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Case Study: Principal Knowledge, Principal Practice, and Student Achievement

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Dedication

I dedicate this work of completion to my children on both sides of heaven. You each have influenced my life to live like there is no tomorrow, to dream without limitations, and to always live with purpose. You are and will always be the extension of my heart.

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I would like to first thank God for allowing me the grace, strength, and determination to reach this milestone in my life. Thank you, God, for creating me in your image and guiding my steps into the service of education and granting me this journey.

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Abstract

A school principal is a critical asset to the success of a campus, teachers, and students. Their role is and will continue to be complex with many responsibilities and challenges. Researchers have implied a disconnect between the level of a principal's practice to their knowledge in the production of student success. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to reveal a deeper understanding of the theory-to practice gap between the professional practices of high school principals and their knowledge. This study attempted to answer the what, how, and why to help establish foundational information for improving and creating ongoing leadership training and development for both principals and those aspiring to be principals. In this case study, the researcher conducted one-on-one semistructured interviews via Zoom, gathered research-generated documents from the state educational websites, and collected leadership survey results for two mid-Atlantic high school principals. Framing the case with the SLII® model, the findings indicated a presence of situational awareness to overlap with building professional capacity through relationships and reflective practices. With observation, feedback, and reflection, the participants were able to engage in a situational approach to address the needs present. The findings suggest that the human element holds the influence on the gap of principal knowledge, practices, and student outcomes while illuminating the importance on relationships and reflective practices.

Keywords: high school principals, leadership styles, student achievement, situational leadership, professional development, professional standards for educational leaders

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Chapter 1: Introduction

School leadership is the one common denominator in education that carries a positive relationship with school reform, instructional achievement, teacher development, and student success (Drysdale et al., 2016; Moral et al., 2018; Tan, 2018). For this reason, the leadership of a school is critical to the essence of school culture and student achievement (Bush & Glover, 2014; Tan, 2018). The ability to influence a team of followers to achieve a common goal, such as student success and a positive learning culture, is directly related to the leader (Northouse, 2016). Bush and Glover's (2003) claim supports this as they indicated that school leadership's endeavor is to achieve common goals with the practices of influence, values, and vision.

The profession most affiliated with school leadership is the school principal (Wallace Foundation, 2013). The Every Student Succeeds Act's (ESSA's) Non-Regulatory Guidance for Title II states that "effective principals, assistant principals, and other school leaders are essential to school success" due to the impact from their practices and their influence in retaining effective teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 16). The ESSA supports the framework for the success of schools and its students under the leadership and guidance of their principals by providing recommended strategies and support for new and veteran principals to strengthen their professional development. Coddard and Miller (2010) also identified principal leadership as the gateway for academic success in response to the interest of school improvement, closing the achievement gap, and student success. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) recognized the pivotal role principals play in providing positive opportunities for student success when creating successful learning environments through positive school climate and motivating best practices amongst teachers (Levin et al., 2019).

Acknowledging that principal leadership is essential, prioritization in understanding effective leaders' everyday thinking, behaviors, traits, and characteristics continue to be at the forefront in creating best practices to ensure student success (Scribner & Crow, 2012; Seashore, 2009). Terosky and Reitano (2016) discovered a positive relationship between servant leadership traits to strong instructional principals with academically successful schools. From this result, their recommendation was to continue research on improving student success by applying more leadership theory to practice. Masewicz and Voel (2014) highlighted the characteristics and practices of effective principals that proved to positively impact their schools' teaching practices and student learning. Their analysis was organized around five distinct terms: behavior, practices, sense making, problem solving, and reflections. Within this study, Masewicz and Voel (2014) justified the need to promote foundational knowledge to enhance principal development to secure competent principals to lead school improvements and help students succeed.

Many challenges and complexities exist within the role of a school principal (Portin et al., 2003; Walden University, n.d.). The NASSP and the LPI discovered challenges in accessing high-quality development, quality working environments, competitive compensation, policymaking authority, and accountability (Levin et al., 2019). A 2017 national survey discovered that the position of a principal was strained with an 18% turnover rate and a 21% turnover rate at high-poverty schools (Goldring & Taie, 2018). Masewicz and Voel (2014) identified complexities from multiple layers of responsibilities that were determined by morals, politics, global affairs, economic drive, and local communities within diverse settings. Regardless of the situation or setting, school principals are expected to influence and maintain organizational capacity and student success at a high standard (Masewicz & Voel, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

The school principal is an essential leader that contributes to the success and achievement of the school, teachers, and its students (Coddard & Miller, 2010; Harris, 2012; Masewicz & Voel, 2014; Sala et al., 2013; Tran & Bon, 2016). The principal's role is complex primarily because of the increasing demands, challenges, and responsibilities from national, state, and local standards (Huggins et al., 2017; Scribner & Crow, 2012). Principals face a diverse set of ever-changing circumstances daily. They are held accountable to properly handle and nurture situations productively to proceed with common practices to foster student academic success (Scribner & Crow, 2012; Wright & Costa, 2016).

Practices in which principals engage to impact student success often include teacher collaboration, supportive professional development for teachers, mastery usage of data-driven practices, and a clear vision for all to follow (Moral et al., 2018; Arnold et al., 2007). Foundational knowledge and implementation of these common practices and behaviors are the scope of the initial preparation, professional development, and ongoing support given to principals (Huggins et al., 2017; Moosung, 2016; Sala et al., 2013). However, it has only been in the last few decades national attention has been given to the preparation and development of principals regardless of their ever-changing platform (National Policy Board of Educational Administration, 2018).

A lack of appropriate organizational support and development can result in deficiencies in principals' positive influence to maximize student academic success (Drysdale et al., 2016). Researchers noted that principals are trained to be knowledgeable about their roles of everyday responsibilities, but the level of application from theory to practice may be lacking (Moosung, 2016; Drysdale et al., 2016). The disconnect deems evident per the data shared in the mid-

Atlantic state used for this study. For example, it was revealed that from 2015 to 2018, principal evaluations demonstrated an average of 95% ratings of effective or highly effective, while only 41% of students in Algebra I reached a level of proficiency and only 44% of students reached a level of proficiency in English Language Arts (ELA; Office of Leadership Development and School Improvement, 2019). This revelation presents a gap between the level of a principal's practice to their knowledge and in the production of student success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to reveal a deeper understanding of the theory-to practice gap between the professional practices of high school principals and their knowledge for possible usage in principal development. Using the perspective of the situational approach illustrated by the SLII® model (see Appendix G), a closer look at the practicing leadership style in correlation to the development level of the followers was assessed (Blanchard, 1994; Northouse, 2016). The SLII® model helped me determine whether the principals' practice from a directive and supportive dimension adapted to the demands of each situation (Northouse, 2016). In addition, the conversation was guided by the 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) that was adapted by the mid-Atlantic state in which this study took place to examine standards from the principals' perspectives and their professional practices in relation to student academic success. Their evaluation ratings and professional development experiences helped identify any existing gaps between standards and actual practice. These findings address the what, how, and why of this problem of practice (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018; Yin, 2013) and help establish foundational information for improving and creating ongoing leadership training and development for both principals and those aspiring to be principals (Huggins et al., 2017; Moosung, 2016).

Research Questions

RQ1. What gaps do high school principals acknowledge exist between principal standards and actual practice?

RQ2. How do high school principals describe their professional practices that contribute to the improvement and retention of student success?

RQ3. How do high school principals identify the level of development for their teachers when addressing daily situations and goals?

RQ4. What do high school principals identify from their professional development to impact their professional practices in support of student success?

Definition of Key Terms

Collaboration. Collaboration is the professional interaction and team capability of working together to address a shared responsibility (Garcia-Torres, 2019).

Leadership. Leadership is the ability to influence others for the purpose to attain an important goal (Northouse, 2016) regardless of the set of circumstances it exists in (Salazar, 2007).

Principal. The principal is the leader at the top of the campus hierarchy (Bennet & Murukami, 2016), whose role and responsibilities can be categorized within administrative and instructional roles as a response to all stakeholders with an end goal of maintaining student success (Balyer, 2014).

Professional development. Professional development is career training that facilitates and supports the growth and adaptability to address any changes and/or necessary learning requirements (Mestry, 2017; Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018; Salazar, 2007).

School culture. School culture consists of the shared beliefs, practices, and values within a school setting that can promote or demote a safe learning environment for its students (Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, n.d.).

Student success. Student success is usually represented by sampling achievement data, but it also involves ongoing growth, participation in higher level programs, engagement in diverse subject matters, and acceptance into higher education or postsecondary programs (National Education Association, 2015).

Theory-to-practice. Theory to practice refers to the appropriate application of research-based sources of data, strategies, and skills to address circumstances and situations present (Wright & Costa, 2016).

Summary

An effective principal's leadership role is difficult to describe (Bush & Glover, 2014) because it is complex and consists of a combination of practices and styles (Pashiardis & Savvide, 2011). The elevated pressures and complex environments to which principals respond daily requires professional practices that can assist principals to properly handle and nurture each situation accordingly (Scribner & Crow, 2012). Scribner and Crow (2012) addressed these phenomena in trying to discover the reason behind the practices necessary to establish a successful school environment and for opportunity for future development. Tran and Bon (2016) focused on ensuring the most effective principal gets the job from the start because of the increasing recognition of principal practices in relationship to student achievement. Other researchers have identified the need to study the professional development and application of practice because it tends to be missing (Moosung, 2016; Drysdale et al., 2016).

In the next chapter, I discuss the foundational groundwork to better understand the gap between theoretical knowledge to professional practice amongst school principals. In it, the theoretical framework of SLII® within the situational approach is highlighted. In addition to a description of the evolution of the roles of principals, a briefing on principal leadership styles and practices and an explanation of how principal professional development plays a role in principal practice as it relates to student success. This literature demonstrates components that may have contributed to the gap that exists between principal knowledge and practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The gap that exists between principal knowledge and practice to achieving student success did not evolve overnight (Aslan, 2020; Bush & Glover, 2014; Scribner & Crow, 2012; Seashore, 2009). To better understand the gap's existence, a review of related literature includes the evolution of the principal role from expectations to standards and a description of principal leadership styles and practices in relation to student success. An emphasis of the Professional Standards of Educational Leaders (PSEL) and its existence is addressed while also explaining how principal professional development plays a role in principal practice related to student success. In support of the study, I used the SLII® model as the theoretical framework to better understand the application of principal practices.

The Role of the Principal

The beginnings of the principal role in education emerged from a one-room schoolhouse that grew into a multiroom schoolhouse requiring a head teacher or principal teacher (Pierce, 1935). As a result, the first principal's position was based more on clerical responsibilities versus educational operations (Rousmaniere, 2007). With time, this position evolved out of the classroom into a system of centralized governance that is currently present (Pierce, 1935; Rousmaniere, 2007).

The Hierarchy

Current leadership roles in education are dominantly layered in a hierarchical chart with a superintendent and assistant superintendents as the executive directors at the top with supporting layers of directors and campus principals to follow (Hanover Research, 2013). The executive leaders oversee all campuses and departments, while the directors concentrate on specialized departments such as curriculum, special programs, elementary education, secondary education,

technology, personnel, maintenance, and transportation. School principals, on the other hand, provide oversight and direction for the daily operations within their respective campuses with a focused end goal being student success (Hanover Research, 2013; Pierce, 1935).

The Principal

Today, the primary role of the principal is to promote student academic success (Balyer, 2014; Scribner & Crow, 2012; Wright & Costa, 2016). The evolution of school principal roles ranged from a managerial role with an authoritarian style (Altenbaugh, 1992) to a shared leadership style with external influences from the school system and community involvement (Beck, 1993) to work together to achieve the same goal.

