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# Research into the Characteristics of Effective High School Principals: A Case Study of Leadership Practices Used in the High School Setting

Gregory G. Wilkey

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RESEARCH INTO THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE HIGH SCHOOL  
PRINCIPALS: A CASE STUDY OF LEADERSHIP PRACTICES USED  
IN THE HIGH SCHOOL SETTING

by

Gregory G. Wilkey

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in

Education  
(Curriculum and Instruction)

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Logan, Utah

2013

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**ABSTRACT**

Research into the Characteristics of Effective High School Principals: A Case  
Study of Leadership Practices Used in the High School Setting

by

Gregory G. Wilkey, Doctor of Education

Utah State University, 2013

Major Professor: Michael K. Freeman, Ph.D.  
Department: School of Teacher Education and Leadership

The lack of successful leadership in many public high schools across the United States has resulted in a leadership crisis, the lack of ability to transform schools, and low student achievement. This study sought to identify characteristics of two successful high school principals who have directed high schools during a period of unprecedented student academic growth.

The purpose of this study was to examine the key leadership characteristics of principals at two different high schools: (a) Good-to-Great High School (GTGHS) and (b) Overachieving High School (OHS). This study was a qualitative exploratory case study with an inductive approach using interviews and observations of two successful high school principals and interviews of 10 faculty and staff to identify emerging themes. Open and axial coding was used throughout the data analysis process.

Several themes emerged that identified common characteristics and behaviors of

successful high school leaders. Conclusions from the study proved that successful high school principals establish relationships of trust, collaborate effectively with all stakeholders to develop a school vision with high expectations for all, positively shape and sustain a warm school culture, select and develop people within the organization, and reach out to all involved to make the most of the resources available to build academic achievement for students. The findings also supported the notion that a visible principal who is highly involved in the development of the curriculum and the instructional environment and who stays current with the instructional ideas of the day will have a positive impact on student learning. Also of note was the notion that high school principals who embrace change and are willing to develop and share leadership will make a positive difference in the lives of young people. If action is taken on the outcomes of this study, social change will occur by minimizing the national public school leadership crisis. In addition, schools will be more positively transformed and student academic achievement will likely increase.

(216 pages)

**PUBLIC ABSTRACT**

Research into the Characteristics of Effective High School Principals: A Case  
Study of Leadership Practices Used in the High School Setting

by

Gregory G. Wilkey, Doctor of Education

Utah State University, 2013

This study came about largely due to my own personal belief in the centrality of the role the high school principal plays in the life of a young adult. I believe most people think of the school principal solely as an administrator who deals with personnel, discipline, facilities, events, transportation, parents, and so forth. While those are some of the responsibilities of a high school principal, I see the role of a high school principal with a much broader perspective. In addition to being an effective school manager, today's high school principal must be a strong and visionary leader who can tackle the increased state and federal accountability expectations. An effective high school principal will impact student learning and achievement. A strong principal is at the heart of a high school organization. They promote powerful teaching and learning for students.

This research sustains the central role of the high school principal. This research offers strong evidence that an effective high school principal makes a significant positive difference in student outcomes. This study concluded that effective high school principals are honest and ethical. They do the right thing and keep the interests of the students as the

focus of their work. Effective high school principals build relationships and honestly respect every individual within the school community. They are visionary. The highly successful principal focuses on the vision of a high-achieving school and builds buy-in from the school community for that vision. The most effective high school principals create a strong culture for learning and achievement. Great high school principals know what effective instruction is. They focus their professional development energy towards the improvement of teaching and learning in the school. They are instructional leaders. They skillfully create a discomfort with the status quo, and promote change as something essential to the sustainment of professional growth for the students and for the educators. These principals “walk the talk.” I see the high school principal as the most important piece in the puzzle of student success. This study serves to broaden the field of research on the subject and affirms the critical role a high school principal plays.

## DEDICATION

Words cannot adequately describe the immeasurable love and support my family has given me throughout the years. My children, Tanner, Rylie, and Joshua, have grown up during the time it has taken me to complete this endeavor. I express my regrets for all of the times they wanted to spend time with me and I was too busy working on this dissertation. I hope they will allow me to now redeem all the past rain checks issued, and I pray they will always know that I love them so very much. I completed this journey, in large part, to be an example for them of the importance of lifelong learning and the critical nature of finishing each task in life that is undertaken. Never waiver from doing what is good and right.

My wife, Kristi Kae Holmes, has been and always will be the love of my life. Throughout this doctoral program she supported me, encouraged me, and gave me the swift kick to the backside when needed. Kristi has always given me strength by never doubting that I would accomplish this goal, even in the moments of my own frustration and self-doubt. I know that her love and support is what pushed me through to the very end. Kristi is both a wonderful mother and an incredible wife.

My parents, George Carl Wilkey and Jean Shumway Wilkey, have never stopped believing in me from day one. I am eternally grateful for these two incredible people for teaching me truth, for encouraging me to dream, for daring me to pursue an adventurous life, for believing in me, for demonstrating discipline, for supporting me in every quest, for picking me up every time I fell down, for helping me look for and find the silver lining behind the clouds, and for always loving me unconditionally. You have been the



rock of my life.

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*“The probability that we may fail in the struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just.”*

Abraham Lincoln

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I would like to express my thanks to Carl Boyington, Executive Director of the Utah Association of Secondary School Principals (UASSP), the UASSP Executive

Board, and the UASSP Legislative Council for supporting and encouraging my work and my research. The efforts of the UASSP to enhance, promote, and recognize the leadership of Utah's secondary principals has helped mold me into the leader that I am today.

I would like to acknowledge the great principals who I have had the honor of serving with over my career. In particular, I would like to recognize those who showed me great leadership under their direct tutelage: Timothy F. Dyson, Dr. Joyce M. Gray, Dr. W. Bryan Bowles, Ryck M. Astle, Dr. Steven A. Hill, and Dr. Rulon A. Homer. These great leaders showed me how to lead, when to lead, and the need to follow. I will be forever indebted to them for believing in my talents as both an educator and a leader and for supporting me in all that I have done. I would like to dedicate this research to Dr. Steven A. Hill, a principal who personified all of the characteristics that make a leader great. He always believed in me and taught all of us that there is great power to be found within each one of us.

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*May the road rise up to meet you.  
May the wind be always at your back.  
May the sun shine warm upon your face;  
the rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again,  
may God hold you in the palm of His hand.*

(Traditional Irish Blessing)

Gregory G. Wilkey

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Public schools have faced enormous challenges as they have struggled to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. Reform efforts of the past century have often looked for a “quick fix.” Labaree (2000) noted in his writings, *The Chronic Failure of Curriculum Reform*, that there has been little in the way of true public school reform in relation to teaching and learning in the American classroom over the past century. As educators work to meet the stringent state and federal accountability standards being placed before them, it is abundantly clear that the stakes have risen for teachers, and especially, for school principals. With all the emphasis on high-stakes testing, standards, and curriculum, there is often a sense that there isn’t time to build trusting relationships within the school community. While educators are being held more and more accountable for increasing student achievement, ultimately, good things don’t happen in the classroom if there is a lack of trust amongst stakeholders. The leaders and their ability to establish trust are paramount to the success of these students and these schools (Lunney, 1996).

Educational leadership is a very intriguing topic. According to Bass (1990) “There are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (p. 11). One of the most well-known definitions of leadership during the twentieth century was that of Tannenbaum, Weschler, and Massarik (1961). They stated that leadership is, “The interpersonal influence directed through the communication process toward the attainment of some goal or goals” (p.

24). Defining leadership in an authoritative manner has been a difficult issue for researchers over the years. However, the more difficult task has been the creation of effective school leaders. High schools whose students attain high levels of academic achievement have a common element within those schools, that of a strong principal leader (Fullan, 2003; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). At a time when high school reform is prevalent in the United States, and at a time when accountability for principals has never been greater, it is crucial that researchers take a closer look at school principals and their contributions to academic achievement for students.

The Obama administration, hoping to spur Congress to act on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), has offered states an opportunity to be granted waivers from some of the more oppressive aspects of the current NCLB legislation. The tradeoffs for receiving a waiver include adopting college- and career-ready standards, developing teacher and principal evaluation systems using a variety of measures (including but not limited to student test scores), and programs to turn around the lowest-performing schools that often include the replacement of the school principal. The “turnaround” strategies demanded in Obama’s Race to the Top (RTTT) are:

- *Transformation model:* Replace the principal, strengthen staffing, implement a research-based instructional program, provide extended learning time, and implement new governance and flexibility.
- *Turnaround model:* Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50 percent of the school staff, implement a research-based instructional program, provide extended learning time, and implement a new governance structure.
- *Restart model:* Convert or close and reopen the school under the

management of an effective charter operator, charter management organization, or education management organization.

- *School closure model*: Close the school and enroll students who attended it in other, higher-performing schools in the district. (U.S. Department of Education, 2009)

It is clearly evident that this is a time when radical high school reform is expected and almost mandated within the public schools of the United States. Now is a time when accountability for principals has never been greater. This leads to the idea that we may be at a “tipping point” for holding school principals accountable for learning. It is crucial that researchers to take a closer look at school principals and their contributions to academic achievement for students.

Most school principals are expected to lead their schools to excellence with the leadership training that was received at the university educational leadership preparation program. However, refining and updating leadership skills is essential to meeting the demands of school standards and accountability in the United States. Therefore, if students are expected to excel academically, school principals must “sharpen the saw” professionally and either possess, or acquire the requisite leadership characteristics to meet the ever increasing demands and needs of students.

### **Problem Statement**

A review of the Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC) database uncovered approximately 4,412 documents connected to the role of a school principal, with only 14 documents focused on the role the high school principal plays in relation to student achievement. This would suggest that there is not ample research available on

the impact high school principals have in relation to student achievement and success. The somewhat limited research on the topic that does exist suggests that leadership and school principals do have an impact on student achievement levels (Beck & Murphy, 1994; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Crawford, 1998; Marzano et al., 2005).

Effective leadership has been studied for many years, yet there are still many schools where students are not performing at expected levels of achievement. While there has been much empirical and theoretical research conducted in the area of school leadership and accountability, there is not a strong research base connecting leadership to school improvement or to academic achievement (Mayrowetz, 2008). Marzano and colleagues (2005) went even further and pointed out that it was somewhat rare in the field of research regarding school leadership to find student achievement as the criterion for leader/principal effectiveness. The relationship between leadership and student achievement needs to be investigated further in order to provide insight into what really matters in increasing student achievement.

With federal and state accountability standards increasing almost annually, there is increased scrutiny of student academic achievement. The need for successful leadership in public schools, particularly at the high school level, will require increased efforts to select, recruit, train, and develop effective high school principals. According to J. E. Smith, Carson, and Alexander (1984), there is a strong possibility that some individuals might possess superior leadership characteristics that are highly appropriate for a given organizational environment. This idea has been seldom considered. It is even likely that no real concrete attempts have been made to distinguish the impact of

leaders who possess superior leadership traits (Angelo, 2005). Therefore, there is a need to identify school principal characteristics that are linked to student achievement. This study will contribute to the resolution of the challenge by providing research in the field of characteristics of successful high school leaders that will ultimately lead to success and academic achievement by students. This study will also add to the somewhat limited body of research that is available on this particular topic.

### **Purpose of the Study**

As educational reforms continue to be implemented, new research is being conducted to describe the principal's role in meeting new accountability standards (Angelo, 2005). The role of the principal is evolving over time. Principals have shifted their focus from being managers in the 1970s (Tirozzi, 2001) to becoming instructional leaders in the 1980s and 1990s (McEwan, 2003a). Increasing accountability efforts led by federal and state authorities have resulted in many principals instituting a form of instructional leadership that seeks to adapt to the culture and community of which he/she is a part of (Rammer, 2007).

This study was conducted to add valuable information to the body of knowledge regarding the positive effect the activities outlined by McEwan (2003a) have, and the impact of first- and second-order change leadership behaviors on school effectiveness (Marzano et al., 2005). Marzano and colleagues discussed 21 leadership responsibilities that impact student achievement and classifies school organizational change in two categories, the level of which is determined by the magnitude or order of the change

being pursued by the educational leader. Leadership practices and characteristics that are appropriate for the initiative are selected by the school principals to fit the order of change. The information gathered from this study should advance the understanding of both novice and veteran principals regarding how deep, decisive, and immediate actions can help improve the academic achievement of students in public high schools.

The literature uses several different terms to describe the impact of leadership on students and their academic success and achievement. In their meta-analysis Marzano and colleagues (2005) referred to leadership *responsibilities, practices, and traits* that impact student achievement. McEwan (2003a) referred to leadership *activities*. Cotton (2003) referred to *traits* and *behaviors*. For the purpose of this study, the researcher has lumped these terms together into one term meant to be synonymous and to describe the sum, that being the idea of leadership *characteristics*. This research will treat the terms of responsibilities, traits, behaviors, practices, and characteristics as similar, or one and the same.

The purpose of this study will be to examine the key leadership characteristics of principals serving in two different high school settings. Researching leadership characteristics at two high school communities with very different demographics will help determine whether principals exhibit similar or different leadership characteristics based on the situation each principal finds him/herself. Both research high schools reside in Mountain School District (a pseudonym) in the Intermountain West. Mountain School District (MSD) has existed as a public school district for over 100 years, is a relatively diverse, largely suburban school district educating over 68,000 total students.

Mountain School District operates over 80 schools in levels ranging from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. MSD has an annual operating budget in excess of \$525 million dollars.

The first school setting of this research is Good-to-Great High School (GTGHS), a high-achieving school that is a perennial on *Newsweek* magazine's top 1,000 High Schools of America list, makes the College Board's Advanced Placement Honor Roll, consistently has students and parents that rate the school as "superior" or "exemplary" on the Center for the School of the Future's Indicators of School Quality (ISQ) survey, has a high number of students who possess more than average levels of developmental assets, and has comparatively large numbers of students who score well on college entrance exams (i.e., ACT, SAT).

OHS, the second high school of the study, is located in a more diverse community than GTGHS, yet still has found ways to help students achieve. OHS has received increasingly "superior" and "exemplary" feedback from parents and students on the ISQ over two administrations of the survey in the past five years. OHS compares very favorably when Utah Office of Education (USOE) Utah Performance Assessment System for Students (U-PASS) and Utah Comprehensive Accountability System (UCAS) progress scores are factored in with fifteen high schools of comparable socio-economic backgrounds in the state of Utah (OHS actually outperforms almost all "similar" high schools in Criterion Referenced Tests administered at the end of level for Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science in progress scores posted on the USOE data site). In the face of an increasingly diverse student body (OHS students have a larger

single-parent background than the state average, and ethnically and socioeconomically OHS has more diversity than state averages), and despite the challenges that come with facing these potential learning obstacles, students of OHS are responding with higher levels of developmental “assets” and are increasingly succeeding when measured on CRT and ACT standardized assessments. More OHS students are engaged in post-high school learning than ever in the school’s 21-year history. The leadership practices being put into place at OHS appear to be helping support high student achievement.

In their study, Marzano and colleagues (2005) found that “in broad terms... principals can have a profound effect on the achievement of students in their schools” (p. 38). Interestingly, the researchers reported a “.25 correlation between principals’ leadership behavior and student achievement” (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 32).

Furthermore, McEwan (2003a) stated that by integrating the seven steps to an effective instructional leader into daily behavior will result in a, “higher level of instructional leadership [that] will make a difference for each person in your school” (p. 16). By framing the leadership characteristics of two successful high school principals within the 21 leadership responsibilities identified by Marzano and colleagues and within the seven steps to an effective instructional leader outlined by McEwan, this particular study sought to discover which leadership characteristics contributed to the success of high schools that exhibited remarkable student achievement in the Intermountain West. The study explored leadership characteristics, behaviors, traits, and practices attributed to student success that emerged over the course of this qualitative research.

Furthermore, by using the 21 leadership responsibilities as part of a theoretical



framework, this study sought to discover leadership characteristics that contribute to the success of students in two specific public high schools in the Intermountain West region. By better understanding the characteristics, practices, traits, and behaviors of successful high school principals, it is hoped that school board officials and superintendents can more easily select quality applicants during the hiring process. Further, superintendents and district leaders can increasingly support current high school principals by providing focused, research-based professional development opportunities that will encourage growth in school leaders that positively translates to student achievement.

In addition to the Marzano and colleagues (2005) meta-analysis, research conducted by McEwan (2003a) regarding the steps necessary to become an effective instructional leader will also serve as a theoretical lens to focus this research. McEwan suggested there were several barriers to becoming an effective instructional leader: a lack of skills and training; a lack of support from superintendents, school boards, and community; and a lack of vision, will, and courage on the part of the principal (p. 137). McEwan proposed seven researched-based activities to build administrators into effective instructional leaders. These activities or steps included the following.

1. Establishment and implementation of instructional goals.
2. Provision of instructional resources to staff and support of positive physical environment to encourage and motivate staff to improve instruction.
3. Creation of a school culture conducive to learning.
4. Collaborative development of a school mission and vision.

5. High expectations for faculty, staff, and students.
6. The development of leaders.
7. Positive attitudes towards students, faculty, staff, and parents (McEwan, 2003a).

McEwan (2003b) developed an Instructional Behavior Checklist, which helps the school principal get a feel for their current level ability in regards to instructional leadership, and then offers suggestions for building instructional leadership in individual principals.

This study investigates the instructional leadership structures and systems that are in place which impact student achievement in two high achieving high schools. It also researches which leadership characteristics that Marzano and colleagues (2005) referred to as the 21 responsibilities of balanced leadership, are most prevalent in the two high school principals participating in this study. The study seeks to determine the most prevalent leadership characteristics along with their correlations to student achievement; including communication with and among teachers and students, building culture by way of fostering shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation, involvement and knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and monitoring/evaluating the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning.

This study links these specific selected responsibilities, or characteristics, to school leadership and collective efficacy for increasing student achievement in high schools. The collective personality of the school is made up of the varying roles of shared leadership and the shared beliefs of collective efficacy. The various interactions

of individuals within the school involve the ways in which individuals and groups communicate, collaborate, and provide and receive feedback. To attain high levels of academic achievement, principals and teachers must have involvement in and knowledge of the curriculum, instruction, and assessments (Marzano et al., 2005). Altogether, this climate of academic achievement should foster a culture of learning in which the collective leadership and collective efficacy of principals and teachers increase academic achievement.

By framing the leadership characteristics of two successful high school principals within the seven steps to effective instructional leadership (McEwan, 2003a), and the 21 leadership responsibilities identified by Marzano and colleagues (2005), this particular study sought to discover which leadership characteristics contributed to the success of high schools that exhibited remarkable student achievement. The study explored leadership characteristics, behaviors, school leadership traits, and practices attributed to student success that emerged over the course of this qualitative research.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study was significant in that it added to the literature base linking effective leadership characteristics to a high-performing school's sense of achievement and positive outcomes. This linkage helps contribute to the ongoing search for "what works," especially as it pertains to closing the achievement gap in spite of the complex structures and complex relationships found in a high school. Northouse (2007) agreed that it was important to study school leadership and student achievement because

leadership is a process whereby an individual influences members of an organization to achieve a common goal. It is not a linear, one-way event, but an interactive occurrence. Leadership is available to everyone. It is a process. It involves influence. It occurs in a group context, and it involves goal attainment (Northouse, 2007). As schools are led by administrators and teachers together to achieve the purpose of maximizing student learning, the examination of relationships between leadership and school achievement is not only important, it is imperative if we are to see that each young person achieves to their potential.

There are a multitude of complex issues that administrators face on a daily basis. Many people now assume that public schools and educators can and should solve all of societies' ills. Public education is expected to produce a well-qualified labor force to preserve the position of the United States in the global economy (Cochran-Smith, 2006). The pressures that come to schools and educators require that the accountability systems in place are fair, justifiable, and reasonable. Schools need leaders who can help them navigate those demands. Fullan (2003) noted that today's leaders need to be able to deal with complexity, chaos, and change. It is these complex issues, the high stakes of the NCLB standards, and the educational change by way of reform efforts and new curriculum movements that make it even more essential for schools to have a leader who possesses characteristics essential to the promotion of student achievement. Schools need leaders who can develop a sense of collective efficacy. According to Marzano and colleagues (2005), "collective efficacy" is the group members' shared perception or belief that they can dramatically enhance the effectiveness of an

organization. Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2004) referred to the collective efficacy of the teachers in a school as the best predictor of student success in schools. In simple terms, collective efficacy is the shared belief that “we can make a difference.”

### **Definition of Terms**

For clarity, within the scope of this research project, the following terms have been defined.

**Adequate yearly progress (AYP):** Under NCLB legislation, each state has developed and implemented measurements for determining whether its schools and local educational agencies (LEAs) are making adequate yearly progress (AYP). AYP is an individual state’s measure of progress toward the final goal of 100 percent of students achieving to state academic standards in at least the areas of reading/language arts and mathematics. AYP sets the minimum proficiency level that the state, its school districts, and schools must achieve each year on annual tests and related academic indicators. Parents whose children are attending Title I (low income) schools that do not make AYP over a period of years are given options to transfer their child to another school or obtain free tutoring services for their child.

**Case study:** An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2009).

**Case study inquiry:** Manages the distinctive situation where there will be many more variables of interest than data points with data needing to converge, and benefits

from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (Yin, 2009).

**Case study research:** The earliest examples of case study methodology are found in the fields of law and medicine, where “cases” make up the large body of research. However, there are some evaluative applications carried out specifically to assess the effectiveness of educational initiatives. Case studies do not need to have a minimum number of cases, nor do they need to randomly “select” cases. The researcher is called upon to work with the situation that presents itself in each case. Case studies can be single- or multiple-case designs, where a multiple design must follow a replication rather than sampling logic. Yin (2009) pointed out that generalization of results, from either single or multiple designs, is made to theory and not to populations. Multiple cases strengthen the results by replicating the pattern-matching, thus increasing confidence in the robustness of the theory (Tellis, 1997).

**High school:** A school in the United States that usually includes grades 9-12 or 10-12. In this particular study, the high schools researched include the grades of 10-12.

**Indicators for School Quality (ISQ):** A comprehensive survey system developed by the Center for the School of the Future (CSF) at Utah State University for school administrators to evaluate and monitor school improvement efforts (CSF, 2012). The survey instrument is administered to the four respondent audiences of parents, teachers, students, and other school staff. The ISQ measures parent, teacher, and student perceptions of parent support, teacher excellence, student commitment, school leadership, instructional quality, resource management, and school safety. The ISQ also

includes a school and community risk and resiliency assessment.

**Leadership activities:** McEwan (2003a) identified seven activities or steps that lead to successful instructional leaders. The activities outlined by McEwan are: (1) establish, implement, and achieve high academic standards; (2) be an instructional resource for your staff; (3) create a learning-oriented school culture and climate; (4) communicate your school's vision and mission to staff and students; (5) set high expectations for yourself and for your staff; (6) develop teacher leaders; (7) develop and maintain positive relationships with students, staff, and parents.

**Leadership traits and behaviors:** Cotton (2003) identified 26 essential traits and behaviors of effective school principals to show how they achieve success as instructional leaders. The traits and behaviors identified by Cotton are: (1) safe and orderly school environment; (2) vision and goals focused on high levels of student learning; (3) high expectations for student achievement; (4) self-confidence, responsibility, and perseverance; (5) visibility and accessibility; (6) positive and supportive school climate; (7) communication and interaction; (8) emotional/interpersonal support; (9) parent/community outreach and involvement; (10) rituals, ceremonies, and other symbolic actions; (11) shared leadership/decision making and staff empowerment; (12) collaboration; (13) the importance of instructional leadership; (14) high levels of student learning; (15) norms of continuous improvement; (16) discussion of instructional issues; (17) classroom observation and feedback to teachers; (18) teacher autonomy; (19) support of risk taking; (20) professional development opportunities and resources; (21) instructional time; (22) monitoring student progress

and sharing findings; (23) use of student data for program improvement; (24) recognition of student and staff achievement; (25) role modeling; (26) aversion to tight administrative control over others at the school.

**Leadership responsibilities:** Marzano and colleagues (2005) recorded the following 21 leadership responsibilities that have statistically significant relationships with student achievement: (1) affirmation; (2) change agent; (3) contingent rewards; (4) communication; (5) culture; (6) discipline; (7) flexibility; (8) focus; (9) ideals and beliefs; (10) input; (11) intellectual stimulation; (12) involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (13) knowledge; (14) monitoring and evaluating; (15) optimizer; (16) order; (17) outreach; (18) relationships; (19) resources; (20) situational awareness; and (21) visibility (pp. 42-43).

**No Child Left Behind Legislation:** The NCLB Act of 2001 reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the main federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school. Proposed by President George W. Bush shortly after his presidential inauguration, NCLB was signed into law on January 8, 2002. NCLB is built upon four main principles: accountability for results, more choice for parents, greater local control and flexibility, and an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research.

**Participant group and selection:** Interview participants included two high school principals, a school secretary from one school, teachers at each site, a custodian, and school counselors. Faculty and staff participants were contacted via e-mail and randomly selected to be in the study. Only those prospective participants who have



worked at the school site for at least the past five years are among the participants in the research pool that were randomly selected. More than 60 potential faculty and staff participants at each study site were randomly solicited to participate. The details of the research study were briefly introduced in a letter e-mailed to participants, with time expectations outlined. Only volunteers were selected to participate in the final research study.

**Prevention needs assessment (PNA):** PNA is a survey system administered to high school students designed to measure levels of risk and protection factors (also referred to as “assets”) within the school or student community. The premise of the risk and protective factor model asserts that in order to promote positive youth development and prevent problem behaviors, it is necessary to address those factors that predict the problem behaviors. PNA operates under the notion that through the measurement of risk and protective factors in a population, prevention programs can be implemented that will reduce the elevated risk factors and increase the protective factors.

**Utah Comprehensive Accountability System (UCAS):** The Utah State Office of Education (USOE) assembled a committee of policy makers, education leaders, and stakeholders from across the state to address a legislative mandate for an accountability system to measure public school effectiveness in the state of Utah. The committee, with technical assistance provided by the National Center for the Improvement of Educational, developed a comprehensive accountability system for Utah’s schools which incorporated the following design principles: (1) Promote progress toward and achievement of college and career readiness; (2) Value both meeting standards

(proficiency) and improving academic achievement (growth); (3) All schools, including those that serve traditionally low performing students, should have an opportunity to demonstrate success; (4) Strong incentives for schools to improve achievement for the lowest performing students; (5) Growth expectations for nonproficient students should be linked to attaining proficiency; (6) Growth expectations for all students, including students above proficiency, should be appropriately challenging and meaningful; (7) Clear and understandable to stakeholders. The resulting accountability system termed, UCAS provides a determination of school performance and supports the design principles by valuing performance on state tests, prioritizing individual student growth toward meaningful achievement targets, promoting equity for low performing students, and incentivizing attainment of graduation and college/career readiness.

**Utah Performance Assessment System for Students (U-PASS):** is the USOE's means to assess school performance levels prior to the development of the current UCAS system. Every school in Utah received an annual U-PASS Accountability Report Card. There are two U-PASS systems; one accountability system for schools with a 12th grade and one accountability system for schools without a 12th grade. Schools are designated as "Achieved State Level of Performance" or "Needs Assistance" based on five components or criteria for assessment. The areas/components of assessment are: (1) Participation; (2) Whole School Proficiency on CRT assessment; (3) Whole School Progress on CRT assessment; (4) Subgroup Proficiency on CRT assessment; (5) Subgroup Progress on CRT assessment. In order to achieve State level of performance a school with a 12th grade must have the following criteria:

- 95% participation on assessments
- 75% whole school proficiency or 180 progress score for whole school progress
- 75% subgroup proficiency or 180 progress score for subgroup progress

### **Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter II focuses on literature reviews of pertinent research articles on effective leadership approaches. Chapter III explains the research design and method of data collection, which was the qualitative in design. Chapter IV focuses on the analysis and synthesis of research findings. Chapter V presents a conclusive as well as succinct summary of research findings, and provides recommendations for further study.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review took resources from electronic library websites, peer-reviewed education articles, textbooks and dissertations regarding school leadership theory, case study research, and learning theories.

#### **Background on School Leadership**

Leadership in schools has not been established without debate (English & Anderson, 2004; S.C. Smith, Murphy, & Piele, 2006). School leadership has been manipulated and saturated over the years with business management concepts, theories and rules in practices in education, laws and policies, and issues of social justice (English & Anderson, 2004). Since the late 1800s, researchers have extensively discussed, scrutinized, and dissected the art of educational leadership (Beck & Murphy, 1993). Researchers have frequently analyzed the role of the school principal and its place in the larger social and educational context, shifting the focus of educational leaders from one decade to be “bureaucratic executives,” followed several years later by a focus on “humanistic facilitators” to finally the concept of “instructional leaders” (Beck & Murphy, 1993, p. 18). Over the years a combination of solid facts about educational leaders and school principals has evolved into definitions of leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

Historically it has been difficult to define the behaviors of effective school principals. The Wallace Foundation has spent years researching in an effort to identify

effective school leadership behaviors of principals. After years of research, Christina DeVita, President of the foundation, noted in 2004, “What’s far less clear, after several decades of school renewal efforts, is just how leadership matters, how important those effects are in promoting student learning of all children, and what the essential ingredients of successful leadership are” (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 3).

