

**LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF
LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN TWO WASHINGTON STATE HIGH SCHOOLS**

By

WADE R. BARRINGER

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of the requirements for the degree of

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the committee appointed to examine the dissertation of WADE R. BARRINGER find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

chair

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LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF LEADERSHIP
PRACTICES IN TWO WASHINGTON STATE HIGH SCHOOLS

Abstract

By Wade R. Barringer, Ph.D.
Washington State University
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Chair: Gail C. Furman

Many factors are associated with student learning outcomes in schools, including academic expectations, school climate, and teaching practices. Principal leadership is one of these factors; research has established that strong principal leadership is a key factor in school improvement. However, the influence of principal leadership may be mediated by many other factors, including school goals, academic expectations, instructional organization, and research on explicit links between leadership practices and student learning outcomes is sparse.

The purpose of this comparative case study is to explore the nature of principal leadership in two Washington state high schools with similar demographics but different student learning outcomes. Specifically, the leadership styles and practices of the principals in the two schools were described and compared, differences were identified and explored, and links between leadership practices and student learning outcomes were considered.

The study was conducted in two phases. The first phase included site observations and interviews with selected participants in the two case study schools. The second phase

included more in-depth interviews with participants selected from the original set of interviewees and continued observations.

Data from both cases were analyzed using the constant comparative or "grounded theory" method developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Then, findings from the two cases were compared to identify cross-case themes. Findings suggest that a major focus of both schools centers on the practice of building relationships and making connections with students. Findings show that both schools have similar staff and student ethnicities, demographics, teacher turnover rates, student graduation and dropout rates, academic programs, extracurricular activities, advanced placement courses, and similar percentages of students who go on to post-secondary education. Regarding leadership practices, administrators from both schools maintain a visible presence with their staff, students, and community; support and recognize students, teachers, staff, and administrators. Teachers in both schools also maintain a visible presence among their students and colleagues, create positive classroom environments for their students and get involved with school committees and student extra-curricular activities.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Michelle, and my parents Rich and Becky Barringer, whose encouragement and support of my goals has always been instrumental in my success. To my sister Jamie and my nieces Taylor and Sydney and nephew Kohlten, may you be presented with similar opportunities and support as I have received through the years. Finally, to all of those communities, schools, staff's and students lives I hope to touch in the future, it is because of you that I push myself to succeed in this profession.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Student learning outcomes in public high schools are influenced by many factors including school climate, positive interpersonal relationships, academic expectations and teaching practices. Some evidence suggests that schools principals can impact teaching and learning indirectly (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999) by ensuring qualified and effective teachers, providing suitable resources, supplying pertinent instructional support, communicating effectively, and being a visible, affirming presence in the school (Smith & Andrews, 1989). In addition, some studies have found that a principal's leadership practices affect "intermediate" school variables, such as teacher attitudes and school programs, but how principal leadership may directly impact student learning outcomes has not been firmly established (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Heck et al., 1990; Siens & Ebmeier, 1996). In the current context of education reform, in which school principals may be held accountable for student learning outcomes, there is increased need to search for such links. This qualitative case study set out to explore these links in two high schools in Washington State.

Background

Research over the years has determined many factors that play a role in student learning outcomes. Research suggests that effective leadership at the school building level is one of these factors in that it influences teaching and learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Heck, 1993; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Hoachlander, Alt, & Beltranena, 2001). For example, the effective schools research of the past 20 years has identified several

characteristics of high performing schools that facilitate high levels of student achievement. Among these factors, which include high teacher expectations, an emphasis on basic skills, an environment that promotes organizational learning and frequent, systematic evaluation of students is the important factor of strong principal leadership (Edmonds, 1979; Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002; Leithwood & Louis, 2004; Stedman 1987).

Sheppard (1996) synthesized the research on instructional leadership qualities; especially those linked to student achievement and confirmed a strong relationship between principal leadership, teacher commitment, and student learning outcomes. Earlier research by Andrews and Soder (1987) found that the achievement gain scores of students in strong-leader schools were significantly greater than those of students in schools with average or weak leadership. Rosenholtz (1985) concluded from her review of the effective schools literature that the principal's supportive actions were a key to effective teaching and learning.

It is also widely understood that the relationship between leadership practices and student learning is “mediated” by many other factors. For example, principals can impact teaching and learning indirectly through their role in ensuring teacher quality, a safe learning environment, providing resources, supplying instructional support, communicating, and being a visible presence in the school (Smith & Andrews, 1989). In addition, studies have found that principals’ instructional leadership practices have direct effects on "intermediate" school variables, such as teacher attitudes and school programs. However, explicit links between leadership practices and student learning outcomes are still unclear (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Heck, et al., 1990; Siens & Ebmeier, 1996), although some promising research has been developing. For example, the McREL study (2003), based on a meta-analysis of research over a 30-year period, identified the knowledge, skills, strategies, and tools leaders need to positively impact student achievement. The McREL “balanced leadership

framework” went beyond abstractions to list concrete responsibilities, practices, knowledge, strategies, tools, and resources that principals and others need in order to affect student achievement positively.

Other scaffolds are also being created for thinking about the complex relationships among the various dimensions of schooling that have an impact on learning (Furman, in press). For example, Spillane and Louis (2002) looked at student learning through a complex series of relationships with classroom instruction, classroom community, school-wide professional community, organizational learning, and leadership practices. They suggested that, if schools promote and foster these relationships, students' opportunities to learn improve and therefore their learning outcomes improve.

Exploring these links in more depth is a critical need within the current policy environment of school reform, which mandates higher levels of student learning outcomes in the form of achievement test scores and holds educators accountable for these outcomes. For example, Washington State’s reform initiatives, begun in 1993, requires that schools align their curricula with prescribed Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) and increase student performance on the state mandated Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) according to prescribed benchmarks. Since schools are held accountable for these student outcomes, there is increased pressure on educators-- teachers and administrators-- to improve their performance. Much more research is needed as to educational practices that can directly impact student learning outcomes.

Research Problem

Many factors are associated with student learning outcomes in schools, including academic expectations, school climate, and teaching practices. Principal leadership is one of these factors; research has established that strong principal leadership is a key factor in

school improvement. However, the influence of principal leadership may be mediated by many other factors, including school goals, academic expectations, and instructional organization. Whether leadership practices are mediated or not, current school reform has increased the pressure on educators, including school principals, to demonstrate increased student learning in their schools. Thus, there is a pressing need for continued research on the explicit links between leadership and learning, especially in the content of current school reform.

Purpose of Study

In regard to the research problem, the purpose of this study is to explore the nature of principal leadership in two Washington state high schools with similar demographics but different student learning outcomes. Specifically, the leadership styles and practices of the principals in the two schools are described and compared, differences are identified and explored, and links between leadership practices and student learning outcomes are considered. The study addresses three research questions:

1. What are the leadership practices and styles of the principals in two high schools with similar demographics but different learning outcomes?
2. Are there notable differences between the styles and practices of these two principals?
3. What is the relationship between certain leadership strategies and improved student performance?

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks that were useful in understanding the findings of this study were caring leadership (Noddings, 1984) and the ethic of care (Starrat, 1994); organizational

learning (Spillane & Louis, 2002); and Beck and Murphy's (1996) "four imperatives of a successful school." These frameworks are more fully described in Chapter Three.

Research Design

A qualitative, comparative case study design was chosen for this study because it allowed the inclusion of a wide variety of potentially relevant evidence--documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations (Yin, 1994)--and the development of an in-depth description and analysis of each case. Comparative case studies, through purposeful sampling, can show the differences between case study sites and participants (Maxwell, 1996) and, therefore, make possible a deeper understanding and explanation of the similarities and differences within the shared emergent themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Analysis of comparative case studies increases the chances of generalizability--that is, relevance or applicability of findings to other similar setting (Weiss, 1994).

The study was conducted in two phases. The first phase included observations and interviews at each site, including observations of site-based management team meetings, staff and faculty meetings, and lunchroom and office interactions. Interviews were conducted with students, teachers and administrators. The aim was to explore participants' perceptions of the role of principal leadership practices in the school. Data collected during this phase were analyzed to generate initial categories related to leadership and student learning; these categories were used to develop a new interview protocol for the second phase of the study. The second phase included more in-depth interviews with participants at each site as well as focused observations. Data from these interviews and observations further refined the analytic categories derived from phase one.

Data Analysis

The “constant comparison” method of data analysis, developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998), was used for this study. Termed the “constant comparative” or “grounded theory” method, this process involved open and axial coding techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding required scanning field notes, transcriptions, and other data line-by-line or word-by-word, looking for indicators and commonalities in the data, which the researcher then labeled as possible emergent concepts, categories, or sub-categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Axial coding involved relating categories to their subcategories according to their properties and dimensions, with the result of elaborating on the emergent concepts and categories and helping to determine relationships among categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Data from each of the two cases were analyzed independently and then compared, since the researcher must understand the dynamics of each case before proceeding to cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Ragin’s (1987) comparative method allows for analysis of multiple cases using key variables, while preserving their configuration case by case.

Validity

Validity in qualitative research is often viewed as the relationship of a study’s conclusions to the real world. While there are no methods that guarantee validity of a qualitative study, which is by definition interpretive (Maxwell, 1996), a number of techniques can enhance validity or credibility of a qualitative study (Maxwell, 1996). These include a prolonged engagement with participants; multiple, persistent observations; triangulation; clarification of tentative findings with participants; and audio-taping and

verbatim transcription of interviews. Frequent review materials and interpretations for consistency (Cresswell, 1998) and frequent checking of appropriateness of data (Morse, 1994), help assure that data are richly descriptive and likely to lead to “saturation” of analytical categories.

Since the researcher acted as the instrument--the means by which the data were collected and interpreted--he may have introduced some unintentional bias (Maxwell, 1996). He was from the outset alert to this “reflexivity” problem (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983) and has disclosed later in this report his analysis of its impact.

Confidentiality and Ethics

Participants completed consent forms, which the researcher read through with them prior to interview sessions. The form specified that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any time or decline, without penalty, to participate in any portion of the study. Participants knew that interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed, access to both limited to the researcher, and that they faced no known risks to their health. Their names were not to be associated with the findings, though they received a brief summary of the findings. The researcher answered questions and gave a copy of the consent form to each participant.

Limitations of the Study

Like most case studies, this one had a relatively small number of cases--two schools in Washington State--with data derived entirely from a few participants’ reported perceptions, voluntarily given, and the researcher’s periodic observations of life in the two schools. Therefore, conclusions in this limited study may reflect only the conditions in those

schools. Whether they are transferable or generalizable to other sites must be judged by readers, though the methodology may be readily applicable to many schools.

Report of Study

The report of this study will consist of five chapters. Chapter One will be an introduction of the study, including a research problem, purpose, and research questions. Chapter Two will contain a review of all pertinent and related literature. Chapter Three will describe the research methods and design, including site and participant selection. Chapter Four will present the findings and analysis of the data in qualitative form. Chapter Five will be a summary of the study findings, including conclusions from the data as well as future research implications and limitations to the study. This study will also include an abstract, list of related references, and various appendices.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

To provide a context for the study, the topics included in this literature review are student learning outcomes, school climate and culture, high performing schools, education reform and leadership, specifically the areas of principal leadership impact on student learning and effective leadership practices.

Everyone agrees that leadership matters in overall school improvement. Research supports this view in suggesting that effective leadership at the school building level

influences and improves teaching and learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Heck, 1993; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Hoachlander & Beltranena, 2001). For example, the effective schools research of the past 20 years has identified several characteristics of high performing schools that facilitate high levels of student achievement; among these factors are: (a) high teacher expectations, (b) an emphasis on basic skills, and (c) an environment that promotes organizational learning and frequent, systematic evaluation of students (Edmonds, 1979; Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002; Leithwood & Louis, 2004; Stedman 1987). Roeholtz (1985) concluded from her review of the effective schools literature that the principal's supportive actions were a key to effective teaching and learning.

It is also widely understood that student learning is impacted by many factors besides leadership and that the relationship between leadership practices and student learning is “mediated” by many other factors. For example, principals can impact teaching and learning indirectly through their role in ensuring teacher quality, a safe learning environment, providing resources, supplying instructional support, communicating, and being a visible presence in the school (Smith & Andrews, 1989). In addition, studies have found that principals’ instructional leadership practices have direct effects on "intermediate" school variables, such as teacher attitudes and school programs. However, explicit links between leadership practices and student learning outcomes are still unclear (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Heck et al., 1990; Siens & Ebmeier, 1996). Thus, while previous research has clearly shown that instructional leadership within the school is of paramount importance to school improvement, the direct impact of leadership practices on student outcomes is not known.

Exploring these links in-depth is a critical need within the current policy environment of school reform, which mandates higher levels of student learning outcomes in the form of

achievement test scores and holds educators accountable for these outcomes. For example, Washington State's reform initiatives, begun in 1993, requires that schools align their curricula with prescribed Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) and increase student performance on the state mandated Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) according to prescribed benchmarks. Since schools are held accountable for these student outcomes, there is increased pressure on educators-- teachers and administrators-- to improve their performance. Much more research is needed as to educational practices that can directly impact student learning outcomes.

The purpose of this study is to explore the links between principal leadership practices and student learning outcomes within the context of Washington State's educational reform. However, there is increasing pressure to empirically identify explicit links between principal leadership practices and student learning outcomes given the present policy context of high learning standards, high stakes testing and accountability.

Student Learning Outcomes

Student achievement is only one facet of effective schools, albeit a highly visible one. Although high student achievement does not necessarily equate with school effectiveness, it is a measurement of school performance. The research on school effectiveness over the past two decades has identified several sets of factors that can make a difference in students' learning (Edmonds, 1979; Reynolds & Packer, 1992; Witte & Walsh, 1990). Although results have not always been consistent across individual studies, taken together, the variables identified make up a conceptual framework indicating the importance of a school's contextual conditions--its structure, policies, personnel, processes and its students'

backgrounds--in determining student achievement (Creemers, 1994; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Heck & Marcoulides, 1993; Leithwood, 1994; Mortimore, 1993; Reynolds & Packer, 1992; Sammons et al., 1995; Witte & Walsh, 1990).

One of the several variables associated with student learning outcomes is the level of teacher preparation and teacher qualifications (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Through teacher preparation and a multitude of teacher quality variables, a school's atmosphere is developed and reinforced through student achievement and overall school effectiveness. Additional mediating variables that effect student learning outcomes and overall school effectiveness are: teacher commitment (Ames & Miller, 1994; Rosenholtz, 1989), building cohesiveness and support (Anderson & Walberg, 1974), collegial and collaborative teacher behavior (Barth, 1990; Little, 1987; Rosenholtz, 1989; Sergiovanni, 1992), supportive and collegial principal behavior (Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Moos, 1979), trust (Tarter et al., 1995), academic emphasis, including the percentage of students taking advanced courses and the frequent monitoring of student progress (Bryk et al., 1993; Edmonds, 1979; Moos, 1979) and parental involvement.

Another factor closely associated with school effectiveness and student learning outcomes is active learning time. Active learning time is the amount of time students are actively engaged in academic activities on which they are experiencing high rates of success (Murphy, 1992; Quinn, 2002). Increasing the time available for active learning has been linked to higher levels of student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000) and the current research has shown that the most effective instructional practice that teachers can utilize is active learning. Stooksberry (1996) states that active learning means learning by doing, or meaningfully interacting in an event, either intellectually, socially, emotionally, aesthetically,

or physically (Quinn, 2002). If a school is willing to take careful steps to make sure there's a strong alignment between the intended, taught, and assessed curriculum, that school can anticipate about a 25% to 30% increase in student achievement and student learning (Lezotte, 1999). The principal can help focus on available time on learning by reducing interruptions, such as those caused by public address announcements, pullout programs, extracurricular activities during the school day, and classroom changes (Leithwood, 1994).

Not so long ago it was believed that student achievement was greatly affected by the students' abilities and their home environments (Coleman et al., 1966). More recently student achievement was believed to be dependent on the student's motivation, effort and abilities (Lee & Smith, 1995). Currently, studies are looking at school characteristics such as collegiality among teachers, personalized teacher-student relationships, and less differentiation of instruction by ability, as indicators of increased student learning (Lee & Smith, 1995). This finding is supported by research (Newmann, 1996; Hill et al., 1990). In these studies, improved student outcomes have been linked to the implementation of key practices, including raising teachers' expectations of students, establishing collective responsibility for student learning, and strengthening external support, all of which depend in large part on the size of the school. A positive, reinforcing school culture and teachers with instructional confidence also seem to influence student achievement (Rosenholtz, 1989). A study conducted in 2001 by DiMartino, Clarke and Lachat (2002) found that personal engagement may be the foundation of success in learning with our secondary schools' students. This assumption, which has support, is that healthy interpersonal relations will facilitate student achievement (Comer, 1980; Corwin & Borman, 1988). Secondary schools with an orderly and serious learning environment, those with teachers who set high but

achievable goals, and with students who work hard and respect others repeatedly do well academically and have higher levels of student achievement (Hoy et al., 1991).

Additional indicators of student achievement, which will be introduced in depth in the following sections, might also include principal leadership, high expectations for student achievement and a positive school climate (Anderson & Walberg, 1974; Bossert, 1988; Bossert et al., 1982; Hoy et al., 1991; Moos, 1979). In various combinations, these variables have been found to be related to school outcomes in previous research (e.g., Creemers, 1994; Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hill & Rowe, 1996; Mortimore et al., 1988; Reynolds & Packer, 1992).

Very few of these studies made predictions about what organizational properties are related to student achievement, and that continues to be the case today. Even fewer studies describe the processes and mechanisms that link school properties to student achievement, that is, provide a theoretical explanation of why certain school characteristics promote achievement (Hoy, 2002). Student achievement as viewed through student learning outcomes may be affected by many different variables, and there remains a great deal of uncertainty about what works and why (Goldring & Greenfield, 2002). However, we do know that student learning outcomes are impacted by school structure and the quality of educational processes (e.g., school climate, relationships, principal leadership, high values and expectations for students) (Brookover & Lezotte, 1977; Creemers, 1994; Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Mortimore, 1993; Reynolds & Packer, 1992; Witte & Walsh, 1990).

School Climate and Culture

During the past decades, considerable attention has been devoted to the investigation and definition of a school's climate, culture, atmosphere, personality or ethos (Brookover & Lezotte, 1977; Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, 1992; Reynolds & Cuttance, 1992; Purkey & Smith, 1983).

Although it is very difficult to define this concept, school climate is a relatively enduring quality of the school environment that is experienced by participants (administrators, teachers, students) and describes their collective perceptions of behavior, and affects their attitudes and behavior in the school (Hoy & Miskel, 1996). Research in the area of school climate indicates that certain characteristics are associated with the climate of effective schools, which is conducive to learning (Brookover & Lezotte, 1977; Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, 1991, 1992; Lezotte & Jacoby, 1990; Reynolds & Cuttance, 1992).

Creating a supportive learning environment is an approach principals and school leaders can use to improve student learning. A supportive learning community is especially crucial when students are asked to develop advanced thinking skills which require them to try new ways of working with ideas and information (Cotton, 1995). The key to establishing an effective learning environment in any school is being there, being seen by all--students, staff, and community. Barth (1990) states that a good school is a place where everyone is teaching and everyone is learning simultaneously; a safe, civil, healthy and intellectually stimulating learning environment, where students feel respected and connected with the staff, classrooms are warm and inviting and learning activities are purposeful, engaging, and significant. Students are encouraged to take risks in their learning and are supported as they learn increasingly rigorous content and apply their knowledge in real world contexts. Personalized

learning environments are created to increase positive relationships among students and between students and their teachers. Students feel that they are valued and honored; their heritage and background are viewed as “assets,” not deficiencies (Barth, 1990).

Likewise, studies of teachers' work show that strong ties between staff members directly affect teacher commitment, and thereby indirectly affect student achievement (Barth, 1990). Communally organized schools seek to promote an environment where students and staff are committed to the mission of the school and work together to strengthen that mission. Interactions between staff members, and between students and staff, are not limited to the classroom, and staff members are encouraged to see themselves as responsible for the total development of students, not just the mastery of one day's lesson. Teachers share a collective sense of responsibility for their students' success, change their teaching to respond to the specific needs of their students, and coordinate their efforts between classrooms and across grades (Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1997). It has been found that schools help foster resilient students when they exhibit caring and support with strong personal relationships, positive and high expectations with the necessary support for students to achieve these expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation in school (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1986). In high achieving schools Boyer (1983) found a clear sense of community and that the principal made the difference in establishing that community.

This community is essential to an effective, supportive school climate. Teacher-principal relations are reflected in collegial leadership, and openness of teacher interactions is encapsulated in teacher professionalism. According to Hoy and Sabo (1998) this simplified view of school climate calls attention to four important linkages in the school: community-school (environmental press), teacher-teacher (teacher professionalism), teacher-student

(academic press), and principal-teacher (collegial leadership). In *environmental press*, strong pressure from parents and the community to change school policy and influence the functioning of the school mislabeled (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hoy, Hannum, & Tschannen-Moran, 1998; Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991). According to Brookover et al. (1979) through the process of school-community interaction, a students' achievement is significantly affected. In *teacher professionalism*, teacher behavior is characterized by commitment to students, respect for the competence of colleagues, warm and friendly interactions, and engagement in the teaching task (Bandura, 1993, 1997) otherwise known as collective efficacy (DuFour, 1998; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk, 2000; Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy, 2000). In *academic press*, teachers set high but reasonable goals, students respond positively to the challenge of these goals, and the principal supplying the resources and exerting influence to attain these learning goals (Hoy & Sabo, 1998; Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991; Sweetland & Hoy, 2000). For example, in *collegial leadership* the principal's behavior is supportive and egalitarian and neither directive nor restrictive (Scheerens & Bosker, 1997; Saphier & King, 1985). Principal's who practice collegial leadership make it a point to motivate and energize antagonistic teachers and forge relationships among otherwise disconnected teachers can have a profound effect on the overall climate of the organization (Sheppard, 1996). These relationships are fostered through respect, support and understanding and when teachers feel supported and respected by their superiors they perceive their relationships with their principals as open, collaborative, facilitative and supportive (Johnson, 1989; Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Murphy, 1994; Smylie, 1992).

Organizational literature has recognized leadership as an essential element in determining organizational climate and productivity (Evans, 1968). By the same token,

organizational climate has been recognized as a powerful element in determining principal leadership effectiveness (Anderson, 1982) and student achievement (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1986). In fact, principal leadership was one of three major factors that determined school climate (Anderson, 1982) and according to Kozlowski & Doherty (1989) the concepts of leadership and organizational climate are intertwined. The principals are the instructional leaders in their schools and it is their responsibility to effectively define and communicate the mission of the school to all school participants and convey a vision of what the school should and will be. According to Blumberg and Greenfield (1986) leaders of successful schools create a positive environment in which teachers work together to meet a common challenge is essential to improving student performance. Within the learning community positive, respectful relationships with staff, parents, and students must be developed. Steps to help create these relationships include: be visible in classrooms, hallways, school grounds, and at community activities; listen attentively and follow through on commitments; build trust by keeping one's word and respecting others' views; model the behavior and attitudes that are expected of others; be positive and optimistic; demonstrate a belief in the efficacy of staff and students; read, learn, and share effective practices, research findings, and inspiration (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1986).