In the 21st century, principals are mandated to ensure specific state and federal standards (Alvarado, 2011). It started with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 to obtain student achievement (Pepper, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The NCLB created a high stakes educational environment to focus on closing the achievement gap to ensure that all students were adequately equipped to meet academic standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The Education Reform Act of 2010 mandated the adoption of teacher and principal performance evaluations for the identification of effective and highly effective educators based on student success and other factors (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). It was with this information that professional development was to support and help improve student success. This was then followed by the pressures of the Race to the Top campaign and ESSA of 2015 in which the principals remained the focal point to lead school improvement with the overarching theme of attaining student success (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Principal Standards

In support of the new legislation, the National Policy Board of Educational Administration (NPBEA, 2015) collectively worked with the Council of Chief State of School Officers and other organizations to create new policies and standards. Although the first educational standards for leaders were not implemented until 1996, it was not until 2008 that the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium's (ISLLC) Educational Leadership Policy Standards were modestly updated (NPBEA, 2015). Prior to these dates, there were not any national standards prescribed for educational leaders to follow or model. Then in 2015, following an in-depth analysis of the ever-changing principal landscape and legislation, the development of the 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) occurred (NPBEA, 2015). The PSEL embodies a clearer guidance on how principals should be "prepared, hired, developed, supervised, and evaluated" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 2). The standards were crafted to address critical areas identified by legislation and to encourage principals to reflect on how the standards interdependently promote student success. The PSEL standards include the following:

> (1) Mission, vision, and core values; (2) ethics and professional norms; (3) equity and cultural responsiveness; (4) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (5) community of care and support for students; (6) professional capacity of school personnel; (7) professional community for teachers and staff; (8) meaningful engagement of families and community; (9) operations and management; and (10) school improvement. (NPBEA, 2015, p. 3)

These standards are meant to display a holistic connection between an array of school leadership domains and student success (NPBEA, 2015).

While there are other sets of national leadership standards for states to adopt now, the mid-Atlantic state in this study adopted the PSEL in 2017 to fit their principal population and need (Office of Leadership Development and School Improvement, 2019b). These principal standards were then scheduled to replace the ISSLC standards and the mid-Atlantic state's Instructional Leadership Framework that once guided the preparation and evaluation of their campus principals (Office of Leadership Development and School Improvement, 2019b). The mid-Atlantic state believed that the "ten interdependent standards in the PSEL, which reflect leadership work that research and practice suggest is essential to student success" would be the foundation to create a rubric that included principal practices in highly effective, effective, developing, and ineffective categories (Office of Leadership Development and School Improvement, 2019b, p. 5).

In 2018, the rubric draft was opened to feedback from principal supervisors, the state's Association of Elementary School Principals, the state's Association of Secondary Principals, the state's Parent Teacher Association, and the public before making the final draft (Office of Leadership Development and School Improvement, 2019b). The PSEL rubric was then distributed to the mid-Atlantic state's counties to use as a source for common language and well-defined levels of expectations for school principals within each standard. This was ultimately a tool to be used to fit the individual needs for each county to build upon for the development and evaluation of school principals in support of improving student success (Office of Leadership Development and School Improvement, 2019b).

Student Success

There are many national indicators representing student success. The most common is usually represented by the sampling of achievement data (Aslan, 2020; National Education

Association, 2015). Student success indicators also involve students ongoing growth, participation in higher level programs, engagement in diverse subject matters, and acceptance into higher education or postsecondary programs. The indicators most used for the passing or failing in student achievement include the examinations and grades conducted at the central levels (Aslan, 2020).

Student success is both a direct and indirect reflection of the leadership from the school principal (Peddell et al., 2020). Researchers found that a small portion is from direct connection, while the majority is indirect through the relationship and presence with teachers, stakeholders, policy, and the cultural climate (Cotton, 2003). Hallinger and Heck (1996) described the relationship between the effects of the principal and student success as complex and not easily calculated but does not ignore its existence. The mediated effect of the principal on student success also does not dismiss the importance of their role but supports their essence of leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

Researchers demonstrated that school principals have an impact on the student learning environment (Aslan, 2020; Peddell et al., 2020). Some focused on general factors or strategies that assisted with school improvement, but Peddell et al. (2020) used their study to focus on specific behaviors and actions. They used the alignment, capability, and engagement (ACE) model to analyze the data attained from 16 principals that were in the process of a school improvement initiative. In their findings, they concluded that data-driven decisions, a shared vision, and transparent teacher relationships resulted in organizational readiness per the ACE model for successful school improvement (Peddell et al., 2020).

In Tan's (2018) study, he presented some of the influences of principal leadership to student achievement. He discovered that a principal's indirect effect was the result in the process

of supporting teacher autonomy and teacher morale (Tan, 2018). Tan (2018) also highlighted the strengths of leadership style and its relationship to disadvantaged students versus those with a better advantage. Together, they all had a positive relationship when the principal was affecting the instructional culture of the school (Tan, 2018). Aslan (2020) added that student success was multifaceted including many intertwining factors, such as organizational variables, socioeconomic variables, and individual variables. Collectively, the school principal's leadership capacity is held at the forefront of accountability for student success (Aslan, 2020).

Principal Expectations

Principals face an array of responsibilities from rigorous national, state, and local accountability standards and expectations. The continual need of creating successful conditions for social and academic improvements is ongoing and can be overwhelming (Huggins et al., 2017; Scribner & Crow, 2012; Seashore, 2009). Scribner and Crow (2012) stated that "schools have become more complex organizations, requiring rapid responses to individual problems and the ability to address constantly changing demands from a diverse, dynamic environment" (p. 245). As these environmental factors intensify, school principals need a thorough understanding of leadership, educational management, and application of theory as they change in practice due to perceptions of importance over time (Bush & Glover, 2014).

Principal realities and expectations are far from simple (Portin et al., 2003). While some researchers focused on what principals should do, the Wallace Foundation funded research to examine the complex details that exist on the principal's role from elementary to secondary in public and private schools (Portin et al., 2003). Portin et al. (2003) discovered some major themes of expectations and realities for principals, including the following: (a) the capability to diagnose the needs and decide what solution to use; (b) ensuring leadership in instruction,

campus culture, management, external development, human resources, and local legislation; and (c) addressing school's governance while completing their tasks (Portin et al., 2003). As a result, it became evident that it was important for principals to understand the rules they were under to best perform their duties and fulfill the intertwined leadership expectations (Portin et al., 2003).

Paino (2018) explained that although researchers described schools to be loosely coupled organizations, a principal's interpretation and implementation of mandates is key. Their role in loosely coupled or tightly coupled at the school-level affect the outcomes of large-scale policy changes (Paino, 2018). Principals are faced with challenges from disrupting teacher preferences to effectively mediating policy changes. They are expected to find a simultaneous balance in acquiring legitimacy from both the school staff and the organization they serve (Paino, 2018). Principals are expected to enforce mandates from local, state, and federal to fulfill accountability measures that are meant to support student success.

The expectations of practice and leadership holds an influential impact on teaching and the learning environment (Xhomara, 2018). Walden University (n.d.) supports this notion as they acknowledge a list of important duties for school principals that impact student achievement. For example, principals need a vision for student academic success to clearly define the goals for all students and staff (Walden University, n.d.; Wallace Foundation, 2013). Principals are also expected to provide a conducive learning environment while building a sense of community and providing teacher support (Wallace Foundation, 2013). This includes encouraging leadership qualities in others and developing strong working relationships on top of just being a good manager with day-to-day processes (Walden University, n.d.).

However, Robinson and Gray (2019) found it difficult to link principal leadership to student achievement because of the different expectations in smaller schools versus larger

schools. For example, in smaller schools, principals influence learning by teaching, while in larger schools, principals indirectly influence learning through their relationship with their teachers (Robinson & Gray, 2019). Another reason Robinson and Gray (2019) referenced the difficulty of linking principal leadership to student success was because of the time it takes to see the effects of a leader's vision and implementations on the learning environment. This complexity adds to the varied expectations for principals under different governance (Portin et al., 2003) and in different environments (Robinson & Gray, 2020).

Recently, different and unknown environments due to the COVID-19 pandemic altered all principal expectations to a new level (Pollock, 2020). Pollock (2020) mentioned that the expectations of school principals were extended to ensure additional safety health measures and to becoming a digital instructional leader. The safety and health conditions of all students and staff with the introduction of new protocols to support interventions and prevention of the spread of COVID-19 was now a priority (Pollock, 2020). Online learning and virtual engagement for educational learning platforms to promote student success was no longer selective but across the board with minimum to zero preparation (Pollock, 2020). Expectations of leading in a digital realm included proactively reducing access issues, managing virtual schools, and supporting online learning (Pollock, 2020). With these intricate expectations of the principal plus promoting adequate student growth and success, principals are still required to inspire and lead (Robinson & Gray, 2019).

The History of Leadership and Education

Leadership is a well-researched topic with a continuous, diverse mix of attributes developed and fluctuating over time in definition and styles. Although the definitions of leadership abound, Northouse (2016) identifies the central components involved in the definition

of leadership to be the process, influence, audience, and common goals. The process is that leadership is a transactional event versus a trait that is interactive and not linear creating influence from leader to followers. Northouse (2016) also defined the audience as the group and context in which the leader influences followers to achieve a common goal. This common goal is the foundational groundwork for their mutual purpose (Northouse, 2016).

Historically, Lewin et al. (1939) introduced three leadership styles: autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. Although many other leadership styles and practices were identified across multiple practices, leadership evolved through phases— "command-and-control" to "empower-and-track" and now to a "connect-and-nurture" approach (Buchanan, 2013, para. 10). For example, in the 1980s, command and control predominantly referred to followers doing what the leader wanted (Goh, 2009; Northouse, 2016). Leadership then transformed to a process where there was a give-and-take engagement leading to a sense of empowerment monitored with a practice of tracking (Northouse, 2016). Today, leadership shifted to connecting and nurturing as seen in transformational leadership, servant leadership, or authentic leadership. The progression, or lack thereof, through these phases and styles help explain the diverse collection of applicable leadership styles that exist today, even in educational leadership.

Leadership Styles of a Principal

Transformational Leadership. One of the most recognized leadership styles for the advancement of education and achieving student success is known as transformational leadership (Hallinger, 2003; Pepper, 2010). The different factors identified in this style include charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Baptiste, 2019; Northouse, 2016). The transformational style is known to focus on how leaders influence

school outcomes rather than on the direction of the outcome (Bush & Glover, 2014). Yildiz and Simsek (2016) added that transformational leadership also has the potential to develop trust and collaboration within the organization while building self-efficacy beliefs. This aligns with the comprehensive model Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) created that consisted of a total of ten dimensions of management and leadership. The dimensions of management included "staffing, instructional support, monitoring school activities, and community focus"; while "the leadership dimensions include building school vision and goals; providing intellectual stimulation; offering individualized support; symbolizing professional practices and values; demonstrating high performance expectations; and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions" (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999, p. 454). Generally, researchers concluded that student engagement and success were both directly and indirectly a result from transformational leadership through the effects it has on the teachers (Baptiste, 2019; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Pepper, 2010; Robinson et al., 2008).

Instructional Leadership. Instructional leadership is another major leadership style in the field of education with two general concepts that focused on overseeing teacher engagement and teacher behavior that influences student success (Hallinger, 2003; Sheppard, 1996). Originally, it was defined with a limited concept focused only on actions in direct connection to teaching and learning (Hallinger, 2003). This view later evolved into including all principal activities that both directly and indirectly affected student learning. A concept that acknowledged that principals as instructional leaders would positively influence the success of student learning (Goldring & Greenfield, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000).

