Asst.) principal(s) motivate the team?

10. What relationship do you believe the HS (or Asst.) principal(s) should have with faculty and staff members in order to effectively implement team decisions?

11. How does your HS (or Asst.) principal(s) acknowledge the work of his/her faculty and staff?

12. What are the three best words that describe the leadership of your high school principal?

Interview Prompt Question:

So, you would say they are _____, _____, _____?

13. What role do you think the HS (or Asst.) principal(s) should play in helping the building leadership team to improve student achievement and in creating a shared vision of learning?

14. What role do you think your HS (or Asst.) principal(s) should play in improving student achievement in general?

15. How effective do you think the HS (or Asst.) principal(s) has been in improving student achievement in general?

16. What specific instructional strategies do you think the HS (or Asst.) principal(s) should recommend to departments in order to improve student achievement?

17. How do you think the HS (or Asst.) principal(s) should evaluate their own effectiveness in relation to improving student achievement?

18. What would you say are the top 3 strengths of your high school principal?

   Interview Prompt Question:

   So, you would say they are _____, _____, _____?

19. How, if at all, does student behavior affect their performance and achievement in school?

20. What percentage of students do you think leave your high school without a diploma?

21. What do you think are some of the most significant reasons that students do not graduate?

22. What do you suggest might be done on a school or district-wide level to increase graduation rates?

23. What involvement does your HS or (Asst.) principal take when a student says s/he is going to take as many study halls as possible?

24. What policies or rules do you see your HS (or Asst.) principal(s) having the most difficulty with?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol for Lead Teachers

Introduction: The purpose of the study is to identify, describe, and categorize high school principals' leadership characteristics with respect to high school graduation rates in rural schools in the northeast Region of New York State. Determining similarities in the functions of high school principal leadership attributes on high school graduation rates is significant. This study will focus specifically on the commonalities in leadership attributes of high school principals, in schools that demonstrate high graduation rates (HGR), yet differ by other identifiable variables. The study will sample a of group schools that have high or low graduation rates, but are different in other ways. High and low graduation rate schools are defined in the study and considered rural by nature of defined geography. The design of the study is a qualitative study conducted across multiple sites. Data will be collected through in-depth interviews and document analysis. The projected findings that emerge from this exploratory study will provide valuable insights about educational leadership attributes, similarities in schools with high graduation rates, and identifiable patterns in behavior of the high school principals found in the 10 selected high schools of the northeast region of New York State. The study will create a list of constructs based upon similarities in these patterns within categorized school systems.

Educational leadership characteristics of rural high school principals and graduation rates in the northeast region of New York State.

1. Did your current HS (or Asst.) principal hire you?

2. How would you describe your HS (or Asst.) principal's leadership style? **Interview**

   Prompt Question:

   Why do you feel this style is _____?

   _____ (facilitative, collaborative, managerial, or another?)

3. What are the communication methods of your HS (or Asst.) Principal? Specifically how does your HS (or Asst.) principal communicate internally (i.e. emails, memos, and verbal)? Secondly does your HS (or Asst.) principal communicate externally (newsletters, memos, letters, emails, and phone)?

4. What sorts of collaborative practices does your HS (or Asst.) principal's implement within his/her leadership?

5. What are the techniques that your HS (or Asst.) principal uses to clarify the meaning of unclear messages?

6. How does your HS (or Asst.) principal conduct meetings?

   Interview Prompt Question(s):

   Is there a formal agenda and if so how is it distributed?

   Who facilitates the meeting?

   Is the meeting engaging and if so how?

   How would you describe the overall meeting? (collaborative or informative)

   How is the meeting follow-up provided (i.e. minutes)?

7. Who would you say are the key formal members of your HS (or Asst.) principal's team?

   Interview Prompt Question(s):

   Why have you identified them as key formal members?

   Would you say there are key informal members of the principal's team and if so who would they be?

8. What would you say are the top 3 strengths of your high school/Asst. principal?

   Interview Prompt Question:

   So, you would say they are _____, _____, _____?

9. How often does your HS (or Asst.) principal's consult with team members?

10. How does your HS (or Asst.) principal motivate the team?

11. What relationship do you believe the HS (or Asst.) principal should have with faculty and staff members in order to effectively implement team decisions?

12. How does your HS (or Asst.) principal acknowledge the work that you do?

13. What role do you think the HS (or Asst.) principal should play in helping the building leadership team to improve student achievement and in creating a shared vision of learning?

14. What role do you think your HS (or Asst.) principal should play in improving student achievement in general?

15. How effective do you think the HS (or Asst.) principal has been in improving student achievement in general?

16. What specific instructional strategies do you think the HS (or Asst.) principal should recommend to departments in order to improve student achievement?

17. How do you think the HS (or Asst.) principal should evaluate your their effectiveness in relation to improving student achievement?

18. What are the three best words that describe the leadership of your high school principal?

    Interview Prompt Question:

    So, you would say they are _____, _____, _____?