Hart (1992) contends that the school context and the dynamics of social interactions largely determined principals' impact on student learning outcomes. Connections between emotion and learning suggest that a leader who is people-oriented (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1986) and grounded in caring walks a path with a higher probability of success and will make a substantive contribution to student learning by building a supportive, caring environment (Lyman, 2000). Caring leadership can contribute to an environment that will make the

difference between positive school experiences enhancing learning and negative school experiences that contribute to stress and alienation (Noddings, 1984). A caring environment also has administrators and teachers engaging in genuine dialogue with their students, and building continuity and a sense of trust through repeated and consistent interactions (Marshall et al., 1996). Therefore, nurturing a caring environment, full of personal relationships, ought to be a primary focus of school principals (Lyman, 2000). Courtney and Noblit (1994) believe personal, caring relationships between people are the key element in education; they [relationships] are about enhancing the being, purpose or life of the individual (Lyman, 2000). Noddings (1984) defines caring as existing within relationships and suggests that caring behaviors can be observed. These behaviors are: engrossment (the use of time reveals his/her priorities, supports and encourages others as persons), action (commitment to job, listens and solves problems when they occur, the mission is focused and central), and reciprocity (confirmation, not limiting yourself or anyone else by or to a role, treating every person equally and with respect). Through these caring relationships teachers are empowered to grow personally and professionally and the principal's relationship with the culture of the school as well as student achievement is directly and indirectly effected (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1986; Fullan, 1990; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Lyman, 2000; Rosenholtz, 1989). Caring relationships are about empowerment, enablement, and enhancement (Sergiovanni, 1987, 1990), laying the foundation for years to come.

Maintaining a caring, collaborative school culture also depends on clear and frequent communication. According to Sergiovanni (1984) the principal provides information about expectations and outcomes in a professional manner because teachers and students should

know what is expected in order to be effective and efficient in the performance of their duties and in order to achieve their goals.

A study of the relationship between the principal and staff is a study of leadership in schools, these relationships with the members of the school culture are vital to the success of a principal (Sergiovanni, 1984). Likewise, teachers in collegial and supportive relationships are more likely to participate in decision making and leadership roles as well as experiment and take risks to improve the quality of instruction (Hoffman, Sabo, Bliss, & Hoy, 1994). This shared leadership or collegial leadership-- that which is, friendly, supportive, and open-- is usually influenced by their relationships with their principals (Smylie, & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992), and may lead to increased student achievement. This close, cohesive internal network describes the relationships among staff and administration in highly effective schools (Louis & Miles, 1990). In contrast, teachers are much less willing to participate if they characterize their relationships with principals as closed, exclusionary, and controlling (Murphy, 1994).

Another important aspect of school climate is that of social support from adults and its effect on student performance. These emotional bonds between students and teachers can play a crucial role in engaging and motivating students to learn. Closer teacher-student relationships appear to result in increased student engagement in school, improved school attendance and retention, and increased student interaction among those from different ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Courtney & Noblit, 1994). To take full advantage of the teacher-student relationship, however, teachers need support and training.

Studies on school effectiveness, school climate, and student achievement all reveal one commonality, the fact that good happenings in schools depend to a great extent on the

quality of school leadership (Norton, 2002). Sheppard confirms a strong relationship between principal leadership, teacher commitment and student achievement outcomes (Blasé & Blasé, 1998). Some studies indicate school climate has been shown to have a significant impact on student achievement and faculty trust (Hoffman, Sabo, Bliss, & Hoy, 1994; Tarter, Bliss, & Hoy, 1989; Tarter & Hoy, 1988). However, the principal's role must shift from a focus on management and administration to a focus on leadership and vision, because without leadership, the chances for systemic improvement in teaching and learning are nil (Fullan, 2001).

High Performing Schools

Currently, schools bear little resemblance to the complex organizational designs associated with high performance (Banner & Gagne, 1995; Lawler, 1986). Some feel that schools of today need to be redesigned, "to become genuine learning organizations for both students and teachers" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 67), a high performing learning organization that seeks to promote an environment where students and staff are committed to a mission of the school and work together to strengthen that mission (Lee, Smith & Croninger, 1997).

Measuring school effectiveness is very complex (Cameron & Whetton, 1983, 1995; Hoy & Miskel, 1982, 1996). Of course, this explanation awaits further empirical research. Numerous studies have identified qualities and strategies that are evident and practiced in high performing schools with above average student achievement and they are: (a) effective leadership (Edmonds, 1979; Scheerens, 1992; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997; Saphier & King, 1985) including administrative visibility, support and involvement (Cotton, 1995; Edmonds,

1979); (b) a sense of mission and clearly defined school goals, (c) high expectations for students, teachers, administrators, parents, and all other stakeholders involved with student learning (Cotton, 1995; Edmonds, 1979; Quinn, 2002; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997), (d) an orderly environment with consistently enforced rules that are conducive to higher level learning (Cotton, 1995; Edmonds, 1979; Scheerens, 1992; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997), (e) continuous staff development, participation and satisfaction (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Ostroff & Schmitt, 1993; Quinn, 2002), (f) high levels of teachers' efficacy (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Kaplan & Owings, 2001; Moore & Esselman, 1992; Ross, 1992), (g) commitment, and loyalty to student success (Ostroff & Schmitt, 1993), (h) shared governance and trust (Ostroff & Schmitt, 1993), (i) school district administration support and cooperation, and (j) parental and community involvement (Edmonds, 1979; Scheerens, 1992; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997; Saphier & King, 1985; David, 1987; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Stedman, 1987; Teddlie et al., 1984). These qualities of high performing schools are not necessarily the only pieces to a successful, high performing school.

As we look more carefully at the characteristics of high schools in Washington State, it is helpful to understand what research tells us more generally about high achieving schools. A U.S. Department of Education (1999) analysis of the available research on school quality identifies three elements most clearly related to student learning: teachers, classrooms and school context. The study identifies the following qualities as characteristic of high performing schools: (a) build the capacity of principals to provide instructional leadership; (b) channel resources in ways that provide additional instructional leadership to schools; (c) create clear, measurable, and rigorous school accountability provisions (Cotton, 1995); (d) ensure that accountability provisions are accompanied by adequate strategies to build

capacity and provide support; (e) provide schools adequate flexibility and support to use that flexibility well; (f) infuse the tenets of comprehensive school reform into other federal education programs; and (g) use legislation, policy, and technical assistance to help educators create regular opportunities for true professional development (United States Department of Education [USDOE], 1999).

Another study on high performing schools by Hoy and Tarter (1997), stated that a high performing learning environment is a place where teachers like the school, the students, and each other and are enthusiastic about their work (high Teacher Affiliation) (Miller, 2001). Teachers see students as serious and diligent in their learning (high Academic Emphasis) (Edmonds, 1979, 1982). They see the principal as their ally in the improvement of instruction; the principal is friendly, open, respectful, supportive, and yet establishes--and is committed to--high standards of teacher performance (strong Collegial Leadership) (Cotton, 1995; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997; Saphier & King, 1985). The principal also has influence with organizational superiors and is seen as someone who can deliver (high Principal Influence) and who can get teachers the instructional materials they need (high Resource Support) (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Finally, teachers are protected from unreasonable outside pressure (high Institutional Integrity) (Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

Continued research on high performing schools concludes that strong administrative leadership is among those factors within the school that make a difference in student learning and achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Quinn, 2002; Rosenholtz, 1985). A healthy, effective school has a strong enough sense of its own mission and goals, and is successful enough in accomplishing those goals, that it is able to cope with destructive intrusions and demands from the community (Hoy & Tarter, 1997; Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991).

Forming a strong organizational learning environment and inclusive leadership team that understands what the mission and goals of each communal segment is the first step in creating an effective school.

The effective schools research has served as guidelines for establishing schools that make a difference in student achievement. Principals in high-achieving schools, as measured by academic achievement in a variety of areas, are more effective instructional leaders than their counterparts in consistently low-achieving schools (Quinn, 2002). So, if the highly effective schools research is so clear, why have schools and teachers not been motivated to implement the effective schools' characteristics? Perhaps the answer lies in the influence of the building principal and their leadership.

Education Reform

The expectations of reform and improvement come from everywhere: state and federal agencies, policy makers, taxpayers, parent associations, professional organizations and in some cases students themselves. Across the United States, state legislatures are responding to rising expectations in the workplace and the demands of a global economy by setting higher standards for schools. To enforce these standards, legislatures are creating high-stakes assessment systems that hold schools accountable for student achievement. Increasingly, state accountability systems are placing the burden of school success -- and individual student achievement -- squarely on the principal's shoulders (Bottoms & O'Neil, 2001). The demands on school leaders have increased dramatically over the last decade (Beachum & Dentith, 2004) resulting in additional pressures and recommendations for new principals' roles (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Cooley & Shen, 2003; Tirozzi, 2001).

A call for strong educational leadership pervades public education these days as students struggle to meet the high standards set by their state and the nation. Academic standards are a central focus of U.S. education. Whether motivated by the national standards conversation, state accountability requirements, or a desire to clearly identify what students should learn school leaders across the country are grappling with the implications of adopting standards, curriculum frameworks, and new forms of assessment (Marks & Printy, 2003). Regardless of where schools are in the process, leaders are beginning to see that standards have widespread implications for their school systems (Cotton, 1995). Yet, despite all of this activity and attention, significant changes in student achievement and basic school practices have been slow to develop (Hoachlander, Alt, & Beltranena, 2001). Teachers are now pressed as never before to improve education quality and equity. Achievement gaps persist, and parents of students who attend low-performing schools increasingly seek an escape from public education. Yet many school and district administrators report their time is consumed by matters unrelated to learning improvement. Even with enough time to focus, the task leaders' face is complex, and it is not always clear what they should be doing to contribute to that goal (Marks & Printy, 2003).

It is well established that reforming schools require both restructuring and reculturing (Fullan, 1999; Hargreaves, 1994; Sarason, 1996), during which the role of the principal is reshaped (Carlin, 1992; Muncey & McQuillan, 1996). This reshaping of the principals role is not surprising, as prior research reveals, the principal's vision for the school often has a major influence on the direction of decision making about reform (Louis & Miles, 1990). Now, reform shapes principals' roles, and the principals' leadership styles in turn shaping the implementation of the reform. It is expected that principals will craft school cultures that help

set the foundation for change (Deal & Peterson, 1998), while maintaining a momentum of continuous growth (Goldring & Rallis, 1993). However, it is easier said than done. The context of many high schools is that of turbulent and often unpredictable environments with numerous constraints that inhibit the promotion of reform efforts. In addition to the unpredictable environments of their schools principals believe that lack of skilled leaders, lack of support (in terms of both money and time), negative teacher attitudes, school climate issues, and the pace of reform in the state are all barriers to accomplishing the goals mandated by the state (Fouts, 2000).

With pressures mounting for increases in student achievement and conservation of funds, educators often have recommended that many of these decisions should be shifted to the schools (Barth 1981; Newmann & Wehlage 1995). More and more states, for example, are adopting high-stakes assessments that not only determine whether students are promoted from one grade to the next and whether students receive high school diplomas but also affect schools' accreditation and their ability to operate without extensive state intervention (National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP], 2001).

Today's educational leaders are functioning in an increasingly complex work and societal environment (Fullan, 1998; Murphy, 1993). They are challenged to establish the climate of the school building, facilitate the teaching and learning process, make data-driven decisions, sustain professional development for the entire staff, meet the special needs of exceptional students and maintain safe and secure learning environments (Bottoms & O'Neil, 2001) as well as be reflective (Sergiovanni, 1991; Short & Rinehart, 1993), collaborative and adaptive (Milstein, 1993), and are able to advocate for their school and students (Reed, 2000; Reed & Kochan, 2001). Additional challenges include increasing ethnic and cultural

diversity, multiple perspectives and values, limited resources within local communities and schools, rapid and continuous technological advances and increasingly high stakes public accountability (Johnston, 1994; Schlechty, 1990).

The newly defined roles that principals are asked to play in reform are accompanied by a series of other challenges. For principals, reform is often accompanied by role ambiguity or overload and by a loss of a sense of identity (Murphy, 1994; Prestine, 1994). Principals often must spend increased time promoting the school's image and working more closely with parents, school boards, and other external agents (Goldring & Rallis, 1993; Murphy, 1994). This is a role in which some principals are uncomfortable (Murphy, 1994). Principals also face challenges in ensuring that teachers implement reforms at the classroom level, as teachers are accustomed to substantial professional autonomy and might resist encroachment (Fraatz, 1989). Even when principals are supportive of reform, their ability to provide effective leadership may be hampered by their own experience, training, or beliefs (Hallinger, Murphy, & Hausman, 1992; Murphy, 1994). No matter, school principals are increasingly held accountable for educational quality in the belief that students' success or failure is determined by the way a school is run (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Wildy & Loudon, 2000). Due to this increasing pressure our nation has thousands of bright, powerful, well intentioned leaders who partially or completely fail in their leadership initiatives because they simply do not understand what they need to know, how to proceed with implementation, or when they need to use various practices and strategies (McREL, 2003).

Within the context of Washington state reform, principals as well as their assistants, teachers, staff, and students, are challenged daily by the ongoing reform initiatives. Over the

past eight years, Washington State has developed a set of Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs), specific Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) and the accompanying Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in reading, writing, math and science. The legislation was followed closely by the national “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) act, and the Adequate Yearly Progress act (AYP). The NCLB act states that no child will slip through the education crack and not get a quality education, whereas, the AYP addresses those schools have not met the standards of academic accountability. Under current legislation, the graduating class of 2008 will be the first to experience “high stakes” standards and tests. Students who meet standard on the tenth grade WASL in reading, writing and math will receive a Certificate of Mastery and will be eligible for graduation. Meeting standard on the science portion of the WASL will become a graduation requirement in 2010. And, if that isn’t enough, our schools can trouble themselves with adjustments in school days, weeks, and years, non-graded classrooms, home schooling, and school vouchers, all of which can be seen as additional pressures on the students, teachers and, undoubtedly, our school administrators.

Since the passing of the Washington State House Bill 1209 in 1993, schools throughout the state of Washington have been under pressure to increase student achievement and to align their curricula with the new Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) (Fouts, 2000). However, few studies describe the processes and mechanisms that link school properties to student achievement, that is, provide a theoretical explanation of why certain school characteristics, as identified in the effective schools research, promote achievement (Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002) and that the fate of school reform across the

country is dependent, in part, on the instructional leadership capabilities of school principals (Fouts, 2000).

Leadership

The definition of leadership is widely debated and not clearly defined. Burns provides a global definition of leadership: “Leadership over human beings is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize, in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers. This is done in order to realize goals mutually held by *both* leaders and followers (Burns, 1978, p.18).” Another definition has been identified as the process of influencing individuals or groups to accomplish shared organizational goals in a given setting, or accomplishing goals with or through people (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Gardner, 1990). Still another, behaviors associated with moving a group or organization toward a higher level of achievement (Hill, 1998), or the process whereby one person influences others to attain group or organizational goals (Yukl, 1994). Regardless of the definition, leadership and the practice of leadership encompass these six dimensions: (a) Identifying and articulating a vision, (b) fostering the acceptance of group goals, (c) providing individualized support, (d) intellectual stimulation, (e) providing an appropriate model, and (f) high performance expectations (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Leithwood, 1994; Yukl, 1989).

Functioning as leaders, principals can serve to transform school cultures or to maintain them (Firestone & Louis, 1999; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). Two primary images of school principalship have prevailed in recent decades-- instructional leadership and transformational leadership (Hallinger, 1992). Transformational leadership, put briefly,

provides intellectual direction and aims at innovating within the organization, while empowering and supporting teachers as partners in decision making (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Conley & Goldman, 1994; Leithwood, 1994). Instructional leadership, developed during the effective schools movement of the 1980s, viewed the principal as the primary source of educational expertise (Marks & Printy, 2003). According to Murphy (1988), instructional leadership focuses on leadership functions directly related to teaching and learning and refers to all other functions that contribute to student learning, including managerial behaviors (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Donmoyer & Wagstaff, 1990; Glickman, Gordan, & Ross-Gordan, 1995; Murphy, 1988). Instructional leadership as defined by Leithwood (1994) is a series of behaviors that are designed to affect classroom instruction.

Researchers have not really identified what instructional leadership is, nor have they provided empirical evidence to suggest that principals who increase the amount of time they devote to instructional leadership will cause higher academic performance in their schools (Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinback, 1998).

Gradually, educators are redefining the role of the principal from instructional leaders or head teachers to intellectual leaders or head learners (Murphy, 2002). This finding is consistent with the literature on school leadership by Hallinger and Heck (1996) and Pounder, Ogawa, and Adams (1996). Effective leadership consists of accomplishing things through others (Hallinger & Heck, 1996), otherwise known as facilitated power; having the ability to help others achieve a set of goals that may be shared, negotiated or complimentary (Goldman, Dunlap, & Conley, 1993). Elmore (2000) presents another view of leadership in the context of standards-based reform. To achieve large-scale improvement in student learning, he writes, the concept of leadership needs to be “deromanticized.” Because most of

the improvement must come from the people who are directly responsible for instruction, not from the management of instruction, leadership needs to be distributed throughout a school organization based on individual predispositions, interests, knowledge, skills, and roles (Elmore, 2000). Distributed leadership is leadership exercised by those not in formal positions of authority (Firestone, 1996; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995) and multidirectional (Pounder, Ogawa, & Adams, 1996) where everyone is responsible and accountable (Gronn, 2000; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). With delegation of leadership responsibilities, the power of the principals' role is now defined by the ability to facilitate teachers' work (Taylor, Bogotch, & Kirby, 1994).

Effective school leadership has been characterized according to qualities exhibited by successful leaders as well as based on views of teachers. Research and professional literature have emphasized the critical role of the principal in improving schools and increasing student achievement. As indicated by Burns (1978), leadership depends upon relationships and shared values between leaders and followers. Effective principals, with good leadership skills, increase the likelihood that school improvement will occur. In fact in the last 20 years much attention has been paid to educational leadership and its impact on student outcomes. From certain early research into school effectiveness (Brookover et al., 1979; DiPaola et al., 2003; Edmonds, 1979; Rutter et al., 1979) and an early review of school leadership studies (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982), the effective principal comes to the fore as an instructional or educational leader who affects school climate and student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Heck, 1993; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Hoachlander, Alt, & Beltranena, 2001). There is a general belief that good school principals are the cornerstones of good schools and that without a principal's leadership, efforts to raise student

achievement cannot succeed (DiPaola et al., 2003). Additional examples of the statement can be found in reviews on school effectiveness research conducted by Levine and Lezotte (1990), Sammons, Hillman, and Mortimore (1995), as well as Bredeson (1996), who notes ample evidence in the literature that effective leadership does positively affect school and student outcomes. Aimed at standardizing the practice of effective teaching, the principal's role has been to maintain high expectations for teachers and students, supervise classroom instruction, coordinate the school's curriculum, and monitor student progress (Barth, 1986).

Principal Leadership Impact on Student Learning

Although principals and teachers are the two most frequently examined sources of leadership in schools and we know leadership at the building level clearly influences student achievement and school effectiveness (Brookover et al., 1979; Hart & Bredeson, 1996), there is still almost no evidence concerning their relative effects on student achievement (Heck, 1993; Miskel & Ogawa, 1982). Indeed, a number of scholars have recognized that little progress has been made in understanding the relationships between principal leadership, teaching, and student achievement, but most aspects of this complex phenomenon have not been adequately studied (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Kroeze, 1984; Leithwood, Begley & Cousins, 1994; Miskel & Ogawa, 1982). It is difficult to track the linkages between principal leadership behaviors and student learning outcomes. In fact, research designs used to measure school effectiveness are insufficient to project a casual relationship between principal behaviors and student learning outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hallinger & Murphy, 1987). Most of the Dutch studies into educational leadership failed to come up with a significant relationship with student achievement (Scheerens & Bosker, 1997; Van de Grift,

1990; Van de Grift & Houtveen, 1999). Similarly, Hallinger and Heck (1996), Leithwood (1994), and Silins et al. (2000) concluded that principal effects on student learning outcomes are minimal. One explanation is that principals do not know the research and practice that have been shown to improve student outcomes (Spillane & Louis, 2002). Murphy (1988) and Hallinger and Heck (1998) argue that not much research is conducted in this area and that most studies in this field are of poor quality failing to offer proof that educational leadership matters. Given the divergence in these findings, the question of whether school principals' matter remains unresolved (Hallinger & Heck, 1998) and less understood (Spillane & Louis, 2002).

There are some theoretical and empirical grounds to support positive relations (Heck, 1993). Principals make a difference in student achievement and school outcomes; however, it is less clear exactly how it happens. Literature confirms the behaviors, beliefs and symbolic leadership of principals directly and indirectly impact on student learning outcomes by what they do, and by what they believe (Hart & Bredeson, 1996). Additional researcher evidence has shown that principals influence student performance and school improvement efforts indirectly through (e.g. establishing school goals, setting high student and staff expectations, organizing classrooms, allocating resources, promoting a positive and orderly learning environment, and communicating with school staff, parents, community groups) rather than directly (e.g. through training teachers to better instruct, visiting classroom, and making frequent teacher evaluations). Recent examples of this research include Hoy, Tarter, and Witkoskie (1992), Tarter et al. (1995), Hallinger and Heck (1996), Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003), and Hallinger, Bickman, and Davis (1996). This perspective on indirect effects also occurs in more recent models for research into principal leadership. Generally

researchers concur that the principal effects on student learning outcomes are indirect if not difficult to measure (Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 1998; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides 1990; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Removed from the classroom, principals can usually only influence student achievement indirectly by working through the teaching staff (Quinn, 2002). The principal is, after all, disconnected from the core business of schooling (Hallinger & Heck, 1998), and according to Heck, et al. (1990), do not have the same direct impact on learners as does instruction by the classroom teacher, which lends support to the assertion that the effects of principal leadership are most often indirect (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hoy & Hannum, 1997).

As Hallinger and Heck (1996) noted, the fact that leadership's affect on school achievement appears to be indirect is not cause for dismay; the fact that principal effects are mediated by other in-school variables (Hoy & Hannum, 1997) does nothing to diminish the principal's importance. The combined effect of student learning experiences, environmental characteristics, and student abilities help determine the level of student achievement. Heck, Larsen, and Marcoulides (1990) found that principals had positive effects on student achievement under certain conditions of school governance, instructional organization, and school climate. In their review of studies investigating the principal's role in school effectiveness, Hallinger and Heck (1996) observed that models incorporating intervening variables (i.e., school goals, academic expectations, instructional organization) between principal leadership and student achievement account for most effects (Griffith, 1999). In a discussion of principal leadership and the impact on student achievement, Heck and Marcoulides (1993) concluded: Effects of principal leadership on student outcomes are not as strong, as researchers have suspected, but collectively they do suggest that through

manipulating a series of variables at the school level, secondary school principals can have a positive influence on school achievement. Thus, the principal must now be considered as one "school effects" variable that directly influences school achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Siens and Ebmeier (1996) agree and found that while principals have strong, direct effects on intermediate school variables, such as teacher attitudes, they can have a direct effect on student outcomes.

In school effectiveness studies of the seventies and eighties, researchers were mostly looking for direct effects of instructional leadership on student outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 1998; Hoy & Hannum, 1997). On average, principal leadership effects are absent in secondary education, whereas they are related to student achievement in primary schools. Nevertheless, it is believed that these findings show some evidence for the statement that educational leadership (really) matters for student achievement, but the direct contribution to student outcomes is small. However, it has been shown that principals who practice effective leadership have direct influences on children just by knowing their names, giving them undivided attention, expecting them to do their best, actively engaging them in their learning, highlighting their achievement gains (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Quinn, 2002), giving them loving admonitions, words of praise and hugs (Lyman, 2000), regularly observing their classroom activities, and frequently reviewing their progress (Duke & Leithwood, 1994).