The conceptualization of instructional leadership took the leadership concept and divided it into three broad dimensions: "defining the school's mission," "managing the instructional

program," and "promoting a positive learning climate" (Hallinger, 2003, p. 332). These dimensions were then subdivided into 10 instructional leadership tasks focused on principals working hands-on, coordinating, and monitoring instructional practices to improve student learning (Aas & Brandmo, 2016; Hallinger, 2003). The first dimension, defining the mission, included practices of framing and communicating the school's goals. The second dimension labeled managing the instructional program integrated the tasks of overseeing and assessing instruction, organizing the curriculum, and supervising student progress. These tasks were the focus of the principal engagement within the coordination of the instructional development of the school (Hallinger, 2003). The third dimension's purpose of promoting a positive learning environment included the remaining five tasks: "protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for teachers, providing incentives for learning" (Hallinger, 2003, p. 332).

Critics questioned the limitations of principals in this directive leadership role and wondered if they had the appropriate balance of will and skill to master this style (Hallinger, 2003). Researchers also noted that efforts of principals providing instructional feedback at the secondary level could fall short due to the classroom expertise by a teacher in comparison to themselves. Hallinger (2003) added that the instructional role of the principal should not be the only area of focus when addressing the improvement of student academic success, because the principal holds many roles within their leadership and must be flexible to adapt to the needs of their school contexts.

Distributed Leadership. While the strength of an individual leader can be displayed through many leadership styles, distributed leadership consists of a shared concept in which the influence belongs to several members of an organization (Elmore, 2000; Northouse, 2016).

Distributed leadership increased interest in synonymous styles that include shared, democratic, collaborative, and participative (Harris, 2008). Marzano et al. (2005) called this shared model "purposeful communities" (p. 99). These communities consisted of the strong school leadership teams created by the principal (Marzano et al., 2005). This concept allows multiple members to share a partnership in diagnosing problems and to collaborate on interventions (Northouse, 2016). A principal with distributed leadership shifts their decision making from just themselves to a team of educators enabling a positive experience for school improvement (Marzano et al., 2005).

Heroic and Post-Heroic Leadership. Heroic leadership and post-heroic leadership were used by Bennet and Murakami (2016) in their studies of successful principals and their leadership. Their focus was to determine the presence of heroic and post-heroic traits present in the practices of leaders that were identified as agents of change. In their study, heroic leadership was described as individually creating efforts to generate opportunities for school improvement; while post-heroic leadership embraced partnerships and working within an institutional culture (Bennet & Murakami, 2016). Bennet and Murakami (2016) recognized an evolution toward practices of post-heroic transformative models with evidence of some heroic acts still in action. These findings included "setting directions through heroic and post-heroic leadership", "empowering and investing in others", "organizational culture of professionalism and respect", and "transforming schools through community uplift and social justice" (Bennet & Murakami, 2016, p. 19).

Complexities in Principal Leadership

Regardless of leadership style used or highlighted, a diverse set of daily situations that principals face requires the appropriate use of behaviors or characteristics in conjunction with

timely and appropriate practice to succeed in today's educational environment (Nichols & Cottrell, 2014). Researchers suggested that there was not just one leadership style that fit all situations, but rather a combination of practices that leads to successful leadership (Pashiardis & Savvides, 2011). Regardless of post-heroic practices in place, the principal was still responsible while at the top of the hierarchy of their school campuses (Bennet & Murakami, 2016).

Scribner and Crow (2012) added a case study on the professional identities of school leaders to better understand the influence on practices. Over a two-year study, they discovered that some of the identities that were self-identified by the leader were father, teacher, sergeant, role model, disciplinarian, mentor, politician, rebel, salesman, and reformer (Scribner & Crow, 2012). Implications for development highlighted the importance of reflection, the opportunity to experience multiple contexts, and the expansion of coursework to include more than just skills and competencies (Scribner & Crow, 2012).

Robinson (2011) recognized five dimensions of practice plus having the knowledge and skills to be a part of a student-centered leadership. This model identified a positive relationship of five sets of leadership practices on student achievement (Robinson & Gray, 2019). These dimensions included setting goals and expectations, resourcing strategically, developing the quality of teaching, developing teacher professionalism, and creating a safe learning environment (Robinson, 2011; Robinson & Gray, 2019). Robinson and Gray (2019) used this research and model to demonstrate the differences that were seen in higher-performing schools versus lower-performing schools.

Effective principals cannot be described with just one leadership style or practice because the role is complex, nonlinear, and multilevel (Pashiardis & Savvides, 2011; Scribner & Crow, 2012). The impact of their leadership on student achievement is not just about style or type but is

contingent upon their purpose (Robinson & Gray, 2019). Mombourquette (2017) supported this notion by addressing her study with the practice of vision in relation to effective leadership. While she determined the positive correlation of successful leadership with vision, Bush and Glover (2014) identified the presence of integrity and values in successful leaders as well. Scribner and Crow (2012) also believed that exploring the values, motivations, and identities in school leadership would help guide the professional development of school leaders in more reflective ways.

Professional Development

In education, professional development refers to a variety of specialized opportunities to advance educational trainings in the field of knowledge, capacity, and effectiveness in support of their practice (Glossary of Educational Reform, 2013). These opportunities include a broad range of experiences from mentoring, coaching, portfolios, professional learning communities, and/or attending workshops (Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018). However, professional development and support for principals are often limited in developing common practices and characteristics in creating effective leaders (Huggins et al., 2017; Moosung, 2016; Sala et al., 2013). Moosung (2016) stated that Western leadership is focused more on the roles and responsibilities of principals instead of understanding the how and why it should happen.

The learning through professional development is not a one-size-fits-all training that effectively enhances the development of each principal (Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018). Effective professional development includes guided training, practice, feedback, and reflection within a continuous cycle (Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018). Determining a campus principal's practice is important to discover the reasons behind their actions for establishing a successful school

environment and for opportunity for future development (Scribner & Crow, 2012; Seashore, 2009).

Researchers discovered that although principals are in favor of professional development, they hold some reservation due to the content and window of opportunities (Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018). Some researchers identified principals who claimed that nothing in their training or preparation programs helped them for this role (Portin et al., 2003). Some principals felt that they were not exposed to the more complex situations and leadership skills necessary to be able to address the realities of their roles (Portin et al., 2003). Others identified that principals shoulder the responsibility of continual development in conjunction with reflecting on personal experiences (McClellan & Casey, 2015; Mestry, 2017). The need for leadership and management development is present while the workshop model is too generic to meet the needs of today's principals (Mestry, 2017; Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018).

Wright and Costa's (2016) study resulted in the reference of 12 effective supporting conditions for professional development in their study. The principals in the study identified these 12 conditions:

(1) choice of time or type of professional development opportunity;

(2) involvement in professional development program design;

(3) ongoing and open communication between stakeholders;

(4) accessibility to professional development;

(5) availability of time, structures, and space;

(6) personal and professional motivation;

(7) individual readiness and need to engage in learning or problem resolution;

(8) alignment of individual, school, and organizational needs;

(9) an environment characterized by social trust, respect, and collegiality;

(10) organizational support;

(11) opportunities for meaningful collaboration; and

(12) reasonable expectations and goals. (Wright & Costa, 2016, p. 41)

Salazar (2007) suggested that rural principals also prefer specific training that would help them enhance high-performing learning systems for their students to meet high standards. The principals recognized team commitment, effective communication, and understanding the change process was essential for growth and success (Salazar, 2007).

Effective campus principals must be developed to remain up to date with tailored professional development opportunities (Salazar, 2007). Reflection is key to uncovering why principals respond and act the way they do when facing daily pressures, responsibilities, and dynamic circumstances (Scribner & Crow, 2012). Learning encompasses this experience influenced by expanding the knowledge and skills and putting it into revised practice (Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018). Priest and Seemiller (2018) added to target design training to enhance leaders' capacity for effective practice. Overall, researchers believed that to create successful professional development opportunities, the needs of campus principals must be identified, acknowledged, and integrated (Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018; Portin et al., 2003; Scribner & Crow, 2012) so that they can be intentionally able to transfer the knowledge and skills to their practice (Daniëls et al., 2019).

However, to promote the transfer between knowledge and skills to practice in professional development (Daniëls et al., 2019), it is important to understand the gaps existent in principal practices. Moosung (2016) supported the recommendation of understanding the how and why in principal practices to be key in principal development. For this study, I utilized the

situational leadership approach as the lens and framework to better understand current principal practices.

Theoretical Framework: SLII® Model

The situational approach to leadership is well-recognized as it focuses on how leadership matches the demands of different situations (Blanchard et al., 1993; Northouse, 2016; Thompson & Vecchio, 2009). Hersey and Blanchard developed this approach upon the influences and evolution of their own life cycle theory of leadership, Reddin's 3d management style theory, and Fielder's contingency theory of leadership (Blanchard et al., 1993; Northouse, 2016). The premise of the situational approach was that effective leadership adapts their style to the different types of situations in relation to the followers (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988; Northouse, 2016). It focuses on what is the task at hand and what is the readiness of the follower.

SLII® Model's Historical Background

Blanchard and Hersey's (1996) initial study were an extension of Fielder's contingency theory. Distinguishing factors of this theory included the relationship between the leader's role, the follower's role, and the environment of the situation (Nunes et al., 2011). Conversely, Blanchard and Hersey focused on the "behavior of a leader in relation to followers" instead of their actual role (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988, p. 170). Another factor worth acknowledging is that Fielder was first to recognize that there was not just one way to lead effectively (Lord et al., 2017). Hersey and Blanchard followed this stance and included the four leadership styles of "telling, selling, participating, and delegating" into their own work (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988, p. 179).

After continuous research and work, Hersey and Blanchard established their approach as situational leadership in 1972 (Blanchard et al., 1993), which was then followed by the

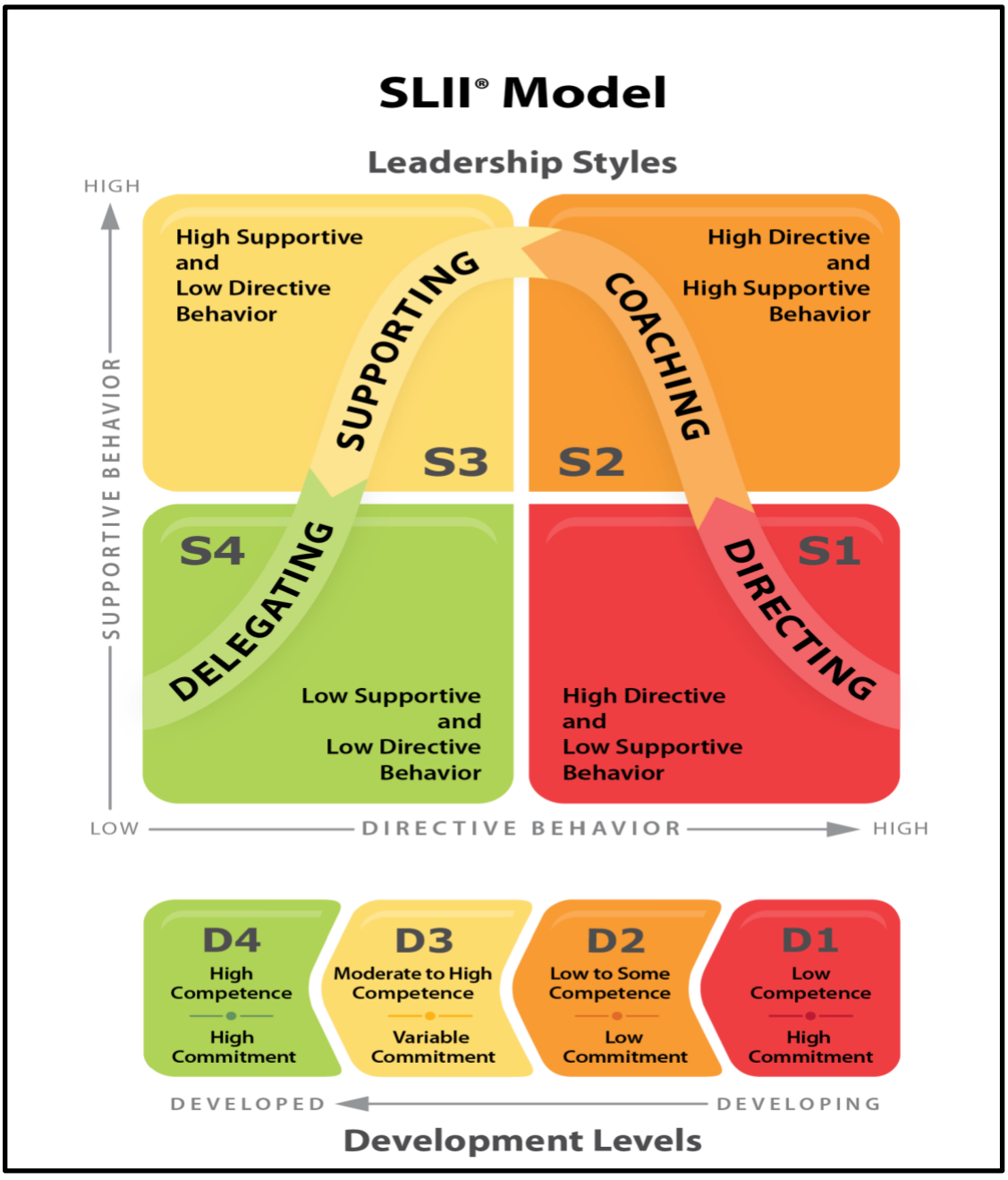
refinement and illustration of the SLII® model in 1985 by Blanchard (Northouse, 2016). This model represents the interaction of when a leader should guide and direct with respect to the follower's needed support and their level of development (Blanchard, 1994). The situational approach modifies a leadership's style based on the follower's developmental level and the difficulty of the task (Smith et al., 2017).