The search for answers about school leadership has prompted a number of researchers to continue to pursue the topic. The focus on leadership as a means to improve student achievement began in the 1980s with the “Effective Schools Research” undertaken by prominent Harvard professor Dr. Ronald Edmonds. Edmonds and supporting researchers identified key behaviors, referred to as correlates that, when in place, enabled schools to deliver high quality instruction to all students. Edmonds identified five correlates of effective schools: (a) leadership that focuses on quality instruction, (b) clear and broadly understood focus, (c) safe and orderly environment, (d) high teacher expectations, and (e) the use of clear data to drive the instructional program (Edmonds, 1982).

In additional studies, Edmonds (1982) noted that the school principal was the most important factor in an effective school. He stated, “Strong administrative leadership without which the disparate elements of good schooling can be neither brought together nor kept together” (p. 5). Edmonds’s strong emphasis on instructional leadership led other researchers to focus primarily on which instructional leadership behaviors affect student achievement.

Kenneth Leithwood (1994) developed a transformational leadership model for education using the components of instructional leadership. Leithwood's model was founded on Bass and Avolio's (1994) "4-I" model for transformational leadership, which included idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Although it is difficult to identify one leadership approach that translates to improved student achievement, it is possible to learn from the behaviors that effective principals demonstrate (Whitaker, 2003). The scrutiny that resulted from increased school accountability has shifted the focus and increased the interest among researchers to identify effective school principal behaviors.

In 2003, Kathleen Cotton (2003) published *Principals and Student Achievement: What the Research Says*. The Cotton study is significant because it was the most thorough and exhaustive study regarding the relationship between effective principals and student achievement that had been conducted to date. Cotton utilized a narrative approach in her study and examined 81 reports dealing with the effects of leadership on student achievement. Each report examined principal behaviors in high achieving schools. Cotton identified 26 areas in which principals of high-achieving schools were effective, and provided examples of behaviors that were associated with each area. Cotton continued her analysis by identifying other variables that impact principal effectiveness. Cotton noted that outstanding secondary principals place an emphasis on instructional leadership. However, Cotton also noted that secondary principals generally spend substantially less time on key instructional leadership tasks than elementary principals.

Cotton's (2003) study of effective leadership behaviors for principals from high-achieving schools furthered existing research seeking to identify specific principal behaviors that improve student achievement. She also identified specific challenges that make secondary leadership difficult (see Table 1). However, unlike the Marzano and colleagues' (2005) study, Cotton's research did not identify which leadership behaviors had the highest correlation of impact on student achievement.

Although it is difficult to identify one definitive leadership approach that leads to improved student achievement, it is possible to learn from the behaviors and/or characteristics that effective principals demonstrate (Whitaker, 2003). While no single overarching leadership style or behavior was identified by Cotton (2003), she did make the connection between specific leadership behaviors and improved student achievement. Elaine McEwan (2003b) and Marzano and colleagues (2005) used the findings of the Cotton study as a foundation to take research on school leadership's connection to student achievement to the next level.

Elaine McEwan (2003b) published *Ten Traits of Highly Effective Principals: From Good to Great Performance* and *Seven Steps to Effective Instructional Leadership* in response to the need for literature on effective principal behaviors as it relates to student achievement. McEwan, a school principal herself, conducted a survey of 108 school staff, principals, central office administrators, school board members, and parents. She referred to her sample group as a sample of convenience, as all the participants were in her e-mail address book. McEwan took the data from her survey, identified the behaviors of principals, and then related her data to how well their

Table 1

*Cotton's Leadership Areas and Behavior Exemplars*

Leadership area	Behavior exemplar
1. Safe and orderly school environment	Set standards for student behavior. Communicate high expectations for student behavior. Apply rules consistently.
2. Vision and goals focused on high levels of student learning	Establish vision of the ideal school. Establish clear goals related to the vision. Emphasize academic goals and the importance of learning.
3. High expectations for student achievement	Expect all students to reach their learning potential. Establish a belief in the students' abilities.
4. Self-confidence, responsibility, and perseverance	Hold themselves responsible for the schools success. Are persistent in pursuit of goals despite difficult obstacles.
5. Visibility and accessibility	Are visible to all stakeholders. Frequently visit classrooms and interact with the school community.
6. Positive and supportive school climate	Communicate of school-wide interests. Set caring environment on campus.
7. Communication and interaction	Good communicator that solicits information from all stakeholders. Involves all stakeholders in communication. Build positive relationships.
8. Emotional/Interpersonal Support	Capable and caring communicators. Support staff/students personal needs.
9. Parent/community outreach and involvement	Conducts vigorous outreach to parents and community. Engages with traditionally under-represented groups.
10. Rituals, ceremonies, and other symbolic actions	Use of ceremonies and rituals to honor traditions. Instill pride, recognizes excellence, and strengthens affiliation with the school.
11. Shared leadership/decision making and staff empowerment	Engage staff and constituents in decision making. Involve everyone in training and provides information needed for productivity.
12. Collaboration	Activities are routinely collaborative. Staffs learn, plan, and work together to improve the school.
13. Importance of instructional leadership	Actively involved in curriculum and instruction.
14. High levels of student learning	Make decisions in light of impact on student learning.
15. Norm of continuous improvement	Continually push for improvement. Improvement process is permanent part of school life.
16. Discussion of instructional issues	Facilitate staff discussion of curriculum and instruction. Participate in discussions of curriculum and instruction.

*(table continues)*



Leadership area	Behavior exemplar
17. Classroom observation and feedback to teachers	Visit classrooms frequently. Observe and provide feedback to teachers regularly.
18. Teacher autonomy	Respect teachers' judgment and skills. Allow autonomy in organizing and managing their rooms. Limit excessive intrusions to the learning environment.
19. Support risk taking	Take calculated risks to improve learning. Encourage teachers to be innovative and experiment in the classroom.
20. Professional development opportunities and resources	Offer more and varied professional development. Be creative in securing resources needed to improve school.
21. Instructional time	Value instructional time by limiting interruptions. Arrange for additional learning time outside the traditional school day.
22. Monitoring student progress and share findings	Ensure there is a systematic procedure for monitoring student progress. Use and disaggregate data. Communicate data to stakeholders.
23. Use of data for program improvement	Know how to interpret data. Use data to plan curricular and instructional improvement.
24. Recognition of student and staff achievement	Make a point of recognizing achievements of students and staff.
25. Role modeling	Exemplify the outlook and behavior they expect from others. Work as a part of the school community.

*Note.* Adapted from *Principals and Student Achievement: What the Research Says*, by Kathleen Cotton, 2003, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, VA.

students achieve. McEwan's research yielded 37 specific leadership behaviors. She used these behaviors to organize a list of the top 10 principal traits from the survey respondents. She provided examples of how leaders who possessed these traits behaved.

The following traits were identified by McEwan (2003b) as being in the top 10: communicator, envisioner, educator, facilitator, change master, culture builder, activator, producer, character builder, and contributor. McEwan described each trait and provided specific behaviors that demonstrate each trait. Further, McEwan took the top identified school leadership traits and developed a blueprint for building more effective

instructional leadership in school principals. However, McEwan's research was largely anecdotal and she did not include specific data collection procedures. She also did not discuss the application of her findings. Additionally, while relaying the experiences of effective principals, she did not discuss how the behaviors she identified improved student achievement.

In *School Leadership That Works: From Research to Results*, Marzano and colleagues' (2005) researchers used the research that Cotton (2003) and McEwan (2003b) had conducted as a springboard to push the research on the topic one step further. The Marzano and colleagues study resulted in a meta-analysis of 69 studies involving 2,802 schools, and over 14,000 teachers. These studies included 10 that focused solely on high schools, and included 371 total schools in the research. Marzano and colleagues expanded, and in some cases substantiated, the work of Cotton by providing quantitative data to analyze and correlate principal leadership behaviors to student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005). The meta-analysis of Marzano and colleagues placed a renewed focus on the ability of school leadership to effect student achievement, "We believe that our general finding of a .25 average correlation is compelling and should stir school leaders to seek ways to improve their leadership skills" (p. 32).

Marzano and colleagues (2005) identified 21 leadership responsibilities and their corresponding specific behaviors. To determine the relatedness of the 21 responsibilities to each other, a factor analysis was conducted using the responses to a questionnaire to measure the principal's behavior in terms of the 21 school leadership

responsibilities. This led to the discovery of two factors believed to underlie the effectiveness of the 21 responsibilities: first and second-order change. First-order change is defined as incremental, fine tuning of the current system through a series of small steps that do not depart radically from the past. This is also referred to as the “management of the Daily Life of a School or...the day-to-day operations of the school” (p. 70). Second-order change is more complex change that requires a different approach than first-order change, is more difficult to successfully bring about, but is deeper and more impactful in nature if successfully accomplished.

Although the Marzano and colleagues’ (2005) study provided the leadership responsibilities in rank order, the researchers were quick to emphasize that this did not mean any item is not important. They emphasized that which is important is how close the correlations are in size. All but one responsibility ranged between a .18 and .28 in correlation. Marzano and colleagues argued that this clearly illustrated that each of the leadership responsibilities is important in its own right and is worthy of continued research.

The Marzano and colleagues (2005) and McEwan (2003b) studies were chosen as the theoretical lenses for this study for several reasons. First, McEwan offered a blueprint and a specific plan for building effective instructional leadership. The purpose of her research was to help build instructional leaders. Second, McEwan believed that effective instructional leaders can be nurtured and taught, and are not necessarily born. She also stressed the importance of strong instructional leadership through the pursuit of fairly precise steps for action. This idea that great instructional leaders can be developed

lends itself nicely to one of the goals of this research study—that being the desire to implement this research as a means for leadership improvement in schools. McEwan’s self-stated purpose for her research was to “make a difference for each person in your school..., everyone will start expecting that all students can learn, and your school will achieve its mission of improving education” (p. 17). McEwan provided a nice focus for this particular study because of the similar aspirations and goals of her work compared with this research, and her blueprint for effective instructional leadership also helps to narrow the scope of study for this research as well.

The Marzano and colleagues’ (2005) researchers assumed in their studies that principals who received exceptional leadership training on the 21 leadership responsibilities would have a major positive impact on the academic achievement of students. The Marzano and colleagues study also represented the largest sample of principals, teachers, and student achievement scores ever used to this juncture to analyze the effects of educational leadership on student achievement. The recent nature of both the Marzano and colleagues and McEwan (2003b) studies lend themselves well as foundations for this study. The Marzano and colleagues research also provides a logical frame for this study by making the connection between leadership characteristics and student achievement, a connection which this study also discovers. The Marzano and colleagues meta-analysis lays much of the groundwork for understanding the relationship between school leadership and student achievement. The McEwan study helped narrow the focus from the 21 leadership practices to seven precise activities and steps for effective instructional leadership. This qualitative study utilizes these

groundbreaking research studies as a theoretical framework for analyzing the similarities and differences between the leadership characteristics (referred to by Marzano and colleagues as “responsibilities”—see Table 2) found with the principals working at both GTGHS and OHS.

Marzano and colleagues (2005) analyzed a number of studies relating to school leadership which led to the development of a 92-item analysis tool used to identify the 21 specific responsibilities of effective school leaders. In looking at both the daily work of school leaders, along with the systems of organizational change, Marzano and colleagues ordered these responsibilities in relation to the level or type of change the leaders were implementing. Using first-order and second-order change as the basis for employing any of the 21 responsibilities, Marzano and colleagues further identified which of the 21 responsibilities were directly related to first or second-order changes. In their research, Marzano and colleagues rationalized that if leadership techniques did not match the order of change by an innovation or change, the innovation would likely fail regardless of its merits.

Marzano and colleagues (2005) described first-order change as those changes that are incremental, subtle, gradual, and a by-product of the daily operations and processes of a school organization. Second-order change involves dramatic departure from the expected day-to-day change. This second-order change involves deep change that “alters the system in fundamental ways, offering a dramatic shift in direction and requiring new ways of thinking and acting” (p. 34). Marzano and colleagues found that all 21 leadership responsibilities were related to first-order change, and they defined the

Table 2

*Marzano and Colleagues' 21 First-Order Leadership Responsibilities and Behavior Exemplars*

Leadership responsibility	Behavior exemplar
1. Affirmation	Recognizes and celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges failures.
2. Change agent	Willingness to challenge the status quo.
3. Contingent rewards	Recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments.
4. Communication	Establishes strong lines of communication with staff and students.
5. Culture	Fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation.
6. Discipline	Protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time.
7. Flexibility	Adapts leadership behaviors to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent.
8. Focus	Establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention.
9. Ideals/beliefs	Communicates and operates from a strong ideals and beliefs about schooling.
10. Input	Involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policy.
11. Intellectual stimulation	Ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices.
12. Involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment	Is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
13. Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment	Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices.
14. Monitoring/evaluation	Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning.
15. Optimizer	Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations.
16. Order	Establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines.
17. Outreach	Is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders?
18. Relationships	Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff.
19. Resources	Provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs.
20. Situational awareness	Is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school. Uses information to address current and potential problems.
21. Visibility	Has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students.

*Note.* Adapted from *School Leadership That Works: From Research to Results*, by R. J. Marzano, T. Waters, & A. McNulty, 2005, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, VA.

standard operating procedures of a school. The 21 responsibilities defined in Table 2 relate to first-order change.

While Marzano and colleagues (2005) found in their factor analysis that all 21 responsibilities were related to first-order change (see Table 2), they found that only seven responsibilities were related to second-order change (see Table 3), and they found that a principal must possess three responsibilities at all times no matter what innovation or change they are implementing (see Table 4). The seven second-order change responsibilities are as shown in Table 3.

### **Can Leadership Be Defined?**

Leadership in schools has not been established without debate (English & Anderson, 2004; S.C. Smith et al., 2006). School leadership has been manipulated and

Table 3

#### *Marzano and Colleagues Seven Second-Order Leadership Responsibilities and Behavior Exemplars*

Leadership responsibility	Behavior exemplar
1. Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment	Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices.
2. Change agent	Willingness to challenge the status quo.
3. Optimizer	Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations.
4. Intellectual stimulation	Ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices.
5. Monitoring/evaluation	Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning.
6. Ideals/beliefs	Communicates and operates from a strong ideals and beliefs about schooling.
7. Flexibility	Adapts leadership behaviors to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent.

Table 4

*Marzano and Colleagues' Three Leadership Responsibilities Independent of Change and Behavior Exemplars*

Leadership responsibility	Behavior exemplar
1. Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment	Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices.
2. Monitoring/evaluation	Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning.
3. Ideals/beliefs	Communicates and operates from a strong ideals and beliefs about schooling.

saturated over the years with business management concepts, theories and rules in practices in education, laws and policies, and issues of social justice (English & Anderson, 2004). Since the late 1800s, researchers have extensively discussed, scrutinized, and dissected the art of educational leadership (Beck & Murphy, 1993). Researchers have frequently analyzed the role of the school principal and its place in the larger social and educational context, shifting the focus of educational leaders from one decade to be “bureaucratic executives,” followed several years later by a focus on “humanistic facilitators” to finally the concept of “instructional leaders” (Beck & Murphy, 1993, p. 18). Over the years a combination of solid facts about educational leaders and school principals has evolved into definitions of leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

**Leadership Themes in Education**

Marzano and colleagues (2005) stated that it does not matter which leadership theory is used to clarify its purposes, leadership has been closely associated with the



effective operation of complex organizations for over one-hundred years. In addition, these leadership theories or models seek to influence the behavior of others. The following literature review is a brief review of several leadership styles that may influence the behavior of teachers, students, and parents. These styles encompass four main theories: trait, behavioral, contingency, and relationship (Owens, 1998). These theories have been chosen because they are the most prevalent according to the leadership and student achievement research found in academia today. It is important to discuss these leadership theories due to both the direct and indirect influence they have on student performance and academic achievement (Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2006).

### **Trait Theory**

In the early 1700s leadership was considered something that was born within a person. Even studies of leadership during the first 50 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century focused mainly on the personal characteristics that leaders possessed. The “great man” theory stemmed from the belief that successful performance of individuals or organizations depended on leaders who possessed leadership characteristics. Leadership skills were not something that a person could learn. Early leadership theorists sought then to explain leadership on the basis of natural heritage, birth order, and age (Bass, 1985). Bennis and Nanus (1985) stated, “Those of the right breed could lead; all others must be led” (p. 5).

During the second half of the twentieth century, researchers began to review many studies of trait leadership and were hard pressed to find similar results and consistencies in leadership impact as a result of having a particular set of traits.

Although some studies came to the conclusion that there were some personal factors associated with leadership, such as responsibility, capacity, achievement, and status, it was still concluded that the trait leadership theory yielded little value toward understanding the depth of how leadership works (Boyan, 1988; Fiedler, 1997; Stogdill, 1974). It was precisely this debate regarding the “great man” theory that led to a discussion of the *situational leadership* theory.

*Trait* leadership theory ignored variables such as style, situation, context, or subordinates and focused completely on the personal traits of a leader. After much research and debate Stogdill (1974) argued that both traits and circumstances were important components of leadership (Northouse, 2007). Stogdill summarized decades of scientific research when he stated:

A person does not become a leader by virtue of the possession of some combination of traits, but the pattern of personal characteristics of the leader must bear some relevant relationship to the characteristic, activities and goals of the followers. Thus, leadership must be conceived in terms of the interaction of variables which are in constant flux and change. (pp. 63-64)

*Trait* theory defined leadership through natural selection, while *situational leadership* considers natural ability as well as circumstances, technique, and background.

### **Situational Leadership**

*Trait* theory defined leadership through natural selection. *Situational leadership* theory considered natural ability as well as technique, circumstances, and background. Hersey and Blanchard’s (1988) *situational leadership* theory asserted that leader behavior is based upon two dimensions of leadership, task behavior and relationship behavior. These dimensions are influenced by one environmental variable, subordinate

maturity or development. As subordinates develop confidence and ability, leaders vary their behavior by adjusting the amount of task direction and psychological support they give them. Hersey and Blanchard's theory emphasizes the effectiveness of a flexible, adaptive leader that varies his/her actions towards different situations. For that reason, it is important for school leaders to learn flexibility, adaptive behaviors, and to effectively assess the environment. They remind us that it is essential to treat different subordinates differently, to treat the same subordinates differently, and to treat the same subordinates differently as the situation changes. Moreover, Hersey and Blanchard advanced the important proposition that leaders should be aware of opportunities to build the skills and confidence of others. School leaders cannot just assume that a particular teacher with deficiencies in skills or motivation must forever remain a "problem teacher." Leader behavior can be exhibited in a more or less skillful fashion in assisting to develop teachers.

*Trait* leadership became less useful to theorists as research provided more and more evidence that the possession of specific traits did not establish that one would presume to exercise good leadership. It was becoming clear to researchers that leadership as a construct had to be viewed as a relationship among individuals within a social context. Early research also showed that individuals who might be effective leaders in one social context may not be able to transfer those leadership abilities to a different social situation. It soon became apparent that leadership, and how it was viewed and evaluated, was contingent upon the context in which it was observed (Fiedler, 1997). Bass (1985) stated that "the qualities, characteristics, and skills required

in a leader are determined to a large extent by the demands of the situation in which he is to function as a leader” (p. 65).

It also became soon apparent that this idea of a *situational* type of leadership was a breakthrough for research. The field’s understanding of leadership had been constrained and restricted to this juncture by the pervasive view that leaders influenced organizations and not that organizations could influence or shape a leader’s behavior (Kruger, van Eck, & Vermeulen, 2005; Yukl, 1999). *Situational* leadership is based on the assumption that various situations might require an assortment of leadership behaviors, or at least certain skills or knowledge for specific situations. Theoretically, the possible variety of combinations and contingencies that could exist when considering measuring effective leadership in a situational contingency model is incredible (Kruger et al., 2005).

### **Transformational Leadership**

There are several theories of leadership that revolve around the concept of *transformational leadership*. Burns (1978) coined the term “transformational leadership” and billed it as a process in which leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation. For Burns, the transformational leader seeks to raise the consciousness of followers by appealing to the higher ideals and moral values such as liberty, justice, equality, peace, and humanitarianism. This is accomplished while ignoring the more base emotions of fear, greed, jealousy, or hatred.

Building on the work of Burns (1978), Bass (1985), Bass and Avolio (1994), and Leithwood (1994) developed the *transformational* model of school leadership with

a primary focus on school principals. Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins (1994) defined *transformational* leadership primarily in terms of the leader's effect on followers. Followers feel trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect toward the leader, and they are motivated to do more than they originally expected to do. A leader can transform followers by making them more aware of the importance and value of task outcomes, inducing them to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organization or team while activating their higher-order needs. Bass views transformational leadership as more than just charisma. Transformational leaders influence followers by arousing strong emotions and identification with the leader, but they may also transform followers by serving as coach, teacher, and mentor. "Transformational leaders not only manage structure but they purposely impact the culture in order to change it. Conversely, transactional leaders are basically concerned with structures, emphasizing organizational purposes and building cultures" (Harris et al., 2003, pp. 16-17).

Transformational leadership is the style most school leadership preparation programs around the United States are emphasizing as they are training leaders to become principals (Hay, 2003). Hay theorized that transformational leadership occurs when leaders (a) broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, (b) generate awareness and acceptance of the purpose and mission of the group, and (c) stir employees to look beyond their own self-interest and work for the good of the group. This suggests that collaborative efforts between principals and teachers results in mutual commitment as well as higher student achievement. According to Hay, transformational leadership approach creates a "win-win situation" (p. 3) for leaders

and followers.

Transformational leadership is all about advancing change. Transformational leaders bring about change through the emphasis on building relationships and developing the people within the organization to their fullest potential. Through the development of the people within, the organizational goals will be met.

Transformational leaders create a compelling vision that provides purpose and meaning for the organization. A transformational leader also recognizes that goals cannot be attained without building capacity within the organization, particularly capacity for organizational members to recognize problems and find new ways of solving problems through innovative thinking. This theory of leadership emphasizes emotions and values, tools used by the leader to motivate and inspire followers to forsake their own self-interests for the sake of organizational goals.

Leithwood (1994) recognized the need for transformational leadership in the case of school reform.

Most school reform initiatives assume significant capacity development on the part of individuals, as well as whole organizations.... Initiatives such as this one also depend on high levels of motivation and commitment on the part of school staffs to solving the often complex problems associated with their implementation” (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000, p. 415).

In the case of school reform, Leithwood (1994) contended that one rarely sees the leadership manifest itself except in the context of change. Furthermore, Leithwood argued that the nature of change is the determinant for what form of leadership is most needed in the given situation.

While the role of the leader is important in the transformational process,

transforming school cultures is a process best described as motivation provided by the leader to bring about positive change for the members within the organization. In transformational leadership, teachers become collaborative partners in the decision-making process within the school (Leithwood, 1994). Bass (1985) understood that the success of the transformational leader is directly tied to the relationship the leader has with their followers. Through a process of collaborative change both transformational leader and followers bond in a manner that impacts the performance of the entire organization, which results in a responsive and innovative environment. The process of transformational leadership has reciprocal effects on both the leader and the followers within the school (Silins, 1994). While much has been written regarding transformational leadership there is an abundance of prominent educational research literature that asserts the critical nature of instructional leadership as the core of good school leadership practice.

### **Moral Leadership**

A discussion on transformational leadership leads to the idea of *moral* or *ethical leadership*. Recently beliefs and ethical purpose have become a central topic for students involved in educational leadership programs (Harris et al., 2003). According to Harris and colleagues, “The best leaders tend to be those that create powerful learning communities and are able to integrate the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual” (p. 20). The concept of *moral leadership* encapsulates three main ideas.

1. The relationship between the leader and those being led is not merely a relationship of power, but it is a genuine sharing of mutual aspirations, values, and needs.

2. Those being led have latitude in responding to the initiatives of the leaders.
3. The leaders take full responsibility for delivering on the commitments made to those being led by negotiating a compact between leaders and those being led (Owens, 1998, p. 210).

### **Collaborative or Distributed Leadership**

*Collaborative leadership* represents another theory in school leadership.

According to Welch (1998), collaborative leadership is a dynamic framework which endorses collegial, interdependent, and co-equal styles of interaction between at least two partners working jointly together in a decision making or problem solving process. Covey (1990) proposed synergy as a means to enhance collaborative efforts. Insecure people tend to make others over in their own image, and surround themselves with people who think similarly. They mistake uniformity with unity, and sameness for oneness. Synergy results from valuing differences, from bringing different perspectives together in the spirit of mutual respect. People feel free to seek the best possible alternative, one that is better than the original proposals. Using the principle of synergy, a person may multiply his/her individual talents and abilities, thus making the whole greater than the sum of the parts.

As research suggests, it is no longer appropriate for a principal to simply be the independent messenger who is responsible for all leadership activities. Rather, research shows that principals must understand their roles beyond the simple managerial level and must move into the critical realm of true leadership as facilitators of a team effort (Elmore, 2000; Sebring & Byrk, 2000). The notion that principals define the improvement process occurring at their schools in order to allow human talents and the



experience of the staff to emerge toward the achievement of a common vision is the nature of *distributed leadership*.

This idea of *distributed leadership* was augmented by Elmore (2000) when he suggested in his research that this model of leadership includes both teacher participation in the leadership process, and the subsequent enhancement of teacher relationships with their principals. Within this system of leadership, Elmore viewed the role of the principal as defensive because teachers must not be distracted from their foundational work of instructional leadership and instructional practices. A responsibility of the principal is to “buffer” teachers from issues that distract them from their primary focus—that of the promotion of academic achievement for students. Elmore indicated that, in addition to the roles of budgeting, organizing, and managing the day-to-day affairs of the school, the effective school principal must also act as the instructional leader, assisting and coaching teachers towards continuous development and improvement in classroom instruction.

### **Vision and Culture**

According to Greenfield (1987), most researchers agree that successful principals and instructional leaders have a *vision* of what they want to accomplish, and that the vision guides them in managing and leading activities. Perhaps the most overused and underappreciated word in the principal-leadership vocabulary is vision, particularly when combined with the concept of instructional improvement. Principals are encouraged to develop a strategic vision and then sell it to teachers, parents, and students. However, vision should involve a collective and collaborative process. This

collective vision need not diminish the realistic and relevant role of the principal in developing and communicating school vision, but rather create a sense of ownership and shared vision amongst all within the organization.

School leadership and vision is a major component of school culture and school climate. According to Black (1997), school principals shape the daily routine of school life, and as a result, mold its culture and climate. At the heart of school success are principals who are focused on the development of teachers' knowledge and skills, professional community, and program coherence. Therefore, leadership, and the creation of positive school culture, are critical to teacher morale, unity within a community, and student learning. Glickman, Gordon, and Gordon (2007) referred to *culture* or supervision as the "glue of a successful school" (p. 9). A leader becomes responsible for developing a linkage between a person, or group of people, and the organization. Individual teacher needs and organizational goals are blended in such a way that the school can work in harmony toward a vision of what the school should be. Culture is the "glue" that holds the school together and that blends the efforts of teachers, students, parents, and leaders toward making a school a particular type of institution for learning. A school culture is a representation of what its members collectively believe themselves to be—it is their self-concept. Culture refers to a system of shared values. These values are known, communicated, and produce an identity within the school. Culture is an important factor in the stability and effectiveness of schools. It is necessary for a school to develop and maintain a sense of "oneness" in a way that individuals behave and believe in the organization. Cultures, however, do not

develop completely, nor are they maintained without effort. The creation and maintenance of culture is a source of stability and predictability, and a positive source of change where such change can improve school life and effectiveness.

### **Instructional Leadership**

As public schools have come under increasing pressure and scrutiny from the federal government, calls for increased accountability for public schools have been heard coming from the halls and chambers of state legislatures and from Congress. This had led to several education reform movements over the past 40 years in the United States. The latest “wave of reform” in the United States has been initiated by the enactment of the NCLB law. This law has demanded that principals invoke their “instructional leadership skills” in schools in order to support academic instruction and improve academic results of students (NCLB, 2002).

Reform efforts and the study of school leaders has resulted in many terms to describe them, however the terms of *instructional leader* and *instructional leadership* are the most prevalent and most accepted terms currently applied to educational leadership (Marzano et al., 2005). Although instructional leadership is a popular model, it is not well defined. The term “instructional leadership” has its origins from the research of the effective-schools movement of the 1980s (Murphy & Lewis, 1999; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). Marzano and colleagues noted in their research that the term *instructional leadership* is the most frequently mentioned educational leadership concept in North America. Although instructional leadership is the popular model of the day, it is not well defined and is a complex model that is difficult to define

in a brief statement. Instructional leadership encourages a focus on improving the classroom practices of teachers as the primary direction of the school (Leithwood et al., 2004). Those in academia typically resort to describing what instructional leaders do in an attempt to define instructional leadership. For example, McEwan (2003a) suggested that instructional leadership is comprised of a traditional management component along with a human component. Traditional management consists of planning, time management, leadership theory, and organizational development. The human component consists of communicating, motivating, and facilitating roles of the principal.