Effective Leadership Practices

Effective leadership is not something principals achieve by following a checklist of tasks; leadership can be taught and can be learned (Leithwood, 1994; Sheppard, 1996). The importance of the principal's role as an instructional leader and the direct relationship on

changing instructional practice to improve student performance has been researched extensively (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Donmoyer & Wagstaff, 1990; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordan, 1995; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinback, 1999; Marks & Printy, 2003; Murphy, 1988). An educational leader or instructional leader is someone whose actions (both in relation to administrative and educational tasks) are intentionally geared to influencing the school's primary processes and, therefore, ultimately student learning outcomes. While there is no one model of effective leadership that can be applied in all situations, there are some common leadership strategies that will improve student achievement (Neuman & Simmons, 2000). These strategies include: being visible to your staff and students (Andrews & Soder, 1987; High & Achilles, 1986), motivating and inspiring teachers and students (Blasé & Kirby, 1992), set the tone for their buildings, be involved in academic instruction, facilitate and promote active learning experiences (Louis & Miles 1990), monitor student learning (Fullan, 2002), maintain an orderly school environment, monitor student achievement progress, promote continuous professional learning (Fullan, 2002), link schools to community assets, provide a strong accountability system, and is actively immersed in day-to-day school activities (Cotton, 1995; Edmonds, 1979). Through these strategies, leadership is more than just shared; it is fostered, nurtured, controlled, and held by all facets of the education community (Firestone & Corbett, 1988; Heller & Firestone, 1995; Leithwood & Prestine, 2002; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Sheppard, 1996) and occurs in and through the interaction of leaders, followers and situations (Spillane et al, 2001).

Educational leadership is an important characteristic of effective schools and an effective principal of a high performing school: (a) identifies and articulates a shared vision;

(b) creates an atmosphere of trust and patience; (c) conveys high performance expectations for students and teachers; (d) encourages teachers to be creative and try new strategies; (e) provides intellectual stimulation; (f) builds a productive school culture; (g) has a strong belief in the value of honest and open communication, collegiality, and a willingness and ability to be flexible; (h) helps structure the school to enhance participation in decisions; (i) fosters the acceptance of group goals; (j) leads by example; (k) focuses first on students and their learning; (l) supports and empowers their colleagues; (m) understand change processes; (n) recognize and reward the achievement and struggles of others; (o) invites participation and shares responsibility; and (p) uses “expectations” to change attitudes and behaviors (Fullan, 2001; Goldring & Greenfield, 2002; Hallinger & Heck, 1996,1998; Jantzi and Leithwood, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Pounder, Ogawa, & Adams, 1995). All of these skills are essential in providing an atmosphere that supports effective and engaging teaching that corresponds with student success and academic achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Heck, 1992; Quinn, 2002). In various combinations, these variables have been found to be related to student learning outcomes in previous research (e.g., Creemers, 1994; Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hill & Rowe, 1996; Mortimore et al., 1988; Reynolds & Packer, 1992).

In McREL’s extensive meta-analysis they identified 21 leadership responsibilities with statistically significant relationships to student achievement that, when consistently implemented, can have a substantial impact on student achievement (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). These responsibilities include such tasks as establishing a set of standard operating procedures and routines; monitoring the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning; and involving teachers in the design and implementation of

important decisions and policies. Involving faculty in defining and directing school change (Copland, 2001) strengthens commitment to improvement and identification with school goals (Barth, 1981; Peterson, 1994) and sharpens the effectiveness of professional development (Leithwood, 1992). Likewise, according to Crow, Hausman, & Scribner (2002) an effective leader expresses appreciation for good work, stresses the importance of job satisfaction, maintains and strengthens the self-esteem of the subordinates by treating them as equals, makes special efforts to help subordinates feel at ease, is easy to approach, puts subordinates' suggestions into operation, and obtains subordinates' approval on important matters before going ahead. This support provided by considerate leaders finds them oriented towards relationships, friendship, mutual trust, and interpersonal warmth (Bass, 1990).

Effective leaders base self confidence on self knowledge; they can handle almost all emotionally charged situations (Smith & Andrews, 1989). They tend to be very persuasive, motivated through high achievement and show exceptional initiative. Effective leaders are able to build consensus, coordinate team efforts, appreciate multiple perspectives and avoid unproductive conflicts (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Leithwood, 1994; Smith & Andrews, 1989). This leads one to consider that principals who are strong instructional leaders may have more of an impact on classroom instructional practice at the extremes of the engagement continuum (Quinn, 2002). Andrews and Soder (1987) described the effective instructional leader as a principal performing at high levels in four areas - resource provider, instructional resource, communicator, and visible presence in the school:

1. As *resource provider*, the principal takes action to marshal personnel and resources within the building, district, and community to achieve the school's vision and goals.

2. As *instructional resource*, the principal sets expectations for continual improvement of the instructional program and actively engages in staff development.
3. As *communicator*, the principal models commitment to school goals, articulates a vision toward instructional goals and the means for integrating instructional planning and goal attainment, and sets and adheres to clear performance standards for instruction and teacher behavior.
4. As *visible presence*, the principal is out and around in the school, visiting classrooms, attending departmental or grade-level meetings, walking the hallways, and holding spontaneous conversations with staff and students.

Considering the above, it is obvious no administrator adheres exclusively to any one theory of management or relies on any one perspective of leadership in day-to-day practice. Actually, most administrators draw from several. There is no single leadership style or approach that is fitting for all school settings. However, a narrow focus on management issues alone is a disservice to teachers and students. According to Fullan (1990) the school's characteristics are a reflection of the educational values of its leader. Therefore, leadership style is determined by deep-seated values and beliefs about how people learn (Fullan, 2002). For example, Bredesen (1985) described four types of principal leadership styles corresponding to four models of school administration. The *instructional leader* is concerned with the technical core of operations, namely, well designed and managed classroom instruction. The *custodial manager* is concerned with well-designed and operating school support functions, such as program planning and budgeting, business operations, and differentiated job tasks and position. The *missionary* principal is concerned with meeting the

social needs of students, school staff, and parents through positive school climate. The *gamesman* or *politician* acts to negotiate and “satisfice” the many and divergent needs and demands internal and external to the school (Griffith, 1999).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research suggests collegial principals who are friendly, open, supportive, and committed to excellence are most likely to create a school climate conducive to student achievement. Likewise, teachers who are committed to students, their colleagues, and their school; who are enthusiastic; who set high but achievable academic goals for students; and who are cohesive and cooperative rather than critical and divisive are most likely to develop a climate conducive to student learning. The general theory guiding this study is that all aspects of principal leadership are positively related to the process of organizational learning and student achievement.

Significantly raising the achievement of all students -- promoting learning that is wide-reaching while also deeply rooted in well-developed insight and relevant experience -- is, without doubt, the top priority of formal schooling. Leadership surely has an important role to play in realizing this objective. Clarifying what educational leaders need to know and be able to do is a worthy endeavor. But effective leadership is only one piece of a complicated school-improvement puzzle. If leadership development is to produce notable gains in student learning, it is essential to understand where effective leadership fits in the larger process of reform and how it relates to -- and perhaps depends upon -- other major changes in the practice of schooling. Furthermore, this review of literature has provided a

bridge between research on instructional leadership and student achievement that has been deficient in the literature.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The overall purpose of this study was to explore the nature of principal leadership in two Washington State high schools with similar demographics but different student learning outcomes and the relationship between principal leadership and student learning outcomes,

within the context of Washington State education reform. The purpose of this chapter is to detail the research methodology and procedures used in this study.

Research Methodology

The appropriateness of a qualitative methodology in research is well established for understanding what happens within social contexts. Qualitative techniques allow researchers to collect and analyze human behaviors as they occur naturally in everyday environments (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to Wolcott (1973), the advantage to a qualitative approach in educational research is that it draws the reader into the arena of the observed.

Qualitative research studies are naturalistic (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), with the researchers immersing themselves in social situations as they seek to gain insight into capturing incidents as they occur in their natural settings and as interpreted through those who interact and participate in those settings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The researcher as principal instrument for data collection has the task of pursuing new paths of discovery as they emerge. Such a researcher must be open to whatever emerges; adapt inquiry as understanding deepens and/or situations change, and avoid getting locked into rigid designs that eliminate responsiveness (Maxwell, 1996). This emergent design, which allows the study to be modified as it progresses, allows the researcher to refocus and redirect attention allowing the study to evolve within areas that seem most relevant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since this study was exploratory, a qualitative emergent design was appropriate to allow maximum flexibility as the study progressed (Maxwell, 1996).

Qualitative research is concerned with the creation of meaning and images rather than discovering truth (Wolcott, 1994). According to qualitative research guidelines and the

chosen constant comparative methodology, this inductive process (Patton, 1980) supports an ongoing analysis, with themes and categories emerging, dimensions and interrelationships presenting themselves, (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Maxwell, 1996) and collecting and coding of data concurrently in hopes to produce theoretical frameworks. Categories and themes are constructed from data and synthesized to construct grounded theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1984). Grounded theory research focuses on the discovery of substantive categories and emergent categories pertinent to the subject under study.

In summary, since a qualitative methodology allows for findings to emerge from the data, a qualitative methodology was determined to be appropriate and was selected as the type most closely aligned with the study's purpose.

Case Studies

The case study methodology approach to data collection and analysis is useful in describing complex interactions through concrete examples and detail (Miles & Huberman, 1984), potentially providing insights, modifying preexisting beliefs, and pointing to gaps in current knowledge. Yin (1984) advocates use of extensive open-ended and formal interviews as an essential source of interactions, which should be reported and interpreted in the voices of the informants.

This methodology provides opportunities to collect data on the complexity of daily practices, including (a) multiple sources of evidence that converge on the same set of facts and findings and (b) a chain of evidence, that is, explicit links between the questions asked, the data collected, and the conclusion drawn (Yin, 1984). Such studies provide large amounts of descriptive detail that can lead toward generalizations, with the overall goal of

convincing the reader that very little relevant evidence remained untouched by the investigator, given the boundaries of the case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1984).

Theoretical Framework

The current literature on student learning outcomes illustrates how increased student outcomes are dependent on a strong school organization and positive school culture. The literature on principal leadership presents how the principal can influence teachers through the organization and culture of the building. Emerging from the research and data collected were three perspective theoretical frameworks. The first theoretical framework for this study is caring leadership (Noddings, 1984) and the ethic of care (Starrat, 1994). This framework brought understanding and depth to the literature and data collected in the area of caring leadership. In addition to the caring leadership framework additional frameworks appeared in the data and literature in the areas of organizational learning and classroom community (Spillane & Louis, 2002) and the “four imperatives of a successful school” as identified by Beck and Murphy (1996). All three frameworks allowed the researcher to “sift” the data and literature through the emerged frameworks, allowing for a more concise and intentional study. These frameworks and how they are used in the study are more fully described in this chapter.

Caring Leadership

Nel Noddings (1992) work in caring acts as a first framework by illustrating the importance and role caring plays in a school, noting caring exists in relationships initiated and fostered in schools. Nodding’s argues that action, engrossment, and reciprocity are keys

to caring in schools. She insists that the person being cared for seems to grow stronger and feels not so much that he/she has been given something, but that something has been added to them. This idea brings us to her first key to caring, which is action. The actions performed out of caring vary with both situational conditions and type of relationship, but the action is directed toward the welfare, protection, or enhancement of the cared-for. The second key to caring according to Noddings is engrossment. Engrossment involves the displacement of interest from one's own reality to the reality of the other. Being fully present in a caring encounter with another, conveying, "regard, a desire for the other's well-being" (p.19), and being receptive of as well as responsive to the cared-for. The third and final key to caring in schools is reciprocity. This has both parties contributing to the relation; "the cared-for responds to the presence of the one-caring." (p.60).

Organizational Learning

In their study on organizational learning Spillane and Louis (2002) point out that organizational learning is a process of gaining new knowledge, skills, or tools for increasing learning and is the product of social interaction. This occurs among the individuals of the learning community, engaging in common activities that support educational innovation. In education, organizational learning is generally associated with an organization that learns, works efficiently, readily adapts to change, detects and corrects errors and continually improves its effectiveness; a joint family investment; one where everyone contributes ideas and takes part in the implementation of these ideas. This school culture is built around the ongoing social processing of external and internal knowledge to produce a shared and guiding vision for high-quality work among teachers, students, and administrators. School

capacity for organizational learning includes supportive school structure, participative decision-making, reflective dialogue, open sharing of classroom practices, developing a common knowledge base for improvement, collaborating on the design of new materials and curricula, and establishing norms related to pedagogical practice and student performance, facilitative leadership, the inflow of knowledge and skills, and a system for ensuring feedback and accountability (Spillane & Louis, 2002).

Four Imperatives of a Successful School

In Beck and Murphy's book, *Four Imperatives of a Successful School* (1996), they explain what they call "four imperatives of a successful school." Based on extensive research in education and successful schools they identified the first imperative as the learning imperative, which states that a school's success has much to do with the transformations that are made in instruction. Three factors contribute to this learning imperative: A strong and passionate commitment to an expansive notion of learning, one that emphasizes problem solving, research, creativity, technology, collaborative work, broad conceptions of literacy and communication. A second factor stresses student development rather than adult activities; assumes that good teaching is not an end in itself and that it occurs only when students are learning. A third factor is that the instructional strategies match student's needs and interests in ways that are producing visible evidence of powerful learning.

The second imperative is the leadership imperative, which describes the exercise of leadership around the areas of learning and teaching as an important factor to the school's overall success. Parents and community members also contribute to the academic success of students by actively and enthusiastically supporting the work of educators. Site-based

management (SBM) has provided an environment in which new types of power relations and shared leadership roles can be played out.

The third imperative is the community imperative, which goes beyond actions, processes, and procedures and is nested in the ways teachers, administrators, staff, and a few parents think about themselves and their work. People are bound together by a strong concern about student learning and by commitments to and friendships with one another. Ongoing invitations and opportunities for involvement provide parents, teachers and staff with a sense that they are welcome and supported, which results in more involvement and a stronger sense of ownership from this group of stakeholders.

The fourth imperative is the capacity-building imperative, which is fostered through site-based management, encourages a sense of organization on the part of teachers and parents, and this, in turn, fostered engagement in capacity-building activities. Teachers believe that their requests and self-identified needs will be addressed by the school and that additional training will be supported. Principals and teachers can pursue professional development in ways that are more in line with the needs of their community. Knowledge and the commitment to continuous learning, especially on the part of principals and teachers seem to ensure that productive development activities are pursued.

Research Design and Procedures

The qualitative, comparative case-study design used for this study allowed for the two case studies to be conducted and then compared and contrasted (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Descriptive data collected within the settings under study were sorted and analyzed by a process that sought to describe, decode, translate, and find meanings in naturally occurring

social phenomena. These data arose from a variety of sources of evidence--documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations (Yin, 1994)--and provided the basis for in-depth description and analysis of each case.

The study was conducted in two phases. First, the researchers made site observations and conducted interviews with selected participants in the two case study schools, including, but not limited to, site-based management-team meetings, staff and faculty meetings, and lunchroom and office interactions. This phase explored participants' perceptions of principal-leadership practices and the role leadership plays in the school. The resulting data were analyzed to generate initial categories related to leadership and student learning; later coding of these categories led to creation of a new interview protocol for use in the next phase.

Second, the researcher conducted more in-depth interviews with participants selected from the original set of interviewees and continued observations. These interviews asked more specific questions that followed closely the emergent categories from phase one. Similarly, phase two observations focused on confirmation of these same categories.

The data from both cases were analyzed with the constant comparative or "grounded theory" method developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998), allowing the researcher to generate tentative theories for each case and then to compare the findings from each case.

Examination of these findings led to drawing conclusions related to principal-leadership practices and possible connections to student-learning outcomes. Data triangulation, the use of multiple sources of evidence about the same phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), addressed potential problems of validity.

Context for the Study

The study was conducted in two public high schools in Washington State. Thus, the general context for this study is Washington's current educational reform environment. Washington's reform effort is similar to educational reforms in other states in that it is standards based, requires high stakes assessments aligned with these standards, and includes various mechanisms to hold educators accountable for student learning.

Washington's reform was initiated in 1993 when House Bill 1209 created Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs), which are criterion standards for each curricular area. For example, benchmark three for tenth grade "Social Studies: Geography" states:

"The student observes and analyzes the interaction between people, the environment, and culture (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2002)." To meet this standard, the student will: "Identify and examine people's interaction with and impact on the environment. Analyze how the environment and environmental changes affect people. Examine cultural characteristics, transmission, diffusion and interaction."

House Bill 1209 also created accountability standards for student learning embodied in the Washington State Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), a criterion-referenced assessment administered to fourth, seventh, and tenth graders in mathematics, reading, writing, listening, and science (the latter for eighth graders only). More recently, the legislature decreed that all students, beginning with the graduating class of 2008, must pass at least the tenth grade WASL to graduate. In addition, in 1997 a Washington Administrative Code (WAC) was created stating that teachers must demonstrate a positive impact on student learning.

The Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) maintains very detailed data on each school's performance, which are updated annually by

OSPI and available to the general public for reference. These data receive wide publicity in the local newspapers and media across the state, pitting one class's results on the WASL against another.

Site Selection

I selected two sites in eastern Washington by the following criteria: (a) geographic proximity to researcher, (b) differences in tenth grade WASL achievement results for these schools over the past five years (see Table 1), and (c) similar student demographics. Both sites were secondary schools that had very similar demographics, though student-learning outcomes, based on the state-mandated WASL test, differed during the previous four years. These schools were rural, 4A high schools with over 1200 students enrolled and similar student populations, programs, and resources. In addition, the principal in each site had been in residence for at least five years. Though 10th grade WASL scores had consistently improved for the previous four years, one site had consistently high levels of rapid improvement, whereas the other had shown minimal increases.

When I started searching for two schools for my study, I was specifically looking for two schools that were very similar in demographics, but differed greatly in their percentage of students who passed each of the sections of the WASL. As shown in Table 1, I had only the 1998-1999 through 2001-2002 WASL data available to me, so once I identified the schools (based on 1998-2002 WASL data only) with the largest discrepancy in scores in the 2001-2002 school year that seemed to have similar enrollments and demographics, I began to look at the individual school to compare and contrast them which led me to my selection of Powerhouse High School (PHS) and Cutting Edge High School (CEHS) (pseudonyms).

Table 1

Powerhouse and Cutting Edge High School's 10th Grade WASL scores.

| School Year | 1998-99 | 1999-00 | 2000-01 | 2001-02 | 2002-03 | 2003-04 | Percentage to which PHS is higher than CEHS for 2003-04 WASL scores |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--|
| PHS Math | 48.40% | 49.70% | 57.80% | 57.30% | 58.50% | 53.80% | 2.60% |
| CEHS Math | 40.60% | 42.80% | 47.90% | 43.10% | 53.10% | 51.20% | |
| PHS Reading | 65.70% | 76.40% | 85.30% | 84.90% | 79.10% | 73.50% | 5.60% |
| CEHS Reading | 56.70% | 70.30% | 67.80% | 53.00% | 65.00% | 67.90% | |
| PHS Writing | 51.40% | 39.50% | 66.90% | 80.90% | 81.00% | 72.90% | 4.50% |
| CEHS Writing | 49.40% | 44.10% | 58.90% | 54.90% | 73.50% | 68.40% | |
| PHS Listening | 82.00% | 88.90% | 95.60% | 96.90% | N/A | N/A | |
| CEHS Listening | 83.10% | 84.80% | 92.40% | 81.90% | N/A | N/A | |
| PHS Science | | | | | 47.80% | 42.70% | -1.10% |
| CEHS Science | | | | | 43.80% | 43.80% | |

Note. Figures in table represent the percentage of students who met standard in their respective years. Schools were chosen based on differences between 1998-2002 WASL data. Both schools are described more fully in chapter four.

Participant Selection

Because the research questions required the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and students, I invited the building principal plus two assistant principals, four teachers, and four students from each school to participate. At PHS, the participants included a principal, two assistant principals, four teachers, and four students. The principal at PHS is a 45-year old white male who has been the principal at PHS for eight years. Two of PHS's assistant principals are white males one in his early fifties and the assistant principal at PHS for nine years and the other in his mid- forties who has been the assistant principal at PHS for 12 years. Of the four teachers at PHS two are white females, with five and 15 years experience respectfully; whereas the other two are white males with five and 36 years experience respectfully. The four students were a senior white male athlete, an uninvolved senior male who plays guitar, a very active white female junior and a white female senior athletic star. At CEHS, the participants included a principal, one assistant principal, four teachers and five students. The principal at CEHS is approximately a 55-year old white male who has been the principal at CEHS for seven years at the time of the study. One of CEHS's assistant principal's is a white female in her mid forties who has been at CEHS for a year and a half at the time of the study. The four teachers at CEHS were all white, two being male and two female, both had between 10 and 27 years teaching experience but were only in their second year at CEHS; whereas the males had been teaching for 20 years total all of which were at CEHS. CEHS's five student participants were a white female senior transfer student who came from an alternative school two years prior to the study, a black male senior who is a three sports varsity letterman and active in ASB, a white female senior athlete and club

member, a white male fifth year senior who came from an alternative school out of state, and a white female junior who does not participate in any school activities.

Of the four teachers from each site, two had more than fifteen years of teaching experience in the current school and two had less than five years of teaching experience. They were chosen randomly by the principal from a list of interested participants generated by the principal. Four 11th or 12th grade students from each site were identified according to their 10th grade WASL scores, academic levels, and school activities. Two in each group had high WASL scores, were high academically, and were highly active; two had low WASL scores, were lower to middle academically, and were inactive. Parental permission was obtained for all student participants. This method of selecting teachers and students allowed the researcher to see different perspectives, experiences, and expectations in relation to the principal's leadership practices.

Data Collection Procedures

A criterion for data collection in qualitative methodology is to obtain enough “slices of data” to provide a complete picture of the situation being studied (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this study, these came from participant interviews, observations, and documents. Data were collected in two phases over a period of 24 school weeks. The first phase consisted of in-depth interviews of the identified participants as well as initial observations of the school. The second phase allowed for a second round of follow-up interviews for administrative participants, artifact collection, and triangulation.

Interviews

In qualitative case studies, interviewing is a major source of data needed for understanding the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1988). No instrument or inquiry method is more revealing than the interview (McCracken, 1988). Consequently, interviews, especially the in- depth interviews, were a major source of data in this study.

Across the two phases of the study, the researcher interviewed each principal twice for one to one-half hours at the respective schools. Two interviews were conducted with each of the assistant principals, teachers, and students. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes (for most students) to two hours. Each interview was audio-taped and transcribed, and during each interview the researcher took notes that elaborated on qualities--such as body language, dress, and setting--that would not be reflected in the transcripts. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to two hours, with the understanding that there would be possible follow-up interviews and meetings. All interviews were audio-taped and subsequently transcribed, ensuring completeness and accuracy of interview data. The purpose of the interviews was to elicit individuals' understandings of the principals' leadership practices. The interview questions were open-ended, allowing participants to draw from their own experiences, and modified for each group. Interview protocols are included in the appendix.