SLII® Model

Blanchard and his team developed the SLII® model (Figure 1) to illustrate to leaders that there was not just one way to impact their followers, but that their choice of style should reflect their followers' development and behavior (Blanchard, 1994; Northouse, 2016).

Figure 1

SLII® Model



Note. From "*Get Started: Proven, Time-tested Leadership Mode*l." by The Ken Blanchard Companies, n.d. Retrieved from https://www.kenblanchard.com/Solutions/SLII.

Figure 1 illustrates how the two dimensions of leadership behavior, directive and supportive, are cross divided to form four styles a leader can use depending on the situation and the development level of followers (Northouse, 2016; The Ken Blanchard Companies, n.d.). These updated styles consist of directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating. The followers are distinguished between four developmental levels ranging from developing to developed (Northouse, 2016). This first level D1 includes the developing follower as an enthusiastic beginner immediately followed by the second level D2 representative of the disillusioned learner. Level D3 represents the capable but cautious contributor, while level D4 represents the self-reliant achiever that is developed (Northouse, 2016; The Ken Blanchard Companies, n.d.).

This model focuses on leadership rather than management, thus creating varying starting points in each relationship. The varying starting points support the need of different approaches in leadership style. The first style S1 focuses on giving instruction with low supportive behavior to direct how the goal will be achieved (Northouse, 2016). This style best fits the followers that are least developed requiring more direction; hence the name for S1—being directing (Northouse, 2016). The second style S2 is high directive and high supportive producing a coaching style. Northouse (2016) references this style as an extension to S1 because the leader is still responsible to direct how and what goal will be achieved. The third style S3 holds a low directive and high supportive approach giving followers more control, but leaders remain available for collaborative guidance (Northouse, 2016). Last, the fourth style S4 provides low directive and low support. This delegating approach promotes the followers' increased involvement to control the details of the goal achievement with minimum support from the leader (Northouse, 2016).

To use the situational approach most effectively, Hersey and Blanchard (1988) recognized that the first step is to identify the situation in need of influence. Then it is important to accurately diagnose the level of development, readiness, and motivation of the group or individual followers. This then allows the leader to appropriately identify which leadership style would be most effective—S1, S2, S3, or S4 (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). The goal is to reach a "high probability match"—the leader's behavior corresponds best to the development level of the follower (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988, p. 182).

Situational Approach in Education

Flexibility and adaptability are components in applying the SLII model (Raza & Sikandar, 2018). Education is a field that requires flexibility and adaptability to lead in the many situations that can occur. The situational approach is founded on the leader's adaptability of applying directive behavior and securing a supportive relationship conditional to the follower's situation (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). Some of these connections have been studied in the field of education with a focus on the application to identified situations.

Raza and Sikandar (2018) explored the effects of situational leadership within the classroom setting. The main goal in their study was to identify the readiness level of the students, then use that information to select a leadership style for the teacher to apply and explore the impact on the student performance (Raza & Sikandar, 2018). They ultimately wanted to test the effectiveness of this model in the classroom. As a result, Raza and Sikandar (2018) concluded that the situational leadership approach established a significant gain in student performance overall but especially in the directing and coaching categories. Due to the study's limited population, they recommended further research to correlate the effects in a broader spectrum (Raza & Sikandar, 2018).

Bush and Glover (2014) completed a different study reviewing the general attributes of contingency models, which includes SLII®, when reviewing multiple school leadership models and theories. In this examination of theoretical literature, Bush and Glover (2014) highlighted multiple researchers demonstrating the alternative advantages to contingent leadership. This type of model was pragmatic and allowed the flexibility to address a situation with the most appropriate response. It gave the adaptability to not follow a one-size-fits-all approach, but one that could address a complex job as seen in education (Bush & Glover, 2014).

Walls (2019) highlighted the value of situational leadership methods in the education of helping equip allied health professionals. She recognized the importance of leadership qualities necessary for nurse practitioners and realized their training is two-fold. Walls (2019) acknowledged the difficulties placed on the practitioners' teachers to lead and develop their nurses in a constant dynamic environment. In her report, she documented the benefits of situational leadership: (a) flexibility in approach; (b) successful collaboration encouraged; (c) adaptability to situations; (d) accommodations to individuals; and (e) supportive with allotment for practice and growth (Walls, 2019). In one statement she stated, "This leadership style incorporates the dimensions of directedness and supportiveness and promotes a method of leading and teaching in which the student can respond, influence and develop confidence" (Walls, 2019, p. 32). Her descriptions align with the challenging environment some principals lead in while still being required to maximize the potential of their teachers, students, and staff.

Walls (2019) also acknowledged that before developing oneself as leaders, how one is led should be considered. She adds that the in-training and professional development training were essential and should be led by example using the situational leadership models (Walls, 2019). This allows a role model to present, support, and demonstrate the practices of situational

leadership that are applicable in everyday experiences, while educating the next leader as is needed for school principals.

Summary and Preview of the Next Chapter

The literature presented included reviews of research concerning the molding of the role of the principal, the history of leadership in education with the principal practices and leadership styles, and the existence of principal development, collectively demonstrating how campus principals have a primary or secondary effect on student success. Evidence of the importance of leadership skills, practices, and use of diverse leadership styles were exposed for better understanding the gap that exists between principal knowledge and practice. Here the lens of the situational approach was offered as an approach to understand the complex nature the principal's role and responsibilities for future professional development.

In the next chapter, I report the research methodology, design, population, data collection, and analysis with its appropriateness to the study and purpose. I discuss in detail the formatting and procedure in discovering a deeper understanding of the theory-to-practice gap within the professional practices of school principals to address the research questions through the lens of the SLII® model and the guidance of the PSEL.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the gap that exists between principal knowledge and practice. With the principal's role being complex, yet essential to the success and achievement of the school, teachers, and students, it was important to attain an exploratory narrative for these experiences to assist in the development and trainings of future principals (Coddard & Miller, 2010; Harris, 2012; Huggins et al., 2017; Moosung, 2016; Scribner & Crow, 2012; Tran & Bon, 2016).

In this chapter, I highlight the methodology, population and sampling, materials and instruments, strategies for data collection, and analysis procedures. The format is discussed in detail with reflection on the trustworthiness and reliability, limitations, delimitations, and ethical considerations of this research with an end goal of answering the research questions that guided this study. These questions included the following:

RQ1. What gaps do high school principals acknowledge exist between principal standards and actual practice?

RQ2. How do high school principals describe their professional practices that contribute to the improvement and retention of student success?

RQ3. How do high school principals identify the level of development for their teachers when addressing daily situations and goals?

RQ4. What do high school principals identify from their professional development to impact their professional practices in support of student success?

Research Design and Method

For this study, a qualitative methodological approach using an exploratory, single embedded case study design was used as the blueprint to address the study's questions, frame the

unit of analysis, and create the criteria for interpreting the data (Yin, 2014). According to Saldaña and Omasta (2018), the methodology is aligned to both the collection methods and the analytic methods. Key attributes of qualitative methodology include "the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15).

For this study, the process of designing a case study is noted to be complex because it is unlike other research methods as it has yet to have a comprehensive design concretely established or codified (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2014). While case studies provide opportunity to closely examine a topic within a bounded system (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), Yin (2014) identified four general types of designs that can be considered as foundational layouts to serve as case study designs. These included Type 1 single holistic design, Type 2 single embedded design, Type 3 multiple holistic design, and Type 4 multiple embedded design (Yin, 2014). After much review, researchers advise to select a design that best suits the topic and its research questions (Yazan, 2015), in which this study was the single embedded case study design.

A single embedded case study design allowed this study to be a holistic case with embedded subcases (Yin, 2014) that displayed exploratory experiences and stories from campus principals within a bounded system (Creswell, 2014; Kim, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Sandelowski, 1991). As stories were the focal point to making sense of our human experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), it was important to include the ordinary and everyday stories that sometimes go unnoticed (Kim, 2016). In support of creating a case study, I utilized multiple sources of data to provide detailed, in-depth information providing a holistic view of the case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014). For these reasons, I used this approach to attain an in-

depth understanding of the gap present in the principals' knowledge and practice in relation to student academic achievement from the principals' everyday perspectives with supporting sources. This case study design allowed me to explore multiple perspectives for understanding the problem of practice to establish a foundation to create transferability for the future effective development of high school principals.

Population

The population for this study included educational leaders practicing in a mid-Atlantic state. As this state is divided into 24 local school systems using the county lines as boundaries, the embedded unit of analysis included two counties with parallel data documented from its state's studies demonstrating evidence of the problem of practice. With leadership existing at many levels and upholding a diversity in important roles, researchers acknowledge that the principals' everyday thinking, behaviors, traits, and characteristics continue to be at the forefront in creating best practices to ensure student success (Scribner & Crow, 2012; Seashore, 2009). Therefore, this study's sample included two principals from the high school population from two different schools in two different counties from the same mid-Atlantic state.