According to McEwan (2003a), there are seven steps to becoming an effective instructional leader. These steps include: establishment and implementation of instructional goals; provision of instructional resources to staff to encourage and motivate them to improve instruction; creation of a school culture conducive to learning; collaborative development of a school mission and vision; high expectations for faculty and staff; the development of leaders; and positive attitudes towards students, faculty, staff, and parents. In addition, W. Smith and Andrews (1989) identified four dimensions of an instructional leader including—resource provider, instructional resource, communicator, and visible presence—and Sergiovanni (1991) proposed one of the earliest models of instructional leadership, defining five leadership forces: technical, human, educational, symbolic, and cultural. Sergiovanni (2001) has more recently included the educational, symbolic, and cultural leadership forces in a new theory of school leadership—a theory that focuses on the school as a community

and the principal as the servant. In this model of instructional leadership the principal is responsible for “ministering” to the needs of the schools he/she serves. The principal ministers by providing help and by being of service to parents, teachers, and students. He/she ministers by highlighting and protecting the values of the school. The principal as minister is whole-heartedly devoted to a cause, mission, or set of ideas and accepts the duty and obligation to serve this cause.

Most importantly, good instructional leaders find a way for every student to experience increased academic achievement regardless of their racial or ethnic background, their community, their home language, their socio-economic status, or their family situation (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). Supovitz and Poglinco (2001) stated:

The instructional leadership, not just by the principal but by the wider cast of individuals in both formal and informal leadership roles, can play a central role in shifting the emphasis of school activity more directly onto instructional improvements that lead to enhanced student learning and performance. (p. 1)

The prevailing school leadership theories and models provide a framework for the historical evolution of instructional leadership, capturing how leadership in social organizations evolves as the social and political climate influence the organization. Thus, the instructional leadership construct highlights and encapsulates trait, behavior, contingency, charisma, and transformational theories. Strong instructional leaders possess specific traits and behaviors, such as charisma or collegiality, which can be applied in different situations and environments. The premise of instructional leadership is to lead teachers and students to reach their full potentials by creating climates characterized by instructional leader attributes such as high academic expectations for teachers and students, communication of shared goals, monitoring of teaching and

learning processes, and promotion of positive attitudes between student, faculty, and staff.

The numerous definitions of instructional leadership prove problematic on at least two different levels. First, the definitions that have come from numerous research studies failed to translate many of the identified broad domains of instructional leadership into specific leadership characteristics that could be empirically tested (Murphy & Hallinger, 1992). Second, with a lack of clarity among researchers about what instructional leadership meant, including defining variables, constructs, and characteristics, it became quite difficult to compare and contrast the results these various among studies. This lack of clarity makes the study of leadership even more challenging. There is a serious lack of congruence in what is being measured, as well as a lack of consideration for the influences of contexts. This results in challenges for the researcher as we seek meaning to what is being observed and to what is being measured.

### **Research Question**

The primary purpose of this study will be to identify principal leadership characteristics related to academic success. This should be accomplished by answering the following question, “Which effective leadership characteristics do highly successful school principals demonstrate?”

## Theoretical Framework

Considerable evidence exists that a strong instructional leader is a fundamental component of an effective school (Barth, 1990; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Purkey, Smith, & Marshall, 1983). For example, Barth stipulated:

The principal is the key to a good school. The quality of the educational program depends on the school principal. The principal is the most important reason why teachers grow—or are stifled on the job. The principal is the most potent factor in determining school climate. Show me a good school, and I'll show you a good principal. (p. 64)

These statements could easily result in a conclusion that principals are the most influential people within schools.

One of the cornerstones of educational leadership research conducted over the past thirty years is the apparently powerful role the school principal plays in overall student achievement (Carter, 2001; Murphy & Hallinger, 1992). Researchers have shown (Bowden, 2002) that there is a direct correlation between the principal's leadership qualities and the overall morale of the faculty and academic performance of the students. Schools that make a difference in the lives of students are led by principals who make a significant investment in the instructional improvement process within the classroom (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982). Principals who make a difference are personally invested in the instructional and learning processes of the teachers and the pupils placed in their charge (Andrews & Soder, 1987).

Williams (2003), in a dissertation titled *The Relationship between Principal Response to Adversity and Student Achievement*, emphasized the importance of the principal in influencing student achievement through developing a school culture

focused on learning and working to establish a collaborative learning community. Results from this study indicated that students attained higher test scores in schools with principals who developed a school culture focused on learning and collaboration.

Owings, Kaplan, and Nunnery (2005) also found that student achievement levels were higher in schools with principals who scored significantly better on the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards rubric (Van Meter & Murphy, 1997). ISLLC standards are a set of benchmarks established by a leadership consortium of state education leaders from across the United States. Their mission is to establish a leadership rubric to assess the effectiveness of school principals. There are six ISLLC standards. Each standard is followed by the *Knowledge* required for the standard, the *Dispositions* or attitudes manifest by the accomplishment of the standard, and *Performances* that could be observed by an administrator who is accomplished in the standard. These benchmarks include attributes such as decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution skills. The ISLLC standards have recently been developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers in collaboration with the National Policy Board on Educational Administration (NPBEA) to help strengthen preparation programs in school leadership (Van Meter & Murphy, 1997).

Owings and colleagues (2005) concluded that principal quality and leadership traits were directly connected to student achievement. As they write, “it is reasonable to believe that principals who practice and build skills in instructional leadership can positively impact their schools’ learning and student performance” (pp. 115-116).

The Wallace Foundation asserted that school “leadership is second only to



classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 5). Furthermore, the Foundation stated that their research shows that successful school leadership plays a highly significant role in improving student learning and achievement.

Hallinger and Heck (1996) reviewed empirical literature on the relationship between the principal’s role and school effectiveness from 1980 to 1995. They assert that the principal’s role is a complex combination of organizational relationships that lead to both direct, and indirect positive influences on student achievement. While Hallinger and Heck found it challenging to determine the exact impact principals exert on student achievement, they also stated that the results of their research indicated that the principal did impact student achievement, even if this impact was perceived to be indirect at times.

Despite an occasional finding of only an indirect principal impact on student achievement (e.g., Hallinger & Heck, 1996), several decades of research overwhelmingly indicated that the principal has both direct and indirect influence on student achievement. A principal’s instructional leadership is critical to the success or failure of educational programs and the academic achievement of each individual student. This literature suggests that the responsibility for improving instruction and academic achievement rests squarely on the shoulders of the school principal (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Barth, 1990; Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Murphy & Hallinger, 1992; Owings et al., 2005; Purkey et al., 1983; Williams, 2003).

The Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) supported a

meta-analysis study by Marzano and colleagues in 2005 that specifically addressed the effect of school leadership behavior (one could also call behavior, characteristics) on student achievement. In *School Leadership That Works*, Marzano and colleagues claimed “that the research over the last 35 years provides strong guidance on specific leadership behaviors for school administrators and that those behaviors have well documented effects on student achievement” (p. 7). The McREL researchers conducted a meta-analysis of 69 studies involving 2,802 schools, and over 14,000 teachers. These studies included 10 that focused solely on high schools, and included 371 total schools. Marzano expanded on the work of previous research by adding quantitative data to analyze principal leadership behaviors. The outcome of the meta-analysis established a correlation of .25 between leadership behaviors and student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005). Marzano and colleagues identified 21 leadership responsibilities, or characteristics in all, along with their corresponding specific behaviors. The meta-analysis of Marzano and colleagues placed a renewed focus on the ability of school leadership to positively impact student achievement, “We believe that our general finding of a .25 average correlation is compelling and should stir school leaders to seek ways to improve their leadership skills” (p. 32).

The purpose of this study is to examine the key leadership characteristics of principals at two different high schools. The Marzano and colleagues’ (2005) meta-analysis laid much of the groundwork for understanding the relationship between school leadership and student achievement. The McEwan (2003a) study helped narrow the focus from the 21 leadership practices to seven precise activities and steps for effective instructional leadership. This qualitative study utilized these groundbreaking research

studies as a theoretical framework for analyzing the similarities and differences between the leadership characteristics found at the two research high school to discover basic leadership characteristics that contribute to the academic performance of students who attend high school in the Intermountain West region.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **Introduction**

Public education is facing increased scrutiny, combined with demands for more accountability and increased student achievement (Rammer, 2007). The 2001 NCLB Act (NCLB, 2002) initiated a strong federal focus for increased student performance and accountability within the public school system. This increased focus has led to an enormous amount of public dialogue about education, which has led to raised expectations for schools, students, and particularly school principals. This heightened awareness, visibility, and responsibility pushes school superintendents to thoughtfully hire the best possible candidates to serve as principals of their schools. There is much at stake, and school principals are the pivotal piece in dealing with the challenges of student achievement and expectations of the school community (Rammer, 2007).

The purpose of this research was to examine the leadership characteristics of two high school principals in Mountain School District (a pseudonym) in the Intermountain West and the perceived role these characteristics play on academic performance of students. Using the 21 leadership responsibilities identified in the meta-analysis conducted by Marzano and colleagues (2005) as well as the 7 steps to effective instructional leadership outlined by McEwan (2003a), this study reveals which leadership characteristics found in two successful high school principals of the Intermountain West were most prominently observed and established. By understanding

the leadership characteristics found with successful high school principals in Mountain School District, school board officials and district superintendents can more easily select qualified applicants and may more effectively mentor and train these principals to increasingly impact student learning and achievement.

### **Qualitative Research**

The research design should be dictated by the nature of the research question (Patton, 2002). The research question guiding this study calls for a deeper understanding of the relationship of leadership characteristics and student achievement. The study sought to find the key leadership characteristics that relate to student success in academics. It sought to understand the lived experience of the school principals and how meaning was constructed while also seeking implications of behavior. In qualitative methodology social reality is socially constructed and multiple. According to Neuman (2000), social reality is

based on social interactions and socially constructed meaning systems. People possess an internally experienced sense of reality. This subjective sense of reality is crucial to a grasp of human social life. External human behavior is an indirect and often obscure indicator of true social meaning. (p. 72)

The social reality within qualitative methodology is whatever it means to individuals in a context of a particular time. Social reality is ever changing and subjective. Given this perspective, researchers can only hope to gain an approximation of an individual's reality. Even the most careful of researchers can only make inferences about the meaning that has been constructed by another person, regardless of the methods used.

Creswell (2009) pointed out that in qualitative research the goal is to achieve,

as best as possible, understanding and trustworthiness. Creswell described understanding as a deep knowledge of some social setting or phenomenon. Striving for understanding requires spending extensive time in the field. Creswell also believes that verification is critical to evaluating the quality of qualitative research. He identified eight procedures for verifying qualitative research findings and recommends that any research study employ at least two of these procedures. This study employed the qualitative research procedures of triangulation, member-checking, as well as rich and thick description of the occurring phenomenon.

In addition, Creswell supported Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of trustworthiness, the concept that credibility and authenticity should be employed when evaluating qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba asserted that trustworthiness of a research study is important to evaluating its worth. Trustworthiness involves establishing credibility; transferability and applicability of findings to other contexts; dependability of findings in such a manner that findings exhibit consistency and repeatability; and the confirmability or the extent that the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias or motivation.

Qualitative research focuses on those actions that make each of us distinctly human. Researchers need to understand an individual from his or her own perspective. The goal of qualitative research is to understand the individual's perspective, not to attain some sense of truth. In qualitative research the researcher is not an objective observer out to discover absolute truth. Researchers acknowledge their viewpoints, motivations, and perspectives. These are not biases needing control measures. Instead,

researcher characteristics are an integral part of the research equation. There is no demand or need for a detached researcher—participant observation is an accepted research method. Perspectives, background, beliefs, attitudes, and values of the researcher form an important part of the research process. There is also no dichotomy between the researcher and the participants. Transcripts of interviews may be shared with the participants to allow them the opportunity to correct any errors in the researcher’s representation of their responses. This is termed a “member check.” Such is the logic of qualitative research.

Case study research is the best tool for learning how teachers perceive their leaders and how principals perceive themselves in terms of how their actions and attitudes. Case study research also allows for a focused study on characteristics that influence the positive culture of schools and the academic achievement of students. In addition, a qualitative case study allows the researcher to include what is seen or heard, or what was communicated during data collection (Maxwell, 2005). As Maxwell noted, in a qualitative case study, the researcher is the instrument, and the researcher’s eyes and ears are the tools used in making sense of what is really going on in the environment. Qualitative research is inductive and grounded by nature. Thus, the researcher works to establish mutual trusting relationships with the participants by socializing and engaging in casual conversations with them. This strategy is essential in case study interviews. It allows participants the flexibility to respond to emerging insights, and information obtained through casual conversation and informal observations can provide important contextual data with a different perspective from that

of a formal interview.

### **Methodology**

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) suggested that qualitative case studies are well-suited for the “study of instances of phenomenon in its natural context and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon” (p. 21). They further state that case studies are excellent for developing detailed descriptions. Case studies allow the researcher to collaborate with subjects and interview them intensely. This type of research is also well suited to situations in which the researcher wishes to suggest the causes and effects of certain events. Merriam (2001) also stated that qualitative case study presents detailed accounts of a particular phenomenon, and that case study research is ideal for the study of innovative practices in education. In short, case study design is ideal for a qualitative researcher to study and examine complex causal systems. The processes, programs, and problems that principals incorporate were examined in this study in an effort to understand what leadership characteristics impact student achievement and may also improve leadership practices.

Qualitative case study research, as defined by Merriam (2001), is theoretical, but is not intended to generate hypotheses. Case studies simply describe the phenomenon under investigation. Case study is also best suited for research that is interested in process. Case study research is ideal for monitoring, describing, and determining the extent to which a treatment has been implemented, and corroborating the process by which the treatment had the effect that it did. Case study design may



provide knowledge and insight that would not otherwise be available. This case study is significant because of what it discloses about the phenomenon under study and what the findings represent.

This case study was, as defined by Yin (2009), a single case, embedded holistic case study. In this embedded type of case study, an investigation of principal leadership qualities with more than one different educational leader is possible. A single embedded case study may include interviews and observations regarding several different principals, it may involve multiple participants in the interviewing, and may constitute separate units of analysis, but all will be embedded within a single case study design.

Interviews are one of the most important sources of case study information (Tellis, 1997). According to Tellis, there are several different forms of interviews that are possible: open-ended, focused, structured, and survey. In open-ended interviews respondents are asked to comment about certain events. Interviewees may propose solutions or provide insight into events. They may also corroborate evidence obtained from other sources. The researcher must avoid becoming dependent on a single informant, and seek the same data from other sources to verify the authenticity. Open-ended interviews were used for this study. This form of interview was particularly useful for this study, because it allowed the participants to discuss their personal interactions with the school principal and to provide information that was relevant to their particular high school.

Qualitative research is a research method that seeks to understand human

behaviors and characteristics as well as human experience from the point of view of those studied (Owens, 1998). The qualitative research method is basically a generic term for investigative research methodology described as ethnographic, naturalistic, anthropological, field, or participant observer research. The qualitative research method was appropriate for this case study because it offered various ways of collecting raw and descriptive information about the topic studied through in-depth, detailed, open-ended interviews, observations, and without constraints from predetermined categories of analysis. This method elicited inductive logical inquiry that aims to make sense of this particular situation without imposing pre-existing expectations on the setting. Thus, inductive design starts with specific observations and builds toward general themes and patterns. This method also creates the opportunity to understand the characteristics of the research topic in its totality (Patton, 2002).

This research investigated the leadership characteristics influencing educational and academic excellence found in at least two different, high-achieving schools. Principal interviews, teacher interviews, standardized test scores, PNA survey results, ISQ survey results, school documents, and observations were all used as sources of evidence. Interviews along with observations and archival documents allowed the researcher to compare what was actually occurring in the two research schools and compare this with what the research participants stated was occurring. The case study technique was employed because this method allowed the researcher to provide an in-depth view of the strategies a principal used in day-to-day situations which may impact student success, learning, and achievement. Merriam (2001) stated that “case studies

help us to understand processes of events, projects, and programs and to discover context characteristics that will shed light on an issue or object” (p. 33). In essence, the case study method was ideal for this type of research as it richly describes complex correlational systems, such as the processes, techniques, and programs that an educational leader employs to better foster an understanding of what impacts student achievement.

### **Study Background and Sample Profiles**

While schools and principals are held ever more accountable for student achievement by the federal and state governments, the researcher’s experience indicates that educational leaders are often thrown into situations with little or no training on how best to impact student learning. This research study provides support for new and existing principals as they seek ways to positively impact students and their achievement. This study focused on the characteristics, qualities, and leadership factors of two school principals in public schools in the Intermountain West that, since 2007, have demonstrated increasing academic success, building levels of developmental “asset” qualities in students, and overall academic excellence and/or academic progress. One of the study sites saw an examination of the characteristics of a principal who oversees a school that has been an academic powerhouse for over 50 years. At the second study site there was an examination of the characteristics of a school principal who oversees a socially and economically diverse student body. Only recently has the second study site seen improving attitudes towards the school from stakeholders along

with higher student standardized test scores that are above the expected range for a school with similar socioeconomics. Both study sites consisted of student bodies that have exceeded the expected range of scores on standardized testing each of the last three years. Both study sites have also collaboratively participated in a standardized survey through the accounting firm of Bach Harrison, L.L.C. in the years 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, and 2011. This survey provided feedback regarding the growth and development of “assets” that research has shown contributes to the academic success of students. Both schools have also administered the ISQ survey from Utah State University at least twice in the last 6 years. This survey shows results that also suggest positive growth related to student learning and achievement at both study sites. In addition to the standardized test scores, this research examines two schools from this school district that have received overwhelmingly positive survey results from both the PNA and ISQ surveys, and those which have exhibited an increased sense of “connectedness” to school by the student body as a whole. This increased sense of connection is often associated with the growth of positive student developmental “assets” as measured by both the PNA and ISQ.

### **Sample Participants and Setting**

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to select participants for this study. This form of sampling, “focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 230). Teachers and staff members of a high school observe the behaviors of principals on a daily basis and can therefore provide

rich data describing their behavior as it relates to school leadership. High school principals are the main subjects of this research and can clearly articulate what it is that they do on a daily basis which represents effective instructional leadership.

Patton (2002) stated that there are no rules for sample size when it comes to qualitative studies. Sample and sample size depends on what it is the researcher wants to know and what will be useful, credible, and doable within the time and money allocated for the study. Purposeful sampling does not provide for the findings to be generalized back to all populations. Therefore the sample size simply needs to support the purpose of the study, unlike probability sampling that needs a sample large enough to generalize from the sample to the population of which it is a part.

Samples for qualitative studies are generally much smaller than those used in quantitative studies. Creswell (2009) provided reasons for this. He reasoned that there is a point of diminishing return to a qualitative sample. As a qualitative study goes on, more data does not necessarily lead to more information. This is because one occurrence of a piece of data, or a code, is all that is necessary to ensure that it becomes part of the analysis framework. Frequencies are rarely important in qualitative research, as one occurrence of the data is potentially as useful as many occurrences in understanding the process behind a topic. Qualitative research is concerned with meaning and is not intended for making generalized hypothesis statements that can be easily transferred to other subjects or locations.

Within any research area, different participants can have diverse opinions. Qualitative samples must be large enough to assure that most or all of the perceptions

that might be important are uncovered. However, at the same time if the sample is too large data becomes repetitive and, eventually, superfluous. If a researcher remains faithful to the principles of qualitative research, sample size in the majority of qualitative studies should generally follow the concept of saturation (Creswell, 2009). Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggested that saturation is attained when the researcher comes to a juncture in the study where ongoing interviews and observations become “counter-productive” and that “the new” that is discovered does not necessarily add anything to the overall story, model, theory or framework (p. 136). Strauss and Corbin went on to state that saturation was achieved when the collection of new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation.

The sample size for this research study was 12. The sample consisted of 2 high school principals and 10 faculty and staff members in two high schools found within one school district. Green and Thorogood (2009) stated that “the experience of *most qualitative researchers* (emphasis added) is that in interview studies little that is ‘new’ comes out of transcripts after you have interviewed 20 or so people” (p. 120). Themes and ideas that emerged throughout this study were very similar amongst all 12 research participants. No “new” themes emerged, and no real new light was brought to the investigation after the first three research participants at each study site were interviewed. Saturation was achieved. The sample size was adequate to support the purpose of the study. The purpose of the study was to contribute to the knowledge of school leadership characteristics and its impact on student achievement while also allowing the findings to be open to generalization within theoretical propositions.

The study included two high schools located within one school district and focused on the leadership characteristics of two different high school principals. Prior to data collection, the researcher discussed this research project with the principals of both high schools involved in this study. Both principals agreed to participate, as well as the faculty and staff from both high school sites. In recent years both high schools have met AYP, both high schools have shown considerable academic growth as measured by Utah's U-PASS and UCAS systems of evaluation, and the students at both schools have exhibited strong academic performance.

The first high school principal in the study, Mr. Newsome, is a veteran of the public school system, having logged over 35 years as an educator and more than 20 years as an administrator. He is the principal of GTGHS, a school that has educated academically high-achieving students for over 75 years. Mr. Newsome (a pseudonym) has been the principal at GTGHS for 6 years. The second high school principal, Mr. Peabody, is also a veteran of the public school system, having spent nearly 25 years as a teacher, counselor, coach, and district and school administrator in public education. However, his years as a school administrator are fewer than the principal at GTGHS. Mr. Peabody (also a pseudonym) has been a district-level and school administrator for 13 years, and the principal at OHS for the past 6 years. The principal at OHS leads a school that has been in existence less than 25 years, and has always possessed a diverse student body with a lower socioeconomic status (SES) than students at GTGHS.

This study involved the two site principals, a school counselor at each site, two general education classroom teachers at each site, a secretary at one school, and a

custodian at the other participant site. Participation was voluntary and only staff who were willing to be interviewed and observed were part of the study. The school staff had varying years of experience at the school site (Table 5). A total of 12 educators participated in this study: 2 principals, 8 faculty, and 2 staff members. Both principals in the study were male and both are Caucasian. The teachers involved in the study instruct in a variety of subjects: social studies, Spanish, psychology, and family and consumer science.

### **Researcher Frame of Reference**

In an effort at full disclosure, it is appropriate to identify the researcher's frame of reference. As a researcher, I am motivated to study this topic for several important reasons. First of all, I am a principal at the high school level. It is my hope in conducting this research to strengthen the unequivocal centrality of a principal's role

Table 5

#### *Participants in Study*

Participant	Years at site
GTGHS principal	6
OHS principal	6
GTGHS counselor	7
OHS counselor	5
GTGHS teacher	18
GTGHS teacher	24
GTGHS secretary	14
OHS teacher	19
OHS teacher	20
OHS custodian	21



in the success of students. The results of this study, if found to affirm the central role a principal plays in the success of students, can only serve to further emphasize the importance of a strong instructional leader.

The circumstances faced by each school principal are unique and require leadership skills that combine structure and consideration (Bess & Goldman, 2001). Principals must pay close attention to all sorts of student-related data, and they must be able to understand and cope with the needs of faculty and staff. The continued emphasis on test scores as achievement measures, the adoption of state standards for high school graduation, and the imposing federal mandates that penetrate every public school in America puts added pressure on school principals. However, the roles of a strong caring culture, real and meaningful relationships, along with effective instructional leadership practices may have a more resounding positive impact on student learning than any other influences on achievement. Even proponents of performance data-driven and goal-oriented school improvement agendas recognize that the “most overlooked ingredient is results-oriented leadership” (Schmoker, 1999, p. 12).

### **Study Purpose**

The purpose of this case study was to improve the understanding regarding principals and how they impact schools, student learning, and the academic success of students. This study hopes to serve as a credible and compelling motivational catalyst to superintendents, school board members, and to principals as they make

personal decisions about where priorities lie, about how school principals have the most profound positive impact on student learning, and how principals make personal decisions regarding their commitment to their work. An increasing number of students in society today face personal and family issues in relation to demographic, societal, moral, and academic challenges. Leaders in education, and in particular high school principals, cannot afford to be deterred in their quest to support student success. Students need encouragement to work hard, achieve, and dream. Principals must help build resiliency in students as they face broad challenges found in society today. They need hope for a better tomorrow, and they need strong leaders who will give them this hope.

### **Research Question**

The primary purpose of this study was to identify leadership characteristics exhibited by high school principals as they related to academic success. This was accomplished by answering the following question, *Which effective leadership characteristics do highly successful school principals demonstrate?*

The researcher has spent over 15 years as a high school administrator, and these years have been some of the most challenging, yet also the most rewarding years of a career in education. As the researcher has interacted with colleagues and friends, an ever-increasing awareness of the need for principals to gain understanding of how best to impact student success for the positive has become very clear. This study has helped the researcher to be a stronger influence for positive change. It is the hope of the

researcher that this study will benefit other educators in the quest to impact others for good. The purpose of this study was to research successful school principals in an attempt to uncover leadership characteristics that positively impact students in at least two study school sites. Both study school sites are schools where students are flourishing despite changing socioeconomic climates combined with rapid shifts in demographics.

### **Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures**

Approval was obtained from Utah State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) followed by IRB approval from Mountain School District (a pseudonym). All information provided has remained confidential and has only been reported as individual/group data with no identifying information. All data, including taped transcriptions from the interviews, were kept in a secure storage cabinet and only the primary researcher had access to them. After the research was completed, the recordings and transcribed interviews were destroyed. In addition, documents and archival records were collected and assessed to provide additional information. These documents were also destroyed at the conclusion of the research for this study. School Improvement Plans (SIP), ISQ and PNA survey data, policy manuals, standardized test scores, accreditation information and the like were included in the data collection and analysis. Efforts to triangulate (Glesne, 2006) the process and the data was accomplished through the careful design of the interview questions, a repeated interview session, a member check, documents and archival evidence, and through participant observations. Multiple

open-ended questions and participant observations have helped to solidify the accuracy of the data.

Open-ended interview questions were developed in an effort to uncover leadership qualities that influence a school's excellence and student success within a given culture (see interview protocol in Appendices A, B, and C). Interview participants included two high school principals, a school secretary from one school, teachers at each site, a custodian, and school counselors. Faculty and staff participants were contacted via e-mail and randomly selected to be in the study. Only those prospective participants who have worked at the school site for at least the past five years are among the participants in the research pool that were randomly selected. More than 60 potential faculty and staff participants at each study site were randomly solicited to participate. The details of the research study were briefly introduced in a letter e-mailed to participants, with time expectations outlined. Only volunteers were selected to participate in the final research study. Participants were selected from the initial group of people who volunteered to participate in the study and who also responded to the e-mail. These study participants were randomly selected to participate in the short interview portion for faculty/staff.

In addition to the open-ended "how" and "why" questions, the researcher has sought to develop a "respondents' acceptance of interviewers' frameworks of meanings," as discussed in Mishler's work (1986, p. 54). Mishler contended that an agreement by interview respondents to cooperate with interviewers and to do what they are asked to do is often seen as the essential factor in a successful interview. This can be

accomplished by helping respondents learn how interviewers may respond to their answers to questions. For example, there may be some meaning behind an interviewer restating or re-phrasing an original question, or as interviewers probe for further information. Helping respondents understand and accept an interviewer's framework of meanings is a key factor in completing interviews productively. Successfully building a rapport with respondents should result in the production of interview answers that are more readily coded and provide helpful research information.

The faculty and staff participants were given a date and a time for individual interviews and were thanked for their participation. At the outset of each interview, the purpose of the study and the selection procedures were explained to each participant, and they were each told how the data would be used to complete the study. All participants were interviewed on two different occasions—once at the beginning of the study, and again several weeks later, towards the conclusion of the study. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The participants were given the opportunity to review the transcription for accuracy before the final analysis of the data took place. The interview questions were designed to elicit stories regarding the school leadership, the school culture, and the connection these might have to the academic achievement of the school. The questions also helped gather descriptions, dialogue, and illustrations of leadership characteristics that were having a positive impact on students at their school, and were designed to validate responses provided by the principals for each corresponding school.

Information was also gathered through participant observations of the principal

during once-a-week visits to the study site where the researcher shadowed the participant principal throughout the day as they interacted with students, faculty, and parents over an eight week period. Participant-observation is a mode of observation in which the researcher is not merely a passive observer (Yin, 2009), but also takes on a variety of roles. Yin noted that participant observation provides opportunities for the observer to gain access to data that may be inaccessible to scientific investigation; the ability to perceive reality from an insider's point of view, further solidifying the accuracy of data; and the ability to observe a greater variety of situations to collect diverse data.