By breaking the data-collection period into two phases, the researcher was able to follow up the first very open-ended and loosely structured questions with more structured and specific questions that checked perceptions stated earlier and added depth to information obtained initially. Themes and data categories that had become defined, prompted questions whose answers interviewers clarified or expanded on those themes.

Observations

Observations had two purposes: (a) to "shadow" the principal in the course of his or her routine of meetings, conferences, and interactions in order to develop an understanding of the principals' leadership styles and practices; (b) to witness interactions of staff, administrators, and students in order to analyze leadership styles and practices.

Observation data were important for several reasons: (a) participant-observation data allow the researcher to discern patterned interactions and associated processes of roles (Merriam, 1988); (b) these data also allow the researcher to take the role of another and thereby gain an understanding of how the role is experienced (Merriam, 1988); and (c) observation data, when coupled with interviews and document collection, permit for data triangulation.

In making observations, the researcher was with staff, administration, and students within the school, including the lunchroom, faculty lounges, faculty meetings, leadership-team meetings, and classrooms. He also observed interactions among staff and students in after-school activities and assemblies. Duration of observation periods ranged from 15 minutes to 7.5 hours, depending on whom and what was being observed. While shadowing principals, each for an entire day, the researcher recorded notes in both written and tape-recorded forms, with the hope that he could compare principals' stated visions and actual behavior. All notes included both descriptive and reflective portions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), the former to provide an objective account of what occurred during the observation session (e.g., details about setting, people, actions, and conversations), the latter to reflect

upon what the researcher was thinking about at the time of the observations (e.g., analysis, methods and procedures, ethics, and points of clarification).

Document Collection

Documents collected from each of the school sites included office memos, newsletters, accreditation reports, district-office communications, and principals' reports, as well as copies of each site's educational profile, parent/student handbooks, and registration procedures. Documents collected at each school helped provide a fuller understanding of the school's climate and overall goals. Analysis of documents allowed for triangulation of data from interviews and observations.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study followed the guidelines for case-studies proposed by Yin (1989) and the grounded theory approach developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

Beginning during data collection, analysis continued throughout the study in an overlapping, cyclical process (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), involving constant comparison of data and developing themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For example, with transcribed interviews the researcher read each line of the transcript, coded data into categories; then, he did a second, more in-depth categorization, adding newly emergent categories which reflected discoveries of new dimensions and /or relationships (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Codes were linked by cross-referencing data to avoid the problem of "context stripping" (Maxwell, 1996), losing the context from which the data developed. For purposes of this study the coding process was guided by two primary questions: What are the

leadership styles and practices of the principals in the two schools? What is the relationship between these principal leadership characteristics and student-learning outcomes?

After the open-coding stage, a tentative theoretical framework began to emerge, which guided the researcher's subsequent scrutiny and interpretation of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Among these categories in this framework were: (a) Administrators' choices and actions, which included maintaining a visible presence, walkthroughs and observations, supporting and recognizing teachers, staff, and administrators and supporting and recognizing students; (b) teachers' choices and actions, included maintaining a visible presence, creating positive classroom environments, and getting involved; and (c) relationship building, which included making connections with students, administrator-teacher relationships, teacher-teacher relationships, administrator-student relationships, and teacher-student relationships.

After the emergence of these initial categories, analysis activities continued with a careful line-by-line reading of the data, where additional overarching patterns and themes emerged. As focal categories emerged, data were collected specific to these foci and analytical memos were written to document the emerging analysis. The ongoing refinement of categories allowed the categories to fit the data, rather than the data to fit the categories (Wolcott, 1994). Details, which surfaced through this ongoing analysis, provided information used to develop portraits and descriptions of practice.

After portraits and descriptions were developed, case themes were analyzed for similarities and differences. Tendencies, differences, and similarities were examined and reexamined against the original data until it appeared that no new themes or categories were being generated. This use of cross case analysis provided insight into individual site

idiosyncrasies and the principal's response to them. The similarities and differences that surfaced provided a closer examination into the contextual nature of each principal's behaviors.

The surfacing of new categories during this process led the researcher to consult additional literature on leadership and school reform as it related to the initial framework. The process of writing theoretical notes allowed the researcher to engage in a continuous dialogue between theory and data.

As a method to increase validity and reliability, triangulation was ongoing throughout the different research phases. Data from different sources (e.g. documents, interviews, and observations) were compared which provided insight into the social context through varied lenses (Wolcott, 1994). Triangulation occurred when data collected from interview transcripts or observations were cross-referenced with other interview transcripts, observation notes, or documents. As themes developed between sites and comparisons were noted, follow-up interviews and observations were conducted to confirm emerging themes in core categories.

Research Ethics

The researcher informed all participants about the nature and scope of the study and obtained signed consent forms from all participants (and the parents of all student participants). Participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time or to decline participation in any portion of the study. The identity of all sites and participants were kept confidential.

Validity

While there are no methods that guarantee validity of a qualitative study, which is by definition interpretative (Maxwell, 1996), a number of techniques can enhance validity or credibility of a qualitative study, among them prolonged engagement with participants; multiple, persistent observations; triangulation; and clarification with participants of tentative findings.

In this study, triangulation occurred when the researcher listened and transcribed tape recorded interviews, made immediate recording of field notes, and reviewed large amounts of documents to ensure accuracy and completeness. In addition, the researcher used member checking with each principal to ensure interpretive validity and to make sure the researcher was accurately portraying the meaning given by the participants to what was being studied.

In this study the researcher acted as the instrument for data collection, his background as a former teacher and assistant principal may have produced an unintentional bias (Maxwell, 1996). He was, therefore, alert to this “reflexivity” problem, continually reflecting on his biases and predispositions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983) and planning to disclose his estimate of their effect on his interpretations of data.

Limitations

Again, this case study had a relatively small number of cases--two schools in Washington State--with data derived entirely from a few participants’ reported perceptions, voluntarily given, and the researcher’s periodic observations of life in the two schools. Furthermore, conclusions in this limited study may reflect only the conditions in these two schools. Whether they are generalizable or transferable to other sites must be judged by readers, though the methodology may be readily applicable to many schools.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONTEXTS OF THE SCHOOLS

Introduction

High school principals operating in complex environments are affected by the organizational structure of the school district and school, the needs of the students, the nature of the teaching and support staff, the existing practices and expectations within the school, the degree of district involvement, and the expectations of teachers about their principal and the school. A researcher who comes into such settings must try to understand them as

thoroughly as possible. This chapter, therefore, presents a description of the two school districts and high schools used for this case study.

The pseudonyms used for the schools in this study are: Acceleration School District (ASD), an upper-middle-class district located in eastern Washington, which includes both Powerhouse High School (PHS) and Restitution High School (RHS); and Opportunity School District (OSD), an upper-middle-class district in eastern Washington, in which Cutting Edge High School (CEHS) is located.

Acceleration School District

Acceleration school district covers over 177 square miles, 90 percent of which is zoned agricultural/rural. The district has seen many changes over the past six years, with the opening of two new high school buildings, PHS and RHS. The district enrollment for the 2002-2003 school year was 8510 and draws students from some of the poorest neighborhoods in the state, from multi-million dollar estates, and from many in between. As shown in Table 2, enrollment in October 2002 was predominantly white, with 6.8% American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, black, or Hispanic. The percentage of students who received free and reduced lunch was less in 2002 than in the previous year, as was the annual dropout rate; the graduation-rate percentage increased in 2002 compared to the previous year. In addition to the two high schools (both with student enrollments between 1550-1750), the district includes one alternative high school, two middle schools, and seven elementary schools.

Table 2

Acceleration School District Student Demographics

| <u>Student Ethnicity</u> | |
|---|-------|
| American Indian or Alaskan Native | 1% |
| Asian or Pacific Islander | 2.3% |
| Black | 1.5% |
| Hispanic | 2% |
| White | 93.2% |
| <u>District-wide Special Programs/Additional Information</u> | |
| Free or Reduced-Price Meals (2002-2003) | 23% |
| Annual Dropout Rate (2002-2003) | 1.7% |
| Estimated Cohort Graduation Rate (2002-2003) | 89.2% |

Prior to the 2003-2004 school year, ASD developed a new set of goals, designed to aid in improving classroom instruction. They are available to the public via the district’s website and are a focus of administrative and staff teams in each of the district’s schools. Extensive turnover of central-administration staff preceded the creation of these new goals. Between 2001 and 2003, both the well-liked and respected superintendent and his assistant superintendent retired, and a new superintendent and two new executive directors were hired. Furthermore, the district replaced its directors of personnel, technology, and special education. The school board however, remained unchanged for the four years before the study and at the time of the study one high school principal was in his position for six years, the other for eight years.

District-wide in the five years before the study, scores in all areas of the 10th grade WASL have improved, as shown in Table 3, most notably in writing, with small and gradual increases in math scores and small decreases in reading and listening from 2001 to 2003.

Table 3

Acceleration School District 10th Grade WASL Scores.

| School Year | 1998-99 | 1999-00 | 2000-01 | 2001-02 | 2002-03 |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Math | 52.4% | 51.5% | 51.0% | 52.8% | 54.2% |
| Reading | 71.4% | 78.7% | 78.6% | 77.7% | 75.2% |
| Writing | 57.8% | 43.2% | 60.5% | 76.4% | 78.0% |
| Listening | 86.2% | 90.4% | 90.8% | 92.1% | 86.6% |
| Science | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 44.1% |

Note. Percentage figures represent students meeting standard in each area. [WASL did not include the Science area until 2002-03.]

Powerhouse High School

PHS enrolled approximately 1,550 students in 2003-2004, an increase of 100 students from the 2000-2001 school year. PHS is on a modified six-period schedule, giving students and teachers six periods for three days a week and four periods the other two days. Compared to a traditional six-period schedule, PHS's modified schedule provides flexibility for more in-depth learning, more teacher-collaboration time, and more time for teachers to provide individual help and mentoring to students.

Most of the 1550 students at PHS, come from white, upper-middle class families. Of those 1550 students nearly 250 participated in advanced placement classes in 2002-2003 (see Table 4). Almost 75% of PHS students participate in athletic programs each year, with a record of almost 20 state championships in several sports during the last decade, including several All-State trophies. The co-curricular programs--drama, music, debate, DECA, leadership, and journalism--have included over 800 students each year. The majority of the student population at PHS does not receive extra services and graduate with their cohort on time.

Table 4

Powerhouse High School Student Demographics

| <u>Student Ethnicity</u> | |
|---|------|
| American Indian or Alaskan Native | 1% |
| Asian or Pacific Islander | 2% |
| Black | 1% |
| Hispanic | 2% |
| White | 94% |
| <u>Special Programs/Additional Information</u> | |
| Special Education Enrollment (2002-2003) | 9.5% |
| Students with Free or Reduced-Price Meals (2002-2003) | 17% |
| Annual Dropout Rate (2002-2003) | 1.2% |
| Estimated Cohort Graduation Rate (2002-2003) | 93% |
| Students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses (2002-2003) | 16% |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Students enrolled in extracurricular activities (2002-2003) | 74% |
|---|-----|

PHS staff includes one principal, two assistant principals, 80 certificated teachers (divided into curriculum departments), four counselors, and approximately 60 support staff members (e.g., para-educators, office and kitchen workers, custodians, and administrative support) nearly 100% of whom are white and stable in their positions (see Table 5).

Table 5

Powerhouse High School Staff Demographics

| <u>Staff Ethnicity</u> | |
|---|-----|
| American Indian or Alaskan Native | 0% |
| Asian or Pacific Islander | 1% |
| Black | 1% |
| Hispanic | 0% |
| White | 98% |
| Teacher turnover including retirement (1998-2003) | 2% |
| Teacher turnover excluding retirement (1998-2003) | 0% |

PHS staff and administrators say they are committed to the complete education of each student, stressing academic excellence, individual achievement, and social growth. Evidence of this commitment is the low percentage of dropouts and the high percentage of students who graduate (see Table 4). The academic program offers a wide variety of opportunities for all students, including required classes in core academic areas of math,

science, social studies, and English, as well as a wide variety of elective courses, including honors and advanced placement programs, three world languages (French, German, and Spanish), physical education, professional/technical education, music, art, and theatre.

Teachers are required to post class grades on the school's website so that parents can check their children's grades.

In August 2001, PHS was extensively remodeled to better accommodate the needs of all staff and students in a 237,000 square foot facility. For example, a new theatre seats 500, includes an orchestra pit, and has top-of-the-line lighting and acoustics. Outdoor athletic facilities have over 30 acres of well-maintained athletic fields for all outdoor sports, including a state-of-the-art track and ten high quality tennis courts. The gymnasium seats 2,500 people; the field house measures 10,000 square feet; and a 3,000-square-foot weight room is equipped with a wide variety of high quality weight-training and fitness equipment.

Among the PHS programs that challenge students to do their best is the "Paw Prints" program; it includes the academic graduation requirements, which all students must meet, and explains what they must do to meet the requirements. Sub-divisions of Paw Prints are "Roadways," an academic preparation and career planning program, and "Portfolio," a culminating project, which is a collection of each student's learning throughout his or her four years. PHS students--including the special education population and those who qualify for free and reduced lunch (and therefore may not be high achievers)--consistently perform among the top high schools in the state on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and the American College of Testing (ACT). For the three years prior to this study PHS students have attained an average combined score of 1070 on the SAT, as compared to the state average of just over 1000. ACT scores

averaged 24, compared to the state average of 22.3. Eighty percent of PHS graduates continue into various forms of post-secondary education, more than half attending either a local or regional four-year college or university or one of the more prestigious institutions of higher education elsewhere.

As shown in Table 6, PHS’s 10th grade WASL scores over the five years prior to this study have increased markedly in math and writing and fairly steadily in reading and listening (though scores in 2002-2003 dropped).

Table 6

Powerhouse High School 10th Grade WASL Scores

| School Year | 1998-99 | 1999-00 | 2000-01 | 2001-02 | 2002-03 |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Math | 48.4% | 49.7% | 57.8% | 57.3% | 58.5% |
| Reading | 65.7% | 76.4% | 85.3% | 84.9% | 79.1% |
| Writing | 51.4% | 39.5% | 66.9% | 80.9% | 81.0% |
| Listening | 82.0% | 88.9% | 95.6% | 96.9% | 89.0% |
| Science | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 47.8% |

Note. Percentage figures represent students meeting standard in each area. [WASL did not include the Science area until 2002-03.]

PHS Principal. Mitch Johansen [in the following descriptions of the PHS staff (and later of CEHS individuals), all names are pseudonyms.] is a white male, approximately 45 years old, who started his career in education 21 years ago and is now looking for a superintendency position in the state. Initially he taught high school social studies and

English for seven years, also coaching football and basketball and acting as newspaper advisor, associated student body advisor, and class advisor. Motivated to explore administration while still teaching, he earned a master's degree in education administration from a highly ranked university in eastern Washington and then a principal's credential. With those qualifications, he became assistant principal in charge of student administration at the high school where he had taught; two years later he became assistant principal in charge of activities.

After 11 years at that high school, he applied for full principalships and landed his first position at a high school in southwestern Washington, where he had two successful years. He moved back to the city where his teaching career had begun to assume the principal position at PHS, where he has completed his eighth year. He has decided to seek even greater challenge as a superintendent somewhere in the state.

Principal Johansen starts his day by driving his own children to school (two of them attend PHS), arriving between 7:00a.m. and 7:15a.m. For the next 30 to 45 minutes he takes care of his e-mail, notes, phone messages, and other administrative tasks. His only plan for the day is an occasional previously scheduled meeting. At 7:45a.m. he leaves his office for the mall, or commons area, getting around to say good morning to staff and students until 8:10a.m., when school starts. He then returns to his office, though he would prefer to do otherwise. He said, "When I'm in the building, I hate it when I'm just sitting in here doing menial administrative tasks, I'd much rather being out doing walkthroughs, observations, or just talking with students and staff." However, he tries to get into classrooms as often as he can. One teacher said of his visits to her room, "Mitch comes in my room all the time, says hi, stays, or leaves. When Mitch comes in and observes me, he really gets involved with what

the students are doing, walking around seeing what they were doing; he actually stayed the whole hour.” Another veteran teacher noted Principal Johansen’s priorities: “His first priority is the kids; if a child needs to come in for a meeting or to talk, that is his first priority, second to teachers, third to parents. He is very child-based; I’ve never seen him give up on a kid.”

Shortly after 10:00a.m., unless he is in a meeting, he is out in the mall socializing with students during their 10-minute mid-morning break and back an hour later for students’ first and second lunch periods. During these lunches he wanders through the lunchroom, picking up trash, talking to students, touching base with staff, and getting bombarded with questions and comments from students. One of them, a junior, said, “Mr. Johansen knows a ton of kids here, it seems like he knows everyone, and he’s kind of like everywhere. He makes a point to come and visit everyone, wherever they are out here [mall/commons area].”

On a few occasions during the course of a week, Principal Johansen is not in the mall area during first lunch because he is teaching an advanced-placement-history class at this time. One of his students shared his impression of Mr. Johansen: “He’s my teacher and he’s awesome. I’ve seen him talk to tons of kids and I think they appreciate it because it makes them feel noticed. He always comes up to me and other students and congratulates us on a great job we did [in a game or performance].” A student athlete recalled his method of recognizing students: “When something goes right in school, Mr. Johansen pulls out his little yellow cards and writes a little note to everybody--each individual person--and when you get one, you just think that’s really cool. He really noticed us.”

During the last two hours of the school day, he either does administrative tasks that he did not get to in the morning or does quick observations in classrooms. Usually, he stays at

school until 5:00p.m., taking care of tasks he did not get to during the school day. After running home to eat, he is back at the school or a neighboring school for the evening's activity. The principal's supervision and participation in after school activities ends about 10:00p.m., depending on the weekly activities calendar and location of events.

PHS Assistant Principals. Spenser Thompson, who has been an educator for 28 years, is one of two PHS assistant principals. Before he became an administrator, he taught sophomore English and honors English while coaching football, wrestling, and baseball for 16 years. His first master's degree was in gifted, talented, and self-concept education; then he decided to get another master's degree in education administration because of his interest in working with the whole school population. He completed courses for an administrative credential while he worked on the second advanced degree. His first administrative position was assistant principal in a middle school, which he held for three years; when PHS incorporated freshmen into the high school nine years ago, he became assistant principal there, where he deals with most of the discipline problems.

A teacher recalled his role in her students' lives: "He's wonderful when it comes to kids coming first; sometimes it almost gets frustrating because he doesn't want to discipline them; he wants to do what's best for them. He's very involved with the kids and is always in my room and finds time to do home visits as well."

Burton Stevens, the other PHS assistant principal, is responsible for the majority of the school's curriculum and instruction. After graduation from a well-known four-year university in eastern Washington, where he majored in history and political science, he finished principal's certification and a master's degree in education administration. Before coming to PHS as assistant principal he taught classes in current issues, sociology,

psychology, and advanced placement European history and coached football, basketball, and track at several high schools. He has been at PHS as assistant principal for 12 years and was voted Assistant Principal of the Year in the Eastern Washington region for the 2002-2003 school year. The PHS principal said of Mr. Steven’s eight years at the school, “I don’t think, in the eight years Burton and I have worked together, I’ve ever had to ask him or tell him to do something different.”

PHS Teacher Participants. PHS has 80 certificated staff members, four of whom were participants in this study. As shown in Table 7, the participants range in age from the late 20s to early 60s, and their years of teaching experience from five to 36 years. Each is white; none has been at PHS for less than four years; they represent three of the departments at the school.

Table 6

Powerhouse Staff Participants

| Teacher Pseudonyms | Subject Area | Gender | Ethnicity | Age Range | Years of teaching experience | Years at PHS |
|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Charlize Young | Special Education | Female | White | 25-30 | 5 | 4 |
| Greg Thrower | Art | Male | White | 60-65 | 36 | 24 |
| Karl Fields | Social Studies | Male | White | 25-30 | 5 | 5 |
| Harley Peterson | Art | Female | White | 35-40 | 15 | 15 |

Mrs. Young, the youngest of the four participants, came to PHS as a substitute teacher. Four years prior to the study she accepted a .8 FTE teaching position at PHS, where she currently teaches English and a careers class in the Special Education Department. On connecting with her peers, she said, “I think the teachers need to have more opportunity to connect and get to know each other better, instead of just staff meetings and workshops, but maybe a social or even a common planning time to meet would be very helpful.”

Mr. Thrower, a 36-year teaching veteran, has experience in several of the state’s small schools, large schools, and colleges. He has coached track and football and has spent many hours working with his students before and after school in his art studio. About the importance of student involvement, he observed, “We are constantly trying to get kids to understand how good they can be, touching them in a way that they see how good they can be. When kids are involved in more than just school, I think you have an opportunity to capture their enthusiasm inside their heart.”

Mr. Fields, in his fifth year of teaching at PHS, enjoys the fact that he is no longer a beginning teacher so he can say “no” to people, even though he is still a member of several building committees. He teaches the new advanced placement government-politics course as well as history. He started as assistant baseball coach five years ago and for the past three years has been head coach. He remarked on why he is still at PHS, “The teachers I talked to before I got hired here said, ‘Oh, you’re going to love it there. Mitch does an excellent job of respecting teachers’ professionalism and just letting you do your job.’ We’ve got some folks in the office that are just amazing, caring people, and that’s why I am here.”

Mrs. Peterson, a seasoned teacher with fifteen years at PHS. She expressed her feeling about kids, “I really feel that these are my babies and these kids all deserve a good education and deserve to be treated with respect. I am extremely passionate about that. When they leave here, kids are not going to remember the curriculum, but they are going to remember how they were treated.”

PHS Student Participants. Most of the 1550 students at PHS, like those at many other schools in the area, are white and upper-middle class. The four students interviewed for this study are a typical cross-section of PHS students. Jim, a senior and offensive lineman on the football team, is active in the Associated Student Body and leadership class and has earned a strong grade point average in preparation for his anticipated college career. He also serves on several school committees and, when he is not participating in a sport, makes sure to attend all the after-school sports events to show his spirit. About the PHS climate and the matter of diversity, he said, “We’re pretty laid back here, not too culturally diverse, pretty much middle-class, white families. I think there’s a place where everybody can fit in even though people all hang out with the same people every day, but I think the atmosphere makes people want to come here every day.”

Lori, a junior at PHS and an active member of Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) and various other business activities, said about learning and the role of PHS teachers, “If you’re not comfortable in a place you’re learning, you’re not going to be productive. The teachers here make you feel comfortable, and they don’t care just about teaching; they care about our lives and environment. I mean they talk to you and take the time to get to know you.”

Carlie, a senior volleyball and track star, is gearing up for her final track season, after which she will attend college to earn a teaching degree and later teach and coach in a high school. Meanwhile, she is active in the Associated Student Body leadership class, and she continues to promote student involvement among her classmates. Of this activity, she said, “I enjoy going around school and giving that little smile to the person that you kind of talk to in the lunch line or you might say hi to in the hall. I just like bringing people up and getting involved with everybody. I am just trying to do my part to make people happy and encourage others to get involved.”

Luke, also a senior, has taken the non-involvement route. Formerly in a band, he quit, though he still “jams” with his buddies and a girlfriend at breaks and lunch. He admitted, “I don’t like school, I don’t like schoolwork, but I do like the school environment.”