Sampling

Participant selection depended on the purpose of the study (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). This study included purposeful and convenience sampling to deliberately select information-rich participants that could contribute personal perspectives based on accessibility (Levy, 2017; Merriam &Tisdell, 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015). The alternative option would have been random sampling which benefits studies by minimizing potential influences and bias, but this form of sampling favors generalizations over in-depth information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015). Supporting my decision, researchers explained that the selective process for

purposeful sampling in this study most readily provided the necessary insight because of the principals' position and experiences in connection with the purpose of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

The selective process was created under the guidance of specific boundaries and identity markers (Anderson, 2017; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018), such as an identified state, specific grade level campuses, and access to evaluation reports. The boundaries in this specific study, like state and grade level of high school, were chosen due to the correlation these markers had with the most current data used and highlighted in the problem of this study. The specific counties chosen were picked because of the accessibility I had to the local high school principals for recruitment (Leavy, 2017). The required agreement for principals to share their evaluations was used to directly match it to campus student achievement data as discussed in the literature. The sampling of these specific principal participants and their campuses made them a part of purposeful sampling that yielded relevant information for better understanding the phenomenon in this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

As a part of finalizing my sample, I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from Abilene Christian University (Appendix A) and the IRB from the local counties before conducting the study. I then followed through with emails to each high school principal within each county to share details of the study, requisitions, and request for participation from anyone who fit the selective markers in my study. For example, a three-year marker was purposely prescribed to ensure the principal was the leader of a high school campus during the 2018-2019 school year before the pandemic. This was to ensure the familiarity and usage of the PSEL as it was the year it was introduced across the state. This specific year was also key to eliminating any gaps in connecting the available report card data to each campus

principal because of temporary documentation pauses due to the pandemic. The participant selection was then finalized once they fit the specific identity markers of working as a high school principal within the county and agreed to share their 2018-2019 principal evaluations.

Data Sources

The design of this case study included data sources from interview questionnaires, principal evaluations under the lens of the PSEL, state school report cards, and a collection of the situational leadership style summary/self-assessment survey. Since qualitative studies focus on saturation versus quantity (Creswell, 2014), this design allowed the opportunity for trustworthiness to flourish in this study when collecting a comprehensive understanding from multiple sources (Palinkas et al., 2015). The variation of data sources was specifically chosen to help gather information for understanding the multifaceted narratives of the participants set within the study (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The data collection and the analysis plan for this study was threefold because there were three forms of sources used in the data collection. The data sources included a combination of artifacts in the form of documents, video-recorded interviews, and surveys. Depending on each source, the preparation and organization of the data collected guided the analysis procedure (Leavy, 2017). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that data collection and analysis are dynamic and should begin simultaneously even if they do not end together. I discuss the three forms of data collection and analysis in detail as they were collectively used to establish internal validity through triangulation (Anderson, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Documents

The first data collection was in the form of researcher-generated documents. These types of documents are commonly available as public record or as private documents and are not created with the purpose of the study but are already preexistent (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The purpose of using researcher-generated documents was to verify the problem of practice by relating school principal evaluations to student achievement at their respective campuses. Researchers consider this source of data as objective, since the information cannot be altered due to the researcher or the present study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, I used the research-generated documents confirm how the participants are evaluated in comparison to their campus data for student success included their principal evaluations under the lens of the PSEL and their state report cards for the 2018-2019 school year.

The PSEL were the standards embraced by the state requiring all principals' participation in a yearly evaluation that is true or adapted by their respective counties (Appendix B). The PSEL embodies "a research- and practice-based understanding" between student learning and the campus leadership (NPBEA, 2015, p. 3). These standards were designed for principals to reflect on how their leadership expectations are interdependent to promote student success. The PSEL standards used by the identified counties included the following: "(1) mission, vision, and core values; (2) ethics and professional norms; (3) equity and cultural responsiveness; (4) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (5) community of care and support for students; (6) professional capacity of school personnel; (7) professional community for teachers and staff; (8) meaningful engagement of families and community; (9) operations and management; and (10) school improvement" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 3). With these standards, a display of holistic connections between school leadership domains and student success were displayed (NPBEA, 2015).

However, since the evaluation data for each principal were not in the public domain, I requested these data as a requirement from each participating principal. Although each principal had an understanding that each PSEL standard was valuable to the overall spectrum of the educational leader, only standards number 1, 4, 6, and 10 were used to guide the interview because they carried overlapping attributes of all 10 standards.

The State Report Cards (Appendix C) for each campus were available publicly and were retrieved online from the state educational website. Information such as demographic data, enrollment numbers, attendance rates, targeted math and ELA (English Language Arts) scores, and graduation rates were available for each campus online. The State Report Card file incorporates the total earned percent calculated per each campus's identified performance indicators. The indicators included were academic achievement, graduation rate, progress towards English language proficiency, readiness for postsecondary success, school quality, and student success. Collectively, the overall percentage score for these indicators were given and categorized into a 5-star rating. For example, 1-star schools demonstrated less than 30% of total earned points, 2-star schools maintained between 30% and 45% of total points earned, and 3-star schools had at least 45% to 60% total points earned, while 4-star schools averaged 60% to 75%, and 5-star schools achieved a minimum of 75% of total points earned. Normally, this information is released yearly, but because of the pandemic early in 2020, this group of information was last released publicly during the 2018-2019 school year.

The goal in analyzing these two documents was to identify existing patterns between the two documents per principal and campus to determine the relationship of principal practice to student data (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Specifically for this study, the 2018-2019 school year was the year of focus because it was the year PSEL was first implemented and the most recent

year available for state report cards due to the unexpected impact of the coronavirus pandemic. In reviewing each campus report card, I hoped to identify specific situations relevant to each campus that validated the problem of practice and provided support to the case study with the most current information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The alternate goal in this document analysis was to establish supporting data and assistance to the interpretation of the interviews with the PSEL standards of 1, 4, 6, 10 from each evaluation. This support for the case study depended on induction, abduction, and deduction in formulating common patterns and threads of these documents (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

Interviews

Interviews allowed me to collect meaningful data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interview protocol (Appendix D) in this study was the primary source used for gathering first-person narrative accounts from the participants to understand the problem of practice. The protocol's development was created under the lenses of the PSEL standards and concepts from situational theory. It is a questionnaire of seven sets of neutral open-ended questions that focus on the research questions and purpose of the study. Using semistructured interviews allowed me to control the line of questioning but still allowed the participant to create the narrative (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

In this case, the semistructured interviews took place with participating campus principals via video conference to better understand the day-to-day stories behind their leadership practices. The logistics to gather the narrative information was in close but distant proximity as in face-to-face conversation through video conferences and in their own setting to support their comfort zone (Creswell, 2014). The site of each participant consisted of a setting of their choice to eliminate restrictions or discomfort. Since the investigation occurred through video conferences

and out of respect for the healthy practices used during the recent pandemic, the rationale for the natural setting of a location was to ensure the participants were in an atmosphere of familiarity and confidence (Creswell, 2014).

As interviews were used as the primary source of data, the interview protocol (Appendix D) consisted of a welcoming statement to set the tone, set the expectations, and review any consent materials. The interview continued with a set of background questions to establish some rapport and then moved into the questions focused on the study. The interviews followed a semistructured format to allow for flexibility in the conversation with some structure to ensure a specific track of questions are asked and specific information gathered (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interview questionnaire was presented in a logical, natural order that supported an effortless transition from one question to the next. At the end of the interview session, I closed with a concluding script (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

During each one-on-one interview, I recorded the Zoom meeting while taking notes during the process as I followed the protocol script and listened to the participant as they dialogued with me from beginning to end. It was important to establish rapport through the interview with active listening using eye contact and gestures throughout the interview (Leavy, 2017). I asked probing questions from my questionnaire to collect in-depth information that supported each participant to tell their story (Leavy, 2017). I was also mindful of any markers dropped within their answers to later review and determine if it is a topic worth exploring (Leavy, 2017). At the conclusion of the interview, I secured closure by allowing the participant to add anything they felt pertinent to my study. My goal was to ensure that together we were working towards understanding and reconstructing their story while maintaining confidentiality (Kim, 2016).

Transcribing Interviews. To properly analyze the interview data collected, I used the trusted services of TranscriptionPuppy.com to transcribe my audio recordings of each interview. The Transcription Puppy company is recognized for its use of expert transcribers, confidentiality, quick turnaround, and 99% guaranteed accuracy (Transcription Puppy, n.d.). This allowed me to member check with my participants within a timely manner and I was able to proceed with manually coding their story. The coding consisted of multiple cycles to discover categories, themes, and patterns through data condensation (Miles et al., 2020).

Coding Interviews. In vivo coding was the qualitative coding method I used for the first cycle of coding of the whole interview. It created foundational codes to help translate the stories of my participants using their own words. Common phrases repeated by participants were used to highlight emergent concepts and trends (Miles et al., 2020). In using this method of coding, I was able to summarize segments of the voice and story each participant shared to set the platform for the next cycle, which ended up being slightly different for the personal questions section versus the section questions focused on the study, but this was still dramaturgical coding.

For the personal introductory section, the second cycle was influenced by dramaturgical coding. This section contained rich background information that exposed the foundational depths of each principal. I was able to approach this section of the interview to discover "the qualities, perspectives, and drives of the participants" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 187). Dramaturgical coding allowed me to identify strategy codes that consisted of the following: (1) the "motives" and "objectives"; (2) the "conflicts or obstacles" present; (3) the "tactics or strategies" used; (4) the "attitudes" towards the situation; (5) and the" emotions experienced" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 186).

For the following set of questions in the interview, I continued with dramaturgical coding as it allowed me to dig deeper into understanding the actions and motives that were put into

existence by each participant (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). This coding process "provides a deep understanding of how humans in social action, reaction, and interaction interpret and manage conflict" (Saldaña, 2021, p.187). It was their story that was important and dramaturgical coding allowed me to compare each participant within the same bounded system of the case study.

Throughout this coding process, I worked loosely with the codes as it was recommended to maintain an elasticity until enough supportive data was grounded to shape recognizable patterns (Miles et al., 2020). These patterns look like themes, categories, causes, or explanations, which were then organized as a narrative description or as visual entities using matrices, networks, and graphics (Miles et al., 2020, p. 83). It was my plan to create a matrix with the codes from the first cycle to visually sort the in vivo descriptors with subcoding tags from the dramaturgical codes, and in so doing, expose the categories and threading themes.

Surveys

The last set of data was in the form of a multiple-choice survey titled Situational Leadership Style Summary/Self-Assessment (Appendix E). The current version that was used came from the Life Flow Balance Coaching and Consulting website. It was a free download available at the "Leadership Development Coaching" section under a "What's your leadership style" link (Life Flow Balance Coaching & Consulting Ltd., n.d.). The version used was minutely adapted from the original Hersey and Blanchard (1969) leader effectiveness and adaptability description assessment. The questionnaire was short in length and was distributed to each participant via email once they had submitted a copy of their principal evaluation and secured an interview date. This only took a few minutes to answer but was not required for submission until the date of their interview.

The purpose of using the Situational Leadership Style Summary/Self-Assessment in my study was for participants to self-identify leadership tendencies they believed they practiced in their leadership role per each scenario. This tool was originally created to be able to consider important leadership dimensions while looking at the leader behavior in response to the maturity level of followers per situation (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969). While participants responded with corresponding action statements, their choices were aligned with one of the four leadership styles presented in the SLII® model with the aid of the Situational Leadership Style Summary Rubric (Appendix F). The preferred style or differentiation of styles was then calculated by each answer tabulated and was used to support interpretation of prior data. The goal for the use of this data source was to construct triangulation, credibility, and trustworthiness to the study and its stakeholders (Leavy, 2017).

After all data were collected, I needed to be mindful of the level of saturation acquired in the data collection process to shift my focus to in-depth analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Within this process, there were exercises of jotting and analytic memos applicable in each phase. I wrote notes in a sidebar panel that included my feelings, opinions, observations, or cross-referencing ideas that happened during and after interviews and analyzing documents (Miles et al., 2020). In contrast, analytic memos included my elaborate reflections and self-reporting drafts that contributed to the foundation of my final report. The common threads and themes from each data source collectively created the meta-themes and final analysis summary.