A member check with each participant interviewed was done to ensure that the researcher did not misinterpret feelings or make inaccurate statements (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member check allows researchers to check their own subjectivity and ensure the trustworthiness of their findings. It also provides a means to tell a story that resonates for all involved. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated, "The member check, whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Member checks were an ongoing process throughout the study. Once the interview data was analyzed, coded, and interpreted a final member check was done to assure that member intent had been maintained. This step was probably the most critical for establishing trustworthiness (Creswell, 2009, p. 203). In efforts to triangulate procedures of the research, the researcher verified findings by returning to the study participants near the conclusion of

the study to collect responses and compared them with the researchers own assumptions and interpretations. This allowed the participants the opportunity to comment and to give additional information, and reduced the likelihood of misinterpretation of data. It also further served to clarify and triangulate the meaning of the interviews and observations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). According to Patton (2002), conducting a member check only serves to provide further validity for the research.

In order to guard against researcher bias the researcher kept a journal of the researcher's own perceptions and experiences throughout the research and data analysis. This journal was used as a source of bias control as well as a means of interpretation. Creswell (2009, p. 278) claims it is difficult to discern where reporting findings end and where interpretation begins. One distinction of qualitative research is that all findings and interpretations are subjective assessments of the researcher. Thus, when examining the findings of a qualitative study, one should look for the personal interpretations of the researcher.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher's task at this juncture of the study was to make meaning from the myriad of data that had been collected. Stake (1995) suggested four forms of data analysis and interpretation. These forms of analysis include: categorical aggregation or the collection of instances with the expectation that issue-relevant meanings will emerge; direct interpretation or the viewing of single instances in the data which leads to inferring meaning from them; establishing patterns by showing relationships between

two or more instances or categories; development of generalizations which identifies what the researcher has learned from the case that may be applicable to this setting or other settings.

The final stage of this qualitative study required the researcher to grapple with the “what” and “how” questions in order to report the findings. Since this study was an exploratory case study, the “what” and the “how” questions should have been answered in a way that would result in an explanation of the studied phenomenon. The researcher assisted in the transcription of the principal and teacher interviews to be utilized in the final analysis. Once the transcriptions were completed, each transcript was hand-coded; then data coding and segmenting was completed for further in-depth analysis according to the conceptual framework. According to Crabtree and Miller (1999), this process of analysis is referred to as template organization. An open coding methodology was used to fracture the data into vignettes about principal characteristics. Axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was then used to reassemble the data into a set of interrelated themes and categories in an effort to provide a more detailed explanation of how faculty and staff members perceived the relationship between school principal and student achievement. Crabtree and Miller suggested that to explore a limited facet of the data the researcher may construct an analysis process that creates a code scheme. According to Crabtree and Miller, creating a code scheme is a relatively quick and easy to understand process. In this particular research study a code template or scheme assisted the researcher in of this study in “categorizing [the data] into empirically based and meaningful segments” (p. 177).



Merriam (2001) implied that researchers who describe data without conveying any meaning may lead readers to disregard the results of a given study. According to Yin (2009), the most commonly applied method for analyzing case study data is pattern matching. Pattern matching allows the researcher to move beyond generalizations to the construction of recurring themes. Pattern matching was applied to this study in an effort to determine common themes occurring in the data, particularly related to leadership characteristics and its effect on academic achievement.

The principal interviews were conducted in the principal's offices and lasted approximately ninety minutes each. The principal's responses were recorded and transcribed. Responses from the principal interviews were analyzed and coded so that a leadership profile could be developed for each participating principal. The researcher integrated findings from *School Leadership that Works: From Research to Results* by Marzano and colleagues (2005) and from *7 Steps to Effective Instructional Leadership* by Elaine McEwan (2003a) to formulate topics and subtopics for themes. Teacher interviews were compared with the principal interviews and/or principal profiles to determine whether teacher perceptions were in alignment with results from principal interviews and observations. Teacher and staff interview responses were coded, which further helped to identify important issues of educational leadership. Recurring themes, patterns, and categories emerged and became evident. Teacher perceptions of principal leadership characteristics and behaviors were compared with those of the Marzano and McEwan studies, and with the principals themselves. Results were summarized, a discussion of meanings was presented, and the researcher worked to interpret and

evaluate the findings to explain what the results meant and how they could be applied to the broader body of research.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Merriam (2001) concluded that validity for qualitative research differs from other types of research designs. The validity in this study was strengthened through the incorporation of triangulation, as explained by Merriam. Validity was also established through reflexivity. Goodall (2000) referred to reflexivity as the “means to turn back our self-lens through which we are interpreting the world” (p. 137). The researcher in this study understood the role of a high school principal. The researcher is a father of high school age children and has also spent more than 15 years working directly with high school age children. This helps the researcher understand the impact relationships the researcher has with other principals and district-level administrators in the school district of study may have had. These relationships did play a role in the researcher’s interpretation of the data. The researcher understood and acknowledged that the results of this research are open to individual interpretations. When these results are examined reflexively, they do reveal to us how we view the world and why we interpret data as we do (Goodall, 2000).

Creswell (2009) noted that in qualitative studies, validity means checking for the accuracy of the findings by implementing certain procedures and then determining whether the findings are accurate from the researcher’s viewpoint, the participant’s viewpoint, and the reader’s viewpoint. Multiple strategies were implemented throughout this study to validate the authenticity and the accuracy of the research

findings. In addition to reflexivity, triangulation was accomplished through the implementation of several procedures that are outlined in the following paragraphs.

The researcher transcribed the audio-taped interviews, and e-mailed transcriptions to each interviewed faculty member to have them checked for accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Interviewees had the opportunity to make corrections, to add or delete information that was shared and transcribed during the interview. The researcher also gave those who were interviewed a second opportunity to share other thoughts about leadership and its possible connection to academic achievement for students towards the conclusion of the study.

In addition, different data sources were triangulated by analyzing evidence from each source and using the data to construct coherent justification for the identified themes. As Creswell (2009) asserted, “If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study” (p. 191). Based on this assumption, the research findings were clearly described and participants’ words were used to form codes and themes. The transcripts of the principals’ responses were checked to ensure that mistakes were not made during transcription, and to see that there were no misunderstandings regarding the definition of codes during the process of coding. Any data collected beyond the face-to-face interviews (i.e., observational data, document review data, etc.) were properly examined in collaboration with the research participants to build a coherent justification for themes that emerged through analysis. Triangulation is a process of collecting data from a diverse range of people and settings,

using a variety of methods, with the aim of reducing the risk of chance association and systematic biases that may result from using a specific method (Maxwell, 2005).

In a further effort to increase the validity of this study, the researcher provided a detailed account of data interpretation methods and data collection techniques that were employed for this research. Perhaps most importantly, all data was documented. Yin (2009) asserted that a proper and thorough documentation procedure is critical to allow later researchers to follow the same case study protocol in order to conduct a similar case study design.

Finally, the researcher recognizes that there are limitations to this study. Glesne (2006) asserted that, “part of demonstrating trustworthiness [validity] of your data is to realize the limitations of your study” (p. 169). The researcher is a high school principal within the school district of study. This research also took place within a relatively small sample and in high schools that may not be similar to many other high schools across the nation. Analysis and interpretation of the data was conducted from a researcher’s viewpoint. It was the researcher’s desire to identify and minimize bias that may be threats to the study in any way possible.

### **Significance of the Study**

The intent of this study was to find leadership characteristics prevalent in two high schools that exhibit strong academic performance amongst their students. The findings of this study are important to other administrators and to other school leaders. It is important to understand what it is that high school principals are doing in schools

where the students are succeeding. This researcher was not be able to answer the research question in explicit detail during this study, but a better understanding of how these high schools effectively support students was revealed.

This study was significant in a number of ways. The literature review referred to several qualitative and quantitative studies that show a positive correlation between the principal of a school and positive student achievement. Some of the most recent school reform efforts call for a strong, experienced principal to provide the remedy for struggling students. This study directly addressed this issue from an angle that may not have been previously researched. In this study, the researcher compared the leadership characteristics of two high school principals who lead two very different kinds of student populations. Both principals lead schools with challenging populations, but it is clear that the two principals address their challenges is very personal and unique ways. According to the literature review, it takes good teachers, strong community support, nurturing parents, and a visionary leader to raise the academic achievement of students. This study brought several of those leadership practices to light.

In addition, this study is significant because there is clearly not enough qualitative research that correlates leadership with student achievement. How is it that some schools simply seem to outperform schools even given comparable demographics? Why does a school that has been performing at an “average” level seem to have dramatic positive changes when a different principal arrives? What leadership characteristics are found in two high school principals that have a higher rate of achieving students than comparable schools? These questions will be answered in

Chapters 4 and 5 of this research study.

### **Conclusion**

This qualitative case study applied observations, interviews, and member checking to analyze recurring leadership characteristics exhibited in two successful high school principals in the Intermountain West. The researcher was responsible for each element of the study, including its reliability and validity. In this study, two very successful high school principals were interviewed and observed in a variety of activities and situations. The data was collected, categorized, and analyzed to identify common characteristics exhibited by these two high school leaders. These characteristics were compared with those Marzano and colleagues (2005) found in their meta-analysis and aligned with the steps of successful instructional leadership outlined by McEwan (2003a) in her study. Chapter IV of this study provides an analysis of the findings of the study. Chapter V provides a summary with implications, discussion, and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this analysis was to examine the leadership characteristics exhibited by two high school principals in Mountain School District (a pseudonym) in the Intermountain West and to analyze which characteristics are most commonly found in principals whose schools/students exhibit strong academic achievement. By understanding the most prominent leadership characteristics found in successful high school principals, school board officials and local district leaders can more easily select applicants during the hiring process who possess those characteristics that translate to high achieving schools. In addition, the identification of these critical leadership characteristics could assist in the successful development of principals and leaders within Mountain District and within districts that have similar demographics. Focus for this research study came through the following research question: Which effective leadership characteristics do highly successful school principals demonstrate?

The researcher served as the sole interviewer during the study process. The study was a single case, embedded holistic case study. The main purpose of this study was to unearth characteristics found in successful high school principals within the Intermountain West, and to compare these with leadership characteristics that McEwan (2003a) suggested led to increased instructional leadership and Marzano and colleagues (2005) found to have a strong positive correlation with increasing student achievement

in schools. An open coding methodology was used to fracture the data into vignettes about principal characteristics. Axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was then used to reassemble data into a set of interrelated themes and conceptual categories to provide a more detailed explanation of how teachers and staff perceive what relationship exists between the school principal and student achievement. The identifying characteristics and common themes that emerged were analyzed and identified as variables needed to be a successful high school principal. The emerging themes were organized into two different categories with subthemes in both of the main categories. Interview responses from both the participant principals and the participant faculty and staff were such that the emerging themes and categories were similar for both participating interview groups. The research question was answered using feedback from the in-depth interviews with the principals, teachers, and staff members who participated in the study. A journal was kept by the researcher to record the perceptions and the experience of the research study.

SIPs along with ISQ and PNA survey data were analyzed to corroborate what the principal and faculty/staff participants said was occurring in each school. The analysis of each high school's SIP also assisted the researcher in understanding expectations from school, district, and state leaders.

The SIP described the mission, vision, and goals for each high school. The culture of each high school was identified indirectly in the plans through the description of the school's profile, issues, trends, and goals for self-improvement. Goals established by each school were described in the SIPs, and how the schools assembled School



Improvement Action Plans to address the goals of the SIP assisted the researcher in better understanding the nature of the culture being studied.

Research data was triangulated (Patton, 2002) which helped contribute to the validity and reliability of the information. Data collected from both the faculty and staff interviews were compared with the data collected from the interviews with the high school principals. This comparison assisted the researcher in finding the characteristics and themes for leadership that were exhibited at both research high school sites. Faculty and staff responses validated what the high school principals perceived as reality in the high school world they lived in. Review of documents also provided the researcher a more complete picture of how the principals were accountable to the local school board.

### **PNA and ISQ**

Indicators for School Quality (ISQ) is a comprehensive survey system developed by The Center for the School of the Future (CSF) at Utah State University for school administrators to evaluate and monitor school improvement efforts. It summarizes the perceptions of parents, teachers, students, and other school staff regarding more than 30 crucial characteristics of a given school. The ISQ reporting systems summarizes what the survey perceives as the “seven core domains” of student commitment, school leadership, instructional quality, resource accessibility, and school safety. The survey instrument is administered to the four respondent audiences of parents, teachers, students, and other school staff in an exclusive format called “Signal Analysis,” which works on a traffic signal metaphor. Each domain and item is given a color grade based on the results of the survey. Green is better than yellow, which is

better than red, and purple is reserved for exemplary practice. ISQ also includes a school and community risk and resiliency assessment. Based on extensive research, ISQ includes items that assess social and academic risk for both school populations and the community at large. With this information, schools are able to receive and interpret data that will assist leaders, teachers, and parents in viewing an accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses of their school community (CSF, 2012).

The ISQ measures parent, teacher, and student perceptions of parent support, teacher excellence, student commitment, school leadership, instructional quality, resource management, and school safety. The ISQ process attempts to gather responses from the entire school population. In almost all cases, response rates are high enough to place confidence in generalizing the results to nonrespondents. Research data that are compared represent eight consecutive years of ISQ responses from over 200 schools (K-12) in the Mountain West. These schools represent a broad sample of geographic settings, ethnic compositions, and SES. Most of the schools in the sample of ISQ data used the ACT test as a reference for the standardized test scores. Tests were given to 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders with a composite battery median score used as a single metric of academic achievement by school.

Both GTGHS and OHS have participated at least twice in the ISQ survey process over the past 7 years (see Tables 6 and 7). Ratings of behavior support domains, as reported on ISQ surveys, were highly predictive of:

- The NCLB notion of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) success
- The U-PASS and/or UCAS notion of strong academic progress by students

Table 6

*Comparison of ISQ Feedback for Good-to-Great High School (GTGHS) 2005 Versus 2012*

Indicators of School Quality	Parent rating	Teacher rating	Student rating	Staff rating
Parent support	2005-at norm 2012-at norm	2005-at norm 2012-at norm	2005-above norm 2012-above norm	2005-at norm 2012-at norm
Teacher excellence	2005-at norm <b>2012-above norm</b>	2005-above norm 2012-above norm	2005-at norm <b>2012-above norm</b>	2005-above norm 2012-above norm
Student commitment	2005-at norm 2012-at norm	2005-at norm <b>2012-above norm</b>	2005-above norm 2012-above norm	2005-at norm <b>2012-above norm</b>
School leadership	2005-above norm <b>2012-exemplary</b>	2005-above norm <b>2012-exemplary</b>	2005-at norm <b>2012-above norm</b>	2005-above norm 2012-above norm
Instructional quality	2005-at norm <b>2012-above norm</b>	2005-above norm <b>2012-exemplary</b>	2005-above norm <b>2012-exemplary</b>	2005-above norm 2012-above norm
Resource management	2005-above norm 2012-above norm	2005-at norm <b>2012-above norm</b>	2005-above norm 2012-above norm	2005-at norm <b>2012-above norm</b>
School safety	2005-at norm 2012-at norm	2005-at norm 2012-at norm	2005-at norm 2012-at norm	2005-at norm <b>2012-above norm</b>

Table 7

*Comparison of ISQ Feedback for Overachieving High School (OHS) 2005 Versus 2012*

Indicators of School Quality	Parent rating	Teacher rating	Student rating	Staff rating
Parent support	2005-at norm 2012-at norm	2005-at norm 2012-at norm	2005-at norm 2012-at norm	2005-at norm 2012-at norm
Teacher excellence	2005-at norm 2012-at norm	2005-above norm 2012-above norm	2005-below norm <b>2012-at norm</b>	2005-at norm <b>2012-above norm</b>
Student commitment	2005-at norm 2012-at norm	2005-at norm 2012-at norm	2005-at norm <b>2012-above norm</b>	2005-at norm 2012-at norm
School leadership	2005-at norm <b>2012-above norm</b>	2005-at norm <b>2012-above norm</b>	2005-at norm <b>2012-above norm</b>	2005-at norm <b>2012-above norm</b>
Instructional quality	2005-at norm <b>2012-above norm</b>	2005-at norm <b>2012-above norm</b>	2005-at norm <b>2012-above norm</b>	2005-at norm 2012-at norm
Resource Management	2005-at norm 2012-at norm	2005-below norm <b>2012-at norm</b>	2005-at norm 2012-at norm	2005-below norm <b>2012-at norm</b>
School Safety	2005-at norm 2012-at norm	2005-below norm <b>2012-at norm</b>	2005-at norm 2012-at norm	2005-at norm 2012-at norm

- Criterion Referenced Test (CRT) proficiency for the entire school and its subpopulations
- Perceptions of school safety

Social and economic risks were not unique predictors of academic success and school safety. Behavior support items from ISQ predicted AYP and CRT success with 85% accuracy. Based on the philosophy of the ISQ instrument, it appears that through the provision of clear behavioral expectations, the fostering of positive student-teacher relationships, the building of social and academic skills by maximizing opportunities to respond, and through the creation a school-wide system of rewards and recognition better academic and safety outcomes result in most social or economic situations.

PNA is a survey system administered to students designed to measure levels of risk and protection factors (also referred to as “assets”) within the school or student community. The school district in this research study (Mountain District) has been using the Risk and Protective Framework (RPF) found in the PNA to guide prevention efforts aimed at reducing youth problem behaviors. Risk factors and developmental assets are characteristics of school, community, and family environments, as well as characteristics of students and their peer groups that are known to predict an increased likelihood of achieved potential or of drug use, delinquency, school dropout, teen pregnancy, and violent behavior among youth. Dr. J. David Hawkins, Dr. Richard F. Catalano (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004), and colleagues at the University of Washington, Social Development Research Group have investigated the relationship between risk and protective factors (assets) and youth problem

behavior. For example, they have found that children who live in families with high levels of health, engagement, service, and positive peer influence typically succeed in school while children who live in families with high levels of conflict are more likely to become involved in problem behaviors such as delinquency and drug use.

Protective factors exert a positive influence or buffer against the negative influence of risk, thus reducing the likelihood that adolescents will engage in problem behaviors. Protective factors identified through research reviewed by Catalano and colleagues (2004) included bonding to family and positive peer influences (including adults); service to others; an understanding of peaceful conflict resolution, engagement with school, community and peers; healthy beliefs and clear standards for behavior; and individual leadership characteristics. Of particular note is the fact that for bonding to serve as a protective influence or asset, it must occur through involvement with peers and adults who communicate healthy values and set clear standards for positive behavior.

Research on risk and protective factors has important implications for prevention efforts. The premise of the risk and protective factor model asserts that in order to promote positive youth development and prevent problem behaviors, it is necessary to address those factors that predict the problem behaviors. By measuring risk and protective factors in a population, prevention programs can be implemented that will reduce the elevated risk factors and increase the protective factors. For example, if academic failure is identified as an elevated risk factor in a community, then mentoring, tutoring, and increased opportunities and rewards for classroom participation can be

provided to improve academic performance.

The survey had been adopted throughout an eight state area of the Western United States to help school leaders determine areas of “protection” in the school and community, as well as areas of “risk.” Results from the survey guide school administrators as decisions are made regarding prevention, intervention, and support for students. Coordination and administration of the PNA Survey was a collaborative effort of the Mountain School District, the local Behavioral Health agency, an Intermountain Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, the State Office of Education, and a local accounting agency.

Data from both the PNA and ISQ signal that survey respondent perceptions have strong increases in the areas of protective assets and school leadership. The PNA and ISQ data provide a context for the researcher to better understand what has occurred, and what is occurring at the two schools. The ISQ and PNA data demonstrate that both OHS and GTGHS are supporting student, parent, and teacher perceptions of increasing positivity, connectivity, engagement, and involvement with these two study school sites. The ISQ and PNA data also suggests that students are increasingly developing protective assets at the two high school sites over the past seven years (see Tables 8 and 9). A more careful look into the leadership characteristics that are present at these two schools is warranted, and can provide insight into what encourages students at these two schools to be increasingly resilient and successful.

### **Research Schools and Academic Achievement**

In addition to the positive survey feedback and high level of healthy

Table 8

*Percentage of Students Reported to Possess Protective Assets found at Good-to-Great High School 2005-2011 (PNA Survey)*

Protective assets	2005	2007	2009	2011
Service to others	68%	71%	76%	83%
Involved in creative activities (i.e., music, theater, or other arts)	27%	31%	33%	41%
Involved in youth programs (i.e., sports, clubs, other organizations at school)	54%	61%	67%	73%
Actively engaged in learning at school (feels connection to school and learning)	60%	67%	72%	81%
Positive adult role models at school and/or positive influences in life	64%	66%	75%	79%

*Note.* Top Five Assets identified by Scales & Leffert (2004) from Search Institute.

Table 9

*Percentage of Students Reported to Possess Protective Assets found at Overachieving High School 2005-2011 (PNA Survey)*

Protective assets	2005	2007	2009	2011
Service to others	51%	54%	57%	63%
Involved in creative activities (i.e., music, theater, or other arts)	19%	21%	33%	35%
Involved in youth programs (i.e., sports, clubs, other organizations at school)	34%	41%	49%	57%
Actively engaged in learning at school (feels connection to school and learning)	43%	48%	54%	61%
Positive adult role models at school and/or positive influences in life	46%	49%	65%	71%

*Note.* Top Five Assets identified by Scales & Leffert (2004) from Search Institute.

developmental assets present at the two research high schools, students at both schools perform extremely well on standardized test measures. Using the Federal Government's AYP accountability system along with the State of Utah's U-PASS and UCAS assessments systems, students from both GTGHS and OHS perform very well when compared with other students across the region and across the country (see Table 10).

Table 10

*U.S. Department of Education Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) met by Good-to-Great High School and Overachieving High School 2007-2011*

School	2007 Made AYP?	2008 Made AYP?	2009 Made AYP?	2010 Made AYP?	2011 Made AYP?
GTGHS	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
OHS	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES

*Note.* Utah received a waiver for participation in AYP beginning in 2012.

Source: USOE (2012).

The USOE has used two models to assess schools within the state. The first model, the U-PASS, measures student proficiency in Language Arts, Math, and Science while also taking attendance in school into account. High School graduation rates are also an important component of the U-PASS formula. Using a somewhat complex statistical formula, the USOE arrives at Whole School Progress Score (WSPS) and Subgroup Progress Scores (SPS) for each school. A school score of 180 or higher is considered outstanding (see Table 11).

Beginning in 2011 the USOE instituted a new assessment tool for schools in Utah termed the UCAS. This system also measures proficiency and progress made by students on end-of-level assessments. The UCAS heavily weighs student growth on the assessments, and includes tools to measure graduation rates, core-subject proficiency levels, and student progress/growth levels to arrive at a school “score.” Students at GTGHS and OHS attained the following UCAS scores in 2011 and 2012 (see Table 12).



Table 11

*U-PASS Accountability Scores for Good-to-Great and Overachieving High Schools 2007-2010*

School	2007	2008	2009	2010
GTGHS whole school progress score	189	220	188	192
GTGHS subgroup progress score	184	208	183	190
OHS whole school progress score	178	197	172	188
OHS subgroup progress score	171	191	169	183

*Note.* Utah changed to a different student growth model in 2011 termed UCAS.  
Source: USOE (2012).

Table 12

*UCAS Accountability Scores for Good-to-Great and Overachieving High Schools 2011 and 2012*

School	UCAS score 2011	Percentile rank vs. other Utah HS	UCAS score 2012	Percentile rank vs. other Utah HS
GTGHS	499	92 <sup>nd</sup> percentile	527	96 <sup>th</sup> percentile
OHS	455	78 <sup>th</sup> percentile	469	79 <sup>th</sup> percentile

*Note.* Score measured using 600 points as perfect score.  
Source: USOE (2012).

### Demographics

Although both schools are from the same school district, student populations at each high school differed along ethnic, socioeconomic, and family lines. Both high schools in the study are grades ten through twelve. Both high schools are a part of the same school district, and this school district in the Intermountain West is home to nearly 70,000 students. Demographics for the two high schools associated with this case study are presented in Table 13. As noted, the source of the information is the National Center

Table 13

*Demographics for High Schools Where Principals Directed SY 2009-2010*

H.S. and “name” of principal	No. students	Ethnicity	White	Average income	Free lunch
1. Mr. Peabody	1,860	21%	79%	\$60,386	29%
2. Mr. Newsome	2,263	8%	92%	\$78,640	8%

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics (2011) and citidata.com for average income.

for Education Statistics (2011) and citidata.com for median income. All high school data are from the 2009-2010 school year (SY). Student populations ranged from 1,860 at OHS to 2,263 at GTGHS, a difference of 403 students. The percentage of minority students ranged from 21% at OHS to 8% at GTGHS, and the percentage of white non-Hispanic students ranged from 79% at OHS to 92% at GTGHS. Median annual income of patron families ranged from \$60,386 at OHS to \$78,640 at GTGHS, a difference of \$18,254 per year. Percentages of students receiving free and reduced lunch through the federal program for low income families ranged from 29% at OHS to 8% at GTGHS. Both high schools are from the same general geographic area of the state.

GTGHS boundaries include acres of open fields on the west side accompanied with many residential areas. The center part of the school boundary includes businesses and even some corporate offices. This area of the county has historically been viewed as the “seat” or center of the county, but has still remained mostly rural while transitioning towards suburban. This community has seen tremendous residential growth in the past 10 years with many of the open fields replaced by subdivisions of individual family homes. It is an area that over the past twenty years has transitioned from rural to

suburban as businesses have fled the congested downtown city areas and moved closer to the residential areas of the county. The vast majority of students who attend GTGHS come from two-parent homes and live in single-family households. This school has the lowest percentage of students qualifying for free lunch (8%) and the lowest percentage of students coming from an ethnic background (8%). It also has the highest median household income, which for 2010 was \$78,640.

OHS is without question a suburban high school with a steadily increasing student body of 1,860. Over the past 20 years subdivisions of homes have sprung from the former fields of onions, corn, tomatoes, and farmlands. Homes that have sprung up in this area of the county over the past 30 years have been considered more affordable than in other parts of the county. Because of the more affordable nature of the housing in the OHS attendance area, many of the homes and subdivisions built in this area was drawing in younger families. This high school attendance area has rapidly changed from rural to suburban while transitioning even towards urban. A higher percentage of students at OHS come from single-parent homes and live in apartments or trailer courts. This school has the highest percentage of students qualifying for free lunch (29%) and the highest percentage of students coming from ethnic backgrounds (21%). It also has the lowest median household income, which was \$60,386 in 2010.

### **Data Analysis**

Recall that the purpose of this study was to examine the leadership characteristics that principals and staff correlated with student success and academic

achievement. A secondary purpose was to see if there were both first order and second order characteristics (Marzano et al., 2005) prevalent at one or both of the study sites. It is clear from both the interview responses and from the observations that participants from the study sites perceive that effective principals do positively impact student learning. This is important because it validates other studies (Leithwood et al., 2004) that show leadership behaviors and characteristics profoundly influence student learning.

Careful analysis of the data revealed several subthemes clustered around many of the 21 first- and second-order leadership responsibilities identified by Marzano and colleagues (2005). The subthemes that evolved not only indicated clear relationships with the leadership responsibilities, or characteristics, identified by Marzano, but also fall under a broader instructional leadership theory umbrella. As has been discussed in chapter two, there are multiple definitions of instructional leadership theory, many of which delineate leadership characteristics of an instructional leader rather than a definitive explanation of instructional leadership theory itself. Following this angle, McEwan (2003a) suggested that there are seven steps to the evolution of a successful instructional leader. These seven steps are outlined below and include:

- Establishment and implementation of instructional goals.
- Provision of instructional resources to staff and support of positive physical environment to encourage and motivate staff to improve instruction.
- Creation of a school culture conducive to learning.
- Collaborative development of a school mission and vision.

- High expectations for faculty, staff, and students.
- Development of leaders.
- Positive attitudes towards students, faculty, staff, and parents .

In addition, W. Smith and Andrews (1989) identified four dimensions of an instructional leader, many of which overlap with the findings of the McEwan (2003a) research. W. Smith and Andrews identified the following four dimensions of a successful instructional leader: resource provider, supporter of instructional resources, communicator, and visible presence.

There were 14 of the 21 Marzano and colleagues (2005) leadership responsibilities identified in this study. For the sake of organization of this study, and as a method to outline the analysis of the data, the 14 leadership characteristics were discussed and grouped under the larger instructional leadership umbrella outlined by McEwan (2003a). The broader instructional leadership umbrella, which identified the seven steps of a successful instructional leader from McEwan, along with the dimension identified by W. Smith and Andrews of *visible presence*, were readily identified as broad themes found within the schools and leaders of both research sites. The 14 subthemes, or characteristics of leadership, were captured by the researcher as the interviews and information was coded and grouped.