Opportunity School District

OSD, an upper-middle class district that covers approximately 73 square miles in eastern Washington, has changed in several ways during the five years prior to this study; one of these changes was the opening of a new Cutting Edge High School (CEHS) building. This district serves 11,200 students from various economic backgrounds-- less affluent neighborhoods to multi-million dollar estates-- in 12 elementary schools, five middle schools, three high schools, and two educational centers that house various district educational programs. As Table 7 shows, OSD students are predominantly white, with a slightly higher proportion of American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black and Hispanic than in the ASD. During the 2002-2003 school year the district’s annual

dropout rate decreased, while the graduation-rate percentage increased markedly, as did free and reduced lunch percentages.

Table 7

Opportunity School District Student Demographics

| <u>Student Ethnicity</u> | |
|---|-------|
| American Indian or Alaskan Native | 1.6% |
| Asian or Pacific Islander | 2% |
| Black | 1.8% |
| Hispanic | 2.5% |
| White | 92.2% |
| <u>Special Programs/Additional Information</u> | |
| Free or Reduced-Price Meals (2002-2003) | 30.4% |
| Annual Dropout Rate (2002-2003) | .9% |
| Estimated Cohort Graduation Rate (2002-2003) | 94.4% |

The OSD Strategic Plan has three major components: student learning, commitment to community partnerships, and commitment to school facilities and safety matters. Moving into the fourth year of their five-year plan (2002-2003), OSD has made remarkable improvements, including improved WASL scores, the building of two new high schools, the remodeling of two elementary schools-- with a middle-school remodel well under way--and the accreditation of Cleveland High School. The plan has, however, been modified over the four years prior to this study due in part to the turnover of district personnel and school-board

members. The current superintendent is in his first year, while the assistant superintendent is finishing his third; a new business director came in 1999 and new personnel and curriculum directors in 2000. Two members of the five-person school board are new in the three years prior to this study. As for OSD high school principals, one has an eight-year tenure; the other is finishing his second year.

As Table 8 shows, whereas in 2001-2002 test scores for the 10th grade WASL decreased in all academic areas, in 2002-2003 increases occurred in all areas tested except listening, which stayed the same.

Table 8

Opportunity School District 10th Grade WASL Scores

| School Year | 1998-99 | 1999-00 | 2000-01 | 2001-02 | 2002-03 |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Math | 39.3% | 38.2% | 46.4% | 41.1% | 52.3% |
| Reading | 59.2% | 70.0% | 69.4% | 55.7% | 68.7% |
| Writing | 44.3% | 40.3% | 61.0% | 55.8% | 73.9% |
| Listening | 75.9% | 83.5% | 91.6% | 84.8% | 84.8% |
| Science | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 41.6% |

Note. Percentage figures represent students meeting standard in each area. [WASL did not include the Science area until 2002-03.]

Cutting Edge High School

CEHS, with an annual enrollment of about 1,730 students, uses a four-period schedule, for reasons like those at PHS: flexibility for in-depth learning; staff collaboration time; and assurance that students have access to staff for individual help and mentoring.

Most of CEHS's 1700+ students are from the surrounding white upper-middle-class neighborhoods. A majority of CEHS's students are white and with a small percentage of additional races represented. Of the 1700 student less than 1% dropout of school and more than half the student body participates in extracurricular activities as shown in Table 9.

Table 9

Cutting Edge High School Student Demographics

| <u>Student Ethnicity</u> | |
|---|-------|
| American Indian or Alaskan Native | 2% |
| Asian or Pacific Islander | 2% |
| Black | 1.5% |
| Hispanic | 2.5% |
| White | 92% |
| <u>Special Programs/Additional Information</u> | |
| Special Education Enrollment | 13% |
| Free or Reduced-Price Meals (2002-2003) | 21% |
| Annual Dropout Rate (2002-2003) | .8% |
| Estimated Cohort Graduation Rate (2002-2003) | 96.6% |
| Students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses (2002-2003) | 9.7% |
| Students enrolled in extracurricular activities (2002-2003) | 56% |

A spirit of teamwork characterizes the staff and administrative team, a possible factor in the low percentage of CEHS teachers who have retired or left for other positions. In the two years prior to this study, the percentage of students getting free and reduced meals has increased by over 10%, and the number of special education students and the overall student enrollment increased as well. When staff and students moved into a new building, one designed for 1700 students, it was already over capacity. Though teachers were to have office pods around the room for planning and storage, a large percentage of them had to move out of their rooms during certain periods to accommodate students and teachers who needed classroom space.

The staff, like the student population, lacks ethnic diversity; it is comprised of three administrators, 85 certificated teachers, four counselors, and approximately 70 support staff (e.g., para-educators, office and kitchen workers, custodians, and administrative support) most of which are white and fairly stable in their positions at CEHS (see Table 10).

Table 10
Cutting Edge High School Staff Demographics

| <u>Staff Ethnicity</u> | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| American Indian or Alaskan Native | 0% |
| Asian or Pacific Islander | 0% |
| Black | 1% |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Hispanic | 1% |
| White | 98% |
| Teacher turnover including retirement (1998-2003) | 5% |
| Teacher turnover excluding retirement (1998-2003) | 2% |

CEHS was extensively remodeled in August 2002 to create a 240,000-square-foot facility on a 44-acre site; it has 75 teaching stations for general classrooms in business, science, art, and music, as well as professional/technical and health/fitness areas. The multi-use commons/cafeteria area accommodates 800 students for lunch and is also used for dances and community meetings. The new theatre seats 575 and includes an orchestra pit, a full stage, and state-of-the-art lighting. The gymnasium has areas for gymnastics, wrestling, weight training, and dance; it also has four full-size basketball courts and seating for 2,200 spectators. A media center provides students with advanced research and communication capabilities, and classrooms are equipped with Internet and video-conferencing access. Professional and technical facilities include automotive, engineering, drafting, and radio-television production.

In 2001-2002, after three years of steady increase in 10th grade WASL scores, sizeable decreases in all areas occurred, as Table 11 shows. However, in 2002-2003 scores in math and reading increased by 10% and in writing by almost 20%. Statistics reported in Table 10 show that nearly 72% of CEHS graduates go on to post-secondary education, more than half attending a four-year college or university. Increasing numbers of students have taken advanced placement courses, the graduation rate is high, and the dropout rate is less than 1%.

Table 11

Cutting Edge High School 10th Grade WASL Scores

| School Year | 1998-99 | 1999-00 | 2000-01 | 2001-02 | 2002-03 |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Math | 40.6% | 42.8% | 47.9% | 43.1% | 53.1% |
| Reading | 56.7% | 70.3% | 67.8% | 53.0% | 65.0% |
| Writing | 49.4% | 44.1% | 58.9% | 54.9% | 73.5% |
| Listening | 83.1% | 84.8% | 92.4% | 81.9% | 83.3% |
| Science | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 43.8% |

Note. Percentage figures represent students meeting standard in each area. [WASL did not include the Science area until 2002-03.]

CEHS Principal. Leif Smith is a white male, approximately 55 years old.

Immediately following college graduation with a BA degree in education and with a supporting endorsement in political science, he began teaching social studies and a new course in consumer economics at his alma mater, Big Valley High School (BVHS). While teaching, he acquired both a master's degree in international relations and a principal's credential. In 1985 he became athletic director at BVHS, a position he held for three years. He next became assistant principal in charge of discipline at a high school in a large eastern Washington city. Seven years later, in 1995, he accepted the principalship at CEHS and has served there for the past eight years, witnessing the new building construction and the

district's changing from 10-12 to 9-12 high schools. He is currently seeking a high school principalship elsewhere in the Pacific Northwest.

His current routine at CEHS is to rise at 4:00a.m. every morning so that he can do his e-mail, paperwork, and evaluation write-ups at home. Arriving at school by 7:00a.m., he drops off his coat and papers and then is out the door, walking around the building and popping his head into rooms to say hi or good morning. His goal is to make two complete laps of the upstairs and two of the downstairs during the day. During the day he makes it a point to get into several classrooms, observing at least one staff member each day. Mrs. Monroe, one of Principal Smith's assistant principals, confirmed his morning routine: "Leif is a very hands-on administrator. He'll wander around through the building and pop in your classroom and just say hi, just to show he's out there seeing what's going on."

If he is not in his office, the halls, or classrooms, he is likely to be at two of the three lunches, where he thinks an appearance by the principal is very important in a large school. Mrs. Caring, a veteran teacher, commented on his ability to help kids out at lunch, "I've seen him in the lunch room loan money to kids, and I bet he feels bad if he doesn't have it [money to loan]. I bet he runs out. I'll bet most of those kids never pay him back, but he still gives." He considers this sort of visibility a good opportunity to get to know students by talking to them about their activities; he and his administrative team are a presence, not a policing or monitoring group.

Another of his daily administrative tasks is to provide the district office with information and responses to requests. He said, "They are always asking questions. They literally drive the communication with us, always wanting me to do something that takes

about an hour a day. Thankfully, we don't have a lot of district meetings, but I would say on average I am at the district office at least a couple times a week."

Meetings with his administrative team involve supervision schedules, upcoming meetings and events, and other day-to-day responsibilities. Sophie Monroe, one of CEHS assistant principals observed, "He's very good at seeking our [administrators'] input and saying, 'I've got this issue coming up. Tell me what you've been seeing, what your thoughts are, what you have heard, what kids are saying about this or that.' He's very collaborative that way."

Daily, he also receives six to eight telephone calls from parents, meets with two to three parents in regard to some matter that affects their children, and sees three to four students who have requests or a question for him to answer. Matt, a student from the alternative school, commented, "He's the best, he's always out at lunchtime talking to people, and for the most part kids are pretty supportive of him and appreciate him, he's a very good principal, a nice guy and if you need someone to talk to, you can just go talk to him, and he'll just sit there and listen to anything you have to say." For his part, Principal Smith said about students' coming to him daily, "They think that, because I am the principal, I deal with all the things they come to me with. Some things I do, more often not; but I am glad they are coming in here. It gives me a chance to talk to them and help them out if I can."

On a typical day up to five staff members come in to talk to him about curriculum, budget, or some other matter. If he can't talk to them then, he makes sure he goes later to talk with those teachers in staff rooms or their classrooms. Mr. Bright, a teacher for the past 20 years, said, "He has promoted his teachers by plugging them into things that will either

recognize or constructively utilize their skill base. He nominated me by saying, ‘You’re doing really well. Let’s get you some recognition for what you’re doing here.’”

Three nights a week, Principal Smith supervises an activity or event, allowing him to get home about 10:00p.m.

CEHS Assistant Principals. CEHS has two assistant principals, but only one participated in this study; the other was excluded in part because he had been at CEHS for only a few months.

Sophie Monroe, a second year assistant principal at CEHS, came from another district, where she worked at the district level in curriculum and learning services. Prior to her district position, she had earned a bachelor’s degree in journalism and then stayed at home for 13 years, raising her children. When she was ready to work outside the home, she decided against journalism, having enjoyed being involved in her children’s classrooms, volunteering, and working with parent groups. Deciding that she wanted to be in education, she returned to college for a teaching degree and then taught English and math at the middle school level. Later she taught English and was yearbook advisor at high school level for a few years. Though teaching was enjoyable, her work on school committees aroused a desire for leadership, even though she did not initially intend to become an administrator. When others encouraged her to go into administration, she changed course and prepared herself formally for that role. Her first impression of CEHS, she said, was that “the school was very positive. The climate has been very welcoming and supportive. Leif, the principal, as well as the staff were extremely supportive of me right from the beginning.”

CEHS Teacher Participants. CEHS has 75 certificated staff members, more than 10% of whom worked in private industry or the private sector prior to becoming teachers. As

Table 12 shows, the four teachers selected for participation in this study range in age from 30s to mid-50s, and their years of teaching experience from 10 to 27 years. Each is white and has been at CEHS for a minimum of two years; they represent four of the departments at CEHS.

Table 12

Cutting Edge Staff Participants

| Teacher Pseudonyms | Subject Area | Gender | Ethnicity | Age Range | Years of teaching experience | Years at CEHS |
|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Talia Caring | Health/Fitness | Female | White | 45-50 | 27 | 2 |
| Sam Law | Social Studies | Male | White | 50-55 | 20 | 20 |
| Stuart Bright | Media Production | Male | White | 50-55 | 20 | 20 |
| Julie Armstrong | World Languages | Female | White | 30-35 | 10 | 2 |

Mrs. Caring is passionate about her job as 9th grade health teacher. Though she has been at CEHS for only two years, she has already taken a very active role in the building’s culture. She is a recent recipient of a Gates Grant, a \$22,000 “moving schools forward” technology grant given to 1000 Washington State teachers every year from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Mrs. Caring is also the founder and coordinator of the CEHS Step team. She said, “I take those little opportunities to try to get to know the kids, because

we know if they connect with us on a personal level, they'll work harder for us in the classroom and they'll want to come to school more. That's what we want--better education for them.”

Mr. Bright, a 20-year veteran of teaching, previously worked in the automotive industry and was an executive with the Boy Scouts of America--for a total of nine years in the private sector. He now teaches classical mythology, radio and television production, multimedia production, an amateur radio-license class, and a video production and TV class. He is also very active in the local teacher's association. He said of his motivation and inspiration for teaching, “I have a number of kids that come back and say, ‘this was a wonderful experience. I really appreciate what you did for me, and I really enjoyed your class.’ It really makes it all worth it when you see your old students and they thank you for your hard work.”

Mr. Law, also a 20-year teaching veteran, was an attorney for several years. At CEHS he teaches law and government classes, coaches year round cross-country teams, and serves on several building and district committees. He said, “I see kids who don't think they are very good at academic subjects, but they can get excited about law. They will read out of class about law and they begin to achieve at a very high level, a level they haven't really achieved before. All we need to do is get the kids excited about something and they will grow and shine.”

Mrs. Armstrong has been teaching for 10 years, the last two at CEHS. She quickly became involved in many committees and clubs and now spends most of her time as Spanish Club coordinator and head of the World Languages Department. She described her classroom behavior thus: “When they come to class, I'm singing and dancing around so they know this

is a fun place to be. I find out what interests them and incorporate their talents, likes, and dislikes into our sentences to build a rapport with them--kind of personalize things. They know I care about them.”

CEHS Student Participants. Most of CEHS’s 1700+ students are from the surrounding white upper-middle-class neighborhoods. The five student participants chosen for this study were a cross-section of CEHS students. Angela, a senior, is a transfer student, who has been at CEHS for two and a half years, where she has often skipped school, missed classes, and gotten into trouble, and was almost expelled. She was eventually placed in the CEHS alternative school--in the CEHS building, just down the hall from the office--where she now earns straight A’s and is preparing to be the first one in her family to graduate since her great grandmother. She plans to go into photography. She commented about her experiences with building relationships at school, “It’s definitely easier to have a good relationship with a teacher or administrator once you get to know them outside of the classroom. I’ve worked in the office as a TA and have gotten to know so many people, it is awesome, and they really motivate and encourage me to do well.”

Lorenzo, also a senior, is very athletic, playing varsity football and acting as one of the captains of the wrestling team. He is involved in the Associated Student Body leadership class; is the honor society treasurer; and serves on various school and student committees. Next fall he will be attending the Naval Academy to study engineering. He commented that administrators “congratulate you personally if you do well in a sport or other activity. They try to get to know as many people as they can and talk to them whenever they see them. I mean they’re always talking to you and smiling. It’s nice to get attention from them; it makes you feel special.”

Aerial, another senior, is very involved at CEHS, training for cross country and track seasons, which she has done all four years, and working in yearbook, journalism, honor society, and Spanish Club. When she graduates this spring, she will be going to Portland State University to study biology and later podiatry. One possible career goal is to become a high school teacher and a coach. About the importance of teacher-student relationships, she said, "Our teachers are full of life and they really take the time to get to know you. They know you not just by name but how you did in cross-country. That personal level really helps me and others stay focused in class."

Mark quit school in Wyoming and moved to eastern Washington. He is now a senior at CEHS, enrolled in the alternative school, which he enjoys. After graduation this spring, he wants to be an exotic car mechanic, heading back to Wyoming and possibly a trade school there. He said of his teachers, "Teachers can make school fun. I came here thinking I would just drop out again, but I got into Mr. C's class and found out he listens to people and he actually asks what we think is fun, what do we want to do. It's cool and it works for us. We wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Mr. C."

A junior, Denae's involvement in school is limited to a few activities and Honor Society; for the most part she enjoys attending school sporting events. Outside of school, at least once a week she volunteers at the local hospital. She commented about the climate at CEHS, "For the most part, it's pretty laid back; most everybody is friends with everybody. There are some cliques, but everybody's pretty friendly, and I think everybody feels safe. The teachers are really friendly, and there are a lot of opportunities for students to get involved in. I really like it here."

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the context of each of the research sites, including descriptive portraits of both building principals as well as brief portraits of each of the participants. The contexts of the schools were presented in terms of the school districts, the schools and their programs, the principals, the assistant principals, the staff and the students.

The following chapter will explore the similarities and differences between the two schools according to the perceptions of the participants in this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS

Introduction

This study focused on the development of descriptive case studies of two public high schools that differ in student learning outcomes as represented on state-mandated assessments. The case studies explored, in general, the question, “What goes on in these

schools that might contribute to or account for the student learning in each site,” with a particular focus on the nature of the administrative leadership in each site. Accordingly, the first step in analysis was to examine each case individually for concepts, themes and categories that emerged from the data. In comparing these across the two cases, there was a marked similarity in the major themes that emerged, which clustered around the choices and actions engaged in by both administrators and teachers and the focus in both sites on relationship-building among administrators, teachers, and students. In each site, then, when considering the contributions to student learning, a broader picture emerged than was anticipated in the original purpose of the study, to explore the nature of administrative leadership that might contribute to student learning. Reflecting on this broader picture, the cross-case analysis presented in this chapter is organized into the three major categories of “Administrators’ Choices and Actions,” “Teachers’ Choices and Actions,” and “Relationship-Building.” Sub-themes under each category are also identified as follows:

1. “Administrators’ Choices and Actions” includes the sub-themes of maintaining a visible presence, walkthroughs and observations, supporting and recognizing teachers, staff, and other administrators and supporting and recognizing students.
2. “Teachers’ Choices and Actions” includes the sub-themes of maintaining a visible presence, creating positive classroom environments, and getting involved.
3. “Relationship-Building” includes the sub-themes of making connections with students, administrator-teacher relationships, teacher-teacher relationships, administrator-student relationships, and teacher-student relationships.

These major categories and sub-themes are explained in the following sections of this chapter.

Administrators' Choices and Actions

The participants in this study focused on several aspects of the administrators' role that seem to contribute to a positive learning environment for students in these schools. These are by no means the only leadership practices engaged in by these administrators; indeed their roles are as complex as in any large high school. However, the "choices and actions" highlighted here seem to stand out for the participants and appeared to result from conscious choices on the part of administrators. This section will discuss the four sub-themes that emerged under this category: maintaining a visible presence, walkthroughs and observations, supporting and recognizing teachers, and supporting and recognizing students.

Maintaining a Visible Presence

The principals in both Powerhouse High School (PHS) and Cutting Edge High School (CEHS) spent much of their time in various tasks related to student learning. These included numerous administrative tasks, preparing for and attending building and district meetings, conversing with teachers or even preparing for a class they might teach. However, in these sites both the principals and other members of the administrative teams (i.e. assistant principals) focus much of this effort on maintaining a visible presence and communicating with students, parents, staff members or community members about the educational needs or issues facing the students.

Assistant Principal Thompson of PHS sums up this administrative role:

We do it all. We will stick our nose out in the cafeteria, classrooms, hallways, community; we even go to the mall, into people's homes, whatever it takes to make sure that students are getting the best possible experience. It's not about filling out paperwork, because that's gonna get done, because everything comes with a deadline,

but being out in the mall [commons], in the hallways, in the classrooms, that doesn't have a deadline, that's just something that needs to be done to make this a great place for everyone to want to come everyday.

With regard to maintaining visibility and the priority it takes over other administrative tasks, administrative teams in both schools saw it as the number one goal in making connections with students. Assistant Principal Monroe of CEHS says she enjoys her time with students, especially at lunchtime and after school activities. She sees her visibility as extremely important to the overall feeling of safety that student's experience. She also feels that the students of CEHS feel safer and more comfortable knowing that the administrators are approachable. Assistant Principal Stevens, another assistant principal at PHS, concurs with Assistant Principal Monroe about being visible and sees the top priority of administrators as maintaining a visible presence with staff, students and parents. Assistant Principal Stevens and the rest of the administrative team at PHS make it a point to be out in the "mall" talking to students and helping them with problems, making sure that they are doing what they need to be doing and are there if the students need them.

Teachers, in both schools, notice and remark on the visibility of their administrators. According to teachers, administrators can be seen in the halls, commons area, classrooms, gyms, and even outside on the grounds throughout the day. A teacher from CEHS notices that the administrators are "everywhere," commenting that they are a "real presence" in the halls, lunchroom and classrooms. Mr. Fields, a social studies teacher at PHS, sees the school administrators in all parts of the school at all times of the day. He mentions that the administrators at PHS are "all over the place" and not afraid to "roll up their sleeves" when they are in classes working with the students. Mr. Fields feels that administrators work hard to be a visible presence to the extent their time allows.

Students also recognize the visibility of administrators, not just as monitors of the school and student body, but also as people who care. Three students from PHS reflect on what they see the school administrators doing:

Principal Johansen [principal] is everywhere, the mall [commons], the halls, at all our games and activities, he'll come in our classes and just kind of stick his head in, look around and say something, and the times he does come in, and he'll sit there, he's always connecting with people, he's kind of just hanging out and kind of wandering around or watching from his box to see what's going on. (Jim, a senior)

I see them out there [mall/commons] and they're talking to teachers, if I walk by, they'll stop me and talk to me for a second or they just stand back and let everything happen, they're very interactive, they're just looking at everybody and hanging out. (Lori, a junior)

The administrators are always out and around, they go around and talk to people while they're watching because they have a lot more stuff to deal with. I like them. I think a lot of the students appreciate them being out there, talking to people and getting to know them. (Carlie, a senior)

Similarly, CEHS students share their thoughts on the administrators' visibility:

Principal Smith is an awesome guy, I see him all over the place and talk to him just about every day, and he comes down to our class all the time and jokes around with us for a while. (Angela, a senior)

I think they [administrators] do a pretty good job of getting out in the halls, they're always out doing something that's related to students, you'll see them walking around and they'll talk to you, like Principal Smith, he'll come up to your lunch table and start talking to you. (Aerial, a senior)

I see them [administrators] strolling around at lunch and passing all the time, they're always out there and you can say hi to them and they will talk to you about anything. (Mark, a senior)

According to teachers from both PHS and CEHS the visibility of administrators-- their choices to be out talking to students, staff and parents during lunches, passing times and before and after school-- makes them approachable and more accessible to all. Mr. Thrower, a thirty-six year veteran art teacher at PHS, feels that administrators' visibility is directly

related to their approachability and credits their visible presence to “perpetuating a positive, supportive attitude” among the staff and school. Mr. Thrower sees this presence and accessibility as the reasons why the administrators are very aware of the needs of staff and students. Mr. Bright, a teacher of media production and a twenty-year veteran of CEHS, feels the same about his principal in relation to his visibility and student needs. He mentions that through his conversations with students he has come to the conclusion that most students think Principal Smith is very accessible and listens to their ideas, issues and concerns; they think he is “great.” Mr. Bright also mentions that Principal Smith works closely with the leadership class and its students and that has a big impact on the school climate and the quality of the events and programs that CEHS conducts.