Establishing Trustworthiness

To establish validity of the research process and its findings, I practiced measures to fulfill the criteria of credibility and reliability to institute the validation and trustworthiness of this study (Creswell, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Credibility was established with the

practice of member checking that allowed opportunity for the participants to ensure accurate data had been collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member checking was performed both during and after the interview process to verify the collection of participant authenticity in responses and experiences. Triangulation was another measure in place with the use of researcher-generated documents, leadership surveys, and semistructured interviews to strengthen the credibility of the study. Reliability in a qualitative study was the extent that the data given and collected were consistent and dependable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To establish this, an interview script was used to create a consistent line of questions during the interview. The principal evaluation and State Report Card were also used to ensure dependable and consistent sources while retracting common reliable data. As in any research study, the trustworthiness and validity of the process and findings were important, but so was the role and ethical practices of the researcher.

Ethical Considerations

Before I began this study, I requested approval from Abilene Christian University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for permission to proceed. I then proceeded to request approval from local school county IRBs for permission to work with their principals as well. By aligning with the ethical standards for human research, I ensured all participants were properly informed with consent documents of the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The participants were confidentially given the opportunity to ask questions and given the opportunity to voluntarily agree to participate with the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. IRB approval from both ACU and local school counties ensured that the research was conducted in an ethical manner.

During the research process, my integrity depended on the ethical practices and research protocols exercised. The ethical integrity of research was interwoven throughout the study from

beginning to end (Roberts, 2010). It ranged from data collection and analysis, to respecting the participants and research site, and to the writing and disseminating of research (Roberts, 2010). Roberts (2010) adds that "what is considered ethical varies from person to person and from institution to institution" (p. 31). This is an example of how our world views influence our choices whether it be in research, practice, or how we choose to handle things. Fortunately, most organizations have designated set standards or principles in place to monitor practices of research (Roberts, 2010). This was important because as history has proven, not everyone has the best interest of humankind in mind. To ensure the ethical integrity of the study, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), also known as the Ethics Committee, was in place to protect the safety and well-being of all stakeholders: the participants, the researchers, and the institutions (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

To minimize ethical concerns, I also ensured the authorization from the local school system and secured the collection of informed consents from each voluntary participant. Pseudonyms were assigned to respect the privacy of the participants and locations, while sources were made available for any collectable data. It was important for a trusting rapport to be established prior to the interviews and in conversation respecting the confidentiality of each participant and their narratives. Again, participants were ensured of their opportunity to question and relay any concerns as it related to the study and choice of participation.

Assumptions

In this study, I made specific assumptions regarding the research and the voluntary participants. My first assumption was that there is a current relationship between principal evaluations, student learning, and professional developments. This assumption extended into the expectation that each participant is knowledgeable and well-versed of the PSEL and its

relationship with student learning. Second, I trusted that the PSEL evaluators were able to keep any biases to a minimum by following the rubric objectively. Last, I assumed that the participants would honestly share and accurately recall their personal experiences and stories. Obtaining complete and truthful information was critical to the revelation of each participant's story and overall outcome.

Limitations

Limitations are the constraints that are not controlled by the researcher but that have an influence on the data collected and how it is interpreted (Terrell, 2016). The Covid-19 pandemic restricted the traditional day-to-day activities in the educational system. This limited the opportunity to have access to any current PSEL completions since 2018, prepandemic, as well as customary practices of instruction and availability of student assessment data. This added to the questionable level of practice and implementation of the PSEL as it had only been integrated into each county in 2018. Although the PSEL was a state-driven evaluation piece, the flexibility and rigorous approach of its use at each county remained questionable.

Another limitation that is frequently noted was the validity of each participant's response. A possible external factor could have included their individual approach to the study and how they answered the questions asked in the interview. Some participants could have remained partial in contributing 100% while others may have been more focused on being judged versus being transparent. Inadvertently these types of limitations could have skewed the data.

Delimitations

In creating this study, certain boundaries were set in place to be able to focus on the problem of study and access data from participants from similar settings and expectations (Anderson, 2017; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The bounded system allowed me to narrow my

participant group to be within local counties that were accessible, principals practicing at the high-school level, and ensuring the participants were head principals leading their own campuses within the specific timeline. The data collected were limited to only the selected participating principals and their campus experiences. Therefore, this study did not include assistant principals, elementary and middle schools' principals, or any outside county school system other than the one referenced for this research. I was able to maintain focus within these delimitations.

Summary

This chapter included the research design and methodology of the study, including population and sampling, materials and instruments, and strategies for data collection with analysis procedures. The layout of this case study included the details with reflection on the trustworthiness and reliability, limitations and delimitations, and ethical considerations of a holistic display of experiences and stories from each participant (Creswell, 2014; Kim, 2016; Sandelowski, 1991). This holistic approach stimulated the reporting of firsthand experiences by the principals, revealing their knowledge and practice from their own everyday perspectives. This resulted with supporting output towards the purpose in understanding the gap that exists between principal knowledge and practice as it affects student achievement.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the gap between principal knowledge and their practice to achieving student achievement. A case study methodology was utilized to collect and analyze data from two principals from two different counties within one mid-Atlantic state. Data collection included recorded principal interviews, principal evaluations, school report cards, and situational leadership self-assessments. The data analysis process began simultaneously and remained ongoing from beginning to the end. Interviews collected were transcribed and vetted by each participant before being analyzed while documents were collected and analyzed to add layers to the case study. The inclusion of each source was purposely guided by the research questions and filtered through the lenses of the PSEL and the situational approach to leadership. The research questions of this study included:

RQ1. What gaps do high school principals acknowledge exist between principal standards and actual practice?

RQ2. How do high school principals describe their professional practices that contribute to the improvement and retention of student success?

RQ3. How do high school principals identify the level of development for their teachers when addressing daily situations and goals?

RQ4. What do high school principals identify from their professional development to impact their professional practices in support of student success?

Participant Profiles

Participants within the study were noted to represent two units of analysis for this single embedded case. The two principals that volunteered and their campuses from 2018-2019 school year were purposely selected to fit specific identity markers for research purposes. For research

and confidentiality purposes, I gave pseudonyms for each participant: Eddy and Allie. Each participant was asked a set of five introductory questions at the beginning of their interviews to establish familiarity of their journey to their current-day position. The individual characteristics were captured and catalogued via dramaturgical coding and are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Participants	Objectives	Conflicts	Tactics	Attitudes	Emotions
Eddy	establish a new career; finalize credentials; career ladder	no set career; less pay; limitations; lack of knowledge	accept intro position; effort to grow; receptive to feedback; networking; learn on the job	unsure; boredom; nonchalant; confident; humbled	rejection; bitter/revenge; dislike; special
Allie	educated for career; build resume; career ladder	needed to be challenged	achieve awards; receptive to feedback; serve on committees; complete principal program; mentor/teach others	challenging but pleasing; loves education; forward thinking	happy; content; special

The dramaturgical coding process was used to approach the personal narratives for exploration of intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences to better understand the participants (Saldaña, 2021). The categories used in the table above include objectives, conflicts, tactics, attitudes, and emotions. Objectives represented their motives, conflicts were for obstacles along

the way, tactics presented the strategies they used, attitudes characterized their way of thinking, and emotions were for the feelings they experienced (Saldaña, 2021). Collectively these data allowed for a deeper understanding of their journey as a high school principal in education.

For example, Eddy's journey to becoming an educator was from a nontraditional pathway that required extra effort to learn the system and attain credentials. He describes himself as follows: "[I] sort of tripped into education." Although his pathway faced rejection at each level, which created negative emotions and experiences along the way, his openness to feedback and eagerness to succeed did not stop him from meeting his goals. As he was teaching and coaching, he "got a hankering for leadership" and felt that he "needed to have more influence." His success and networking skills allowed him to get his foot in the door for him to move up the career ladder.

Allie shared that he purposely went to school to become an educator, as it was his parents that influenced his career choice. The admiration toward his mom was evident when he shared that his mom was "a special education teacher for 25 years." As he continued his journey as a middle school principal, his mentor planted the seed that "you need something that's more challenging" and recommended him to the associate superintendent of high schools. These initial conversations with each of the participants demonstrated very different journeys leading to similar outcomes: both became principals and earned doctorates.

Each participant had been a high school principal of a campus for several years. As they had changed campuses since 2018-2019, they also earned the title and recognition as a Doctor of Education. This fact does not change the data from 2018-2019 school year in which the results recognize that their evaluations reflected their work, but the campus report card demonstrated that student assessment scores were still suffering. Table 2 lists their individual attributes in

relationship to their 2018-2019 campus data and evaluations. These were a vital component of this research as it validated the most recent gap between their knowledge and their practice as it relates to student achievement.

Table 2

Attributes of Participants, Evaluations, and Campuses

Prior COVID	Participants			
	Eddy		Allie	
Years of Service thru 2018-2019	17 years and started as a paraprofessional		15 years and started as a teacher	
Years as Principal at 2018-2019 Campus	2nd year		1st year	
Principal Evaluation for 2018-2019	Highly Effective		Highly Effective	
Campus Rating in 2018-2019	2 out of 5 stars	35% total points earned	2 out of 5 stars	37% total points earned
Campus Report Card for 2018-2019	ELA - Did not meet standards	MATH - Did not meet standards	ELA - Did not meet standards	MATH - Did not meet standards
Campus Highlights for 2018-2019	Annual target met for readiness for postsecondary		Improvement in academic achievement; Annual target met for English language proficiency	

Although the campus report cards provided evidence that the students did not meet standards in ELA and Math, each participant was able to show areas of improvement for each of their campuses during that year. With Eddy's second year at his campus, he met the annual target of readiness for postsecondary. Allie, in the first year at his campus, was acknowledged for an improvement in academic achievement and had met the annual target for English language

proficiency. One thing that was not referenced in the table was that Eddy's campus was an alternative campus, while Allie's was a traditional campus.

Research Question 1

RQ1: What gaps do high school principals acknowledge to exist between standards and practice? For this question, I explored the dialogue from the interviews and the data from the principal evaluations. From these interviews, each participant shared their day-to-day experiences that included standard-driven practices with district-mandated strategies. What the participants shared in their interviews aligned with the principal standards, district-mandated practices, and details from the principal evaluations. Collectively, the common underlying theme for the gap was the human factor because the results were clear that both Eddy and Allie followed through with their principal standards.

One of Allie's mantras in supporting the standards was that "we're one family, we're one mission and one vision—that's the success for every child." He did not allow interference with the goal at hand. He described "the whole name and need philosophy," a district strategy in which principals are required to know all their students by name and their specific, most pressing need. When it came to knowing the students, he described his teamwork in practice: "You can have systems in place where if I don't know, I know who I can go to that will know."

Eddy's evaluation provided evidence that his practices were standard-based, and to be described as someone who "articulates and cultivates core values that define the school's culture and stress the imperative of child-centered education." Eddy mentioned that as principal, he "spends a lot of time . . . setting the table for students' achievement," while "teachers are the ones that are on the ground making the magic." One of Eddy's shared strengths was that he

"always empowered . . . a diverse group of people to achieve a common goal." He depended on others to fulfill the full effects of teamwork.

Table 3

Professional Standards of Educational Leaders and Participant Practice

PSEL	Descriptor	Common practices
(1) Mission, Vision, and Core Values	develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student	Student-Centered, Goal-Oriented, Relationships
(4) Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote student success and well-being	Teamwork, Reflection, Relationships, High Expectations
(6) Professional Capacity of School Personnel	develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student's academic success and well-being	Relationships, Situational Leadership, Reflection, Awareness
(10) School Improvement	act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being	Awareness, Reflection, Relationships, Self-Evaluate

There were examples in the interview data that clearly demonstrated that Eddy and Allie followed through with practicing strategies that supported principal standards. For this question, common practices are categorized in Table 3. However, the gap that they experienced was not so much between their standards and practice, but the human element that affected the outcome of their roles. Eddy shared how "student success is not just academic success," because to him the

"whole purpose of school is to transition" and each "journey is unique for each student." Allie added that "there's nothing in the standards that says, how do you deal with a child that intentionally fails," but he understood that the guidance was there. He said, "They [principal standards and practices] don't take into account the human side of it."