There was an especially strong emphasis at both research sites on positive school culture that became evident as the study progressed. The researcher sees this concept of sharing and building school culture as a broad topic that encompasses several of the steps necessary to evolve to the role of an instructional leader along with

a number of the successful principal responsibilities Marzano and colleagues (2005) identify in their meta-analysis. The characteristics, or responsibilities as Marzano and colleagues referred to them, that were uncovered and identified by the researcher as important to a strong culture are: *culture; optimizer; ideals and beliefs; order; input; outreach; relationships; and contingent rewards*. This idea of building a successful school culture through the evolution towards an instructional leader while also implementing responsibilities identified by Marzano and colleagues is discussed in the research findings that follow.

Many of the remaining steps to the evolution of an instructional leader discussed by McEwan (2003a), along with the W. Smith and Andrews (1989) dimension of *visible presence*, became evident as the research progressed. These broad instructional leadership themes, just as the broad theme of culture, came to light as the interview responses were transcribed and coded. The leaders who participated in this study were adhering to the steps of a successful school leader outlined by McEwan, even if neither one of them consciously knew that they were doing so. Some of the instructional leadership characteristics were found to be more prevalent in the principal at OHS, but almost all of the characteristics were themes found in characteristics encompassed by both research principals and were present at both research sites. These characteristics associated by the researcher from Marzano and colleagues (2005) responsibilities, aligned with the steps outlined by McEwan and included: *knowledge of curriculum, instruction & assessment; intellectual stimulation; change agent; and focus*.

The seven broad steps outlined by McEwan (2003a) suggested the creation of a

successful instructional leader. These steps, along with their related subthemes or responsibilities outlined in the Marzano and colleagues (2005) research, clearly emerged as the researcher took the feedback from the interviews and observations, analyzing and coding the information as the study moved forward. The concept of strong instructional leadership attributes, with an emphasis towards the importance of leadership characteristics that develop a positive sense of culture clearly emerged as the researcher dissected the information from the study. A summary of the data for this study is outlined below.

### **Conceptual Framework Components**

It is important that the principals, teachers, students, parents, and staff all work collaboratively and intelligently in order to increase the achievement level of students. Teachers must institute researched “best practices” in the classrooms while principals must be able to recognize those practices. Principals must also lead in such a manner as to most profoundly and positively impact student learning. The principals in this study utilized many of the 21 leadership “practices” identified by Marzano and colleagues (2005) in similar ways. The way in which they utilized these “practices” had a profound impact on the high school’s culture, and thereby had a strong influence on student achievement.

Consequently, the researcher created a table to depict the prevalence and strength of the various leadership characteristics or practices observed or reported during the study. The reported use by a principal is marked with a “Y.” The observed use of a characteristic is marked in the table with a “Y.” The reported use of a principal

leadership characteristic from a faculty or staff member is marked with a “Y.” If the characteristic or practice was observed or reported by more than two members of the study, it is marked with an “SY.” If the characteristic was not observed or reported it was marked with an “N.”

The researcher made decisions and some interpretations for Tables 14 and 15 regarding the usage of leadership characteristics by the principals. This process was subjective in nature, but methodical in practice. Principals or faculty may have referred to a characteristic during interviews using a synonym or an example. If the researcher could make a connection to the leadership characteristic, it was noted as a “Y” or an “SY.” What follows is an attempt to summarize and explain a framework used to outline the prevalence of the various leadership characteristics found in the two study high schools. The information summarized in these two tables is detailed in thick, rich description throughout the narrative of this study. The narrative of the study follows the summary tables (Tables 14 and 15).

## **Culture**

There was considerable emphasis provided throughout the research by the successful high school principals, as well as through the faculty and staff for the development of positive school culture. This theme was the single most referred to characteristic of a successful study body and school. Among the top elements of a successful school culture discussed by research participants in this study was: a clear articulation of a school vision that focuses on student learning, with collaborative and successful “buy in” from stakeholders for the school vision (referred to as *ideals/beliefs*



Table 14

*Summary of 14 Marzano and Colleagues (2005) Leadership Characteristics Present at GTGHS Based on Interviews/Observations*

Leadership characteristic at GTGHS	Observed	Principal interview	Teacher interview
Ideals and beliefs	Y	SY	Y
Input	Y	Y	Y
Intellectual stimulation	Y	Y	Y
Change agent	Y	Y	Y
Outreach	Y	Y	Y
Relationships	Y	Y	Y
Order	Y	SY	SY
Resources	Y	SY	SY
Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment	Y	Y	N
Focus	Y	Y	Y
Culture	SY	SY	SY
Optimizer	Y	Y	Y
Contingent rewards	Y	SY	Y
Monitor and evaluate (termed <i>visibility</i> by McEwan)	Y	Y	Y

Table 15

*Summary of 14 Marzano and Colleagues (2005) Leadership Characteristics Present at OHS Based on Interviews/Observations*

Leadership characteristic at OHS	Observed	Principal interview	Teacher interview
Ideals and beliefs	Y	SY	SY
Input	Y	Y	Y
Intellectual stimulation	SY	SY	SY
Change agent	Y	SY	SY
Outreach	Y	Y	Y
Relationships	SY	SY	SY
Order	Y	Y	Y
Resources	Y	Y	Y
Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment	SY	SY	SY
Focus	Y	Y	Y
Culture	SY	SY	SY
Optimizer	Y	Y	SY
Contingent rewards	Y	Y	SY
Monitor and evaluate (termed <i>visibility</i> by McEwan)	SY	SY	SY

*and input* by Marzano and colleagues); a culture of achievement (Marzano and colleagues said this was the responsibility of *optimizer*); family-oriented relationships (Marzano and colleagues simply said *relationships*); discipline (referred to as *order* by Marzano and colleagues); collaboration (Marzano and colleagues divided collaboration into two terms, *input* and *outreach*); support of a pleasing physical facility (simply stated as *resources* by Marzano and colleagues); and recognition and celebration of success (called *contingent rewards* by Marzano and colleagues). Each of these elements of culture had evolved in such a manner as to appear somewhat different at each of the research sites, but the concept of a positive school culture was profoundly prominent at both locations.

During interviews and discussions, school leaders were asked what their main goal for the school was. Both leaders shared dreams for their students and for the future of their students. They also shared dreams for the teachers, staff, and the community. The success of students was the focus of both principal's hopes and aspirations. There were even pictures in the principals' offices that were examples of students who had made great strides in life after struggling at some point during high school. Both principals shared dreams for the school as an organization, and spoke of the positive impact the organization has had on the lives of students over the past several years.

### **Ideals/Beliefs and Input**

Both principals agreed that it is essential for a successful school to have a clear vision for student learning. "It is important for each school leader to understand what picture they are trying to paint before we get too involved in the painting," said Mr.

Peabody [a pseudonym]. There was a strong sense of increased difficulty in changing an existing painting than completely creating a new painting from a blank canvas. Bringing about change from the outset of a principal's term of leadership seems the idea of choice. While principals may not start out with a clean canvas, so to speak, they do need to know where they would like to begin their painting and what they would like the painting to look like when it is completed. At both study sites each school year begins with the faculty reviewing the school vision and reflecting on the beliefs and values that underlie and support the school vision. "Our school vision is something we reflect on each school year. It is part of the school accreditation process, the self-study process, to re-evaluate our school vision, mission, beliefs on an annual basis" (Mr. Newsome [a pseudonym]). "This year as we worked it [the vision, mission, belief statements] through, we made sure we worked it through with both teachers and parents to make sure that they were part of the whole vision exercise" (Mr. Peabody[a pseudonym]).

An analysis of each school's SIP showed that a clear vision had been established at both research sites. The vision reflected the beliefs, values, and commitment to the community. District and State goals were included in the plans along with school and community goals. Each SIP began with a school mission statement and was followed by a narrative of the vision. This vision was reflected within each SIP through the goals and action plan that were set by the school.

The discussion on school vision led to further discourse from the high school principals regarding school culture and how the school culture had been molded. Both principals agreed that the school culture reflected the values, mission, and beliefs of the

leader and the school itself. These successful school leaders had clear visions for the school, and they put considerable effort into making this vision clear, collaborative, and readily available to all those within the organization. The successful high school principals created an ongoing platform for the development and navigation of a clear direction, a clear vision for the organization. The principals were able to bring people within the schools together and communicate a clear vision to all of the stakeholders. It was clearly evident that the stakeholders engaged in this process of self-evaluation and vision development on a regular basis. There was clear communication as to whether each stakeholder was moving in the right direction within all levels of the organization. If there were issues with stakeholders moving off-track, there was a plan that each principal had in place to bring them back into the fold. If the plan was not successful, even after repeated attempts, there were plans to move forward for the betterment of the organization. “At some point the members of the school have to either get on the bus, or the bus is going to leave without them,” stated Mr. Peabody. The ability to cast a successful vision for the entire organization appeared vital to the overall success of those who were a part of the culture. Ms. Doright, a teacher at OHS stated, “Creating a successful school culture requires building and sharing a school vision that brings confidence for all involved...and this confidence brings an air of success with it.”

It clearly came to light that a school vision and mission had been created in collaboration with the teachers, parents, and students at each research site. Ann Academia [a pseudonym], a teacher at GTGHS stated, “He [the principal] let us develop a school vision, and we have been continually included in this ever evolving

process.” A secretary at the school, Sally Smith, said, “I think he [principal] allowed us to take an open-ended vision of his own and kind of pour our own ideas into it. The result was a vision that is visionary to all of us.” The words “committed to excellence—working together to make it happen” were found at the entry of GTGHS on a large sign above the doorway. The principal clearly had high expectations for the teachers, students, and for himself. However, he chose not to dictate his views or vision. By not forcing his views on colleagues, Mr. Newsome encouraged the faculty and staff to develop their own vision, which resulted in the staff taking ownership for the school vision and mission. Based upon observations and interview responses, there was little doubt that the participants in the study felt strongly about the positive impact the principal’s leadership had upon the school culture.

The mission, vision, and goals established under the direction of both Mr. Newsome and Mr. Peabody were at the heart of the school’s actions and everyone the researcher spoke with at the school felt these goals were both challenging yet also attainable. An attitude resonated amongst the study participants that the leadership, teachers, and even the parents at GTGHS and OHS could help every young adult achieve their potential. There was a strong sense that the organization was having a powerful positive impact upon students. Ms. Jones, a counselor at OHS shared,

Mr. Peabody has this phrase, “let’s do what’s best for the kids.” I can’t begin to count how many times he says that—in faculty meetings, in department meetings, in PTA meetings—it truly is his mantra. That phrase has become part of the school culture. I now hear teachers say all of the time, “let’s do what’s best for the kids.”

The school culture of both high schools valued the pursuit of rigorous

coursework by students, and encouraged students to be high achieving. Both principals made a habit of collecting data, and using the data in an on-going fashion to drive decisions for the school. It was apparent to the researcher that the individual needs of students were being addressed, but there was also a strong emphasis on achievement. This emphasis was evident through the observed verbal communications of each principal to students and teachers, through displays in the classrooms, through the perusal of accreditation documents, in the minutes from PTSA and Community Council meetings, and in posters found throughout both high school buildings. In some instances achievement results were charted and used by teachers working with individual students in “advisory” classes to track academic progress. Students were encouraged to pursue and attain academic benchmarks, and were recognized and rewarded for reaching these academic benchmarks.

A strong emphasis on the value of advanced placement (AP), concurrent enrollment (CE), honors-level, and college-preparatory courses was a hallmark of Mr. Newsome’s at GTGHS. Upon Newsome’s arrival at GTGHS there were a variety of changes made to address a shift in emphasis for rigorous coursework. The master schedule was adapted to encourage student growth in these courses. Teachers moved towards “team teaching,” common curriculum maps, and common assessments in their smaller learning communities. Strategies were put in place to encourage students to register, enroll in, and pursue rigorous courses. An open-entry policy opened the door for all students to sample rigorous courses, and counselors were encouraged to allow students to move freely between courses at the beginning of the school year to support

the sampling of, and pursuit of AP, CE, and other college-preparatory courses. Techniques were developed to encourage students to register for more rigorous courses during registration periods, and students were applauded and even rewarded for doing so. Both counselors and teachers were onboard with this school goal to push the academic rigor, and an assessment of the school's AP test numbers and CE credits earned proved that their efforts were bearing fruit.

The schools held high expectations for students, and for faculty and staff. Mr. Newsome attributed the success of the school to "our focused, very dedicated, and extremely hard working faculty and staff." He explained:

They have come together under the common goal of serving kids. There is a very close relationship amongst the teachers. We all belong to a tight-knit fraternity of educators, and we are proud of our profession. We look at our role as not simply teaching information, but as developing good citizens. We have an obligation to help students learn. Learning first.

Academically the school expected nothing short of the very best from students and from faculty. This concept was central to the beliefs and activities at both GTGHS and OHS. Marzano and colleagues (2005) asserted in their research that high expectations from the principal was one of the strongest correlates to positive student learning and student achievement out of the 21 school leadership characteristics they researched.

### **Outreach, Relationships, and Order**

Mr. Newsome employed a number of strategies at GTGHS in an effort to positively impact school climate. The principal recognized the traditional events (e.g., Homecoming, Alumni Day, school's birthday, teacher birthdays and special events, etc.) at the school and these traditions were a part of the school that helped bring

faculty, students, and the community together. The faculty was considered “family.” At GTGHS, almost one half of the current faculty and staff had been students at the school when they were younger. Many teachers had their own children attending the school, even if many of these parents and families lived outside the school’s boundary area. The school had educated generations of families that lived in the neighborhood. There was a real sense of community at GTGHS. Former students who no longer resided within the school’s boundary area regularly requested permits to enroll their children in the school. There was a waiting list of students who resided outside the school boundary area that numbered well over 100 students. These were students who were to attend a neighboring high school, but were hoping to attend GTGHS. Staff and faculty commented in several of the interviews that this was a school that was “doing positive things,” and that “everyone wants their children to go to school here.” Mr. Clean, a custodian at OHS, commented:

The most important thing Mr. Peabody does is to build relationships. He gets to know every faculty and staff member as well as possible, and encourages the faculty and staff to do the same. Mr. Peabody treats everyone great and equitably—from the part-time custodians to the AP teachers—he respects everyone and recognizes that everyone has an important role in the school, and without everyone, nothing will be accomplished.

Both principals found it important to recognize and celebrate successes, both for teachers and for students. These successful leaders had a system of recognition in place. While both celebrated successes, there were different ways that the successes of students and teachers were recognized at each high school. Each chose to find ways to celebrate successes publicly. There were both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational tools in place at each high school. Student recognition ceremonies were common, and a



variety of celebration techniques were used to recognize and honor high-achieving students who met goals and reached benchmarks. In both schools educators were also honored and celebrated for their contributions, and were considered a crucial element to the successes of students.

All stakeholders were adamant about the need to create and sustain a safe and orderly school environment for all. Both principals had meetings/assemblies with all students at the beginning of the school year each year to outline expectations for students. Mr. Peabody mentioned that he took every opportunity to clarify expectations with both students and faculty. “The kids know I care about them even though I expect a lot,” declared Mr. Peabody, “and I work very hard to show students that I support them and that I am always here for them.” Students were expected to take pride in their physical appearance and to adhere to dress standards, while also allowing some latitude for students to express their individuality. When students did not measure up to expectations, efforts were made by both principals to privately, individually, and discreetly discuss those shortcomings with students.

There was a strong emphasis on a collaborative and collegial atmosphere at both high schools. Both principals noted that each and every individual is an instrumental part of the education process within the schools. Both principals gave tremendous credit to those around them for the success of students. It was noted at several different junctures during the principal interviews that their colleagues were the real “heroes” in the successes of students. The principals recognized that every member of the school is instrumental in the learning and educational process. No one person, no one individual

could see that students were successful. “Teaching and learning is a very collaborative process,” noted Mr. Peabody on multiple occasions. That being said, both principals mentioned the crucial need for leaders to be highly involved in nurturing the culture of learning on a daily basis. “The successful nature of our school did not happen overnight. It has taken years and years of work, and the efforts of many dedicated educators to build the culture that exists today [at OHS]” (Mr. Peabody).

Mr. Newsome stated in an interview that coherence of purpose could not be achieved by a top-down management style. Rather, the culture required everyone to be on the same page at the same time. It comes, he stated, “through consistency of relationships and conversations, as well as repetition of a limited number of processes and values over a range of different circumstances.” No matter who was spoken with in the organization, similar themes were repeated. Everyone seemed to know why they were there, what they were doing as individuals, and that their organization was contributing to benefit the greater good. Participating faculty members shared a sense of pride in what was going on, with several expressing a “familial” atmosphere that trickled down to the students. Everyone *felt* that he or she “belongs.” Sally Smith, a secretary at GTGHS, made the comment:

Mr. Newsome is always open for suggestions or ideas. He usually consults the people closest to the situation, and asks for input and ideas. He often asks us to identify what we think the problem is, just to make sure we are all on the same page. He recognizes that any decisions made without input from the faculty will probably be met with resistance, so he tries to involve as many people as possible. He wants to make sure he is getting all sides of the situation.

Sergiovanni (2001) believed collegiality and culture to have a strong connection to academic success for students, and further suggested that if principals

authentically encouraged collegiality, teachers themselves ultimately will take responsibility for the mission of the school and work together to achieve that mission.

The principals at both schools provided the time, the structure, and the means for teachers to openly voice their opinions and to discuss school issues. Leitwood and colleagues (2004) explained that if school leaders will allow teachers to be active participants in the decision making process, the result will be increased teacher loyalty, enhanced teacher roles in faculty professional development, increased feelings of professional self-efficacy, and the optimum integration of intellectual abilities distributed throughout the school organization.

The family-oriented relationships nurtured by the successful leaders within the two high schools was a common theme in both of the study sites. A sense of “family” was mentioned during the interviews by faculty and staff from both schools. The importance of being treated like “family” within the school culture was readily apparent at both research sites. The principals at both schools exhibited a real desire to see those around them succeed and achieve. It was clearly evident that the students at both schools were treated with respect, and there was a strong sense caring. Students were often treated by the educators as if they were their own offspring. The principals, faculty, and staff also seemed to treat each other as if they were siblings rather than simply colleagues. This was apparent despite the natural occurrence of disagreement during the process of collaboration. The theme of collaboration was strong and recurring at both study sites. It was a big part of how these principals both conducted business.

## Resources

The physical facility at OHS was a building that had shortcomings. It was alleged that the building had been built on an underground aquifer despite objections from several experts that the site was not development-appropriate. The land that OHS sits on had been donated to the school district. Many stated that construction on the building had been pushed ahead despite several “red flags” throughout the design and build processes. This has led to numerous building issues from the beginning of construction until today.

Adding to this challenge was the fact that the building at OHS was rumored to have been built using lower quality materials because the school district did not have the money set aside to construct the building to high-end expectations. The main portion of the building had recently undergone some minor renovations (even though it was only 20 years old), but there were multiple discussions of a leaky roof and consistently broken water pipes while the researcher was conducting the study. Despite this fact, combined with other obvious facility challenges, the building exhibited many attributes that contributed to a positive school culture. Decals adorned the entry doors, reading “Welcome to our school—Visitors please report to the main office upon entering the building during regular school hours. Thank you.” Bright, warm colors adorned the hallways, classrooms, and cafeteria. Uplifting quotes and sayings were found on walls throughout the building. Student art decorated nearly every nook and cranny of the building. School colors, school banners, and small flags proudly displayed a fierce looking mascot and were found in stairwells, staircases, and

in the main entry. Other cultures were celebrated with flags from countries around the world that hung from the commons area. Each flag was representative of a country for the cultural background of every student in the building.

Administrators, teachers, and staff were introduced to the public and presented as personal and warm people through a bulletin board at the entry of the school. The bulletin board showed pictures of faculty and staff engaged in a typical daily task. Below each picture was a favorite quote or statement of that particular faculty or staff person. The media center included comfortable stuffed chairs, table lamps, couches, and colorful paintings on the walls. The office area included telephones designated specifically for student use, and signs promoting positive public relations were found at the office counter and on the office walls. The faculty lounge was furnished with large couches, lounge chairs, green and flowering plants, paintings, a large television set with cable access, refrigerator, microwave, and a large dining table. On two different occasions the researcher found bagels, doughnuts, a baked cake, and small sandwiches in the lounge for faculty to enjoy. This could only serve to magnify feelings of appreciation and support the faculty and staff might share with their principal. Pre-stamped and preaddressed postcards for each student in the school were in a file box in the faculty lounge. Teachers were encouraged by administration to write at least one positive postcard to a student each day during their preparation period, and to mail it home to a student or parent.

Ms. Doright, a teacher at OHS, had this to say regarding Mr. Peabody, his approach to the physical facility, and how this might impact the culture of OHS.

One of the things that he did to physically change our school was to put inspirational quotes all around the building, in the hallways, commons areas, office areas. He fosters school spirit by installing school flags and other memorabilia throughout the public areas. The school building itself embodies optimism!

Mr. Peabody brought in at least one prominent and nationally well-known motivational youth speaker per year to provide an assembly and evening presentation for the students and the community. These events were typically coordinated in a collaborative fashion with the local PTSA and other area high schools. Related organizations helped to defray costs, encourage participation, increase attendance, and to solicit a positive atmosphere. He also spent time over the summer pouring over yearbook photos in an effort to learn each student's name prior to school beginning in August. Each week during school students were honored or recognized and treated to a free "lunch with the principal." Students would eat lunch, socialize, and be recognized with the principal, faculty members, and parents at a specific table in the lunchroom. Students were given recognition at this event for a recent birthday, an act of kindness noticed by a peer or a teacher, a marked improvement in academic grades or school attendance, or for their overall leadership. Students were also nominated by their peers for their acts of kindness and were recognized by the principal at assemblies and at half-time presentations of the high school sporting events.

Faculty meetings were held at least once a month and were typically held during preparation periods or during late-start mornings. This enabled teachers to attend faculty meeting without being required to come before, or stay after, contract time in order to attend their required meetings. Each faculty meeting began with food,

humor, support phrases, and a celebration of all the successes that had occurred since the last meeting. There was a focus on providing rewards and supports for all teachers and staff. Henson, Kogan, and Vacha-Haase (2001) concluded that several positive behaviors of teachers (e.g., ability to deal more effectively with failing students, persistence when difficulties arise) are linked to teacher efficacy, which positively impacts student outcomes.

Perhaps as a result of all of these efforts, the school had a high retention rate for teachers. A teacher noted in the interview that “we have a very low turn-over rate. There is also a waiting list of district teachers requesting a transfer into [the school].” Teachers were given opportunities to attend workshops and conferences around the country that met school or individual goals and needs. The principal looked for leadership from within, developed leaders, and promoted classroom teachers to leadership roles. Mr. Newsome assembled a team of teachers that worked with the school leadership during the interview process each time a new teacher was hired. The team opinion was an important part of the hiring process.

### **Visibility and Contingent Rewards**

Principal visibility and approachability were both mentioned as key attributes of the research principals during interviews. Most research participants agreed that these characteristics were critical for increased student learning. Multiple references were made by study participants to the positive influence of a principal who is not only visible, but who also make themselves available to students both formally and informally to discuss academic and nonacademic matters. Interviewees consistently

commented that principals who cultivated an approachable climate and consistently engaged students translated into higher student achievement. This approachability showed a strong measure of affiliation and connection for students, according to multiple interview respondents. “It [the visibility and approachability of the principal] shows that the principal is interested in the personal academic successes and challenges of students,” commented Ms. Jones. “He [the principal] helps students succeed by forming relationships and showing students that he cares, that he’s checking up on things like that [student academics and challenges],” shared Ann Academia.

Teachers who were interviewed commented throughout the study that the amount of time principals spent observing teachers within the classroom was an important predictor for student success. It was reported that principals who frequently visited classrooms, and who visited classrooms for extended periods of time, were perceived by faculty and staff as being more influential instructional leaders. Mr. Dorigt, a teacher at OHS, made the following observation:

Mr. Peabody is always visiting classrooms. He is in my classroom at least twice a month. He typically stays for 10 to 15 minutes, depending on what we are doing. He interacts with the students—asks them questions about what they are learning, how they are doing in class, etc. He also interacts with me—usually, his visit begins with, “So, what are we learning today?” In his short visits, he is able to observe the curriculum and my methods of instruction. He always follows up with a brief conversation the next time I see him—nothing formal, but just enough to let me know that he is aware of what is happening in my classroom. These types of visits are more effective than the traditional “come in with an evaluation form and sit in the back of the room” evaluations. He really has a feel for my classroom.

Teachers reported that regular classroom visits signaled to them that learning, teaching, and classroom environment were important to their principal. Teachers shared that



students seemed more “intent and focused” on their work when the principal visited the classroom. They also shared that students were better-behaved when the principal was present in the classroom, and this, combined with an increased focus from students when the principal visited the classroom was interpreted by research participants as very supportive increased student learning. Ms. McRight, a counselor at GTGHS, stated:

The principal often makes drop-in visits during instruction time, frequently participates in instruction & activities during those visits, then gives verbal and sometimes written feedback to the teacher and the students regarding the observed instruction time. The principal is also very conscientious about academic achievement and monitors test scores, meets with teachers to discuss strengths/successes, and avenues for improvement on a continual basis.

Multiple research participants explained that the principal at their school was highly interactive with students, both in the hallways and in the classroom. Teachers commented that principals who got to know students, and who helped with classroom assignments or who checked student work during classroom observations had “a powerful influence on learning.” Both research principals exhibited characteristics described by McEwan’s (2003b) steps to effective instructional leadership and were perceived as very effective leaders because they were more teacher or instructional leader than they were manager. Mr. Jones, a counselor at OHS commented that, “principals I have previously worked with would only visit classrooms to discipline students or to passively observe teachers. Mr. Peabody enjoys interacting with students and is comfortable in the role of teacher. He [Mr. Peabody] has a profound positive impact on students.”

Mr. Peabody spent nearly every evening of the week attending student activities and supporting students in their extracurricular activities. Students were

encouraged to be involved in a variety of extracurricular activities available to them. These activities included athletics, musicals, fine art performances, and clubs. Mr. Newsome even participated in a bit part for a school play, performed in a skit for an assembly with other students, was said to have been shooting half-court shots with other student during physical education classes, and agreed to have his head shaved because students met a fundraising goal for homeless youths within the community. These events were said to have taken place all within recent memory. Mr. Smith, a teacher at OHS, shared:

Mr. Peabody attends EVERYTHING. I seriously don't know how he does it. Football games? He is there. Choir concert? There. Tennis match? There. And he isn't just off to the side—he is in the crowd, talking to parents and students, interacting with the athletes or performers. During the school day, he is rarely in his office. He is in the halls, especially during the passing periods, talking to students and teachers. I think it's very important to mention that he expects the same of his vice-principals, and faculty members, as well. He encourages us all to be visible during the passing periods, making sure that students get to class on time.

Research participants further stated that the principal had “strong parent communication,” “visits classrooms frequently,” “is very visible and available,” and is “totally vested in the success of the students and teachers, and uses all available resources to provide outreach to the surrounding community and within the school.” Ms. Academia stated, “He [Mr. Newsome] made every effort to know what was going on with every competition, every employee, every classroom, every test. He knew everyone's name and something about us all. He asked questions. He asked for input and opinion. He listened to the answers.”

Each morning Mr. Newsome could be found walking the grounds, saluting

buses as they arrived, stopping students and wishing them “good morning,” and peeking into classrooms as they were getting started. He visited the faculty lounge, cafeteria, classrooms, grounds, and shops on a regular basis, and obviously felt the importance of being proactive and visible. Mr. Newsome had an “open door” policy with students, faculty, and parents. Each day he set aside two hours to spend time in classrooms, observing instruction and interacting with students and teachers. “The time that I dedicate modeling, observing, and assessing instructional practices is crucial to our success at GTGHS. Instructional leadership necessitates the delegation of some of the managerial-type duties to my assistant principals.” Both Mr. Newsome and Mr. Peabody mentioned on several different occasions the importance of strong instructional leadership. Mr. Clean, a custodian at OHS, stated:

He [Mr. Peabody] is present in the classrooms. He is present at after-school performances, sporting events, and competitions. He has a good working relationship with the teachers, the counselors, the lunchroom workers, the custodians, the secretaries...with everyone involved in the day-to-day operation of the school. He focuses on relationships, as a matter of fact, and the trust he has in each of us to do our job fosters great things at our school.

A strong sense of caring clearly existed within the culture of both high schools.

Mr. Newsome was seen holding doors open for students and adults. Mr. Peabody followed teachers and students down hallways and spoke with people as if they were the only item of importance at that particular moment. An observed central focus of Mr. Newsome’s work day was found within the direct personal contact he conducted with school stakeholders. He was constantly in physical contact with the students, faculty, staff, parents, and community members within the school culture. This required a delicate balancing act as he worked not to ignore “managerial” tasks such

as the paper work and duties, appointments, phone calls or e-mail messages to return, and the basic “housekeeping” duties of running an effective school. However, as both Mr. Newsome and Mr. Peabody were spending a great deal of time being visible and available there was a strong message being sent out to every stakeholder regarding the importance of what was happening at each moment within the walls of these two high schools. Mr. Peabody said:

I think it is important for the teachers to see me. I believe it is important for the kids to see me in the classrooms all of the time. It is really important for me to make sure the students see me engaged in the education process. That is my number one priority. I want people to know that I want to know what they are involved in, and that I want to be a part of it.