Teachers, students and staff also note administrators’ visible presence at after school activities and sporting events. They think it’s a great opportunity for students to see the administrators outside of the normal school day. Mrs. Young, a special education teacher at PHS, notices that the administrators are “all over the place,” mixing and mingling with students, before and after school, as well as at many of the school activities. She feels their presence helps with the behavior of the students and also allows them time to interact so the students know they are there if needed. She sees the administrators having fun with students rather than intimidating them. Similarly, Mrs. Caring, a health and fitness teacher from CEHS comments:

[Principal Smith] attends a lot of the activities. He wants to know what’s going on. He goes to the concerts, the drama things, the Step Team things, the leadership team meetings, parades, etc. I mean only three staff members were at the local parade, but our principal, Principal Smith, and one of our vice-principals were there. It says a lot to those students and the community to see them out and about.

Walkthroughs and Observations

Administrators from both sites conduct classroom walkthroughs and observations. By law, school principals and assistant principals must observe and evaluate their teaching staff at least two times during the year. However, in both schools the administrators see this as more than a responsibility; they see visits to classrooms and observations as an opportunity to provide support and feedback to teachers, and more important, an opportunity to see what students are doing. Principal Johansen of PHS really wants to observe the interaction between a teacher and students, feeling that this interaction has an important impact on students. Principal Johansen wants to know that the teacher's teaching objective in a particular lesson is clear, and whether or not the students know what the objective is. He wants to know how teachers intend to measure whether students have met the objective and whether the students are able to show that they understood the material being taught. He makes it clear to the teaching staff at the beginning of the year that he wants them to be thinking about such things all the time as they are teaching. Principal Johansen shares his thoughts about the goal of walkthroughs:

Every time I do a walk through, I give out some kind of feedback to the teacher, something positive. I am not going to comment on pedagogy, or assessment, I want to see interaction and impact. I may ask a question about something, but I'm going to find something positive and I'm going to send that back. I want them to know I'm there.

Principal Smith, the principal at CEHS sees the observation or walkthrough as a tool to assess what is going on in the classroom. He goes into the rooms looking for a motivated, inspiring teacher who has good strategies, and management skills and is enhancing the student's learning through engaging activities. Principal Smith feels that observations and walkthroughs are critical and had this to say about the role trust plays in those observations:

The process [observations/walkthroughs] builds trust and rapport between the administrator and the staff member that really can allow that to be a critical growth tool, because if you are in a trusting relationship you can make suggestions or comments or share in a decision. That can't happen if you have that person on the defensive.

Observations and unannounced walkthroughs can be intimidating and uneasy for staff and students alike. However, the administrative teams in each building work to prepare the staff and students for these unannounced walkthroughs in hopes that they become a routine for teachers and students. Prior to the school year beginning, teachers are reminded that administrators will be popping in periodically throughout the year for informal and usually quick observations or walkthroughs, with the purpose being able to get a consistent idea of the particular classroom environment and student engagement throughout the year. Mrs. Young, a special education teacher at PHS, recognizes that Principal Johansen spends a lot of time going to classrooms and, from talking to various teachers, she found out that he poses very similar types of questions to each of them, usually dealing with what you want the students to learn from the lesson, why you think it's important that they learn this, and how is it going to affect their lives, their future. Mrs. Young also mentioned that Principal Johansen always stresses those questions whenever he observes teachers and much of the feedback or conversations following those observations or walkthroughs deal with those questions. Mrs. Young had this to say about Principal Johansen's feedback:

After the observations he [Principal Johansen] really wants to talk, and he points out really good things making sure he lets me know if I improved from the previous year. He always makes me feel like I'm doing a good job, and at the same time, he's always there for suggestions; he's very helpful.

Mrs. Young's opinion of Principal Johansen's walkthroughs and/or observations and his feedback are similar to those of her PHS colleague, Mr. Fields, a social studies teacher.

Mr. Fields notes that Principal Johansen's walkthroughs are always unannounced, and most of the time he just walks in the door, leans up against the counter and just watches for maybe 60 seconds, and then he leaves; the next day Mr. Fields would find a note in his mailbox mentioning what Principal Johansen thought of the lesson or what he thought of the concept Mr. Fields was teaching. Mr. Fields also mentioned that Principal Johansen sometimes offers suggestions even when he does just a quick 2-minute walkthrough. Also noteworthy is that when Principal Johansen sits down with Mr. Fields to talk about his lesson or his observed teaching methods, he asks the kind of questions that really can make a teacher think about what they have done and what they may do next time. Mr. Fields touches on the types of questions and feedback Principal Johansen is trying to get from him and what he does for him:

He's really big on the questions of what were you trying to accomplish and how do you know at the end that the students got what you were trying to give them. I love talking about the observations and breaking them down with him; he truly helps me.

Not all teachers agree that the administrators do enough in regard to their presence in the classroom. In fact, Mrs. Armstrong, a world languages teacher at CEHS, shares her opinion in regard to the presence of administrators in the classroom:

I've always felt that it would be great if administrators were dropping in a lot more often and really seeing what we're doing; really seeing what the students are doing and how we're engaging them or how we're not engaging them. They [administrators] need to truly be giving us suggestions about how to improve our teaching and nurturing of our students. I just don't see that as much as I think we should.

Even though walkthroughs and observations are usually associated with classroom instruction, they can also be conducted during a teacher's preparatory period or during various curriculum or grade level meetings. A couple of the teachers from PHS specifically

mentioned that most of their curriculum or grade level meetings were attended by an administrator, in fact, according to Mr. Fields, “just yesterday” Principal Johansen walked through their department meeting and sat down and stayed for about 20 minutes. According to Mr. Fields this is the impact Principal Johansen had on that meeting:

He came right in, sat down and joined us as we were talking about what we can do to improve student-writing skills in our social studies classes. He was right there offering suggestions and before he left he said, “say the word and I will get you that half day, I’ll get you guys an in-service to look into this further.”

Supporting and Recognizing Teachers, Staff and Administrators

Teachers, students and other administrators in both of the schools recognize the importance of the principal showing support and recognition for their hard work. It was observed in both schools that administrators, who spend time in classrooms and motivate their staff and students by sharing accomplishments or a touching story, can have an impact on their school. However, it was also mentioned that administrators can be appreciated for things they don’t do. For example, Assistant Principal Stevens at PHS appreciates that Principal Johansen doesn’t “micro-manage.” If Principal Johansen has a question about the master schedule he comes to Assistant Principal Stevens and asks, what are we doing and why are we doing it. According to Assistant Principal Stevens, Principal Johansen doesn’t make the decisions that would affect the master schedule unless he confers with Assistant Principal Stevens first. If there’s something that has to do with student behavior and discipline, Principal Johansen goes to Assistant Principal Thompson because that’s his area. As a team Principal Johansen, Assistant Principal Stevens and Assistant Principal Thompson are always talking to each other but not “second-guessing” each other’s decisions.

In addition, Assistant Principal Stevens and Assistant Principal Thompson share the opinion that Principal Johansen spends as much time in classrooms as any administrator they have ever worked with or met, and, because of the large amount of time spent in the classrooms, the teachers know he cares about what they are doing. Every year when PHS has their end of the year staff meeting Principal Johansen shares what the school accomplished that year, debriefing and sharing test data, AP scores, students and teacher accomplishments, and many other uplifting comments. Assistant Principal Stevens and Assistant Principal Thompson add that Principal Johansen always ends the meeting talking about how important it is to treat students with respect and to get to know their names by saying hi to them in the hall and going to their activities, because you never know how you might impact a student.

Administrators from both schools feel it is important to support and recognize the staff and teachers for the jobs they have done and/or are doing. Principal Johansen goes one step further and handwrites a note to every teacher before the school year begins and at least one or two during the school year. Likewise, he always sends a Christmas card to each of his staff, in which he writes something personal to each teacher. He writes cards to people all the time, success cards and little notes to teachers, students and parents, whenever he has reason or gets the chance. This gesture can be seen as motivating, inspiring or just in good faith; at any rate it is recognized by those who receive the letters or cards.

Teachers and staff are motivated by meaningful praise and support from the administrative team as well as their peers. Mr. Thrower, an art teacher at PHS, acknowledges that Principal Johansen will support teachers by sending them cards or putting little notes in their boxes. Mr. Thrower also shares that Principal Johansen has been known to go out of his way to walk down the hall and say hi, “how’s it going, keep up the good work.” According to

Mr. Thrower, Principal Johansen supports and recognizes his teachers in everything they do, even to the point of going overboard sometimes, putting himself at risk with the district at times to support teachers. Mr. Thrower shares his perception of what Principal Johansen does for teachers:

He's going to fight like heck to try and get someone to do something for teachers. He's the supportive, open-minded sounding board if you want to do something differently. Within reason, he will do what ever it takes to make a teacher happy, he really cares about the teachers around him.

Jim, a senior at PHS, thinks that teachers are happy and feel supported because Principal Johansen allows the teachers to do what they want; "they don't have to go by the book," they are trusted with the freedom to make their own choices on how they teach. Jim recognizes the support and freedom given to the teachers as a key to teachers being comfortable in their jobs, which in turn makes it more comfortable for students.

Mrs. Caring, a health and fitness teacher at CEHS, was amazed by the support she received from Principal Smith:

One day I was just walking out of my room during my prep, carrying my laptop and he stopped me to ask if everything was ok. I told him it wasn't working and I was having this difficulty try to troubleshoot, so he escorted me down to our tech guy. He didn't need to take his time to do that, but we chatted on the way and he brought me in and he wasn't here, so he got on the phone immediately to the head of the technology department in the district, got them on the phone right there, and then he tried to troubleshoot the problems with me.

She felt Principal Smith took a very personal interest in her job and her predicament at the time. Again, she was amazed that he cared about her enough to take the time to help her troubleshoot and to relieve her stress.

Mr. Fields, a social studies teacher at PHS has had a similar experience with his principal, Principal Johansen, who has repeatedly offered him and anyone else on the staff

any type of training opportunities they feel they need. If Mr. Fields wants to attend a training or get together with the other Advanced Placement teachers across the district, Principal Johansen will give him that opportunity; in fact Principal Johansen will go so far as to “call the district and set up a training time.” Principal Johansen wants to be supportive of people’s ideas related to interdisciplinary teaming and training, whether it’s allowing them to go to a conference, providing for sub-time, observing them, or providing ideas and suggestions. He wants to be supportive of teacher’s ideas, what ever they may be. The same can be said for Principal Smith at CEHS. It was mentioned by a few of his teachers that Principal Smith said on several occasions that if an individual, group or recognized club needed something (e.g.. space, funding, assistance), that they could come to him with the request and he will see what he could do.

This type of support for professional development and student involvement is something that is also fostered at CEHS. Many of the teachers interviewed mentioned that the members of the administrative team were constantly planning things that would help the staff and teachers enhance student learning. Principal Smith and his administrative team at CEHS make it a point to create opportunities for the staff to attend seminars, workshops, trainings or any other event seen as valuable for professional development. Mrs. Caring, a health and fitness teacher at CEHS, feels that the administrators challenge teachers to learn additional strategies and skills, and that a lot of that happens through the in-service days, district trainings and regular scheduled teacher meetings.

Assistant Principal Stevens of PHS recognizes the workload that most teachers carry and shares his thoughts on giving them one more task:

I’m not going to ask teachers to take more time out of their day [speaking to a series of projects that were requested that teachers do], which takes them away from the

types of things that they're trying to do for students. I mean we already ask them to meet several times a month with students, outside of their regular teaching schedule, with their colleagues, with district personnel, and to tack on more, I'm not going to do it.

Mrs. Caring, a teacher at CEHS, felt as though she was being put first when she interviewed for her current position. She shares her first impression of Principal Smith and CEHS:

He [Principal Smith] leaned in as I answered questions, taking notes, looking at me, making eye contact, smiling and responding to what I was saying and he acted excited about what I was presenting and he's carried through with that, every time I see him, he acts interested in what I'm doing.

Both schools' administrative teams look out for the staff and teachers, encouraging them to have a very active voice in the decision making process. Assistant Principal Stevens of PHS feels the administrative team does a lot to show teachers that they are genuinely listening and looking out for them. He cited an example from the previous school year. PHS teachers felt that administrators were not holding students accountable enough for inappropriate student behavior. With the urging of the teachers, the administrative team revised the way they deal with student discipline, and many of the teachers have commented on the change in students' behavior. In addition, when a teacher refers a student for discipline, it is now common practice for the administrator to follow up with the teacher, letting the teacher know what transpired between the administrator and the student. This communication between the teacher and the administrator was not always practiced in the past, but with the urging of the teaching staff, it has become a common practice.

Supporting and Recognizing Students

Observations of both principals indicated that one of the many similarities between them was their practice of showing appreciation to students. Both principals make it a point of noticing when student engage in positive behavior, like picking up the food and garbage on their tables and throwing it away, or helping others put chairs away at lunch or after class, and letting the students know they appreciate their actions. Further, administrators at both schools focus on communication with parents and make a lot of phone calls to let parents know that their child is doing well.

Both schools in this study are doing several other things to ensure that students feel supported and recognized. For example, Principal Johansen at PHS will cut out newspaper articles or pictures that mention one of his students, laminate it and send it home with a note to the parents. In return, he gets many calls from parents and students thanking him for his recognition. Principal Smith at CEHS admits he doesn't know all the students, but after a choir or band concert, sports activity or assembly he knows who did a solo or a great performance, and he writes a note to those students and tries to follow up the next day to congratulate them. Principal Smith, like Principal Johansen, will typically stay after an event to congratulate the performing group.

The assistant principals at both schools also mentioned that they write notes to students periodically. If an administrator sees a student who seems a bit down or a little hyperactive or perhaps who's just having a good day, the administrator will write a nice note of encouragement. The assistant principals also pay close attention to students who are trying to make adjustments or changes in their behavior and their performance. This is when administrators are most apt to write the students a note or give them a pat on the back or call

their parents. Sometimes at lunch, both Principal Johansen and Principal Smith will sit down and talk with a group of students or wish them well in a particular activity.

Students recognize that administrators are supporting and recognizing the students' efforts. Jim, a senior at PHS, recalls Principal Johansen's routine when it comes to recognizing students for their accomplishments:

He'll [Principal Johansen] read things about students and then he'll try and talk to them, so he can talk to you about something that you are doing or have done. If you win an award or something, he'll know about it and then he'll, like, if he sees you, he'll say, hey congratulations, or he will read your name and accomplishment over the loud speaker during the daily announcements. It makes you feel like he knows you. He may not get to everybody, but I'm pretty sure he knows everybody in the school. He maybe doesn't talk with them, but he knows who they are.

Carlie, another senior at PHS agrees with Jim and feels especially good when her personal accomplishments are shared in her classes, over the announcements, or through personal communication. That really means a lot to her, and she thinks it means a lot to other students who get that "special" attention.

Teachers from both schools are also aware of the recognition the students are getting from administrators. At PHS Mrs. Young, a special education teacher, and Mr. Thrower, an art teacher, specifically notice Principal Johansen taking on many responsibilities in regard to student welfare; from counseling certain students who feel comfortable with him to motivating students in preparation for the 10th grade WASL. According to Mrs. Young, when the WASL testing period comes around, Principal Johansen makes it a point to talk to the sophomores, letting them know the importance and purpose of the WASL. Principal Johansen has students set goals for themselves and asks students to prove to themselves that they can succeed. Both Mrs. Young and Mr. Thrower mentioned that Principal Johansen wants to motivate students and that last year he read every single WASL paper; he even came

to Mrs. Young's room to tell her he read one of her student's papers and was really impressed.

At both schools administrators mentioned that they want students to be happy. Assistant Principal Stevens at PHS does as much as he can to try and make sure that students are happy with their classes and their teachers. When students are given their schedules at PHS, they are told if they don't like their schedule, the assigned classes or teachers, they can come to the office and make changes, so students have opportunities to make adjustments to their schedule before they actually wind up in class. It creates a lot of work for the counselors and administrators, but according to Assistant Principal Stevens, if a student goes into class with the right attitude, the student is going to be more successful.

There is little doubt from the data that the staff in these schools focuses on supporting students, and, according to Mrs. Armstrong, a world language teacher at CEHS, that is exactly what students need. Mrs. Armstrong feels that some students don't have enough support at home, so it is hard for them to come to school with any motivation or chance for success. She stated, "Once they are at school they need to have their basic needs met, and feel accepted and supported by both teachers and their peers. Once they feel good about themselves and their environment then they can strive and learn and grow." This idea of meeting students basic needs ties into Principal Johansen's philosophy of how a student should be treated, regardless of the situation. According to Principal Johansen, students need to be treated with dignity, respect and love. He mentioned that students have done the stupidest, most unjust things, and, as hard as it is sometimes, administrators and teachers must treat the students with dignity and respect, even when they don't deserve it.

In addition to meeting students' basic needs, both schools are supporting students through additional learning and growth opportunities. Both schools currently bring in inspirational speakers, who address each school's particular interest or agreed upon themes.

Assistant Principal Stevens at PHS explains the programs they offer for students:

We had a student program called the eight open doors, and it focused on respect and tolerance issues, and this year we have a gentleman come in to work with students and staff in the building and understanding those respect, getting along, making students feel more comfortable types of issues. All students will have an advisory called Paw Tracks where students discuss goal setting, career choices, achievement in current classes and portfolios. This year we instituted a reading/writing workshop where they get English credit for going to an intensive reading strategies and writing strategies workshop.

These schools also have more indirect ways to support students. For example, both PHS and CEHS administrative teams make it a point to examine WASL results and determine how students did on each of the test items. Following the identification of areas that need work, the departments are given the test results broken down into strong and weak areas. Currently, both schools' curriculum departments are working to adjust the curriculum to address the identified areas of weakness. Likewise, both schools are consistently checking student's grades and performance in the classroom. Administrators get printouts of names of students who have one or more F's in a specific term or are below a certain GPA. The administrators visit with every one of these students, contacting their families, working with their counselor and generally organizing an effort to support the students. Specifically, at CEHS, those students who fall into this category are required to attend tutoring sessions and homework sessions, which, according to Assistant Principal Monroe, has been great for the students' self-esteem and GPA.

Teachers' Choices and Actions

The participants in this study identified a number of teachers' practices that seem to contribute to a positive learning environment for students. These identified practices are by no means the only practices engaged in by these teachers; indeed their roles are as complex as in any large high school. However, the "choices and actions" highlighted here seem to stand out for the participants and appeared to result from conscious choices on the part of teachers. This section will discuss the three sub-themes that emerged under this category: maintaining a visible presence, creating positive classroom environments, and getting involved.

Maintaining a Visible Presence

Like the administrators in these schools, teachers spend much of their time outside of the classroom maintaining a visible presence and communicating with students, parents, staff members or community members about the educational needs or issues facing the students. For instance, many teachers spend time in the halls talking to students and other staff and can be seen attending activities before and after school as well.

Principal Johansen of PHS recalls that as he walks around on a daily basis he sees teachers out in the halls talking to students, other teachers, secretaries, para-educators, food service people and custodians. Mrs. Young and Mr. Fields, a special education and social studies teacher respectively, are two teachers at PHS that make themselves visible to students. Mr. Fields has gotten so comfortable walking around that he can walk into other parts of the school and see people from other departments and never feel like they're disconnected from what he is doing in his classroom. Mrs. Peterson, another art teacher at

PHS, agrees and feels that teachers are a lot more accessible and approachable for students because they are in the halls, the “mall,” at after school activities and available for help whenever a student may need it. She feels that the climate at PHS would be much different if the teachers chose not to walk around and mingle with other staff and students.

This is characteristic of CEHS as well. According to Assistant Principal Monroe, staff and teachers wander the halls and commons area in the morning, during passing periods, and after school. Assistant Principal Monroe sees many of them talking to students and making an effort to get to know them; she believes, “Our teachers like to have relationships with students and you can see that by watching them when they are out and about.” Mrs. Caring, a health and fitness teacher at CEHS, makes sure she is visible all the time, and she has noticed several other teachers doing the same. She shares what she saw on her way to the interview for this study:

When I was coming down to meet you [the researcher], there was a teacher, who happens to be a PE teacher, upstairs just hanging out with some students, chatting about their lives. These students were just sitting around at a table staring up at him as he talked. I see this all the time with the staff here.

The teachers that participated in this study are a visible presence for students. Some are a little more noticeable and purposeful, but nevertheless they are all highly visible. Mr. Thrower, a veteran art teacher at PHS, is purposeful in his effort to be visible. He spends time in the halls hanging out and talking to students that he doesn’t even have in class. As he walks down the hall, he tries to get students to say hi to him. He feels that this makes students more comfortable with him and other teachers just because he is out there. Two PHS students attest to this behavior:

Certain teachers say hi to anybody in the hallway even if they don’t know them. Most of them have a vested interest in our learning, I mean, they’re out there, they’re not

just hiding in their rooms and teaching all day and then going home, they want to make an impact on student's lives and they are. (Jim, a senior)

Teachers are everywhere; they hang out with us while we are doing our work in class and when they see you in the hallway they say hi. We're not afraid to go talk to them before school if you're having a problem in class. They don't intimidate you, and they are always there to talk. (Carlie, a senior)

Creating Positive Classroom Environments

In these schools, teachers use a variety of teaching methods and classroom strategies that appear to contribute to positive classroom environments. Both schools have schedules that have 80-minute periods, which, according to both teachers and students, allow for building and fostering better relationships between teachers and students. Teachers at both PJH and CEHS create their own learning environments and classroom climates by offering extra help if needed and taking the time to show their students that they care by getting to know them. Mrs. Armstrong, a world language teacher at CEHS, feels that a productive classroom needs to be interactive and full of learning activities. She describes a normal class period in her room:

There is a lot of energy, and you can see it. There is very little wasted time and more facilitation by the teacher so there can be more engagement by the students, not just a teacher lecture. My class is choreographed, so there are many opportunities for learning. I address all the different types of learning and abilities by breaking my class into smaller learning pieces, sometimes six to eight different activities each 80-minute period; this way the information will sink in. Through the choreography of my class period I can make sure students have a lot of opportunities to interact with the material and to experience it in multiple ways: reading, writing, listening, interacting, speaking, and acting. We make sure we are having a lot of fun, and if I am having fun and the students are enjoying themselves, it should lead to a productive environment.

Assistant Principal Monroe, Mrs. Armstrong's supervisor and evaluator, recently spent some time in Mrs. Armstrong's classroom, where she noticed the multiple activities and space changes in the short 45 minute time period she was there. To Assistant Principal Monroe, it

seemed that Mrs. Armstrong had a 10-minute activity and then a 20-minute activity and then another 15-minute activity, and each one built on the other, with the students moving around, working in pairs for some activities, and whole groups for others. She noticed there was a direct instruction piece, but it was never just the teacher standing up and talking. Assistant Principal Monroe was very impressed by the student engagement in the classroom and mentioned that, while it depends on the content being taught, she wished more classes were being taught in an interactive engaging way.