Research Question 2

RQ2: How do high school principals describe their professional practices that contribute to the improvement and retention of student success? Answers were revealed in the data for this question. The emerging themes and areas of focus from the interviews with support from the results of the Situational Leadership Survey are reported in Table 4 and Table 5. The resulting data and themes were insightful on the day-to-day professional practices the participants felt contributed to the improvement and retention of student achievement.

Table 4

Emerging Themes With Areas of Focus and Practice

Themes	Areas of focus and practice
Relationships	students' name and need; well-being of teachers; interdependence with school system
Awareness	knowing your role to lead, build, and support; being pro-active; understanding the cascading effect
Professional Capacity	inclusive professional development; invitational inquiry; developing reflective practitioners; providing specific feedback

Interview Data

After analyzing the interview data from both participants, relationships, awareness, and building professional capacity were common themes found in their stories of professional practices in place to support student success. Each participant expressed the importance of creating a quality learning culture with high expectations for all students. It was evident in their

stories that relationships were a common thread and area of focus alongside the awareness to make connections and identify situations among the students and teachers.

Eddy stated that his role as a campus principal was "to provide high quality and rigorous instruction for all students and to create a safe and nurturing learning environment where teaching and learning can happen at a high level." Relationships were "extremely important" and carried "a direct relationship on the influence on student achievement." He said, "It's being the parent of the student while the parents are at work and the student is under your care." He also referenced key attributes for a campus principal to be successful with their students' success: "to be knowledgeable, to be caring, to be supportive, and to have high expectations for all."

Eddy was aware that the importance of relationships not only with students but also teachers because they "are the ones that are on the ground making the magic happen." He also shared how he depended on off-campus departmental teams, like the curriculum team, to share their expertise and provide professional development to his teacher leaders. He stated, "I trust other experts to tell me what it is that they need to learn." Eddy believed that it was up to him to set the stage for his teachers to succeed. He summarized it as follows: "In a principal's evaluation, it's how well you've created, how well you've set the table for dinner that is high quality teaching and learning."

As a leader, Eddy also focused on developing the professional capacity of his team by developing the empowerment of his teachers. He said, "A lot of it comes from a coaching background . . . you know giving people the skills and the tools to achieve a task and then supporting them." In his follow-ups, he strongly believed in the "opportunity to reflect" with his infamous question, "Knowing what you know now, what would you have done differently?" He

stated, “It’s all about cultivating that reflective piece . . . and then become instructional entrepreneurs.”

Allie concurred that his role was “to cultivate a learning culture that breeds successful students in the school.” He stated that “my overall role is to make sure that school operates successfully” and that when the students graduate, “they have some realm of success.” He claimed, “my success should be tied to their success.” He believed that there was a direct relationship between a campus principal and their students. “They have to know you even more than you really know them.”

Building relationships was “number one” in Allie’s mind. He followed and led his team to follow through with the “name and need” philosophy. It required him to know each of the students by name and a need in their lives. He stated, “To know every child by name and need is very difficult, but it’s required if you want to be successful.” He added, “Also on the same token, you’ve got to have a relationship with your staff, because if they don’t understand what your expectations are, then your children are not going to be successful anyway.”

Allie was aware that his influence on the improvement and retention of student success was not a solo practice. He learned early in his career that “I have to work through other people and developing them in their areas to make the school successful.” He added that in his practice, “I draw correlations from my staff all the time between the standardized state expectations in the common core versus the student grades and then I triangulate that with the levels of rigor.” He shared that he included his teachers in observations of each other with rubrics to understand the process. He coached on their opportunities to be able to reflect on matching their teaching to each standard. He explained to them, “Because your state is going to test you on the framework versus what you are testing your students in your classroom on whatever you have developed

from your lesson." Allie was very familiar with curriculum and instruction. Unlike Eddy, therefore, he was able to lead and coach from experience in addition to the support the district provided.

Allie proceeded to share his ideology in developing his team's professional capacity. It was under the district guidance of the coaching philosophy known as the "invitational inquiry." Here he focused on the idea of "where you really ask a lot of questions and not just jump out and say, well, this was excellent. No, I'm very specific." He added that certain practices of leadership required different approaches to be able to lead his team in the best way. There was a time to facilitate, direct, observe, and coach. He realized, "I have to implement, I have to balance what the district is requiring and what is best for the building and best for the kids in their class."

Situational Leadership Surveys

Collectively, both Eddy and Allie favored and practiced a coaching style in their everyday practice as they shared their stories. This was supported by the results from the Situational Leadership Survey, as reported in Table 5.

Table 5

Situational Leadership Survey Results

Participants	Situational Leadership Styles			
	Directing	Coaching	Facilitating	Observing
Eddy	1	6	3	2
Allie	3	7	2	0
Similarities in Choices	1	3	1	0

The number one leadership style from Table 5 was identified as *coaching* by both participants. They differed on remaining styles as Eddy preferred the following order after coaching: *facilitating*, *observing*, and *directing*. Allie preferred *directing* and *facilitating*, while

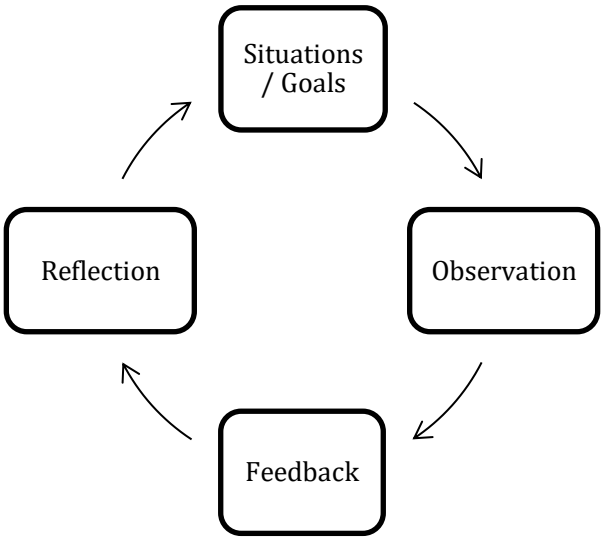
observing was not acknowledged to be used in the case of this survey. Interestingly, they shared a few similarities in answer choices in *coaching* and only one similarity in *facilitating* and *directing*. This coincides with the practice of coaching that was commonly expressed in their interviews with respect to the other options as they saw fit to situations within their relationships and building of teachers' capacity.

Research Question 3

RQ3: How do high school principals identify the level of development for all their teachers and staff when addressing daily situations and goals? The tactics utilized by Eddy and Allie discovered within the threading themes included observations, feedback, and reflection. Figure 2 illustrates the flow of the processes in practice that was explained by each participant.

Figure 2

Principal Tactics Flow Chart



The practice of observation, feedback, and reflection was evident in Eddy's and Allie's tactics. Each practiced these tactics to gain an awareness of what was going on at their schools and to effectively communicate to the needs of individuals. Eddy confirmed the necessity of this practice when he shared that one of his challenges consisted of "shaping the attitudes and belief

systems of adults." Allie added that his awareness birthed from observing a lack of accountability. He said that "a growth mindset is difficult for some." Similarly, they each practiced the skill of observation to become aware and provided feedback with opportunity for reflection for the development of their teachers.

Eddy's Story

Eddy held himself accountable "to create a safe and nurturing learning environment where teaching and learning can happen at a high level." His practices to support his role included time to "observe and analyze instruction." He included his "team of administrators" and "team of teacher leaders" to follow his lead in this practice. He acknowledged that "informal observations" was a successful strategy because it was "less threatening, more supportive, and creates an opportunity to have different snapshots in time to collect data." His goal was to better understand "a deeper picture" collectively.

Eddy was on a journey to "create a self-fulfilling organization, that's sustainable." He made sure that he was "providing specific feedback" and "letting people know exactly what their expectations are" in support of their development. He wanted his teachers to "see me [him] as a person, not as somebody who's, you know, the eye in the sky or the ivory tower," so he said he liked to lead from the middle. He did not want his push of wanting to be excellent as an element that would be "counterproductive to someone because they don't, they don't have the same goal." Through observation and feedback, he would say "Let's find ways that we can improve your craft."

Eddy would then measure "the impact of that feedback in trying to create reflective practitioners." He commented that the teachers needed "to know that I'm invested in them" and "know that they can be excellent." He understood that he had to "shift your [his] leadership to be

able to meet their [teachers] specific needs." He was aware that "it's real easy to get jaded" and "it's hard to identify." Even so, Eddy strived to make his teachers "feel confident enough to take a risk instructionally, because I think that's how this industry continuously grows and improves." Eddy's goal was for all his teachers to "be able to reflect on their practices" and be able to identify "what worked" and "what didn't work."

Allie's Story

Allie held himself accountable to "cultivate a learning culture that breeds successful students in school." His practices were in response to what he observed and the need of creating a culture of accountability to make sure "teachers are actually teaching every day" and students are "attending those classes every day, completing their work." He understood he had the responsibility of "developing them [teachers] in their areas to make the school successful."

Allie strived to get his staff to trust in him so that he could motivate them to see the bigger picture and to "develop your [their] own understanding" of the mission and their purpose. He believed success looked like "enjoying themselves, but that there's data to support that they're meeting or exceeding state expectations." He would take the time to "triangulate" data with teachers because not only he would observe, but he would "always have them observe," too. The practice of observation was shared to bring awareness and conversation of each connection within standards, lessons, and student grades to the forefront.

Allie also acknowledged that not only was the instruction important to observe, but also the environment in which students were sitting in. He said, "You can't really get to that [rigor] until you address what their classroom environment looks like, how they manage their classroom." He added that he "knew it was an issue, simply because I had observed them." From

observations, he learned he had to be “very specific with feedback,” even with praise, and “slow down and address one piece at a time” in areas of growth to best build their individual capacities.

In his practice, Allie claimed that he preferred facilitating, but now he also focused on using a coaching philosophy to get them “through XYZ” but never “a do-this-or-else kind of culture.” The combination was to make the teachers reflect by “think[ing] about whatever the question is.” His goal was to have his teachers have “some belief in it” or “whatever the topic is” because “it tells me [him] that you [teachers] internalize it and are at least willing to trust enough . . . at least make an attempt.” Then he would “observe you [teachers] in performing and while performing or right afterward giving feedback.” Allie’s practice was not black and white as it included an “allow[ance] you [for teachers] to move at your [their] own pace within that [my] pace.”

Together Eddy and Allie saw success in their day-to-day practices addressing levels of developments through observation, feedback, and reflection. Allie felt that he felt most success when he observed “those [ideas] implemented in the classroom.” This reinforced that “this educator has grown based on their interactions with me or someone on my team.” Eddy added that he felt successful with individuals when he was “empowering a diverse group of people to achieve a common goal” and it gets done. They both believed that their teachers’ success was connected to them and their leadership.

Research Question 4

RQ4: What do high school principals identify from their professional development to impact their professional practices and support of student success? For this question, I explored the data from the interviews, data from the principal evaluations, and the data from the survey. Examples from the results created three underlining themes: What I learned from mentors and

experience; what I learned from district mandates and philosophies; and what I wish was available for future growth.

Mentors and Experiences

Eddy and Allie were in the beginning years of serving as high school principals of their respective campuses during the 2018-2019 school year. Eddy was in his second year and Allie was in his first year at their first assigned high schools as a high school campus principal. Their promotions to these positions were set up for them by mentor principals and connections they had established. However, each story differed.