This direct contact with the teachers, students, and parents was described by Mr. Newsome as “a strategy to build a positive culture.” Noddings (1984) work on caring in education illustrated the critically important role that caring plays in a school. Ms. Academia described Mr. Newsome as a “constant whirlwind of activity and energy” that translated into a feeling of support and caring within the school. There was a strong sense from stakeholders that Mr. Newsome believed in everyone, and that he worked hard to support people and positive behaviors.

There was considerable emphasis placed on building, shaping, and sustaining school culture by both of the high school principals. There were multiple elements of culture-building that were brought to light as themes emerged from the research in the two research high schools. A culture of achievement, discipline, collaboration, accountability, family-oriented relationships amongst colleagues and stakeholders, and recognition and celebration of success. Each of these elements were perceived slightly

differently in both of the research schools, but all were present and highly visible at each location.

### **Optimizer**

Mr. Newsome worked diligently to develop a good mix of expertise on the GTGHS school leadership team. There was a collaborative commitment amongst the team members to help each other when needed. There were clear and measurable goals within the organization and within the leadership team. Mr. Newsome and representatives from the faculty and staff worked tirelessly to analyze data, provide positive interventions for students, set goals for students, track student progress, and to strategize solutions. The leadership—whether it was the principal, the school improvement team, individual teachers, or even parents—worked collaboratively within organizational boundaries. Mr. Newsome felt that, “you have to have a strong focus on progress.” Ann Academia further explained:

We hold ourselves accountable. The State and Feds set up mandates, but we are already accomplishing goals that we feel we need to accomplish. We don't need someone telling us things we need to do. We have that already figured out, and we're working to meet our goals, and the goals for students. We are constantly working to come up with different ways to address the needs of our students.

Despite the challenges faced with an increasingly diverse and socio-economically challenged student body, goals established by the state and federal governments were being met at both OHS and GTGHS. By putting the “human touch” into the organizations, by nurturing the growth of leadership within the school organization, Mr. Newsome and Mr. Peabody had found a recipe for success when it came to

developing leaders. Ms. McRight, a counselor at GTGHS, said:

Mr. Newsome is a great communicator. He sends probably at least 3 e-mails a week to the faculty and staff with information on upcoming events and activities, new information, or just a general “have a good week” message. He is also great at face-to-face communication—if he has a concern or question, he will come to you personally. He truly has an “open door” policy—teachers, staff, parents, and students are always welcome in his office, to discuss anything, major or minor.

Ongoing training was encouraged by both principals. In an effort to increase student academic performance, the principals at both schools encouraged teachers to seek ongoing training, and provided professional development to the faculty during late-start mornings once a week. Mr. Peabody noted that, “I provide professional development to my staff on a weekly basis and encourage them to seek advanced degrees. I set the standard for learning very high, even with the faculty.” Both Mr. Newsome and Mr. Peabody envision the faculty members as educational leaders. They encourage their teachers to model life-long learning, and to seek academic excellence in both their own learning and in their instruction.

These successful high school principals placed a high importance on selecting quality people who would become members of their faculty and staff. Not only was there a high level of importance placed on selection, but an even higher level of importance was placed on developing people once they became a part of the team. Before being selected to interview for a position on the faculty at OHS, candidates are asked to become informed regarding the overall vision and mission of the school. This helps members of the selection committee to understand whether the potential candidate is a good fit at OHS during the interview and selection processes. In some

instances during an interview, potential candidates are asked to teach a mini-lesson for the selection committee. According to Mr. Peabody, candidates are selected “for attitude, not necessarily for aptitude.” There is a strong emphasis placed on the centrality and importance of student learning when it comes to selecting teacher and staff candidates at both study sites. Applicants need to be “student-centered” and focused on “student learning rather than simply teaching,” according to Mr. Newsome. Once candidates are hired at one of the two research high schools, they undertake a variation of “new teacher induction” trainings that includes the assignment of a teacher mentor to assist and support.

Once hired, teachers and staff undergo a process of “grooming” for leadership. Both principals stressed that they had no desire to lead alone. Mr. Peabody commented that he felt the school and the students would not be successful if it were not for the collaborative efforts of the faculty and staff at OHS. “Success requires a great team. It literally takes a village to raise a child. We need everyone if we are to truly make a difference in the lives of the young people we work with,” stated Mr. Peabody. Every Tuesday morning is late start with faculty professional development activities conducted at both OHS and GTGHS. During the past school year the faculty and staff at OHS worked through the book, *Teach Like a Champion* by Doug Lemov. The faculty and staff at GTGHS worked through the book, *Ten Traits of Highly Effective Teachers: From Good to Great* by Elaine McEwan (2003b). Both principals suggested that these professional development opportunities, combined with collaboration time and opportunities for teachers, has led to increased student achievement amongst their

students.

Both principals felt it was very important to foster leadership in those who were around them. They deemed it their role to identify, promote, and support leaders from within the faculty and staff. The principals shared that it was about recognizing strengths and seeking opportunities for others to lead. It was also about helping members of the faculty achieve success as leaders by providing support, by allowing faculty and staff to take some calculated risks, and then providing them opportunities to lead. “I do everything I can to lower the affective filter, to make it okay to take some risks, and then I give teachers opportunities for growth and allow them to shine,” stated Mr. Newsome.

Decision-making was done by the research principals after careful consultation with those involved. Both principals commented regarding the importance to be decisive, and to make decisions as quickly as possible. However, both noted that it was crucial to involve stakeholders whenever possible when making decisions. Mr. Peabody noted that, “it is really important to consider those who might be affected by the decisions I make, or to possibly even consult with those who might be impacted when making those kinds of decisions.” Mr. Newsome commented, “When making decisions I find it very important to have all the pertinent information regarding the given situation, and then to make an educated decision collaboratively with those who are involved.” Both principals made it very clear that there was no group less important than another when making important decisions. Parents, students, community members and leaders, faculty, staff, administration, and district leadership were all important



stakeholders in the decision-making process. All were deemed essential to making good decisions for the organization.

This focus on building leadership capacity was not simply focused on the faculty and staff. Both principals pulled from resources around them. Expertise and talent was tapped at the central office level. Local business and government leaders were used as consultants. City and county governments were viewed as partners, and resources were used from these areas whenever possible. Parent support groups were in place, and the Community Council was vibrant and well-functioning in both schools. Students were empowered via committees and through membership in the Student Government organization. Student clubs provided service in a number of areas, and there was great community support for the schools and their student body. Shared leadership was deemed a critical component for success by both Mr. Newsome and Mr. Peabody. Decisions were made in consultation and collaboration with many different groups. There were many opportunities afforded stakeholders to learn, grow, and share in leadership. Mr. Smith, a teacher from OHS, shared:

Mr. Peabody is one of the most positive people I have ever worked with. He consistently focuses on the positive. He recognizes that there are things that need to be improved, but he always focuses on the good things we are doing first. If something isn't working, like our advisory period during its' first year for example, he would say, "OK, we know this is a good idea, let's not just give up on it and throw the baby out with the bathwater. What can we do to make it work better?"

### **Focus**

The teachers believed that everything that happened at OHS and GTGHS, from the morning announcements until the students went home at the end of the day, focused

on student learning. Both principals shared their belief that it was extremely important to protect the instructional time in the schools. Mr. Peabody commented that it was always a struggle to provide the needed instructional time when there were so many other activities vying for time out of the day. Activities that are important to the development of a sense of belonging, such as assemblies, motivational speakers, and presentations constantly pushed the instructional envelope. Mr. Newsome stated:

We are always seeking to find that delicate balance. Are we doing too much, are we taking away instructional time to create connections with some of our students? There are benefits to the activities that promote school spirit and a sense of belonging, but instructional time is so critical.

Both principals supported the efficient daily operations of their school in an orderly manner. Principals and teachers at both sites commented that this helped support the protection of instructional time and also contributed to student learning. Conducting morning announcements, holding an advisory class, scheduling assemblies, setting up presentations, and organizing school calendars and timetables all contributed to an efficient and protective way of protecting instructional time. Assemblies and celebrations were strategically planned to promote climate and culture while being very protective of instructional time in the classrooms. Each Tuesday morning was late start for the two high schools, and both schools conducted common professional development and common planning during the 60-minute time allotted each week. Teachers were provided foundational instruction with goals and vision for the late-start time, and then were allowed to collaborate each week during this late-start time. This time was protected and set aside by the principals to promote collaboration and the development of common instruction as well as common assessments.

Faculty and staff at several high schools in the Mountain District had collaborated together on the development of advisory and tutorial time during the weekly class schedule. Every week students are scheduled for an advisory and tutorial period at each of the two high schools. The advisory class began with a 10 minute opportunity for students to receive a progress report sheet that shows their academic standing at the moment, get organized, set goals for the week, and allow students to connect with the same teacher and same group of students on a regular basis. It also allowed for reflection and discussion on issues that may be going on at any given time (i.e., bullying, policy questions, etc.). Mr. Smith, a teacher at OHS, said:

Advisory period allowed me to get a better idea what was going on with students and to help them stay on top of their academics. I wasn't sure what to think of the concept when it was instituted by Mr. Peabody, but I now know how much something as simple as this change can make for students and their success.

The theme of morning announcements was to create a positive beginning to the day and week for students. Anything that might threaten the positive school climate was minimized through the advisory class and through morning announcements, assemblies, and celebrations.

The teachers at both research sites shared that they felt the principals were building a community of learners at their school. Opportunities for teachers to collaborate and work together were established on an almost daily basis. Depending on the school, the type and method of collaboration varied. Teachers at OHS worked in clusters of students and teachers termed, "academies," or career-oriented pathways. Teachers at GTGHS worked in "communities" that were designed to cut a large high school down into smaller units to encourage connections. Both structures provided

added opportunities for teachers to get to know one another, to get to know their students. Teacher collaboration time was also built in during the school day to promote communication and commonalities. Mr. Holland, a teacher at GTGHS, commented:

He [the principal] researched the success of small learning communities (SLC), to which our school had made a partial transition before he arrived on the scene, then supported the wall-to-wall transition to SLCs for the entire school. This was a huge change, which included changing the physical locations of teachers, establishing a geographical closeness for teachers working in the same SLCs, and building teacher collaboration time into the daily and weekly schedules. It also included a great deal of professional development. He supported the transition in every way possible, and led the way with passion and example. He established Professional Learning Communities and appointed teacher leaders to work together to create unity and support.

Teachers at both schools reported that they saw professional development opportunities as exactly that, opportunities for learning and growth. Members of both research schools commented that they enjoyed the professional learning opportunities provided to them, and that they seized upon the time and growth experiences that were available.

### **Intellectual Stimulation and Change Agent**

These successful high school principals aligned what was verbalized with an overlying vision and mission that were both clear and direct. Objectives, goals, and outcomes were all established for the sole purpose of successfully accomplishing the mission. Instruction was aligned with the school mission and goals. These goals were focused and the instructional strategies selected to achieve the goals of the organization were research-based and proven to increase student learning. All aspects of the culture, whether it was the staff development, parent involvement, community partnerships, or the daily curriculum were carefully planned and communicated. Desired achievement

outcomes were clearly stated and visible throughout the organizations. Both high schools had a clear vision in place, with a mission for accomplishing the tasks at hand.

There was strong agreement amongst stakeholders that the articulation of the school vision and mission was crucial. Mr. Newsome commented, “What good is it to have a vision or a mission if no one knows what it is that they are working to create.” The values and beliefs that serve as the foundation of the school vision must be in agreement with the values and beliefs of the community as a whole. Both principals noted the importance of repeatedly discussing the vision. “An opportunity to share thoughts about our vision should never be passed up,” noted Mr. Newsome. It was noted that the two principals shared several common methods of articulating the vision.

These methods included:

- School handbook and student agenda book
- School newsletters
- School website
- School Improvement Plan (SIP)
- Welcome banner at the entrance of the school.

Both Mr. Newsome and Mr. Peabody stressed the importance of being an instructional leader. The goal was to stimulate learning and growth within the teachers, who would in turn do the same for their own students. The principals put considerable time and effort into staying current with the most recent learning theories and practices. Professional development activities were designed to build capacity in teachers through curriculum development and through instructional support. Mr. Smith, a teacher at

OHS, made the following observation:

The principal and his administration research current trends in scholarly publications, attend meetings and conferences, and disseminate all information to the faculty. Much of the research is presented to us in faculty meetings. The principal puts academics and student success above all else, and has made that clear from the beginning of his time at OHS. He is always in the classrooms; he instituted the school-wide practice of stated objectives for every day of instruction, and had each classroom outfitted with decals for the whiteboard which guided the teacher to state objectives, activities, etc., then drops in frequently to observe teacher follow-through. He makes sure that we have all the resources we need in order to accomplish our goals as facilitators of student success, from technology in the classrooms to professional development, to individual support.

Ms. Doright explained, “The sharing of scholarly articles and information with faculty is a common practice. He [the principal] is always reading, and in fact posted on his office door what books he was currently reading, inviting discussion. He is a great instructional leader, and invited discussion of current educational topics at every opportunity.”

Collaboration and instructional support through Professional Learning Communities (PLC) was another tool successfully used to stimulate professional growth in teachers at OHS and GTGHS. The principals not only encouraged capacity building in teachers through learning opportunities, but also provided structural adaptations to build communities for collaboration. The principals were active participants in the PLC process which helped build community and also improve classroom instruction. The implementation of PLCs at both high schools allowed the principals to focus on student learning, participate in reflective dialogue regarding best instructional practices, and to develop shared norms and values. The leadership at both OHS and GTGHS developed a collaborative community in which both administration and teachers worked together to

grow student success and achievement.

He [Mr. Peabody] tests and challenges our commitment to the status quo in all that he does. He challenges his department chairs, PLC leaders, and other teacher leaders to take charge and to meet goals and expectations. He sticks to the plan even with some resistance from a loud minority, and he supports the transitions with individual help, encouragement, and – when necessary – firm resolve. He is always an EXAMPLE of optimism, academia, collaboration, and goal-setting. He teaches evening classes at a local college from time-to-time, I suspect not only to satisfy his love for teaching, but to stay current on instructional practices and to set an example as an instructional leader.

Similar kinds of remarks were noted at GTGHS as well. Both GTGHS and OHS experienced some challenges while making reform shifts towards Smaller Learning Communities (SLC), but faculty and staff at both locations also noted the positive changes that the reform efforts brought. Mr. Holland, a teacher at GTGHS, stated:

We have a great smaller learning community environment that Mr. Newsome has helped to set up in the school. These 6 teams of cross-curricular teachers are small “heartbeats” in the school. Keeping and maintaining the relationships among these teachers helps to keep the positive culture of a large high school in common. The leaders of each team meet bi-monthly with the principal and discuss items of concern or work on self-improvement through professional development that is needed. Then the team leaders take the information gleaned from the meetings with the principal to their teams. These teams meet in small, comfortable groups to discuss and relay this information. The principal and his assistants attend these meetings as members of each team. This helps to focus teachers on the goal of increasing the learning of each individual student. It also helps the administration become more accessible to teachers in a nonthreatening way.

## **Conclusion**

The interview data has been organized around the theoretical framework of the 21 leadership responsibilities identified by Marzano and colleagues (2005), using the broad instructional leadership umbrella described by both McEwan (2003a) and W.

Smith and Andrews (1989) as a broader theoretical lens. The data gathered for this qualitative research case study of two highly successful secondary principals in the Mountain School District of the Intermountain West supported the notion that successful and effective principals have a positive impact on student achievement. The ISQ data suggested that the two schools have increasing levels of teacher excellence, school leadership, instructional quality, and resource management since 2005. The PNA data suggested an increasing percentage of students acquiring the protective assets of service to others, involvement in creative activities and youth programs, increased engagement in learning at school, and more positive (“connection” to school) adult roles models at school. The PNA and ISQ data is an indication that the researcher’s initial description of the research high schools was accurate and that there are leadership characteristics of both first-order and second-order change prevalent at both sites (Mr. Peabody at OHS exhibited increased levels of second-order change leadership characteristics).

The interview, observation, and anecdotal data revealed that multiple “responsibilities” or characteristics of school leadership exist in successful high school principals. Among the most often observed and referred to leadership characteristics of this study were the broad concepts of instructional leadership and those characteristics that lead to the development of a strong school culture. The findings of this study supported the belief that successful high school principals establish relationships of trust, collaborate effectively with all stakeholders to develop a school vision with high expectations for all, and reach out to all involved to make the most of the resources



available to build academic achievement for students. The findings also supported the notion that a visible principal who is highly involved in the development of the instructional environment, and who stays current with the instructional ideas of the day will have a positive impact on student learning. A high school principal open to change and willing to develop and share leadership will make a positive difference in the lives of young people.

UCAS, AYP, and U-PASS data suggests that the students at both high schools in this study are achieving at higher levels than their peers across the State of Utah. This combined with the PNA and ISQ survey data suggests that students at both study sites are basically well adjusted, even keeled, and successful.

The study participants credited most of their success in supporting high student achievement to the fact that there was a strong, positive school culture in place. They also shared that the majority of their success with students came from an ability to sustain a collaborative school culture and structure that built leaders and empowered teachers to take calculated risks in the classroom. This collaborative and shared leadership environment created ownership, a sense of belonging, responsibility, commitment, loyalty, and motivated all stakeholders to seek an increased sense of success.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

Parents have a desire to have great schools for their children to attend. Great schools are made up of excellent teachers and outstanding principals. Parents want educators who care about their students individually, and who care about the academic success and progress of each child. Parents want their children to be challenged to learn. They want their students to be engaged and to enjoy learning while in school. Parents want their students to be successful. Drawing from the researcher's personal thoughts, parents form their opinions on the success of their local school largely based on the learning experience of their student. Parents simply want their students to excel.

Students, especially high school students, want school to be intellectually and academically challenging. They also hope that school is fun and engaging. High school students seek connections with their peers and with their teachers. They live in a very social world and often hunger for relationships.

Student engagement can be described as the student's relationship with the school community: the people (adults and peers), the structures (rules, facilities, schedules), the curriculum and content, the pedagogy, and the opportunities (curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular). There are many ways in which a student may engage with the school community; the degree to which a student is "engaged" in school is dependent on the quality, depth, and breadth of the student's relationship with these various aspects of the life and work of the school. (Yazzie-Mintz, 2006, p. 1)

Keeping things stimulating and also engaging, particularly given the challenges of large class sizes, along with increased assessment and accountability

requirements is no easy task for educators. It is clear that stakeholders want high achievement from students. Schools that are engaging their students appear to be making a difference when it comes to achievement and success. Both OHS and GTGHS are student-centered schools. They have high school principals at the helm who continually strive to create an atmosphere for success where students feel connected, safe, and are high achieving. Survey data suggests that students at both schools feel connected, lifted, and even better prepared to deal with the challenges that the world might throw at them. So who is leading these schools? Do the personalities who lead these schools possess characteristics that are as inspiring as the students they lead? Leadership “activities” described by McEwan (2003a) along with leadership “responsibilities” from Marzano and colleagues (2005) are both examined and found to be prominent characteristics in the two high school principals that were studied in this Intermountain West research. One might be surprised by the picture painted with this story.

### **Summary of the Study**

The participants in this study answered face-to-face questions and were observed to answer the following research question, “Which effective leadership characteristics do highly successful school principals demonstrate”?

These two high school principals, who had been working at the study sites for more than 5 years, both had a plan in place. During their tenure at GTGHS and OHS, both school principals and faculty were actively collaborating with the Northwest

Regional Education Laboratory (NWREL). The NWREL works with schools, districts, and communities across the country on comprehensive, research-based solutions to the challenges schools and students face. Through the work supported by NWREL, vibrant learning environments where all youth and adults can succeed are supported and fostered. NWREL works with teachers, administrators, policymakers, and communities to identify needs, evaluate programs, and help develop new solutions for student success (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). The design instituted by both OHS and GTGHS included the adoption of PLC, career/course pathways, and academies. The focus of this comprehensive school reform effort was based on methods of preventing student failure through early detection, early intervention, and a focus on rigor and acceleration.

However, the presence of this plan alone did not ensure student success. There is no “silver bullet” plan or school reform effort that will cure all of the ills that plague education and students. Rather than one more school reform effort, the researcher would argue that it is the drive and commitment of the people at the two school organizations who really carry the day. The principals are integral cogs at both GTGHS and OHS. They exhibited leadership characteristics throughout this study that were viewed by the research participants as major factors contributing to student success and improved academic achievement. Key facets to student success included the presence of leadership characteristics that have been outlined in rich, qualitative detail.

Marzano and colleagues (2005) asserted that schools can have a tremendous positive impact on student achievement. Considerable research exists that demonstrates

there are organizational systems and structures which promote high academic achievement in schools that have previously been labeled as low-achieving, underperforming, or high poverty (Beck & Murphy, 1994; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Crawford, 1998; Marzano et al., 2005). Other studies suggest there are other ways to intervene in these struggling schools beyond organizational systems and structures. For example, Marzano and colleagues reported that it was not necessary for underachieving schools to undergo dramatic school reform efforts in order to improve to a higher performing school. The most dramatic means of supporting students in low-performing schools is to more fully understand and more fully infuse successful leadership characteristics into the academic lives of students. Marzano and colleagues further asserted that school leadership is the key factor in bringing improved student success and achievement into the school environment.

The role of leadership in schools has been previously studied. There has been considerable research conducted in the area of school leadership, yet there is not a strong body of research that connects leadership to school improvement or to individual academic achievement (Mayrowetz, 2008). Marzano and colleagues (2005) went so far as to state that it was rare in the body of research on educational leadership to find student achievement as a criterion for school effectiveness. It seems obvious that the relationship between school leadership and student achievement needs to be further investigated. There exists strong sentiment in the current educational environment to push for radical school reform efforts. However, further insight into what really makes a difference in the academic success of students would be appropriate as school reform

efforts are pushed and supported from both federal and state levels. The purpose of this study was to investigate the leadership characteristics that positively impact student achievement. Marzano and colleagues (2005) referred to 21 “responsibilities” of leaders and their correlations with student achievement. Many of these leadership characteristics identified by Marzano and colleagues came to light as the participants of this research study were interviewed and/or observed. There were several characteristics from the 21 identified by Marzano and colleagues that were readily identified by research participants during the study. These characteristics came to light as the study began to unfold. The characteristics that were identified were grouped under two larger themes, which were the leadership attributes found in the development of a successful school culture and the activities which lead to the development of an effective instructional leader (McEwan, 2003a). The specific leadership “responsibilities” or characteristics that came to light during the study were: optimizer, order, collaboration, relationships, outreach, affirmation, contingent rewards, ideals and beliefs, input, resources, focus, knowledge of the curriculum, intellectual stimulation, change agent, and visibility.

### **Findings**

This study presents the perceptions of two high school principals and 10 faculty and staff members from two high schools in the Intermountain West who have students that possess strong developmental assets, who sense they attend an academic-minded school, and who are high achievers. The face-to-face interviews

and observations with the high school principals along with the interview feedback from the other research participants/educators within this study strongly suggest direct links between principal leadership characteristics and student achievement. Connections between instructional leadership and student achievement were found in characteristics that McEwan (2003a) often associated with a successful instructional leader and are also identified in the Marzano and colleagues (2005) meta-analysis (i.e., knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment, intellectual stimulation, change agent, visibility and focus). Connections between leadership characteristics and student achievement were also suggested through the characteristics which help build a strong and healthy school culture (i.e., culture, optimizer, ideals and beliefs, order, input, outreach, relationships, and contingent rewards).

Recall that the purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of the principal, the faculty, and the staff regarding principal characteristics found at two high schools with students who possess high numbers of developmental protective assets, have strong indicators for school quality, and are high achieving. Faculty and staff were queried regarding the leadership characteristics found in the principals at their two schools. Their narratives provided a rich mosaic about the perceptions of their current principals and their leadership characteristics.

Although the two high schools differed along ethnic, socioeconomic, and demographic lines, it is noteworthy that teacher and staff responses to interview questions from both school sites were remarkably similar. Regardless of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English proficiency, academic ability, community standing, and

demographics, all voiced comparable thoughts and feelings regarding the leadership characteristics of their principals, and the school leadership necessary to make a strong difference in the lives of young people.

As Mr. Newsome and Mr. Peabody were being interviewed and observed it was readily apparent that both principals were very busy, but there was a focus to their activities. Neither principal sought to be everything to everyone, but rather focused energy and resources on leading in a manner that positively impacted student learning. Hallinger and Heck (1996) explained that principals do positively impact student achievement, and that such an impact on achievement might also be greater if principals focused their efforts on a small number of leadership traits that were most closely tied to student achievement (p. 26). Both Mr. Newsome and Mr. Peabody appeared to have taken this assertion to heart.

There was a high volume of interactions and situations that demanded the attention of both principals each day. How could they maintain their energy and their stamina? No wonder high school principals typically serve in their respective schools fewer than 8 years before moving on to central office positions or to other careers (Darling-Hammond & Orphanos, 2006). The stresses and strains of the job must surely result in periods of mental and physical weariness. While the researcher would not necessarily characterize Mr. Newsome or Mr. Peabody as addicted to their work, it could easily be suggested that they were both very much dialed in to an attitude of caring for others and of selfless service. At the outset of the study the researcher wondered whether the entire experience would be insightful. By the conclusion of the



study, the researcher marveled at how either Mr. Newsome or Mr. Peabody could maintain such a frenetic pace. It is readily apparent that the role of a successful high school principal is not for the faint-hearted, weak-spirited, or those with less than good health. Few human beings on the planet could likely maintain pace with the high school principals of this study.

### **Findings at Good-to-Great High School**

Mr. Newsome maintained a sense of humor throughout the research, and was often observed laughing at himself and continuously infusing laughter into the culture itself. Laughter and fun were at the core of keeping the culture of GTGHS healthy. It was not simply about fun as Newsome held high expectations for all students and staff. The faculty, staff, and principals at GTGHS demonstrated a belief that all students could succeed. Everyone was held accountable to meet these expectations. Table 16 summarizes the leadership characteristics and the identifiers present that were observed or reported at GTGHS. Carter (2001) reviewed high performing schools and concluded that those organizations that held students to high standards and expectations had the highest achieving students. Based on public data available on USOE's website ([www.schools.utah.gov](http://www.schools.utah.gov)), GTGHS has some of the highest standardized test scores and most college-ready students in the research State. The students at GTGHS were successful.