This example of a productive classroom learning environment at CEHS can be partially attributed to how teachers are using their large amount of instructional time. Teachers and students at CEHS have commented on how the use of the longer 80-minute period has contributed to improved student learning and the reduction in stress and behavior problems in students. Many of the teachers interviewed believe the stress level in students and teachers is lower because both teachers and students are dealing with fewer subjects during the day and more time in each class period, which gives both students and teachers opportunities to get to know one another better. Denaë, a junior at CEHS, shares her feelings about her teachers:

Most of our teachers will start a conversation with you before, after or even during class; they don't just stand up in front of the class and teach, they make it fun and interesting. I'm really comfortable around my teachers and that is because they make class fun and take the time to get to know us. I think if I was having problems outside of school, I would feel comfortable talking to my teachers, because I know they'd be able to help me.

Lorenzo and Aerial, both seniors at CEHS, say that having only four classes each day and more time in those classes allows the teachers and students to get to know one another better. They feel that this longer period really breaks up the instruction, making it “not as

boring and impersonal.” Jim, a senior at PHS, has had similar experiences with his teachers making class fun and getting to know the students, which he attributes to teachers feeling comfortable with their jobs; when teachers are comfortable, they make the students comfortable. According to Jim, teachers get to teach they way they want and do projects and assignments that they like to do, which then makes teaching more enjoyable for them, and that filters down to the students. Jim explains why he likes his classes and his teachers:

I like all my teachers; they’re all really open, laid back and helpful, really cool people. The teachers here make it comfortable, more personal, it’s not hierarchical where they think they are better than everybody else, and students are respected here. In class they get on the same level as you so they can explain things and you can talk to them on a personal level, which make learning so much more purposeful.

In contrast, Luke, another senior at PHS, has had different experiences with teachers, due in part to his dislike of school in general. According to Luke, it all depends on the teachers, because not all teachers take the time to get to know their students or make their class fun. He shares that there are certain teachers that he likes; his art teacher, for example, is said to be “really cool” because she helps all of her students. Luke says, “She doesn’t just teach, she tells stories about her life and tries to help all of her students as much as possible.” Some of Luke’s other teachers will take time to get to know students and learn some things about them, but not all of them. It seems that only some of them know he sits out in the mall during lunch and breaks playing his guitar; Luke states that he feels more comfortable in classes of teachers who notice his interests.

Principal Johansen of PHS recalls a classroom where the teacher had created a climate that allowed students to feel absolutely comfortable and at ease with their learning:

Students can write these papers using some incredible writing techniques. He is getting students to write about who they are and what’s important to them, and then they read it out loud in front of the class. I was there when a girl read her story about

her boyfriend, and I heard a boy read a story about his father. You don't just do that, these are seniors in high school that are writing stuff that's fairly vulnerable for them, but the teacher created this climate where they're very comfortable with sharing because they have real strong relationships within their class. Our teachers are getting students to make the content synonymous with who they are.

Mr. Fields, a social studies teacher at PHS, mentioned a similar strategy that helps him get his students focused and interested in his class. He starts with a "hook" each day, one that gets students' attention. He really feels that he has to convince the students that his classroom is where they need to be, and only then will they want to be there. To do this he uses a lot of humor and visual aids, tells stories and draws pictures, whatever it takes to keep the students interested and coming to class.

This idea of getting students interested in school and coming to class every day is not unique to Mr. Fields or to either of the schools. Administrative teams and teaching staffs at both schools recognize that students come to school with personal issues they are dealing with, so it is important to reach them and connect them to their learning. Assistant Principal Thompson at PHS stated:

They [students] are dying for that connection, they're dying to understand every day what they're learning, and how is it going to help them in the real world. These students with all the issues want something to work for them, something that will help them feel comfortable. They want to know how these lessons can relate to them and their issues they live with everyday and whether or not there is any hope for the future. It's that connection piece; where everyday we [all staff] try to connect to our students.

Mr. Thrower, an art teacher at PHS, agrees in that he sees teachers trying to get students to understand how good they can be. He feels students can see the reality of their own potential if teachers help them to develop a direction. He shares these thoughts:

If we [teachers and administrators] can get our students to have direction and to expect the direction to become a reality, you have more of an opportunity for the students to have success. They don't have to work as hard; they don't have to work as

long, so they work better, smarter. I think that's a concept that we're trying to do all the time, because everyday there's more and more stuff for our students to learn, but they have the potential to be successful if they believe in their chosen direction.

Getting Involved

Teachers at both schools are trying many things to get students to be engaged in their education and perform at high levels. The teachers get involved in committees, assume leadership positions, take on coaching and advising, and even spend time at their students' extracurricular activities to show support. In fact, it was mentioned by an administrator from each school that many of the school activities and programs outside of the academic classroom would not be available if it weren't for the support and involvement of teachers.

At both PHS and CEHS teachers are leaders on the site council--the site council chair is a teacher at both schools. Teachers are involved with district curriculum committees and building committees, as well as their local chapter of the Washington Education Association, and serve as curricular leaders in their content area. The opportunities for teachers to be involved at each school are numerous. At PHS at least half of the teachers coach sports teams, and of the half that do not coach, many are involved in music, drama, debate, or some other club or organization. According to Principal Johansen of PHS, his staff is involved at high levels:

Very few, I mean very few of our teachers, I could count them on two hands, come to school in the morning and leave in the afternoon and don't do anything other than their class, which is fabulous, it's just fabulous.

Mr. Law, a social studies teacher at CEHS for 20 years has a similar take on the staff involvement and commitment at CEHS. He shares that most of the teachers on staff are involved in something in school life. He notes that teachers are "all over the place" on

weekends, working and preparing things for the next week. According to Mr. Law, very few teachers just teach at CEHS, they are a hard working group who genuinely care about giving kids the best education.

Not only do many teachers get involved by coaching or advising a club or organization, they also make it a point to get to know their students outside the classroom either before, during, or after school. Assistant Principal Monroe at CEHS mentions that many teachers attend games, plays, concerts, and other student activities. Mr. Law, who is also a year-round coach at CEHS, feels that he is the kind of teacher that takes a very active role in the students' lives. Through his coaching and his real world experience as an attorney, coupled with his down to earth personality, Mr. Law sees himself as the teacher students are inclined to come to when they have any questions or problems. He attributes this to his involvement and the sense of trust he has created with students.

Some teachers choose to take their involvement with students a step further, making a deeper connection with their students. Mrs. Armstrong, a world language teacher at CEHS, decided to get involved with her 28 TAP [teaching advisory period] students over the summer, setting goals and creating relationships, which have made the class a very tight group. An art teacher from PHS, Mr. Thrower engages in a similar relationship building process with many of his art students. He gets to know them, their lives outside of school, their interests, their strengths and their weaknesses, and then he strengthens those relationships by talking to them and supporting them in their activities.

At both schools, teacher involvement is not something that goes unnoticed, especially not by students. Students seem to recognize that teachers are there for them. Angela, a senior transfer student at CEHS sums up the CEHS, staff involvement from a student point of view:

All of our club advisors, coaches, and mentors are teachers. They're here to see you in the morning; my math teacher, he's there for me every morning because I don't understand calculus, my bio [biology] teacher will be there for me every morning if I need her help. They all go and watch school activities and sports. Most importantly they are our friends, they are there for us, and they support us in every way.

Lorenzo, a senior from CEHS feels similarly toward the CEHS staff in regard to their involvement. Active in athletics, leadership and various clubs, Lorenzo notes that all of his advisors and coaches are teachers and very involved in and around school. He also mentions that a lot of teachers are involved in extracurricular activities or clubs after school or before school. He even points out that there is a teacher that comes in for wrestling, "he's not a coach but he just comes in and volunteers to help out just because he likes it and he likes students." Lorenzo feels the more teachers get involved, the easier they are to talk to and the more it makes students feel safe and comfortable.

Not only does CEHS junior Denae recognize that the CEHS staff is very involved in advising or coaching activities, she also notices the time teachers take before, during and after school to offer extra help for those that need it. According to Denae, "pretty much every teacher in school offers extra help before or after school; they really are there for us when we need them."

Administrators in these schools encourage teachers to interact with one another about curriculum, sound instructional practices, instructional methodologies, etc. This collaborative behavior leads to a coaching type relationship among teachers, which inevitably makes those teachers involved better equipped to deliver meaningful instruction. Administrators in both buildings have noticed an increase in teacher collaboration since the expectations for students passing the WASL became more of a priority. Both Principal Johansen and Principal Smith

have witnessed teachers meeting during their prep period, lunch, and before and after school to discuss various teaching strategies, assessment methods, and use of class time.

In the classroom, teachers at both schools attempt to create a social and developmental experience for students. Teachers have mentioned that if students feel safe and welcome in the classroom, then students are going to learn at a higher level. According to PHS Assistant Principal Thompson, teachers recognize the different cliques in the classroom and purposely group students to work with different people. This method of grouping fosters the social and developmental experiences that students need to perform at higher levels. Assistant Principal Thompson believes that teachers who group their students outside of their comfort zone really care about getting all students involved.

Relationship-Building

The theme of relationship building emerged early on in the data analysis and became one of the core categories for this study. Participants in this study shared several views, not only on the importance of relationship building in the school, but also concerning the practices that have facilitated relationship building. This section will discuss the five sub-themes that emerged under this category: making connections with students, administrator-teacher relationships, teacher-teacher relationships, administrator-student relationships, and teacher-student relationships.

Making Connections with Students

Participants in this study consistently mentioned that building relationships with students depends on making “connections” with them. It was stated more than once that with

the many differences between students and teachers including age group and level of education, it is not always easy to find ways to connect with students. But, according to the teachers and students at both schools, it's not always about the specific connection made between the adult and the student, but the effort taken to make a connection.

Administrators from both PHS and CEHS have similar philosophies about making connections with students, and thus similar experiences in making their own connections to students. They recognize that it is hard for administrators in each building to know every student's name, but they realize that the more names they do know, the more opportunities they have to talk to students about things that interest them. These connections, according to the administrators, help a lot when it comes to building a long relationship of trust and getting student buy-in on various issues. Principal Johansen at PHS shares an experience he had with a student as he conducted a classroom walkthrough:

Today I spent first period in our metal shop class, and while I was in there walking around seeing what the students were doing, I asked a student to show me how to weld, show me how are you doing this, what do you do. If it's a student you don't know, which this was, I just said, hi, I'm Principal Johansen, what's your name, I don't think I've met you yet, he responded and spent the next ten minutes showing me and explaining to me what he was doing. We started by making a connection, and now we have the beginning of a relationship.

Teachers from both PHS and CEHS see their principals engaged in this type of connection making all the time. Mrs. Peterson, an art teacher at PHS, mentioned that Principal Johansen does a "great" job making connections with students. She goes on to say that he makes it a point, almost a goal, to make connections with different students each day, so much as to say she has never heard a student say "let's get rid of that awful principal, he's never around." Mrs. Caring, a health and fitness teacher at CEHS sees a similar connection between Principal Smith and the CEHS students, expressing that he really makes it a point to

connect with students at lunch, at after school activities and when he comes into the classrooms.

Teachers also make connections with students all the time, according to the teachers in this study. Teachers constantly try to find out what activities students are involved in, and then talk to them about those activities or even their own interests if they are relevant to that student. Teachers at both schools feel that making these connections with students shows students that they care and are genuinely interested in getting to know them. In addition, teachers from both schools mentioned observing several support staff talking to students, helping them, and even cheering them on at activities. According to the teachers interviewed, this happens because it is a school goal or focus to make connections with students, to really show that the school and the people within it support them.

Mrs. Caring, a health and fitness teacher at CEHS shares the effort she makes daily to connect with students, especially those she doesn't know:

I let students come in and eat lunch in my room with me at lunchtime; we just chat about whatever and there are always students that come in the mornings, they don't have a place to hang out. Everyday I see a couple girls sitting on the floor at lunchtime and everyday I invite them in to eat in my room, and they don't know me, I'm not their teacher, but I don't care, it's a fun way to get to meet students and I think most teachers feel that way, they just want to get to know you.

Mrs. Caring also mentioned that she knew of a teacher who lets students come in and play games like X-Box and Play Station II during lunch, because these students represent a segment of the student population that isn't involved in athletics, drama or some other organization. This teacher offers these activities that he enjoys himself because, according to Mrs. Caring, he recognizes that these students don't connect well with other students.

Mrs. Young, a special education teacher at PHS, shares what she does in an effort to have students make connections with adults or other students:

There are so many opportunities here for the students, as far as sports and leadership classes and groups. If teachers see that there's a depressed student, we can make a connection, or I am going to hook him up with a group. If you have a new freshman coming in and they're not transitioning very well, there's a group for that, exchange student not dealing with the atmosphere, there's a group for that. If I am not the best person to make them feel comfortable, then I am going to find a group or someone else who can.

Teacher participants from both schools share their perceptions of their relationships with their administrators. According to the teachers, administrators from both sites are there for teachers; they spend time with them and listen to their questions, concerns and complaints over and over again, reassuring them that they will do their best to address the situation in an expeditious manner. At PHS administration commented on the relationship they have with their teachers. Assistant Principal Thompson of PHS mentioned that teachers have a lot of trust in what the administrators do and are comfortable around the administration; in fact, they will "walk right into our offices," call them at home, or grab them in the hall or mall. Assistant Principal Thompson believes that teachers appreciate the relationships with the administration and have no problems talking to them, due in large part to the administrators' past record of following through on issues. Likewise, Assistant Principal Stevens says that a good portion of the trust between staff and administrators is built through the opportunities and voice that teachers are given within the school's decision-making process. For example, Assistant Principal Stevens makes it a point to solicit input from the teachers as to how the master schedules should be put together. One teacher reflects: "He listens to everyone's suggestions and taking them to heart gives teachers a sense of empowerment as well as belonging."

Reciprocally, the administrators at CEHS have similar opinions about the relationship between teachers and administrators. Assistant Principal Monroe is confident that the

teaching staff feels very comfortable with the administrators. According to her, CEHS teachers feel open to speak their minds, interject, question and challenge anything that may come up. She attributes this feeling of comfort to the fact that the administrators don't boast about being superior, they don't convey the sense that teachers work for them, but rather that teachers work with them. CEHS administrators make sure they are doing things that recognize and support what teachers are doing in and out of the classroom. At the same time, according to Principal Smith, these established relationships and feelings of comfort make it easier for administrators to express frustration and/or disappointment with teachers.

Similarly, teachers from PHS share views of the relationship with their principal.

Mrs. Peterson, an art teacher, stated:

I appreciate that Principal Johansen trusts me, because I trust him and if you don't have that trust with your principal, there's nothing there because you're not going to be candid with them when you need to be.

And Mr. Fields, a social studies teacher, stated:

He [Principal Johansen] really respects my character and abilities. He doesn't ask me what time I got to work or how late I stayed, because he knows I'm getting it done. I appreciate that more than you know.

Not surprising, teachers at CEHS have similar relationship qualities they appreciate about their principal:

He's [Principal Smith] friendly, he likes to hug you or give you a pat on the back, he's not in your personal space and you don't feel uncomfortable, he's got that balance, that personal touch that draws us in (Mrs. Caring, health and fitness teacher).

Principal Smith is there whenever you need him. He is a teacher advocate who models his relationships for his teachers to follow. He's a man of incredible integrity, incredible character (Mr. Bright, media productions teacher).

Teacher's relationships with their peers are another dimension of relationship building that is prominent in these schools. Teacher participants from both schools share their perceptions of their relationships with their peers.

These positive, collegial relationships amongst staff members lead to support and collaborative work. Assistant Principal Monroe of CEHS hears teachers support one another all the time. She hears them talking and sharing ideas, strategies and philosophies at the copy machine, in staff meetings, the lunchroom, smaller curriculum, content or grade level meetings, as well as the building management team meeting. It is obvious to Assistant Principal Monroe that teachers are there to help each other out if they can. Principal Johansen of PHS shares that his entire staff have very strong relationships with one another and the relationships are probably strong enough to "withstand any major divisive issues." He makes it a point to mention that there has been several divisive issues that get people upset at each other, but nothing that breaks the bonds of the individual relationships.

The administrators from both sites briefly mentioned that not all teachers get along, and that not all teachers and administrators share the same perceptions about various school or student related issues. For example, teachers at CEHS see things a little differently than the principal. In fact, the teachers are quite proud of the relationships they have with one another, whereas, Principal Smith is hoping for growth in the area. Three of the four CEHS teachers interviewed had this to say about relationships with colleagues:

This is the tightest staff I have ever worked with and there are about 90 people here. If I'm not working directly with people, when I see them, we still speak to each other; we eat lunch with anybody and everybody. It's nice, because we are all trusted and respected by one another (Mrs. Caring, health and fitness teacher).
We are a family and when something happens to a family, how we react shows whether or not we really are all together and all for one, or it's every man for themselves (Mr. Bright, a media productions teacher).

I think the staff that we have right now is a very strong, complimentary group. I honestly feel that this staff would be cohesive no matter what; it's one of those staff's that just gets along and works well together (Mr. Law, a social studies teacher).

Principal Smith of CEHS would like to expand on their relationships by:

Our staff needs to open up the boundaries between our classified and certified staff. There are clearly boundaries and they are probably just friendships. I mean, we have a mixing, but it is pronounced; the dynamics of any lunch period can change. We have 161 employees here and there are several that don't even know a fourth of them, because of the world they stay in. Some have no contact with our Educational Assistant's, and that is why we need to work on this relationship building within our personnel.

Another dimension of relationship building that is built and fostered within schools is the relationship between the administrators and students. An administrator's relationship with students is a relationship that many participants felt strongly about. Some relationships between administrators and students in this multi-case study were so important that they might have impacted student's lives and safety. For example, the following excerpt is shared in its entirety to highlight the importance of the administrator-student relationship.

Principal Johansen, principal at PHS shares an experience that he feels exemplifies the importance of relationships with students:

I took a loaded handgun off a student at Western HS, it's been now 12 years ago, but here at PHS we have actually had two gun incidents. It started when a student I had a relationship with came up to me and said hey he heard that this student Billy was really upset, I understand that he's got a gun and I'm really worried. I already had a prior relationship established with Billy over the course of time, so I was able to go up to Billy and ask him how things were going, and then offered my help to him. I also very carefully brought up the fact that I was told that you had a handgun. He quickly told me that he did and that it was at home and he wouldn't bring it to school. I asked him if we could go get that, explaining to him that he's only 17 years old, and you shouldn't have a gun. So, I talked him onto going to get the gun from his house and give it to the sheriff. We left here, we went to his house about two and a half blocks away, walked in, he hands it to me, we give it to the sheriff, and no charges were pressed. In this case the student who came and talked to me in the first place believed that it was wrong for Billy to have a gun and needed to tell somebody. The point is he felt like he could tell somebody and Billy had no problem admitting it and

handing it over within minutes of me asking him about it. If I hadn't had a relationship with either of these boys who's to say if this would have turned out that way. I can't stress the importance of relationships enough, it can all come down to whether or not you have a good relationship with a student that can make or break some of the decisions they make.

Assistant Principal Thompson of PHS recalls those incidents and others that have had students coming to talk to an administrator. He feels that when you have a student that doesn't like school, teachers or even themselves, but they like to be at school and they feel comfortable enough to come in and talk to an administrator about their problems or their friend, it is a big step for that student. Assistant Principal Thompson agrees with Principal Johansen in that those types of things "just don't happen everyday," administrators have to work for those relationships and wait for them to grow.

Administrative teams from both schools recognize their role in creating and fostering relationships between themselves and students. They are constantly building relationships with students out in the hall, in the mall, in the classrooms, and in the office. They try and talk to as many students as they can each day, getting to know them by name, and starting that relationship building process. Both sets of administrators shared that they felt that many of the students trust them, coming to them to tell them about students that are doing drugs, hurting or harassing others, or plotting trouble. They also are quick to mention this doesn't happen every time, but most of the time students come to them because they have that trusting relationship or understanding with them. They try and build relationships with students in the good times so that when the hard things come up its easier to deal with the situation. Principal Johansen of PHS, shares that no matter what he does after a relationship has been created between himself and a student, the students, more often than not feel that he is being fair with them, for the sole reason that they have a relationship with one another. He

states, “they may not like what I do, but they know I’ll be fair and it’s all because I have a relationship with them.”

Assistant Principal Monroe of CEHS, enjoys the interaction and the relationships she builds with students, it’s the one on one relationship she really likes and the fact that students don’t have to put on a show for any of their peers. She says she can just hang out with them and see what’s going on. She even has relationships with students where it started with a discipline issue and now they feel comfortable to talk to her in the hall or commons.

According to Assistant Principal Monroe if she doesn’t see those students she has built relationships in the hall or commons, they know she has a dish of jolly ranchers in her office and has told those students to stop by for a jolly rancher and say hi. This gives her a chance to see how things are going and what’s new in life and school. She also shares that she has had a lot of students take advantage of this offer, thanking her for caring and helping out.

Students from both schools recognize the relationships administrators have with them and other students. Aerial, a senior at CEHS has a pretty good relationship with most of the administrators because she is involved in several committees at school. She feels that the administrators are really nice and easy to talk to and they “genuinely” care about her and she knows that because they ask her how she is doing, how her classes are, and what’s new with her. Jim, a senior at PHS, thinks Principal Johansen is down to earth and focuses on building relationships with students. He explained something to me that he had heard about Principal Johansen:

I heard that last year he [Principal Johansen] was in a staff meeting and somebody said that this girl won an award and for some reason he didn’t know who she was and I guess he got really upset because here she was a student at PHS and she obviously did something and he didn’t know about it. That just told me that he really cares about students and getting to know them.

Not only did Jim notice that Principal Johansen cares about students and the relationships he has with them, but Principal Johansen does also. Principal Johansen makes it a point that if someone has done something that is either a positive impact on themselves or the school he is going to talk to them about it, recognizing them for playing well in a game, performing well in a choir concert, or seeing them do something in class that he was really impressed with. Once he recognizes them for the positive action he proceeds to ask “how’s it going, how’s your day,” hopefully opening up a dialogue, and building a strong relationship that he can follow up with later when their paths cross again.

Yet another relationship that is built and fostered within schools is that of a teacher’s relationship with students. Participants from both schools share their perceptions of teacher’s relationships with students.

For both PHS and CEHS teachers, building and fostering quality relationships between teachers and students is a top priority. Principal Johansen, principal at PHS, explains that his building’s teacher-student relationships are getting very collegial and collaborative, which he feels is going to improve student learning down the road and going to help make teaching more enjoyable for the entire teaching and support staff.

Teachers can get more out of students with the building of relationships. Assistant Principal Stevens, assistant principal at PHS feels that in order for students to achieve academically, teachers need to promote the “relationship piece.” He adds that teachers must not just drive students academically, because students are going to become uninterested. According to Assistant Principal Stevens, students need to see why things are important, they need to have a relationship with teachers. Principal Johansen agrees with his assistant principal sharing that students need to have multiple relationships with adults and they need

to know teachers care about them and put them first. He would like to see every student have a meaningful relationship with a minimum of one adult and preferably more. He also feels that in order for students to experience a positive learning environment, the adults have to get along with their students and be able to recognize and praise them for the positive things they do. He adds, “That one little thing can make all the difference for students, it can spark that connection that might turn students around or make all the difference in their education.”

Teachers from both PHS and CEHS agree that relationships have an impact on students and their learning. For example, Mrs. Armstrong, world languages teacher at CEHS feels the purpose of her TAP (teacher advisory period) class as a time for teachers to be an advocate for a group of students, to be a resource for “their students,” a kind of helping relationship. Mrs. Armstrong believes that way students when they have a problem they can go to the adult they trust. She adds, “We want to take the pressure off the students by having a teacher who they knew best and feel comfortable talking to about anything.” Mr. Law, social studies teacher at CEHS is motivated by the relationships he has with his students and states that his relationship with students is a major reason behind how well they learn. He genuinely feels that his demeanor says “I care about you” and for that he sees students trusting him and talking to him about issues that are affecting them outside of school.