19. How, if at all, does student behavior affect their performance and achievement in school?

20. What percentage of students do you think leave your high school without a diploma?

    Interview Prompt Question:

    What are the reasons they leave?

21. What do you think are some of the most significant reasons that students do not graduate?

22. What do you suggest might be done on a school or district-wide level to increase graduation rates?

23. What, if anything, do you notice about instructional practices in your school? What, if any, patterns have you noticed?

24. What involvement does your HS or (Asst.) principal take when a student says s/he is going to take as many study halls as possible?

25. What policies or rules do you see students having the most difficulty with?

Appendix D: Example of E-mail Invitation to Participants

TO: Potential Dissertation Participant

FROM: Christopher M. Groves

DATE: _____

SUBJECT: Educational leadership characteristics of rural high school principals and graduation rates in the northeast region of New York State.

You are being asked to participate in a multiple site case research study designed to address the potential influence(s) of the High School Principal over high school graduation rates in 10 rural schools in the northeast region of New York State. My purpose was to identify, describe, understand, and compare high school principals' leadership characteristics as they relate to high school graduation rates in 10 rural high schools of northeast region of New York State, so that strategic efforts can be made to improve graduation rates. The study will explore the function of the high school principal in schools with high graduation rates, by identifying how the schools differ in other measurable variables, while also looking for commonalities in their high school principals' leadership characteristics. These characteristics will be identified and placed into categories. High school principals will also be sorted and placed into defined categories.

Please know that your district superintendent has approved for this school site to be a part of the research study. He/She has no other knowledge of your decision, regarding participation, nor your responses. You as a potential participant may select to participate or decline.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a secondary school principal, assistant principal, superintendent, assistant superintendent, and/or a teacher leader within the northeast region of New York and that has witnessed and experienced the potential influence of the High School Principal in rural school systems. You have also been asked to participate in this study because you have been an educational leader.

If you agree to participate, you will complete two activities. First you will experience approximately a 20-30 minute interview. The interview session will be conducted, either during site visits or phone conferences. If at a site visit, I will arrange a time and place for the interview that will minimize disruption. I will arrive at the pre-determined interview location at the designated time to complete the interview. The interview will be tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Second, a copy of the transcribed interview will be provided to you for your examination. If you wish to change any of the answers you provided, then you will make these changes and return them to the researcher. If a review and revision process is required it should take approximately 30 minutes. These changes will be incorporated into the original transcription. All tape recordings and transcriptions will be kept secure and confidential. Tape recordings will be destroyed after five years.

Please know that all personal and identifiable information will be protected and pseudonyms will be used for all participants and school sites. And that I am acting as an independent researcher and this study is exclusively for my own research and completely separate from my current employment.

Please contact me to express your interest or to learn more about the study.

If you agree to participate, I will forward the interview questions, protocol, and the

consent form. This will be followed by a follow up call to confirm your receipt of the

email and your desired selection, date and time.

Respectfully,

Christopher M. Groves

Appendix E: Example of E-mail Follow-up with District Superintendents

TO: District Superintendent

FROM: Christopher M. Groves

DATE: _____

SUBJECT: Follow-up email confirmation

Dear Superintendent,

Thank you for our telephone conversation on _____. It is my understanding from this discussion that you have granted this researcher permission to conduct a research study focusing on high school principal leadership characteristics at _____ Central School. Again just to reiterate, this researcher is conducting research completely independent of his employer and solely as a doctoral student at the University of Walden.

As we discussed, this researcher will be conducting a maximum of three interviews, lasting approximately 20-30 minutes each. These interviews will be held in a private location at the school district. During this conversation you indicated that the high school principal at _____ high school currently has _____ years of service as the principal. You also identified _____ and _____ as teacher leaders at _____ Central High School. It is understood this researcher will request participation from the first teacher leader identified and in the event they decline participation, this researcher will move on to the next identified teacher leader.

Please respond accordingly as this will confirm written permission for this researcher. All personably identifiable and private information will be kept confidential.

This researcher will use pseudonyms for all participants and cases. Thank you for your time.

     Respectfully,

     Christopher M. Groves

Appendix F: List of Participants

Participant Number List	Leadership Team Members
Benjamin Central School District	
Participant P1	Superintendent
Participant P2	HS Principal
Participant P3	Teacher Leader
Clay Central School District	
Participant P4	Superintendent
Participant P5	HS Principal
Participant P6	Teacher Leader
Edison Central School District	
Participant P7	Superintendent
Participant P8	HS Principal
Participant P9	Teacher Leader
Franklin Central School District	
Participant P10	Superintendent
Participant P11	Superintendent
Participant P12	HS Principal
Participant P13	Teacher Leader
Great Wind Central School District	
Participant P14	Superintendent/K-12 Principal
Participant P15	Teacher Leader
Harrington Central School District	
Participant P16	Superintendent
Participant P17	HS Principal
Participant P18	Teacher Leader
Ivory Central School District	
Participant P19	Superintendent
Participant P20	HS Principal
Participant P21	Teacher Leader