An upbeat spirit and a "refuse to quit" mentality were prevalent attributes found in many of the activities and personalities observed by the researcher. Both high school principals worked tirelessly with students, teachers, and staff. Teamwork

Table 16

*Summary of Key Responses: Marzano Leadership Responsibilities and McEwan Steps to Effective Instructional Leader Characteristics Prevalent at GTGHS*

Leadership characteristic	Identifier
Knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal actively involved with teachers in coordination of curriculum</li> <li>• Teachers pressed to integrate things learned in professional development into their classrooms</li> <li>• Principal involved in professional development during Late Starts (i.e., PLC meetings, common assessments, helping address assessment &amp; instructional issues)</li> <li>• Leads learning through “Teach Like a Champion”</li> <li>• Principal models effective teaching and assessment during professional development and faculty meeting activities</li> <li>• Curriculum, instruction, and learning materials are well coordinated across the various curricular areas</li> </ul>
Intellectual stimulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common planning time in place (Late Start Professional Development time)</li> <li>• Principal actively exposing faculty to cutting-edge research and theory on effective schools (PLC meetings, Late Start Professional Development)</li> <li>• Emphasis is on teaching the basics (stick to the core curriculum)</li> <li>• Principal promotes discussion regarding instructional issues</li> <li>• PLCs and course pathways/Academies are in developing and advancing stages at GTGHS</li> <li>• Principal leads formal discussions concerning instruction and student achievement</li> </ul>
Change agent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal uses teacher leadership team to develop a curriculum improvement process and a model for instruction</li> <li>• Principal is integrating several aspects of Smaller Learning Communities (i.e., advisory, tutorial period, Pathways/Academies, PLCs)</li> <li>• Tutorial period being instituted</li> <li>• Principal embraces change as “that which makes us stronger”</li> <li>• Principal sees the systematic change process as a way of doing things better</li> </ul>
Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PLCs nurtured to improve curriculum &amp; instruction and to increase student assessment scores</li> <li>• Collaborative development of School Improvement Plan, School Improvement Goals, Mission Statement, School Vision, Desired Results for Student Learning</li> </ul>
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on collaboration, shared ownership, relationships, listening, order, flexibility, safe environment, PLCs, educator empowerment, listening, clear expectations, positivity, celebration of successes, humility, empathy, rigor, instruction, learning</li> <li>• Principal communicates a clear vision for school</li> <li>• Principal is highly involved in teacher development and evaluation of student writing—school-wide writing project underway</li> </ul>
Optimizer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supportive of staff and encourages creativity with reasonable “risk taking”</li> <li>• Leads by example</li> <li>• Recognizes individual staff members for accomplishments and rewards them with gift cards during faculty meetings</li> <li>• Principal seeks to empower teachers</li> </ul>

*(table continues)*

Leadership characteristic	Identifier
Ideals and beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership efforts are focused on collaboration and curriculum/teaching and learning improvement</li> <li>• Principal leads whenever possible—smartly delegates and builds leadership in others</li> <li>• Principal strives to develop goals that are widely shared and supported</li> <li>• Relates challenges and problems to the wider mission of the school</li> <li>• Has new teacher mentor program in place</li> <li>• Follows up with teachers regarding programs and classroom strategies</li> <li>• Goal setting effectively directed by principal with buy-in established through collaborative development and communication of goals</li> <li>• Goal setting and communication of academic growth is based on data</li> <li>• Teachers and staff are committed to goals</li> <li>• Principal has carefully planned a collaborative problem-solving process for instructional challenges</li> <li>• Principal encourages use of formative and summative assessments</li> <li>• Principal makes his expectations clear for meeting instructional goals</li> <li>• Principal “uses clearly communicated criteria for judging my performance”</li> <li>• Principal openly discloses his own views, but there is great effort to not restrain other peoples viewpoints</li> <li>• Principal exhibits a “student-centered” approach</li> <li>• Displays and models strong work ethic</li> </ul>
Order	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anticipates obstacles and how they will be overcome</li> <li>• Reflection on practice is the norm</li> <li>• High expectations for all in organization (i.e., students, faculty, principals, staff, parents, community partners)</li> <li>• Very vocal about the importance of following rules and policies in place—adherence to policy is expectation</li> <li>• Very experienced and expresses little to no negative emotion or frustration</li> <li>• School-wide discipline plan in place</li> </ul>
Input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers collaboratively develop School Improvement Goals with leadership</li> <li>• Teacher leaders used as leadership committee to funnel feedback to principal</li> <li>• Common language concerning goals</li> <li>• Weekly meetings with leadership committee, administration, and department chairs to solicit input from stakeholders</li> </ul>
Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Numerous methods for communication with parents (i.e., e-mails, newsletter, web page, post cards, “robo” phone calls, parent-teacher conferences and transition nights, school fact sheet brochure, and community school program)</li> <li>• Principal is accessible to discuss all matters</li> </ul>
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal is widely respected and revered</li> <li>• Teachers and staff fight for the success of students and do not want to let the principal down</li> <li>• Principal has confidence in expertise of teachers, gives students freedom with parameters</li> <li>• Emphasis on nonthreatening means to assess faculty and staff</li> <li>• Direct communication and language regarding expectations</li> <li>• Principal encourages teachers to relate instruction to student experiences, make meaningful, and to invite students to implement learning in their lives</li> <li>• Principal takes a personal interest in teachers and students, places the needs of others ahead of his own</li> <li>• Professional learning takes place within school community</li> </ul>

*(table continues)*

Leadership characteristic	Identifier
Contingent rewards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal one-on-one recognition and celebration of successes</li> </ul>
Visibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal is interactive with students in all settings</li> <li>• Principal makes being in hallways and classrooms a priority</li> <li>• Principal “knows what is going on in my classroom”</li> <li>• Principal makes frequent classroom observations</li> </ul>

and collective accountability was the norm. Mr. Newsome and Mr. Peabody continually focused on the academic achievement of the students. The programs, interventions, and supports put into place focused on bridging gaps for students in their learning. The commitment towards student learning and towards instruction was clearly evident. Reeves (2007) concluded that schools committed to focusing considerable efforts and resources towards high academic achievement were deemed to be the most successful in increasing student achievement.

Mr. Newsome employed a number of strategies at GTGHS in an effort to positively impact school climate. A real sense of tradition existed within the culture at the school. The principal recognized the traditional events (e.g., homecoming, alumni day, school’s birthday, etc.) at the school and these traditions were a part of the school that helped bring faculty, students, and the community together. The faculty was considered “family.” Almost one third of the current faculty and staff had been students at the school when they were younger. Many teachers had their own children attending the school. Most of these children of faculty lived outside the school’s boundary area and were brought in under special privileges afforded faculty through district policy. The school had educated more than generations of families that lived in

the neighborhood. Former students, who no longer resided within the school's boundary area requested "boundary variance" permits to enroll their children in the school. There was a waiting list of students who resided outside the school boundary area of over 100 students long who were hoping to attend the study school. Staff and faculty commented in the interviews that this was a school that was "doing positive things" and that "everyone wants their children to attend here."

A strong sense of caring clearly existed within the culture of GTGHS. Mr. Newsome was observed holding doors open for students and for adults. He followed teachers and students down hallways and spoke with people as if they were the only item of importance at that particular moment. A central focus of Mr. Newsome's work day was found within the direct personal contact he conducted with school stakeholders. This was a delicate balancing act as he worked not to ignore administrative paper work and duties, appointments, phone calls or e-mail to return, and the basic "managerial" duties of running an effective school. However, Mr. Newsome was sending a message to all those who were within shouting distance—regardless of what was happening at any given moment within the hallways and within the walls of GTGHS, you are important. As he said:

I think it is important for the teachers to see me. I believe it is important for the kids to see me in the classrooms all of the time. It is really important for me to make sure the students see me engaged in the education process. That is my number one priority. I want people to know that I want to know what they are involved in, and that I want to be a part of it.

This direct contact with the teachers, students, and parents was described by Mr. Newsome as "a strategy to build a sense amongst people that GTGHS is home."

Noddings' (1984) work on caring in education illustrated the critically important role that caring plays in a school. Ms. Academia described Mr. Newsome as a “constant whirlwind of activity and energy” that translated into a feeling of support and caring within the school. There was a sense that Mr. Newsome believed in everyone, and that he worked hard to support people and positive behaviors. Mr. Newsome was building a healthy school culture each and every day. From the small and simple things to the big and grandiose decisions, GTGHS had a healthy and student-centered feel. The culture was infectious.

Saphier and King (1985) remarked that those school principals who create a positive school culture and climate; collaboratively create and communicate a clear vision; have high expectations of themselves, staff, and students; share decision-making; encourage the development of leaders, and value instruction are the most effective. School leadership is a major component of school culture and climate. According to Black (1997), school principals shape the daily routine of school life, and as a result, mold its culture and climate. At the heart of school success are principals who are focused on the development of teachers' knowledge and skills, professional community, and program coherence. The creation of a positive school culture is critical to teacher morale, unity within a community, and to student learning. It is the model or theory of school leadership that the researcher most personally connects with. Not only is the creation of positive school culture critical to the researcher, but also to the success of students everywhere. The creation and maintenance of culture is a source of stability and predictability, and a positive source of change where such change can improve

school life and effectiveness.

Williams (2003), in a dissertation titled *The Relationship between Principal Response to Adversity and Student Achievement*, emphasized the importance of the principal in influencing student achievement through developing a school culture focused on learning and working to establish a collaborative learning community. The researchers used an ex-post facto research design to examine the relationship between an Adversity Quotient, a self-reporting instrument, and scores from standardized student achievement data over a two year period. Results indicated that students attained higher test scores in schools with higher adversity quotient principals.

In a similar, yet more recent study, Owings and colleagues (2005) conducted a statewide study to “determine the relationship between principal quality as measured by ratings on an ISLLC standards rubric and student achievement scores over time” (p. 102). Student achievement levels were higher in schools with principals who received higher ratings. The researchers concluded that principal quality and leadership traits were connected to student achievement. They cautioned, though, that “the relationship is correlational and not causal” but that “it is reasonable to believe that principals who practice and build skills in instructional leadership can positively impact their schools’ learning and student performance” (pp. 115-116).

Based on this study of both Mr. Newsome and Mr. Peabody, findings support the notion that instructional leadership characteristics have a powerful positive impact on student performance. Mr. Newsome made everyone feel that they were an integral part of the school community. He gave teachers and staff the sense that they were

respected as professionals. Faculty had the autonomy to implement instructional practices that aligned with school goals. The stakeholders felt that their voices were valued and heard, and they felt that the culture and climate of the school was positive and comfortable. Blasé and Blasé (1999) suggested that one should not minimize the importance of a strong and positive school culture. Sergiovanni (2001) even went so far as to declare that principals who authentically encourage collegiality and school culture develop teachers who ultimately take responsibility for the success of students, and for the mission of the school.

Mr. Newsome's style focused on empowering teachers. He modeled and created an open and collaborative environment. He encouraged teachers to collaborate and to share instructional methods. They were encouraged to visit one another's classrooms during instruction so that teaching methods could be observed, demonstrated, and collaboratively developed. Mr. Newsome valued instructional time, and focused a large portion of his day directly observing classroom practices. In addition to the two annually scheduled formal principal visits of teachers, he informally visited classrooms on a daily basis. The principal looked for opportunities to engage faculty in conversations regarding instruction and teaching practices. He was constantly looking for ways to improve instruction. McEwan (2003a) expressed that good instructional leaders should dedicate a majority of their school day improving, observing, and assessing instructional practice.

### **Findings at Overachieving High School**

Similar findings of strong relationships, caring attitudes, and high expectations



were evident at OHS. Table 17 summarizes the leadership characteristics and the identifiers present that were observed or reported at OHS. Mr. Peabody went to great lengths to invite and involve stakeholders in the decision-making processes. The researcher observed an emotional address at faculty meeting by Mr. Peabody, and noted the strong sense of camaraderie that existed amongst the faculty and staff at OHS. While there were many similarities between the two high school principals in the characteristics that were both observed and reported, there were some differences as well. For example, at OHS the physical facility was aging at a rapid rate. Unlike GTGHS, which was a state-of-the-art facility, OHS was showing some wear and tear. Even though the school building itself was just over 20 years old, there were discussions of a leaky roof, carpeting that was ripping up, and bathrooms that were unkempt and had been vandalized to a point that they were in need of constant attention. However, the building also exhibited character and great care. There was evidence of efforts to contribute to a positive school culture. Decals adorned the entry doors, reading “Welcome to our school—Visitors please report to the main office upon entering the building during regular school hours. Thank you.” Bright, warm colors adorned the hallways, classrooms, and cafeteria. Uplifting quotes and sayings were found on the walls and in the hallways throughout the building. Student art decorated nearly every nook and cranny of one wing of the building. School colors, school banners, and small flags adorned by the school mascot were found in stairwells, staircases, and in the main entry. Other cultures were celebrated with flags from countries around the world that hung from the commons area. Each flag was

Table 17

*Summary of Key Responses: Marzano Leadership Responsibilities and McEwan Steps to Effective Instructional Leader Characteristics Prevalent at OHS*

Leadership characteristic	Identifier
Knowledge of curriculum, instruction & assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal actively involved with teachers in coordination of curriculum</li> <li>• Teachers encouraged to take “risks” with instruction and curriculum</li> <li>• Principal involved in professional development during Late Starts (i.e., PLC meetings, common assessments, helping address assessment &amp; instructional issues)</li> <li>• Leads learning through “Teach Like a Champion,” “10 Traits of Highly Effective Teachers,” “The Art and Science of Teaching”</li> <li>• Principal models effective teaching and assessment during professional development and faculty meeting activities</li> <li>• Curriculum, instruction, and learning materials are well coordinated across the various curricular areas</li> </ul>
Intellectual stimulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common planning time in place (Late Start Professional Development time)</li> <li>• Principal actively engaged in immersing self in current research and learning theories (i.e., research of month, faculty meeting professional development, PLC meetings)</li> <li>• Principal actively exposing faculty to cutting-edge research and theory on effective schools (PLC meetings, Late Start Professional Development)</li> <li>• Principal fosters a systematic discussion regarding current research and theories on effective schools during Late Start Professional Development</li> <li>• PLCs and course pathways/Academies are in advanced stages at OHS</li> </ul>
Change agent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal created Curriculum and Instruction Advisory Team to develop a curriculum improvement process and a model for instruction</li> <li>• Principal integrated several aspects of Smaller Learning Communities (i.e., advisory, tutorial period, Pathways/Academies, PLCs)</li> <li>• Principal reorganized faculty rooms and master schedule according to PLCs and Academies. Grouped teachers by PLCs.</li> <li>• Tutorial period instituted despite significant resistance from some faculty</li> <li>• Pyramid of Interventions developed and successfully instituted despite many naysayers</li> <li>• Is open to change, and stated he sought change in an effort to remain “fresh”</li> </ul>
Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PLCs nurtured to improve curriculum &amp; instruction and to increase student assessment scores</li> <li>• Collaborative development of School Improvement Plan, School Improvement Goals, Mission Statement, School Vision, Desired Results for Student Learning</li> <li>• Collaboratively created Pyramid of Interventions, Model of Instruction to establish curricular and assessment goals</li> </ul>
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on collaboration, shared ownership, relationships, listening, order, flexibility, safe environment, PLCs, educator empowerment, listening, clear expectations, positivity, celebration of successes, humility, empathy, rigor, instruction, learning</li> <li>• Principal communicates a clear vision for school</li> </ul>
Optimizer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supportive of staff and encourages creativity with reasonable “risk taking”</li> <li>• Leads by example</li> <li>• Says we can accomplish anything and goes out and proves it</li> </ul>

*(table continues)*

Leadership characteristic	Identifier
Ideals and beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership efforts are focused on collaboration and curriculum/teaching and learning improvement</li> <li>• Principal leads whenever possible—smartly delegates/builds leadership in others</li> <li>• Common planning time used to develop teaching/learning and to plan for student success (i.e., PLC brainstorming for intervention strategies, common assessments)</li> <li>• Consistent and reliable supervision of students, teachers, and instruction by principal and assistant principals</li> <li>• Supervision is differentiated based on the needs and the development of the individual teacher</li> <li>• Goal setting effectively directed by principal with buy-in established through collaborative development and communication of goals</li> <li>• Goal setting and communication of academic growth is based on data</li> <li>• Teachers and staff are committed to goals</li> <li>• Principal models and encourages use of formative and summative assessments</li> <li>• Principal makes clear to faculty of his expectations for meeting instructional goals</li> <li>• Displays and models strong work ethic</li> </ul>
Order	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pyramid of Interventions is effectively in place</li> <li>• Reflection on practice is the norm</li> <li>• High expectations for all in organization (i.e., students, faculty, principals, staff, parents, community partners)</li> <li>• Common language for goals, expectations, assessment</li> <li>• Clear policies in place—adherence to policy is expectation</li> <li>• Principal is directly involved in monitoring students' progress through consistent review of data and through consistent conversations with teachers and students</li> <li>• Weekly progress reports distributed to students with their needs as focus for exercise</li> </ul>
Input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers collaboratively develop School Improvement Goals with leadership</li> <li>• Pyramid of interventions, various leadership committees, and PLCs run by teacher leaders</li> <li>• Common language concerning goals</li> <li>• Weekly meetings with leadership committees, PLC leaders, administration, department chairs to solicit input from all stakeholders</li> </ul>
Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Numerous methods for communication with parents (i.e., e-mails, newsletter, web page, post cards, “robo” phone calls, parent-teacher conferences and transition nights, lunch with the principal, community town hall meetings, school fact sheet brochure, community school program, partners with district public relations person to interact regularly with local media, use of group texts, school Facebook page, Twitter, and video podcast</li> <li>• Principal is accessible to discuss all matters</li> <li>• Community Liaisons established with different ethnic groups prominent in community</li> <li>• Encourages active parent and community involvement</li> </ul>
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal is widely respected and revered</li> <li>• Teachers/staff fight for success of students and do not want to let the principal down</li> <li>• Emphasis on nonthreatening means to assess faculty and staff</li> <li>• Direct communication and language regarding expectations</li> <li>• Principal encourages teachers to relate instruction to student experiences, make meaningful, and to invite students to implement learning in their lives</li> <li>• Professional learning takes place within school community</li> <li>• Humble and flexible approach with teachers and students</li> </ul>

*(table continues)*

Leadership characteristic	Identifier
Contingent rewards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal one-on-one recognition and celebration of successes</li> </ul>
Visibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Five-minute walk-throughs are the norm</li> <li>• Principal is highly interactive with students in all settings</li> <li>• Principal makes being in hallways and classrooms a priority—has goal to be in classrooms at least 15% of school day</li> </ul>

representative of a country for the cultural background of every student in the building.

The administrators, teachers, and staff at OHS were presented as personal and warm people through a bulletin board at the main entry to the school. The bulletin board showed pictures of faculty and staff engaged in a typical daily task. Below each picture was a favorite statement of that particular faculty or staff person. The media center included comfortable stuffed chairs, table lamps, couches, and colorful paintings on the walls. The office area contained telephones designated specifically for student use, and signs promoting positive public relations were found at the office counter and on the office walls. The faculty lounge was furnished with large couches, lounge chairs, green and flowering plants, paintings, a large television set with cable access, refrigerator, microwave, and a large dining table. On two different occasions the researcher discovered bagels, doughnuts, a baked cake, and small sandwiches in the lounge for faculty to enjoy. This could only serve to magnify feelings of appreciation and support the faculty and staff might share with their principal. Pre-stamped and pre-addressed postcards designated for each student in the school were in a file box in the faculty lounge. Teachers were encouraged by the principal to write at least one positive postcard to a student each day during their preparation period, and to

mail it home to the student or parent.

Both Mr. Peabody and Mr. Newsome spent nearly every evening of the week attending student activities and supporting students in their extracurricular activities. Students were encouraged to be involved in a variety of the extracurricular activities available to them. These activities included athletics, musicals, fine art performances, and clubs. Mr. Peabody seemed particularly involved with the activities and occurrences at OHS. He participated in a bit part for a school play, performed in a skit for an assembly with other students, was said to have been shooting half-court shots with students at the halftime of basketball games, and agreed to have his head shaved because students met a fundraising goal for homeless youths within the community. These events were said to have taken place all within recent memory. Research participants stated that Mr. Peabody had “strong parent communication,” “visits classrooms frequently,” “is very visible and available,” and is “totally vested in the success of the students and teachers, and uses all available resources to provide outreach to the surrounding community and within the school.”

Mr. Peabody brought in at least one prominent and nationally well-known youth speaker per year to provide an assembly and evening presentation for the students and the community. These events were typically coordinated in collaboration with the local PTSA and other area high schools. Related organizations helped to defray costs, encourage participation, increase attendance, and to solicit a positive atmosphere. Peabody also spent time over the summer pouring over yearbook photos in an effort to learn each student’s name prior to school beginning in August. Each

week during school students were honored or recognized and treated to a free “lunch with the principal.” Students would eat lunch, socialize, and be recognized with the principal, faculty members, and parents at a specific table in the lunchroom. Students were also given recognition during halftime of football and basketball games.

Nominated by their peers, students would be honored during halftime for an act of kindness noticed by a peer or a teacher, for marked improvement in academic grades or school attendance, or for their overall leadership.

Faculty meetings were held once a month and were held during preparation periods. This enabled teachers to attend faculty meeting without being required to come before, or stay after, contract time in order to attend their required meetings. Each faculty meeting began with food, humor, support phrases, and a celebration of all the successes that had occurred since the last meeting. Mr. Peabody would celebrate a different individual teacher at each faculty meeting. He would seek out a teacher who had participated in something noteworthy or had simply made a difference in the life of a student. Nominations for this award were available in the school’s business office, and the winner received a gift card from a local restaurant. These awards and celebrations were looked forward to with anticipation by members of the OHS faculty and staff. There was a focus on providing rewards and supports for all teachers and staff. Henson and colleagues (2001) concluded that several positive behaviors of teachers (e.g., ability to deal more effectively with failing students, persistence when difficulties arise) were linked to teacher efficacy, which positively impacted student outcomes.

Perhaps as a result of these efforts, OHS had a high retention rate for teachers. One teacher noted in her interview that “we have a very low turn-over rate. There is also a waiting list of district teachers requesting a transfer into [OHS].” Teachers were given opportunities to attend workshops and conferences around the country that met school or individual goals and needs. The principal looked for leadership from within, developed leaders, and promoted classroom teachers to leadership roles. Mr. Peabody assembled a team of teachers that worked with the school leadership during the interview process each time a new teacher was hired. The team opinion was an important part of the hiring process.

There was at least one major difference between the leadership characteristics observed at GTGHS and those observed at OHS. At OHS, it was repeatedly commented and observed that major organizational change was a part of who Mr. Peabody was. Mr. Peabody embraced change. He noted that “discomfort brings growth,” and that “change is healthy, even for me.” All of the study participants noted that OHS had undergone great changes over the previous 7 years. Some had been initiated by a former principal, but there was a feeling amongst stakeholders that the changes had not become a part of the culture, the fiber of the school. When Mr. Peabody arrived at OHS some 6 years ago, there were many who hoped he would roll back the changes that had been initiated by the former principal. To most everyone’s surprise, he embraced the changes and charged ahead at top speed. Each study participant commented that Mr. Peabody’s ability to embrace change had made a huge positive difference for the students at the school. The changes in the way everything

was taught, from the integration of PLC and Career Academies to the concept of daily tutorial and during-the-school-day course/credit remediation was making a difference in the lives of the students at OHS. This might help explain the ability of students at OHS to achieve at near comparable levels of protective developmental assets as those students at GTGHS, despite the fact that there were ten times as many students who were English-Language learners at OHS. This might also help explain why students at OHS identify strongly with their teachers and school as high quality, despite the fact that three times as many of them come from families of poverty than their counterparts at GTGHS. This too might help explain why the students at OHS are making similar strong gains in standardized test scores (comparable to gains in students from GTGHS) despite the fact that almost four times the number of students at OHS come from single-parent homes. Embracing the leadership characteristic of change may be an academic game-changer—literally.

### **Conclusions**

Glickman and colleagues (2007) referred to *culture* or supervision as the “glue of a successful school” (p. 9). A leader becomes responsible for developing a linkage between a person, or group of people, and the organization. Individual teacher needs and organizational goals are blended in such a way that the school can work in harmony toward a vision of what the school should be. Culture is the “glue” that holds the school together and that blends the efforts of teachers, students, parents, and leaders toward making a school a particular type of school. A school culture is a representation of what



its members collectively believe themselves to be—it is their self-concept. Culture refers to a system of shared values. These values are known, communicated, and produce an identity within the school. Culture is an important factor in the stability and effectiveness of schools. It is necessary for a school to develop and maintain a sense of “oneness” in a way that individuals behave and believe in the organization. Cultures, however, do not develop completely, nor are they maintained without effort.

Cultures arise as schools attempt to solve two major problems: external adaptation (i.e., responding to the demands of the external environment), and internal integration (i.e., blending the efforts of individuals inside the school so that there is a coherent set of behaviors; Schein, 1992). Over time, a culture is created. Culture is a “pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to these problems” (p. 12). A school culture is pervasive in determining how teachers, students, parents, and others view the school, shape their attitudes and their relationships to others associated with it, and conduct themselves in working with others within the school.

Once teachers, administrators, students, and parents agree that these values, assumptions, and beliefs are successful in solving the school’s internal and external issues, the leadership role of the principal should move towards maintaining this culture. Leaders maintain culture by influencing those individuals who are veteran group members to abide by the norms of the school’s culture. The culture is spread to

future generations of students through the recruitment and selection of teachers who already possess the core values and beliefs held sacred by the school.

In addition to creating and maintaining culture, leadership involves changing culture. As internal and external environmental demands on the school change, cultural change may also become necessary. This is particularly true in the face of ever-changing internal and external assumptions regarding accountability, student learning, and school governance. This may also be true as morale declines or when individuals perceive that power is unfairly distributed. As groups within a school hold different and opposing values and belief, there will be little sense of shared community and culture. In these circumstances, leaders must use their influence with followers to reinforce the current set of values and support, perhaps, even cultural change.

Both leaders and followers play critical, active roles in influencing the creation, maintenance, and change of culture. In creating culture, leaders are likely more influential than at any other time. The values, beliefs, and assumptions leaders hold true become the values, beliefs, and assumptions that form the basis of the school culture. Followers also play an active role in the creation of cultural development. Their commitment to the values and beliefs of their leader provide the opportunity to test these aspects of culture to decide if they work well within their environment. Without a willingness on the part of followers to commit to these values and beliefs, there is really no way to determine if the values and beliefs of a culture are successful.

Aside from the creation of culture, principals also serve the role of supporting teachers taking on leadership roles themselves—especially cultural leadership. Teachers

will reinforce the values, beliefs, and assumptions with one another and with newcomers. They will also serve to install a system of “checks and balances” to keep the principal from being trapped by the culture. They can serve in a capacity referred to by Sergiovanni (2001) as the “loyal opposition” (p. 37), constantly reminding and prodding the principal to be critical of the culture and its connection to the environment. Principals must always strive to support the leadership role of teachers to create and maintain a vibrant culture.

The purpose of leadership, in the view of the researcher, is to bring about real and positive change based upon mutual purposes. School culture that results from strong leadership provides resources for this positive change to occur. Culture provides the source for change. As the organization struggles with solving internal and external problems, the response to these issues originates in the culture in which the students, parents, teachers, and administrators work and learn. Constituents start with their own values, beliefs, and assumptions and then adapt these to address the concerns and demands. Change begins with individuals acting in a leadership function to help schools consider what is not working and what needs to be changed.

Finally, culture provides the energy for positive change. The best example of this is the way in which schools with strong cultures can adapt to changing environmental demands. The cohesive and shared nature of their values and beliefs enables them to withstand the difficulty of considering changes. The leadership of the principal is crucial at this juncture. Even strong cultures can be rigid, and anxiety can prohibit group members from considering change. Principals must provide enough

psychological safety for members of the culture that they are willing to take the necessary risks to bring about positive and productive change.

Recently, researchers have concluded that school leadership is a major influence on the school culture. Kotter (2002) stated that a leader is so important to the process of successful schools that he placed 80% of the responsibility for school success squarely upon the principal's shoulders. Only 20% was placed with a variety of other people and with other factors. Fullan (2001) reflected that in a culture of change leaders must work on five basic principles of leadership. For Fullan, leaders must have a moral purpose for making a positive difference, understand the change process, build relationships that foster purposeful interaction and problem solving, focus on knowledge building, and seek coherence. In a culture of positive change, leaders, teachers, students, and parents can share a commitment to a vision and motivate each other to implement the best ideas.

Leaders' views shape the views of others. The heart of leadership pertains to what a person believes, values, and dreams about as a personal vision (Sergiovanni, 1991). Depree (1987) stated that outstanding leadership is demonstrated in the way followers act. "Are followers reaching their potential? Are they learning? Are they serving? Do they achieve the required results? Do they manage conflict?" (p. 12). The principal's greatest challenge and responsibility, according to Sergiovanni (2001), is to develop a caring community in the school, a place where strong character emerges from shared purpose that allows and encourages students to be successful learners. Leaders must understand the culture of the organization, the personalities within it,

and mold a process of change for good through strong and steady leadership.

Culture, along with expectations, resources, monitoring, supervision, and evaluation must all be in place to make sure that teachers truly know their students and understand, respect, and demonstrate the ability to effectively implement research-based teaching and learning strategies.

Instructional leadership must ensure that educators have the high expectations, the resources, the monitoring, the supervision and evaluation that form a strong culture.

Instructional leaders teach the students and do not simply teach the curriculum.

Instructional leadership creates the expectations and maintains the conditions for the very best instructional practices to be identified, trained, supported, and sustained.

Marzano and colleagues (2005) referred to this concept as the “guaranteed and viable curriculum.” Respect for ethnic, racial, cultural, and linguistic differences is nurtured, and instructional staff must provide the needed supports for ensuring that all learners are learning and are successful. Instructional leadership calls upon teachers to make student engagement a focal point in the planning and in the delivery of instruction.

While instructional leadership provides for rigorous and thoughtful evaluation of learning practices, its energies are primarily focused upon development of instructional practice. As leaders in schools we must model and practice an unrelenting passion for learning. We must recognize that we are all in the business of nurturing and growing talented youth. Regardless of recognition or accolades we might receive in the profession, we will never reach the pinnacle of learning, but will be engaged in the life-long pursuit of learning.

The findings from this study indicate that the principal characteristics found in Mr. Peabody and in Mr. Newsome are reflective of the steps required to achieve strong instructional leadership, as outlined by McEwan (2003a). These include the establishment of instructional goals; the assurance of instructional resources; the commitment to a positive school culture conducive to learning; the collaborative development of a school mission and vision; high expectations for faculty, staff, and students; the development of leaders; and positive attitudes towards students, faculty, staff, and parents. The schools that participated in the study have high student achievement as measured by the State end-of-level exams and other standardized test measures. The students at the research sites also report to possess high levels of protective developmental assets and see their schools as strong, quality institutions for learning. As the instructional leader for their schools, the principals play a vital role in the academic success of their students. The research shows the importance of a strong focus on teaching and learning. Leithwood (2004) noted that an instructional leader must adopt and follow the model of effective instructional leadership. DuFour (1999) reiterated the critical nature of instructional leadership in his statement that, “where principals are effective instructional leaders, student achievement escalates” (p. 15).