Mrs. Caring, health and fitness teacher at CEHS comments on why she thinks relationships with students have an impact on them:

We have fun relationships, where we show that we care and that we trust them, not just in the classroom, but in the lunchroom, hallways, you name it, it’s all in the way we talk to each other. I think students see in the classroom that most teachers go the extra mile to show how what we teach relates to their real lives and that that’s a critical piece. We let them make their own choices and all the while they know we are here for them.

Mrs. Peterson, art teacher at PHS feel that spending a lot of time with students, learning who they are and what they are about leads to a comfortable relationship. Mr. Thrower, also an art teacher from PHS agrees but shares that teachers (some) still lack touching students that are “not gregarious enough.” He sees students that are in their own little world because teachers don’t have a way to get through to them to get them to open up. He mentions, “Sometimes it’s the smallest thing teachers do, that can make an impact on somebody and it all starts with relationships.” Mrs. Young, a special education teacher at PHS also views relationships as being very important to promote and foster a caring school environment, especially with what’s going on with schools today as far as school shootings. She and Mr. Thrower agree that students who are “ignored, bullied or not seen as important enough to get to know” are the students teachers need to make it a point to get to know. According to Mrs. Young, most students choose to come to school because it is a safe, caring and trusting place for them and they can really make connections with the teachers, because teachers have taken the time and have built relationships with them.

Both administrative teams have no doubt that students know that teachers and administrators care about them. Every teacher and administrator interviewed at both schools shared that belief. The issue is to get all of the students to believe that all the teachers and administrators care about them. Students from both schools share that teachers motivate them, assist them when they need it, listen to them, and take the time to get to know them. Each of the four student participants from each school had something to say about teachers and the relationships they have with them.

Both Denae, a junior from CEHS and Luke a senior from PHS, feel more comfortable around and receptive to teachers that are trying to learn more about the students and that take

time to get to know students individually. According to Luke and Denaë, those teachers are usually more “down to earth,” with a sense of humor and focus on having personal relationship with their students. According to them the relaxing, comfortable atmosphere helps a lot when they’re trying to learn or get help. Lori, a junior from PHS and Aerial and Mark, seniors from CEHS, feel that there are a lot of teachers in the buildings that they feel comfortable talking to, teachers that “don’t judge you” and they take a real interest in who we are. Jim and Carlie, seniors at PHS agree, but add that the teachers get along with everyone, opening people up and taking the time to get to know that student that doesn’t talk a lot in class. They feel it’s great to have a good relationship with a teacher outside of the classroom and that they could have a conversation with them outside of school talking about related interests or just about anything. They explain that these relationships make school comfortable, easier and more fun. Angela, a senior from CEHS shares her student-teacher relationship experience:

Mr. C, my only teacher, really motivates all of us. He cares about our grades and family lives. He always asks how’s your mom or dad and what’s going on. He meets our parents and knows our home lives. He talks to us and gets to know who we are, what kind of learners we are, so if we do have a problem, he knows how to help. You can’t get that from a regular teacher. He’s a very personal person and I feel totally comfortable around him. I can tell him anything that I did on the weekend, about my friends, anything. I’m glad he’s like that; I’d rather feel comfortable around a teacher than not know the teacher.

Summary

The original intent of this study was to identify the various practices and roles the principals assume and the impact they have on student learning outcomes, however the focus shifted. The more time I spent in each building the more I began to realize, through interviews, observations and document collection, that these two schools were very similar. In fact, the focus shifted quickly from principal leadership practices to what the both the

principals and teachers were choosing to do to impact student learning, and to the relationships that were created and fostered within the school and classrooms.

The analysis examined the three emergent themes and their sub-themes. The first was “Administrators Choices and Actions” in which participants in this study shared several aspects of the administrators’ role in these schools that seem to contribute to a positive learning environment for students. This theme was further broken down into four sub-themes that emerged: maintaining a visible presence, walkthroughs and observations, supporting and recognizing teachers, and supporting and recognizing students. The second theme, “Teachers Choices and Actions” again had participants stating several aspects of the teacher’ role in these schools that seem to contribute to a positive learning environment for students. This section was divided into the sub-themes of maintaining a visible presence, creating positive classroom environments, and getting involved. The third and final theme of “Relationship Building” found participants sharing the importance of relationship building in the school, and also the practices and impacts that have lead to these relationships. This section discussed sub-themes related to relationships, such as: making connections with students, administrator-teacher relationships, teacher-teacher relationships, administrator-student relationships, and teacher-student relationships.

The similarities in the sites in regard to their findings beg the questions as to why these two sites differed in state-mandated criterion tests. In the next chapter, this question will be explored and the findings regarding the similarities in practices between the schools will be compared with concepts in the current literature on effective schools.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this comparative case study was to explore the nature of principal leadership in two Washington state high schools with similar demographics but different student learning outcomes. When I initiated this study, I expected to find notable differences in the practices in the two schools. How else could the differences in student outcomes (described in Chapter Four) be explained? However, as the analysis in Chapter Five makes clear, I found more similarities than differences in the two schools. What I found was that in the three years before the study, both schools had been growing steadily in student enrollment. Both have similar staff and student ethnicities, demographics, teacher turnover rates, student graduation and dropout rates, and similar percentages of students who go on to post-secondary education. Both schools offer a wide variety of academic programs, including advanced placement courses and extracurricular activities for students. Regarding leadership practices, administrators from both schools make it a point to maintain a visible presence with their staff, students, and community; conduct periodic classroom walkthroughs and observations; and support and recognize students, teachers, staff, and administrators. I also found that teachers in both schools also maintain a visible presence among their students and colleagues, while striving to create positive classroom environments for their students and getting involved with school committees and student extra-curricular activities. A final similarity in the sites centered on the practice of building relationships and making connections with students.

In addition to these similarities between the two sites, I found that the practices in both schools strongly reflected many of the characteristics of “best practices” in “successful” schools as represented in contemporary literature. Specifically, the two schools reflect the

ethic of care (Noddings, 1984; Starrat, 1994), aspects of organizational learning (Spillane & Louis, 2002); and the “four imperatives of a successful school” as identified by Beck and Murphy (1996). This chapter will summarize these characteristics and then consider reasons for different student outcomes between these two schools.

Caring Leadership

Nel Noddings (1984) work on caring in education illustrates the importance and role caring plays in a school. Noddings notes that in relationships, caring involves both a *one-caring* and a *one cared-for* and that young people who experience caring grow stronger and have a better chance of learning and of becoming caring people themselves. Caring can be seen in the case study schools’ practices of relationship building among administrators, teachers and students. Each of the adult participants in the two schools commented on the importance of relationships and getting to know the students. Both administrators and teachers in these schools take “action” in regard to caring, making it a point to make connections with their students through social interactions in the hallway, conversations in the classrooms or lunchroom, and even participation and/or support in student’s extra-curricular interests. Likewise, teachers and administrators from both schools are “engrossed” in their students learning by creating opportunities that meet students’ needs and interests. Teachers take the time to get to know their students’ interests and goals, adapting some classroom assignments and projects to satisfy those interests, whereas the administrators in both schools listen to the students’ suggestions and comments regarding block scheduling, guest speakers and the implementation of various programs. Within both schools there is a definite “reciprocity” for the one-caring. Teachers, administrators and students alike share

that they appreciate the attention, recognition and support that is given to them from one another. These dimensions of action, engrossment and reciprocity in the two case study schools strongly reflect characteristics of caring leadership delineated in Nodding's work.

Organizational Learning

Spillane and Louis' (2002) framework of organizational learning looks at the process in which new knowledge, skills, and tools are used to increase student learning; this occurs among the individuals of a learning community, who engage in common activities that support educational innovation. The practices of organizational learning can be seen in the two case study schools through the daily interactions amongst the students, teachers and administrators, as well as through the site-based management (SBM) team, which represents the involvement and input of all school parties. Through my observations and interviews, I witnessed teachers, students and administrators talking and working with one another every day. Teachers collaborated with their colleagues about instructional and curricular strategies; students were asked to participate in classroom and building decision making; and, administrators disseminated information to teachers either in written or verbal form asking for reflective feedback.

On a similar note, each of the two schools SBM teams act on the input of the students, staff, teachers, parents, and district, and address all areas associated with the functioning of a school, including teaching and learning. The SBM team is made up of elected or appointed positions that are filled by the representatives' respective groups (e.g. PTA, student body, social studies department). In both schools, the SBM team meets bi-monthly, bringing to the table various suggestions, issues, or concerns from their

representative groups. These and other practices in these schools strongly reflect the principle of organizational learning as represented in Spillane and Louis' work.

Four Imperatives of a Successful School

Beck and Murphy's (1996) "four imperatives of a successful school" holds that learning, leadership, community and capacity-building promote a healthy school organization and ultimately, better workplace conditions for teachers, improved learning opportunities for students, and greater satisfaction for parents and community members. The learning imperative as described by Beck and Murphy can be seen in the two case study schools in that teachers and administrators, through in-services, workshops, guest speakers, and creative and interesting curriculum are meeting the needs of their students. In addition, administrators in both schools strive to build the instructional capacity of their teachers by providing the most current and useful information and the time for collaborative planning among the teachers. Both schools monitor their students' progress or lack of progress in the main curricular areas, offering tutoring and assistance before and after school for those in need. Likewise, teachers get to know their students' interests and skills so that they are able to adapt their curriculum or assignments to better meet the needs of all their students. Teachers have commented that when students are learning about content that is interesting to them, they are more likely to pay attention and enjoy the class.

Beck and Murphy's (1996) leadership imperative can be seen in the two schools in that teachers and parents sit on many of the building and district committees. The administrators in both buildings have made a conscious decision to have teachers and parents involved in the decisions making process as much as possible. In fact, both sets of

administrators noted that there are some things that teachers and parents know about the learning of students that have proven to be very helpful to the development or implementation of programs. In addition, the site-based management team in both schools is not only chaired by a teacher, but also believes that everyone on the SBM team is acting as an equal, including the parents.

The community imperative can be seen in the two case study schools in that many of the teachers in both schools are coaches, advisors, committee members, or department area chairs. In addition to the teachers' role in building and district leadership, the parents and community members are also in and out of the schools every day. Some volunteer in classrooms, engage in before or after school monitoring, or sit on a building committees that directly relate to student learning. The opportunities for leadership and involvement in both schools are encouraged and promoted by the administrative teams. According to the administrators from both schools, the involvement and leadership of their teachers, parents and community members help to keep the schools running successfully.

Finally, Beck and Murphy's (1996) capacity-building imperative can be seen in the two schools through the several professional development activities that are offered throughout the year, as well as the administrators' constant promotion of professional growth and development opportunities for teachers. Administrative teams in both schools recognize the challenges teachers and students face in education today and have stated they are more than willing to get teachers whatever they may need to make their teaching and their students' learning easier and more productive. It was stressed in both schools that, when a teachers requests time or money for professional development, they usually get it, depending on the availability. Teachers in both buildings are encouraged to meet and collaborate with

their fellow content area teachers as well as teachers in the same content areas from other schools.

Differences in Student Outcomes

Given the similarities found in the two case study schools and that the practices in both sites strongly reflect empirical and theoretical perspectives on “best practices” in “successful” schools (Beck & Murphy, 1996), how can the differences between the two sites in regard to student testing outcomes be explained? In addressing this question, it should be noted that there is nothing explicit in the data of this study to explain this difference. What follows are speculations on why different testing outcomes might be found in these two high schools with similar student demographics, which both engage in “best practices.”

First, various aspects of the study’s design might have prevented the discovery of significant differences in leadership across the schools. The study was not a longitudinal study. Schools were selected based on WASL assessment scores from four years, 1998-2002; and administrators’ and teachers’ roles and practices were studied for only a four-month period. In addition, the data strongly reflect the perceptions and opinions of participants, since interviews were a primary means of data collection. Further, the preponderance of the data represented administrators’ perceptions; although this data was triangulated with teacher and student interviews, site observations, and document review, interviews with principals were longer and made up the bulk of the data. It is certainly possible that a longer field study involving more comprehensive data collections would lead to findings regarding differences between the schools. However, the data do support a number of speculations regarding differences in student outcomes.

PHS (the higher scoring school) has an administrative team (principal and two assistants) that has been together for eight years, whereas CEHS has a principal of eight years, a new Assistant Principal and another Assistant Principal who is finishing her second year. Having a stable administrative team in a school can have a profound effect on teachers, students, community, and the overall school climate. With PHS's administrative team in place for the past eight years, the staff and community have learned to work with their expectations, goals and objectives. At CEHS, having a new Assistant Principal, who was hired a week before the school year started, and an assistant principal going into her second year, may have had an impact on past student learning outcomes. With the instability in the assistant principal positions, one might speculate that expectations, routines, delegation of duties and relationships are still being ironed out.

A second speculation involves the number of students enrolled in advanced placement courses. While both schools offer advanced placement curriculum, PHS has over 16% (248) of its student body enrolled in advanced placement (AP) courses, whereas CEHS has just shy of 10% (173) enrolled. With PHS's advanced placement enrollment being over 16% of their student body, it is fair to speculate that these students are highly likely to pass the WASL assessment, giving PHS a higher score than some schools with a smaller AP enrollment. CEHS, with fewer than 10% of its students enrolled in AP courses and a larger student population, may not benefit as much in their WASL scores because of the ratio between AP enrollment and total student body enrollment.

Another speculation relates to special education enrollment. At PHS 9% (140) of the student body qualifies for special education services, whereas at CEHS 13% (225) of the student body is enrolled in special education. The difference in special education enrollment

can have a large impact on student learning outcomes as measured by the WASL. Historically, students who qualify for special education services and who have an individualized education plan (IEP) receive services in one or more academic areas. If these students are in a mainstream classroom for any academic work (e.g. assignments, projects, assessments) they are usually accommodated according to their ability level and their agreed upon IEP. However, the WASL and NCLB do not account for these IEP accommodations on these assessments except for approximately 1% of the special education population that is exempt from the exam. So, more special education students in a school tend to lower the WASL passing percentage.

As for free and reduced lunch, PHS is just shy of 15% (232) of its students qualifying for the free and reduced lunch programs, whereas, CEHS has over 26% (450) of its student population qualifying for the services. More often than not these students who qualify and receive free and reduced lunch experience hardships in their lives that those not on free and reduced lunch do not experience. These experiences can have both short term and long term affects on these students.

Given differences in the percentage of students at the two schools that participate in AP courses, special education and who qualify for free and reduced lunch, it may be concluded that PHS has a better chance of scoring higher on the WASL than CEHS. In summary, the results of this study show that both case study schools appear to be “successful” schools in terms of “best practices” as represented in the literature on caring, organizational learning and Beck and Murphy’s (1996) “four imperatives of a successful school.” However, student outcomes, as measured by the WASL, are different. There is nothing explicit in the data that explain the differences in student outcomes. My initial

expectation that differences in principal leadership styles and practices would be discovered was not borne out.

However, subtle differences in the student bodies in the two schools (e.g. percentage enrolled in AP courses, special education and free and reduced lunch) may account for some of the difference in student outcomes. In particular, the difference in special education enrollment may play an important part in producing different student outcomes.

The case study descriptions in this study provide illustrations for educators in regard to enacting a number of “best practices” in schools. However, the findings also indicate that uncovering explanations for differing student outcomes, particularly in regard to leadership practices, is difficult. It is possible that academic press (Hoy & Sabo, 1998; Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991; Sweetland & Hoy, 2000) and the learning imperative (Beck & Murphy, 1996) might account for some of the differences in student learning outcomes, but clearly, further in-depth field research in schools with varying student outcomes is needed.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A
Letter of Introduction

Dear Mitch and Leif,

This letter is a follow-up to the phone call conversation I had with each of you last week. To assist in making this project a success, I would like to interview the following people at least once and quite possibly twice: Principals, Assistant Principals, four teachers (2 with less than 5 years teaching experience in your building, and 2 with more than 15 years experience in your building - randomly selected if possible), and four students (preferably two who passed all of the sections of the 2003 10th grade WASL or that are very high academically and very involved in school and two who passed only 1 or 0 sections on the WASL and tend to be lower academically and not involved in school). Differing perspectives will be a large part of my analysis.

I would like to conduct these interviews once prior to winter break and again toward the end of January. Each interview will last about 45 minutes –1 hour (30 minutes with students) and will be tape recorded and transcribed for my data analysis. In addition, a consent form will be signed by the interviewee and myself, stating the purpose of the interview and the confidentiality of the information collected. Pseudonyms will be used throughout my analysis and write up and at anytime the interviewee wishes to terminate the interview or stop the tape I will adhere to their wishes immediately. I want this experience to be comfortable for all parties.

In addition to interviews I would like to (if possible) sit in on any SBM or staff meetings as well as shadow the acting principal on two separate occasions.

I am familiar with all the legalities regarding privacy and students rights, so please let me know if this is something you, your staff and students would be willing to be a part of.

I do not want to be a thorn in you or your staff and students' side, because I understand the hectic world of an administrator, teacher and student. I sincerely feel I can do my research, interviews, and observations with little or no disruption to the average school day.

Thank you again for the opportunity it is greatly appreciated.

Truly,

Wade

APPENDIX B

Adult Interview Consent Form

To:

From: Wade R Barringer

Re: Consent form for human subjects study

My name is Wade Barringer, and I am a PhD candidate in Washington State University's Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling Psychology. I am conducting a research study in the area of education administration with an emphasis on exploring the links between the leadership of the building principal and student learning outcomes in two Washington State public secondary schools. Specifically, the qualitative study will develop in-depth descriptions and analysis of the principal's leadership style and practices, comparing these indicators with data on student learning outcomes.

The information in this consent form is provided so you can decide whether you wish to participate in this study. It is important you understand your participation is completely voluntary. This means even if you agree to participate you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, or decline to participate in any portion of the study, without penalty.

As a participant of this study you will be asked to partake in two 45-60 minute interviews.

During the interviews I will ask several open-ended questions in the following areas: principal leadership practices, effective schools, student learning outcomes, role of the student and teacher in the school community, etc.

In addition, you will be tape recorded during our interview sessions, so I can later transcribe our confidential conversation for the purposes of my study. I am the only person who will

have access to these tapes and they will be locked up securely in a file cabinet until the research is finished and then will be destroyed. Likewise, all transcriptions will be done by me personally and only seen by me.

This experiment poses no known risks to your health and your name will not be associated with the findings, unless you so desire. Upon completion of your participation in this study you will be provided with a brief explanation of the question this study addresses. If you have any questions not addressed by this consent form, please do not hesitate to ask. You will receive a copy of this form, which you should keep for your records.

Thank you for your time.

Wade R. Barringer

PhD candidate

509-332-4437

Consent statement:

I have read the above comments and agree to participate in this experiment. I give my permission to be tape recorded under the terms outlined above. I understand that if I have any questions or concerns regarding this project I can contact the investigator at the above location or the WSU Institutional Review Board at 509-335-9661.

(participants signature)

(date)

Parental Consent Form

To: _____ (parent(s)/guardian(s))

From: Wade R Barringer

Re: Consent form for human subjects study

My name is Wade Barringer, and I am a PhD candidate in Washington State University's Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling Psychology. I am conducting a research study in the area of education administration with an emphasis on exploring the links between the leadership of the building principal and student learning outcomes in two Washington State public secondary schools. Specifically, the qualitative study will develop in-depth descriptions and analysis of the principal's leadership style and practices, comparing these indicators with data on student learning outcomes.

The information in this consent form is provided so you can decide whether or not you feel comfortable having your child participate in this study. It is important you understand their participation is completely voluntary. This means even if you and your child agree to participate they are free to withdraw from the study at any time, or decline to participate in any portion of the study, without penalty.

As a participant of this study you will be asked to partake in two 45-60 minute interviews.

During the interviews I will ask several open-ended questions in the following areas: principal leadership practices, effective schools, student learning outcomes, role of the student and teacher in the school community, etc.

In addition, they will be tape recorded during our interview session, so I can later transcribe our confidential conversation for the purposes of my study. I am the only person who will

have access to these tapes and they will be locked up securely in a file cabinet until the research is finished and then will be destroyed. Likewise, all transcriptions will be done by me personally and only seen by me.

This experiment poses no known risks to their health and their name will not be associated with the findings, unless they so desire. Upon completion of their participation in this study they will be provided with a brief explanation of the question this study addresses. If you have any questions not addressed by this consent form, please do not hesitate to ask. Your child will receive a copy of this form, which they should keep for your records.

Thank you for your time.

Wade R. Barringer

WSU PhD candidate

509-332-4437

Consent statement:

I have read the above comments and agree to participate in this experiment. I give my permission to have my child be tape recorded under the terms outlined above. I understand that if I have any questions or concerns regarding this project I can contact the investigator at the above location or the WSU Institutional Review Board at 509-335-9661.

(participants signature)

(date)

Student Interview Consent Form

To:

From: Wade R Barringer

Re: Consent form for human subjects study

My name is Wade Barringer, and I am a PhD candidate in Washington State University's Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling Psychology. I am conducting a research study in the area of education administration with an emphasis on exploring the links between the leadership of the building principal and student learning outcomes in two Washington State public secondary schools. Specifically, the qualitative study will develop in-depth descriptions and analysis of the principal's leadership style and practices, comparing these indicators with data on student learning outcomes.

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Thank you for your time.

Wade R. Barringer

PhD candidate

509-332-4437

Consent statement:

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(participants signature)

(date)

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

What is happening in secondary schools to increase student outcomes?

Principals

- Please give me a little background in regards to your education experiences.
- How do you spend your time each day from when you arrive until you leave?

- In your opinion what do kids need today to be successful in school? Why?
- In your opinion what are the characteristics of a productive learning environment?
- Describe your schools atmosphere.
- What are the schools goals and their relation to student learning?
- How do you influence student learning?
- What drives you in regards to student learning?
- What are the most important tasks associated with your job?
- What do you do to interact with your students? With teachers?

Teachers

- Please give me a little background in regards to your education experiences.
- How do you spend your time each day from when you arrive until you leave?
- In your opinion what do kids need today to be successful in school? Why?
- In your opinion what are the characteristics of a productive learning environment?
- Describe your schools atmosphere.
- What are the schools goals and their relation to student learning?
- How do you influence student learning?
- What drives you in regards to student learning?
- What are the most important tasks associated with your job?
- What do you do to interact with your students? With teachers?

Students

- Please give me a little background in regards to your education experiences.

- How do you spend your time each day from arriving at school to going home?
- In your opinion what do kids need today to be successful in school? Why?
- In your opinion what are the characteristics of a productive learning environment?
- Describe your schools atmosphere.
- What are the schools goals and their relation to student learning?
- What to your teachers and administrators do to influence your learning?
- What drives in regards to learning?
- What are the most important things teachers and administrators can do for you?
- Describe your relationship you have with your teachers and administrators.
- What do you do to interact with your teachers? With administrators?

Phase II Questions for Administrators and Teachers

- In your opinion how to the current and future education reform mandates affect your schools daily routines?
- What is happening with regard to improving student outcomes? Who is involved?
How?
- What could you be doing that you are not doing that may have a positive effect on student learning?
- How frequently do you initiate communications with students, teachers and administrators?