The body of research regarding instructional leadership is broad and deep. This research has resulted in extensive feedback regarding the impact of instructional leadership on schools. In her analysis of effective schools research, McEwan (2003a) confirmed the link between instructional leadership and student achievement with her statement that, “while each researcher has generated a slightly different set of

descriptors that characterize effective or excellent schools, one variable always emerges as critically important: the leadership abilities of the building principal, particularly in the instructional arena” (p. 1).

During the course of this study both Mr. Newsome and Mr. Peabody demonstrated characteristics that were reflective of McEwan’s (2003a) seven steps to instructional leadership as they were observed and reported. By meeting the criteria or characteristics for instructional leadership, the principals in this research study can be described as effective instructional leaders. The students who attend school at the research school sites are reporting higher levels of satisfaction and protective developmental assets than their peers. They are achieving above their peers on standardized test measures. The connection between the characteristics of instructional leadership and student success seems closely intertwined. Mr. Peabody and Mr. Newsome are proof of that.

### **Implications for Future Research**

While there are many studies and articles that address the topic of school leadership, there is relatively little research that examines the relationship between culture, instructional leadership and student achievement. In order to positively impact student achievement, the principal must understand the process of building a positive culture and climate. The literature on high achieving school organizations has emphasized that leadership, strong organizational culture, and meaningful relationships between the principal, teachers, and students are central to the

development of student achievement (Glanz, 2006; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Zepeda, 2003).

Utah has invested substantial funds and resources to focus on its schools through its accountability system of U-PASS and its recently updated accountability system referred to as UCAS. President George W. Bush pressed the issue of school accountability from the Federal level with his NCLB legislation. This Act, which was signed into law by President Bush on January 8, 2002, required significant changes in schools and demanded sweeping reforms from the Federal level. The legislation addressed the issue of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for student achievement. In measuring AYP, the 2001-2002 school year was considered the base for test scores. Schools were given AYP scores and growth targets for each successive year until each school was expected to attain 100 percent proficiency for their students on the assessment by the year 2014. And while many states have recently been granted waivers by the Federal Government for this proficiency requirement, President Barack Obama could not resist his own attempt at more school accountability through his “Race to the Top” grants. These grants mandate wholesale changes in school leadership at individual school sites, and do little to ease the stress on schools from the Federal level.

Many schools have been labeled “failing” in the past 10 years. Many schools have not met their growth targets and are sanctioned by the State or Federal Government as underperforming or failing schools. In the face of this public accountability and scrutiny, the role of the site administrator has been both broadened



and intensified. Principals are expected to challenge students to learn while also moving a “failing” school into the category of meeting AYP or meeting growth targets for student learning. This is a monumental task.

If there were certain specific leadership traits that impacted student achievement on a significant scale, would it not be beneficial to train and encourage school leaders to train and develop these characteristics as cornerstone qualities in each of our school principals? The results from this study suggest that the leadership characteristics found in a strong culture, combined with the characteristics necessary for successful instructional leadership have the most direct and positive relationship to student achievement in these two high schools found in the Intermountain West. The purpose of this research was to review this crucial question based on prior research, and to propose more findings that will add to the somewhat limited body of research on the topic.

The tremendous increase in state and federal accountability within public schools has made it necessary to take a closer look at a school’s academic performance. School leadership is but one piece of the effective school puzzle. While there are hundreds of studies and articles available that address the topic of school leadership, relatively few examine the qualitative relationship between a strong school culture, instructional leadership, and student achievement.

Although the researcher does not assert that this study provides definitive answers to the connection between leadership characteristics and student achievement, substantive and methodological questions have been raised that may form the basis for

future research. There is justification for further examination into how instructional leadership and positive school culture leadership characteristics nurture the seed and support the growth of student achievement. As this seed is nurtured and becomes engrained within the organization, it influences teacher behaviors, instruction, learning, and attitudes. These attitudes ultimately impact student achievement levels.

The following questions and thoughts are posed to prompt further research possibilities.

1. This case study used a single research method—qualitative—with twelve participants. Therefore, further research using a mixed method approach is recommended to expand investigation and findings that might add to the findings of this smaller sample. The researcher may start with qualitative one-on-one interviews for exploratory purposes and combine the inquiry with a quantitative method, using a survey with a larger sample so that the results can be generalized to a larger population.

2. Student and parent perceptions of the principals were not included in this study and would present a different perspective on the leadership characteristics that could contribute to high levels of academic success for students.

3. How does leadership differ at the elementary level versus the middle and high school levels?

4. How might successful leadership be hindered by organizational constraints?

5. How does teacher behavior in the classroom translate into student learning (teacher “behavior” needs to be operationalized)?

6. What types of quantitative studies are feasible within the confines of a school

building or district to assess the impact of leadership on achievement?

7. Would longitudinal studies support a direct or indirect effect of leadership on student achievement?

8. How can gains in achievement be attributed to leadership behaviors versus an abundance of other intervening variables?

### **Summary of Significant Findings**

What is it exactly that the most effective high school principals do to positively impact student learning, success, and achievement? Based on the research from this study, the researcher has succinctly arrived at the following significant findings.

1. Principals who create a school culture where a positive, welcoming, solution-oriented and no-blame atmosphere exists; where students, teachers, and principal collaborate, where stakeholders are made to feel safe; are supported, connected, nurtured, and respected will have the most potential positive impact on student success.

2. Principals who focus their professional development energy towards the improvement of teaching and learning in the school, through increased visibility and engagement in the classroom and with students, and through the pursuit of the latest research on instructional strategies will have the most potential positive impact on student success.

3. Principals who collaboratively develop and build a school vision that provides purpose, identity, direction, priorities, inspiration; a sense of community and

guidance for assessment of strategies, policies, practices and progress for all stakeholders will have the most potential positive impact on student success. This vision must contain a commitment to high standards and success for all students.

4. Principals who skillfully create a discomfort with the status quo, and promote change as something essential to the sustainment of professional growth for the students and for the educators at the school will have the most potential positive impact on student success. This being said, the most effective high school principals constantly reinforce a strong sense of efficacy everywhere, with every student, faculty, and staff member.

5. Principals who facilitate changes that are deep, lasting and possess the potential for with the most positive impact (which Marzano et al. [2005] referred to as “second-order change”) are those leaders who exhibit skills that show an understanding of the change process, and who possess a leadership courage to go against the dominant currents of the time when necessary, along with the persistence to stay focused on always moving forward, and the resilience to recover and adjust from disappointments.

6. Those principals who build PLCs in schools along with a collective ownership of student learning, and who also acknowledge that the most important determiner of success may not be what educators believe about their students, but what they believe about their own abilities to be successful with those students will have the most potential positive impact on student success.

7. Principals who have the highest potential to influence student success think about what they do and say, and they “walk the talk,” everywhere and every day. These

principals do what they believe is the “right thing” regardless of the audience or the difficulty.

8. Principals who are trustworthy, competent and prepared; who consciously keep commitments; and who are willing to openly acknowledge their own errors and model how they learn from mistakes will have the most profound positive impact on student success and learning.

9. Principals who work to build relationships, who work hard to know and honestly respect every individual within the school community will be the best equipped to adjust and to individualize expectations, attention, and support in a manner that promotes student learning and success.

### **Final Summary**

Principals who are having a positive impact on student achievement are honest and ethical. They treat all members of the school with dignity and with respect (Whitaker, 2003). Excellent principals do the right thing and keep the interests of the students as the focus of their work (McEwan, 2003b). Principals with a powerful influence on learning establish relationships of trust with those around them. They are positive with those around them and they lift others up so they might reach their full potential. Strong school leaders treat others with dignity and respect at all times, they exhibit ethical behavior, and they make decisions based on what is good for the school organization as a whole (Whitaker, 2003).

Marzano and colleagues (2005) discovered that a variety of relationship-

building behaviors with teachers, staff, students, parents, and community leaders had a strong impact on effective leadership. Nurturing these relationships on a continual basis enables principals to build opportunities for support and assistance when the moment may demand it. These relationships lead to a sense of a common vision and collaborative mission. Ultimately they lead to the development of a healthy school culture, which in turn promotes success and achievement from students.

Principals who make a difference are visionary. The best high school principals realize they may steer the direction for vision, but ultimately must have support from stakeholders for the mission to be successful. Successful principals know that they help create the school's vision, and that an environment that allows teachers to make decisions and to have ownership with this vision must be cultivated (Beck & Murphy, 1996). McEwan (2003b) discovered that less effective principals offer excuses, and that highly successful principals focus on the vision of a high achieving school and build buy-in from the school community for that vision.

Effective high school principals take this collective vision and move to positively impact school culture. The positive school leadership provided by a principal directly impacts the culture of the school, and in turn positively affects student achievement (Sergiovanni, 2001). High school principals who are impacting student achievement pay attention to the culture of the school and focus on creating a collaborative learning environment (Fullan, 1997). A high school principal may impact student achievement in a positive manner by envisioning a successful school, acting with integrity, and communicating this vision of a successful school through positive

relationships within the school community (McEwan, 2003b). Whitaker (2003) suggested that principals who have the most powerful positive impact on culture believe it is their responsibility to create a culture for learning and for achievement. Marzano and colleagues (2005) found that principals who were having the most impact on achievement fostered shared beliefs and a collegial sense of community within the school. The principals in this study exhibited characteristics throughout that were creating a strong sense of positive culture. Building and nurturing this strong sense of culture is making a difference with students.

Good principals know what effective instruction is. They are instructional leaders. They push teachers to bring about student learning, not simply the sharing of information. Effective principals base decisions regarding instruction and learning on data (DuFour & Eaker, 1996). They are results-oriented leaders who understand that high achieving students will have greater opportunities in the future if these students are given high expectations for learning. Instructional leaders understand that effective teaching and learning comes from leaders who are knowledgeable about the latest best teaching practices. These leaders will be most successful when they seek out opportunities for personal growth and learning, with an eye towards instruction and assessment (Beck & Murphy, 1996). Good principals understand that one of their chief goals as an instructional leaders is to improve the effectiveness of the teachers they lead (Whitaker, 2003).

In conclusion, this research suggests that a principal who possesses qualities associated with the characteristics of instructional leadership, and who also builds a

strong and positive school culture with high expectations and positive relationships, results in a school with high achieving, well-adjusted students. Who is to say which of these leadership characteristics may have made the most significant difference? It may have been two or three, or may have even been a combination of many or all of them. One thing is certain—students at GTGHS and OHSs are doing well, despite the challenges that the surrounding community is increasingly facing. So is the principal responsible for all of this “good karma?” It may be difficult to award the principals all of the credit, but it is without doubt that Mr. Newsome and Mr. Peabody are crucial pieces to this successful school and student puzzle.

As the researcher witnessed and heard the powerful impact these high school principals were having at their respective schools, the simplicity of the solution came into play. If these principal leadership characteristics could be emphasized at schools around the country, would we see similar results? One goal of this research was to strengthen the unequivocal centrality of a principal’s role in the success of students. Another was to have this study serve as a strong and motivational catalyst to school principals. The results of this study can only serve to further emphasize the important role that a school principal plays in the life of students. The continued emphasis on test scores as achievement measures, the adoption of state standards for high school graduation, and the imposition of federal mandates that penetrate every public school in America puts added pressure on school principals. However, there appears to be some recipes for tackling these challenges. Even proponents of performance data driven and goal-oriented school improvement agendas recognize that the “most



overlooked ingredient is results-oriented leadership” (Schmoker, 1999, p. 12). Mr. Newsome and Mr. Peabody undoubtedly possess crucial leadership qualities, and they are seeing positive results for students.

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**APPENDICES**

Appendix A  
Administrator Interview Protocol

## ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Person Interviewed: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Time Started: \_\_\_\_\_ Time Ended: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Time: \_\_\_\_\_

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**First-order Change-Principal Interview Protocol****Interview Questions**

1. Tell me briefly about your experience and role as a leader at the school.
  - a. How long have you been at this school?
  - b. What is your educational and professional background?
  - c. What is your role as a leader at this school?
  
2. How do you establish an effective monitoring system to provide feedback on the effectiveness of: How do you determine the effect of these practices on student achievement (Monitoring/Evaluating)?
  - a. The school curriculum?
  - b. Instruction?
  - c. Assessment practices?
  
3. How do you build and maintain a culture in which a common language is employed, ideas are shared, and staff members operate within the norms of collaboration (Culture)?

- a. How are you operating from a set of ideals and beliefs regarding schooling, teaching, and learning (Ideas/Beliefs)?
  - b. How are they articulated and visible?
4. How are you seeking out and keeping abreast of the research and theory available regarding effective curricular, instructional, and assessment practices (Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment)?
  - a. Describe how you are actively supporting teachers with issues regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the classrooms (Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment).
5. How do you establish concrete goals relative to student achievement as well as curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the classrooms (Focus)?
  - a. How do you keep these concrete goals prominent in the day-to-day life of the students and the school (Focus/Order)?
  - b. How do you establish procedures and routines that give staff and students a sense of order and predictability (Order)?
  - c. How do you recognize and celebrate the legitimate successes of individuals within the school as well as the school as a whole while also recognizing failures when appropriate (Affirmation)? What specific activities do you employ to both expect and also recognize superior performance from teachers and students (Contingent Rewards)?
6. How do you establish and foster procedures that ensure the entire faculty and staff have input into key decisions and policy-making (Input)?

- a. What do you do to establish and foster clear lines of communication to and from the faculty/staff as well as within the faculty/staff itself (Communication)?
  - b. How do you attend to and foster personal relationships with the faculty/staff (Relationships)?
  - c. What strategies do you employ to provide an optimistic view of what the school is doing, and of what the school is capable of accomplishing (Optimizer)?
  - d. How do you invite and honor the expression of a variety of opinions regarding the running of the school and adapting one's leadership style to the demands of the situation (Flexibility)?
7. What strategies do you employ to foster a knowledge of research and theory regarding best practices among staff through both reading and discussion (Intellectual Stimulation)?
8. What practices do you have in place to see that faculty/staff members have the necessary resources, supports, and professional development in place to effectively execute the teaching and learning processes (Resources)?
- a. How are you an advocate of the school to all relevant constituents, and what are you doing to ensure that the school complies with all-important regulations and requirements (Outreach)?
  - b. How do you protect faculty/staff members from undue interruptions and controversies that might distract them from the teaching and learning processes (Discipline)?

9. How do you stay keenly aware of the mechanisms and dynamics that define the day-to-day functioning of the school? How do you use that awareness to forecast potential problems (Situational Awareness)?

10. What are you doing to be highly visible to teachers, students, and parents (Visibility)?

11. Specifically what are you doing to challenge current school practices that have been in place for a long time in an attempt to promote the value of working at the edge of one's competence (Change Agent)?

a. How do you reach your vision? Desired outcome or goal? How do you initiate new programs?



## ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Person Interviewed: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Time Started: \_\_\_\_\_ Time Ended: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Time: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Second-Order Change-Principal Interview Protocol****Interview Questions****Section I. Innovation**

•Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment—Knowing how the innovation will affect these and provide conceptual guidance in these areas (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, p. 70).

1. Describe the innovation (change) and the role you played in the design implementation, and evaluation.
2. How do you know it was successful? Data? Evidence?
  - a. How did the innovation affect curriculum?
  - b. How did the innovation affect instruction?
  - c. How did the innovation affect assessment?
  - d. Give an example of your work individually or in groups regarding the innovation? (Marzano, et. al., p. 120)

•Optimizer—Being the driving force behind the innovation and fostering the belief that

it can produce exceptional results if members are willing to apply themselves (Marzano, et. al., p. 72).

1. Who provided the most leadership for implementation of the innovation?
2. What role did you play in implementing the innovation?
  - a. Can you give an example of speaking positively about it? Providing examples of other schools being successful?
3. How did you instill confidence in others that this innovation would yield results?
  - a. Provide examples of you voicing continued confidence in the innovation's success and impact?
  - b. How were roadblocks and challenges identified and addressed? (Marzano, et. al., p. 120)

•Intellectual Stimulation—Being knowledgeable about the research and theory regarding the innovation and fostering the knowledge among staff through reading and discussion (Marzano, et. al., p. 72).

1. Can you tell me about the research or theoretical background of the innovation?
2. How did professional staff learn about the theory and research behind it?
3. Give an example of you including it in conversations, leading discussions, or asking Questions (Marzano, et. al., p. 120)?

•Change Agent—Challenging the status quo and being willing to move forward on the innovation without a guarantee of success (Marzano, et. al., p. 72).

1. What political processes were used to move the innovation beyond the status quo?
2. Give an example of you raising issues related to student achievement?
3. Give an example of you sharing data.
4. Give an example of you providing comparisons of where the school/district was and where it needs to be?
5. Can you think of a time when you demonstrated tolerance for ambiguity related to the innovation (Marzano, et. al., p. 120)?

•Monitoring/Evaluating—Continually monitoring the impact of the innovation (Marzano, et. al., p. 72).

1. What type of monitoring of results has taken place?
  - a. Formative?
  - b. Summative?
2. What other monitoring or evaluations are planned?
3. Can you think of a time when you conducted walkthroughs or visits (Marzano, et. al., p. 120)?

•Flexibility—Being both directive and nondirective relative to the innovation as the situation warrants (Marzano, et. al., p. 72).

1. Provide me with an example of your being flexible during the design, implementation, or evaluation of the innovation.
2. Provide an example of adjusting plans as needed.

3. What protocols for evaluation were used or did discussions bog down (Marzano, et. al., p. 120)?

•Ideals/beliefs—Operating in a manner consistent with his ideas and beliefs relative to the innovation (Marzano, et. al., p. 72).

1. How was consistency in leadership related to the innovation obtained?
2. What role did you play in achieving consistency?
3. How did you communicate regarding the innovation?
4. What are examples of strategic questions that you asked when actions were not aligned with the core beliefs/expectations (Marzano, et. al., p. 120)?

Appendix B  
Teacher Interview Protocol

## TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Person Interviewed: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_

**Interview Questions**

1. How does the principal at this school establish an effective monitoring system to provide feedback on the effectiveness of:
  - a. The school curriculum?
  - b. Instruction?
  - c. Assessment practices?
  
2. How does the principal at this school build and maintain a culture in which a common language is employed, ideas are shared, and staff members operate within the culture of collaboration (Culture)?
  - a. How does the principal at this school operate from a set of ideals and beliefs regarding schooling, teaching, and learning (Ideas/Beliefs)?
  - b. How are they articulated and visible?
  
3. How does the principal at this school seek out and keep abreast of the research and theory available regarding effective curricular, instructional, and assessment practices (Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment)?
  - a. Describe how he is actively supporting teachers with issues regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the classrooms (Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment).

5. How does the principal at this school establish concrete goals relative to student achievement as well as curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the classrooms (Focus)?

a. How does he keep these concrete goals prominent in the day-to-day life of the students and the school (Focus/Order)?

b. How does he establish procedures and routines that give staff and students a sense of order and predictability (Order)?

c. How does he recognize and celebrate the legitimate successes of individuals within the school as well as the school as a whole while also recognizing failures when appropriate (Affirmation)? What specific activities does he employ to both expect and also recognize superior performance from teachers and students (Contingent Rewards)?

6. How does the principal at this school establish and foster procedures that ensure the entire faculty and staff have input into key decisions and policy-making (Input)?

a. What does he do to establish and foster clear lines of communication to and from the faculty/staff as well as within the faculty/staff itself (Communication)?

b. How does he attend to and foster personal relationships with the faculty/staff (Relationships)?

c. What strategies does he employ to provide an optimistic view of what the school is doing, and of what the school is capable of accomplishing (Optimizer)?

d. How does he invite and honor the expression of a variety of opinions

regarding the running of the school and adapting one's leadership style to the demands of the situation?

7. What strategies does the principal at this school employ to foster a knowledge of research and theory regarding best practices among staff through both reading and discussion (Intellectual Stimulation)?
8. What practices does the principal at this school have in place to see that faculty/staff members have the necessary resources, supports, and professional development in place to effectively execute the teaching and learning processes (Resources)?
  - a. How is he an advocate of the school to all relevant constituents, and what is he doing to ensure that the school complies with all-important regulations and requirements?
  - b. How does he protect faculty/staff members from undue interruptions and controversies that might distract them from the teaching and learning processes (Discipline)?
9. How does the principal at this school stay keenly aware of the mechanisms and dynamics that define the day-to-day functioning of the school? How does he use that awareness to forecast potential problems (Situational Awareness)?
10. What is the principal at this school doing to be highly visible to teachers, students, and parents (Visibility)?
11. Specifically what is the principal at this school doing to challenge current school practices that have been in place for a long time in an attempt to promote the value of working at the edge of one's competence (Change Agent)?



a. How does he reach his vision? Desired outcome or goal? How does he initiate new programs?

Appendix C  
Classified Interview Protocol

## CLASSIFIED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Person Interviewed: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Time Started: \_\_\_\_\_ Time Ended: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Time: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Interview Questions**

1. Tell me briefly about your experience and role at this school.
  - a. How long have you been at this school?
  - b. What is your educational and professional background?
  - c. How would you describe your role in this school?
  
2. How does the principal at this school establish an effective monitoring system to provide feedback on the effectiveness of: determining the effect of these practices on student achievement (Monitoring/Evaluating)?
  - a. The school curriculum?
  - b. Instruction?
  - c. Assessment practices?
  
3. How does the principal at this school build and maintain a culture in which a common language is employed, ideas are shared, and staff members operate within the norms of collaboration (Culture)?
  - a. How does the principal at this school operate from a set of ideals and beliefs

regarding schooling, teaching, and learning (Ideas/Beliefs)?

b. How are they articulated and visible?

4. How does the principal at this school seek out and keep abreast of the research and theory available regarding effective curricular, instructional, and assessment practices (Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment)?

a. Describe how he/she is actively supporting teachers with issues regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the classrooms (Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment).

5. How does the principal at this school establish concrete goals relative to student achievement as well as curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the classrooms (Focus)?

a. How does he/she keep these concrete goals prominent in the day-to-day life of the students and the school (Focus/Order)?

b. How does he/she establish procedures and routines that give staff and students a sense of order and predictability (Order)?

c. How does he/she recognize and celebrate the legitimate successes of individuals within the school as well as the school as a whole while also recognizing failures when appropriate (Affirmation)? What specific activities does he/she employ to both expect and also recognize superior performance from teachers and students (Contingent Rewards)?

6. How does the principal at this school establish and foster procedures that ensure the entire faculty and staff have input into key decisions and policy-making (Input)?

- a. What does he/she do to establish and foster clear lines of communication to and from the faculty/staff as well as within the faculty/staff itself (Communication)?
  - b. How does he/she attend to and foster personal relationships with the faculty/staff (Relationships)?
  - c. What strategies does he/she employ to provide an optimistic view of what the school is doing, and of what the school is capable of accomplishing (Optimizer)?
  - d. How does he/she invite and honor the expression of a variety of opinions regarding the running of the school and adapting one's leadership style to the demands of the situation (Flexibility)?
7. What strategies does the principal at this school employ to foster a knowledge of research and theory regarding best practices among staff through both reading and discussion (Intellectual Stimulation)?
8. What practices does the principal at this school have in place to see that faculty/staff members have the necessary resources, supports, and professional development in place to effectively execute the teaching and learning processes (Resources)?
- a. How is he/she an advocate of the school to all relevant constituents, and what is he/she doing to ensure that the school complies with all-important regulations and requirements (Outreach)?
  - b. How does he/she protect faculty/staff members from undue interruptions and controversies that might distract them from the teaching and learning processes

(Discipline)?

9. How does the principal at this school stay keenly aware of the mechanisms and dynamics that define the day-to-day functioning of the school? How does he/she use that awareness to forecast potential problems (Situational Awareness)?

10. What is the principal at this school doing to be highly visible to teachers, students, and parents (Visibility)?

11. Specifically what is the principal at this school doing to challenge current school practices that have been in place for a long time in an attempt to promote the value of working at the edge of one's competence (Change Agent)?

a. How does he/she reach his/her vision? Desired outcome or goal? How does he/she initiate new programs?

## CURRICULUM VITAE

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#### POST-SECONDARY DEGREES

1990 B.A., German, Weber State University  
 1992 B.A., History, University of Utah  
 1993 M.A., German Language and Literature, University of Utah  
 1997 M.Ed., Masters of Education, Educational Leadership and Policy, University of Utah  
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#### CERTIFICATES

1992 Secondary teaching certificate, State of Utah (subjects: German, History).  
 1997 Utah Administrative/Supervisory certificate.

#### PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT (partial list)

2010-present Principal, Bountiful High School, Davis School District, Utah.  
 2009-2010 Principal, North Layton Junior High School, Davis School District, Utah.  
 2007-2009 Assistant Principal, Northridge High School, Davis School District, Utah.  
 2000-2007 Assistant Principal, Bountiful High School, Davis School District, Utah.  
 1997-2000 Assistant Principal, West High School, Salt Lake City School District, Utah.  
 1997 AP History Teacher, Copper Hills High School, Jordan School District, Utah.  
 1996-1997 Assistant Principal (Intern), Hunter Junior High School, Granite School District, Utah.

- 1992-1996 German/History Teacher, Crescent View Middle School, Jordan School District, Utah.
- 1991-1992 Master Teacher for Undergraduate German courses, University of Utah, Foreign Language Department.
- 1990-1991 Teaching Assistant (German), University of Utah, Foreign Language Department.

#### **AWARDS AND HONORS (partial list)**

- 2008 Golden Key International Honour Society
- 2006 Assistant Principal of the Year Finalist (UASSP).
- 2006 Founding member of Association of International Baccalaureate World Schools of Utah (AIBWSU).
- 2005 Who's Who Among America's Teachers Award.
- 2004 Who's Who Among America's Teachers Award.
- 2002, 2003 Assistant Principal of the Year Nominee (UASSP).
- 2002-2007 Advanced Placement/College Board National Delegate
- 2002 Who's Who Among America's Teachers Award.
- 2000-present Reader-consultant for Advanced Placement examination in German language and literature for Educational Testing Services (Trinity University).
- 1998 Who's Who Among America's Teachers Award.
- 1997 Granite Education Foundation Outstanding Educator nominee.
- 1996 Who's Who Among America's Teachers Award.
- 1996 "Outstanding Teacher" award, Crescent View Middle School.
- 1996 Nominated teacher from Crescent View Middle School for "Huntsman Award for Excellence in Education."
- 1992 Graduated Cum Laude, History-University of Utah (B.A.).
- 1992 Recipient Dee Graduate Leadership Scholarship-Univ. of Utah
- 1991 Member, Phi Sigma Delta (German) Honor Society.
- 1991 Member, Phi Alpha Theta (History) Honor Society.
- 1990 Graduated Cum Laude, German-Weber State University (B.A.).
- 1989 Member, "Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges."
- 1989 Member, Phi Sigma Iota (International Foreign Language Honor Society).
- 1983 Member, Phi Eta Sigma, national freshman honor society.
- 1983 Recipient, Honors at Entrance Scholarship, Weber State University.

#### **MEMBERSHIP IN PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES, ASSOCIATIONS, ORGANIZATIONS**

- Member, High School Principal Representative for Davis School District Superintendent's Liaison Committee, 2012-present.



Member, Davis Education Association (DEA) District Negotiations Team, 2007-2008.

Member, Davis School District Interest-Based Facilitation Team (IBFT) Committee (Budget Negotiations), 2007-2008.

Member, Davis School District Classified Performance Evaluation Committee, 2005.

Member, Davis District Superintendent's Task Force on New Teacher Induction, 2004.

Member, Utah Education Association (UEA), 1992-present.

Member, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL).

Member, German Advanced Placement College Board.

Member, Member of Salt Lake City School District Facilities Committee, 1998-2000.

Member, Utah Association of Secondary School Principals (UASSP), 1996-present.

Member, National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), 1996-present.

Member, Utah Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (UASCD).

Member, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

### **PROFESSIONAL WORKSHOPS, CONFERENCES, CONVENTIONS, PRESENTED OR FACILITATED**

2008 Presenter at National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Convention in San Antonio, TX (topic: Smaller Learning Communities).

2000 Presenter at Special Education Law Conference in Salt Lake City, UT (topic: Mainstreaming SP ED students across all core and curricular areas).

1999 Presenter at U.S. Department of Education's "Improving America's Schools" Convention held in Denver, Colorado (topic: Connecting high school students through after-school programs).

### **PUBLICATIONS**

Wilkey, Gregory G. (2004). *Promising school partnership practices*. Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships. Johns Hopkins University National Network of Partnership Schools, Baltimore, MD.

Wilkey, Gregory G. (2013). *Research into the Characteristics of Effective High School Principals: A Case Study of Leadership Practices Used in the High School Setting*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.