Eddy's Experiences. Eddy's journey began as a paraprofessional and coach. His relationship with the head coach who recruited him into the field of education was also the mentor that encouraged him to be patient when he ran into some obstacles in becoming a certified teacher. He remembered his mentor telling him, "Don't do anything, you never know what's going to happen." Shortly afterward he was introduced to an individual in a state-level position. His mentor described Eddy to this individual as "a great coach . . . positive male role model, would be a great teacher, but he can't get in any programs." Because of this relationship, Eddy was able to begin his journey into the world of education as a teacher and coach.

After Eddy had become confident as a teacher, he encountered an "administrator [who] was someone I [he] didn't respect too much." So, he "got a hankering for leadership" and "was like, well I should have more influence." After becoming an assistant principal, he then desired to take the next step to become a campus principal. Yet as a prerequisite, he had to first become a principal intern, "which is basically an assistant principal," during a specified time with principal duties. To get this opportunity, it required that he participate in a climate survey during his assistant principal role. However, he ran into obstacles because the results of the climate survey

held him back. Eddy's response to it was, "Well, you know, it was good for the kids. It wasn't good for the adults, I guess. But, you know, this is what I am supposed to do."

Eddy did not stop trying and he remained open to feedback and followed through with what his then principal and mentor recommended. Their suggestion was to "consider a different experience" by transferring schools as an assistant principal. Eddy followed through because he believed that since he was "a person that gives feedback," he couldn't "give feedback and not apply feedback." After he had transitioned, his former principal was promoted and recommended him to "apply for the principal job because no one knows the school better than you [him]." So, he shared, "I did that and knew [that] I didn't know what I was doing, but figured I'd learn on the job and did and made great things happen for kids."

Supporting Eddy's statement, his evaluation referenced many examples that aligned with his mission during the 2018-2019 school year as the new campus principal. Eddy's supervisor noted that he "articulates and cultivates core values that define the school's culture and stresses the imperative of child-centered education." His supervisor also mentioned Eddy's eagerness to learn and that he "frequently states an interest in feedback." He was recognized as one who focuses "heavily on relationship building," and that he is not afraid to "confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization," and that he "aligns and allocates resources to foster equitable student learning environments." The supervisor also recognized Eddy as a leader who "employs situational-appropriate strategies" within a "shared accountability structure," because he "encourages restorative practices of relationship building, student reflection, and community circles."

Allie's Experiences. Allie's experiences in education started on a more traditional pathway in comparison to Eddy. Allie began his preparation by majoring in education while in

college and was able to go right into the classroom upon graduation. Allie continued his journey receiving “teacher awards and administrator awards,” serving on several committees, and became a “mentor principal for the district.” He was also a part of the “first principal leadership program” and has “come back and actually taught in that program every year.”

So, what persuaded Allie to go in the direction of becoming a high school principal? After becoming a middle school principal, Allie shared that his supervisor and mentor “poured into me that middle school wasn’t it, that I could do more.” This relationship in combination with former established relationships crossed paths when his mentor “recommended me to the associate superintendent of high schools and it just so happened that that was my AP when I was a teacher.” He added, “She already knew who I was because she was one of the people that recommended me to become an AP from a teacher.” She encouraged him and lined up his résumé and experiences. He said she had told him, “It’s very unique to have every level on your résumé. You can say that you have been a principal or assistant principal from a child’s birth, like early education, all the way to finishing graduation.” In addition, the high school he took over was a feeder school for the middle school where he previously held a position.

Once in their positions, both Eddy and Allie faced some individual learning experiences. For example, Eddy acknowledged that when he was a novice administrator, he was told that “the core values will get you through the challenging times, because they speak to who you are and your belief system.” He then shared that he learned that “everyone is a minimalist” and added, “my personal standard is different than your personal standard . . . so I’ve had to differentiate my leadership to maximize or to elevate people’s personal standard of performance.” Allie admitted that he was “very rigid,” “very disciplined,” and “very consistent,” which was viewed as both a strength and an area for growth. Allie continued to share that “my expectations are very high

when you are given the tools you need as a professional," especially for the adults. Yet he learned that "sometimes it just doesn't work like that." He continued and shared, "My supervisor does it all the time, just pulling our coattails . . . one piece at a time. It's clear they don't understand X, so don't give them X, Y, and Z."

District Mandates

Since Eddy and Allie were from different districts, they each had different professional developments enforced at their schools. However, the highlighted one discussed for this study is the PSEL. This was a statewide initiative that Eddy and Allie were both aware of, but they embraced it differently.

Eddy felt that "the validity [of the PSEL] is questionable" and that "it's too cumbersome." He believed that "meaningful feedback needs to be digestible, and it's not digestible." He did say that the first standard, mission, vision, and core values, was the "most important step," but he added that "you cannot achieve your goals as a principal of high-quality teaching and learning if you're unable to have, you know, operations that make sense that are achievable." Although this was his opinion of the PSEL, his principal evaluation scored his practices to be successful across all standards.

In his interview, Eddy did not identify any other district mandates, but his principal evaluation reported him to "devoting time to personal development . . . [and he] has participated in principal PLCs, central service meetings, cluster meetings, and the superintendent's A & S meetings." His evaluator summarized that

> Eddy will continue to make visible his leadership practices and school improvement efforts through ongoing data monitoring of classroom instruction to ensure fidelity of

curriculum implementation, clear structures in place for student intervention and support, and attending to a positive school climate that motivates all school stakeholders.

His evaluator made other statements demonstrating Eddy's practices, which are categorized in Table 6, but it is unclear if these statements were directly related to his district professional development.

Table 6

Evaluation Attributes

Categories of influence	Feedback from Eddy's evaluator
Relationships	• Focused heavily on relationship building with all stakeholders; • encourages restorative practices of relationship building, student reflection, and community circles; • makes connections and brings in experts from central office to support teachers and team.
Culture and Climate	• Establishes and sustain a professional culture of engagement and commitment to shared vision, goals, and objectives pertaining to the education of the whole child; • believes in the power of collaboration; • reflects trust, transparency, and positive intention.
Leadership Approach	• Employs situationally appropriate strategies for improvement, including transformational and incremental, adaptive approaches and attention to different phases of implementation; • provides job-embedded professional learning and continuous improvement experiences that are differentiated and data-informed with results in improvements to professional practice and student learning.

Allie, on the other hand, verbally contributed that the PSEL's purpose was "so you know exactly what the expectations are of a great leader, a successful school leader." He acknowledged

that “for it to be highlighted, just kind of solidifies the fact that, okay, I was already addressing this” and “so I guess being a seasoned principal is the things you would already do if you were a successful leader anyway.” Allie believed that the professional development activities listed on the PSEL was a contributing factor towards his continuous improvement. His principal evaluation supported and demonstrated distinguished performance that were within the PSEL standards, and which was collectively graded by his supervisor, teachers, and students.

Other district performance mandates identified by Allie included StrengthsFinder, Rigor, Name and Need Philosophy, Invitational Inquiry, and DataWise. These were the top choices he mentioned to have a positive effect on his professional development as a campus leader. This was evident throughout the interview as he referenced some in detail and others were just mentioned by name. The summary of descriptors to the ones he explained are listed in Table 7.

Table 7

Professional Developments

Topic (*Category of Influence*)	Descriptions by Allie
Name & Need (*Relationships*)	"It is knowing every child's name and what every child needs in that time, year, or whatever."
Invitational Inquiry (*Leadership Approach*)	"It is a coaching philosophy that we have to turnkey with our staff. For example, when a question is asked, it is addressed with another question. It is meant to make you think and create your own understanding. It becomes a cycle until a solution has been discovered. It will never be a do this or do that."
DataWise (*School Improvement)*	"It makes you really dig into everything you're doing every day. Then you kind of find out where some holes are by prescribing things all the time. Asking questions like "why is this happening?" And then collecting data around why something is happening. Then you make a decision around it, and you test it again repeatedly until you discover the area of need, the root cause, and successful approaches to address it."

Wishful Opportunities

The examples, opportunities, and development that were made accessible to both Eddy and Allie's individual journeys were presented from the results of the data. The interviews allowed them to share their future endeavors in professional development, but it was critical to notate their wishful opportunities or goals that they believed would add support to their roles as a high school principal. This would collectively add to understanding and supporting the role of the principal and any unknown gaps.

Eddy's goal was to "continue to get better every day." He stated, "I'm just, you know, reflecting on my practice every day and asking myself, you know, now that I know how it went,

would I do it differently? Sort of like when I ask my teachers." He continued with examples: "In this role, I say things like, you know I handled that exactly the right way. I didn't have all the information. I didn't consider all the variables and, you know, trying to learn from each experience." He didn't share a specific request for more professional development, just his desire to become a "lifelong learner and, you know, learning more about, you know, leadership and developing high performance teams."

Allie shared that "you don't stop learning"; however, he was more specific and shared that he wished there were "principal therapists." This would be to establish "a confidential space" where you could "get a lot of things out . . . of how you're feeling or whatever the case may be and what you're faced with." This would "be a former principal" that would be familiar with experiences in which "they would have something to tie into it," and "someone you can bounce ideas off of every single day." He added, "If you don't need it that day, you don't need treatment that day. I guess it's the best way to put it, then you don't need it." Allie then expressed that it wasn't like a mentor, but "someone [on whom] they can release this burden . . . , because it's a burden. Although we love it, it's difficult. It is very difficult, and it wears on you."

Summary

In this chapter I reported the findings of the data collected from multiple sources. I then analyzed the views of the principals and documentation as they related to the research questions guided by the PSEL and the lens of the situational approach in leadership. I highlighted integrated themes and categories using a combination of in vivo and dramaturgical coding practices for the principal interviews, principal evaluations, school report cards, and situational leadership self-assessments. The case study's results allowed examples from the holistic stories

of each participant to be showcased in support of understanding the gap between a principal's knowledge and practices related to improving student achievement.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to reveal a deeper understanding of the theory-to practice gap between the professional practices of high school principals and their knowledge for the usage in principal development. The problem addressed in this study was the level of a principal's practice to their knowledge in the production of student success. The blueprint used to address this problem was an exploratory single embedded case study design (Yin, 2014) with two participating high school principals. In this study, I allowed the voice of each principal to be heard by conducting semistructured interviews. Supplementing the high school principal interviews, a combination of artifacts in the form of documents and surveys were also used for data collection from the 2018-2019 school year. Therefore, it should be noted that the data collection included experiences that were tainted within the perspective of pre and post COVID 19.

The data collected was analyzed and coded to display the emerging themes and answers to the four research questions. The questions included:

RQ1. What gaps do high school principals acknowledge exist between principal standards and actual practice?

RQ2. How do high school principals describe their professional practices that contribute to the improvement and retention of student success?

RQ3. How do high school principals identify the level of development for their teachers when addressing daily situations and goals?

RQ4. What do high school principals identify from their professional development to impact their professional practices in support of student success?

I utilized the answers to the four questions to summarize the findings and interpretations of this study in relation to past literature, describe any limitations, and provide recommendations for current application and future research.

Interpretation of Findings in Relation to Past Literature

The data collected for this embedded case study consisted of multiple sources. The analyzing and coding of the data resulted in multiple layers of discovery. The first discovery progressed to gaining a deeper understanding of the participants' journeys in becoming a high school principal. Those results set the stage for the findings in relation to each of the four research questions. Collectively, a response to the problem of practice was manifested and explained.

Summary of Participant Profiles

The principal role is essential to the success and achievement of the school, teachers, and its students (Coddard & Miller, 2010; Harris, 2012; Masewicz & Voel, 2014; Sala et al., 2013; Tran & Bon, 2016). The first objective of this case study was to gather the stories of high school principals to acquire insight of their everyday situations and practices in response to achieving student success. Scribner and Crow (2012) believed that exploring the values, identities, and motivations would help guide reflective developments and understandings in school leaders. In this case study, the first part of the interview was to listen to the fist-hand experiences of the participants' professional journeys in becoming a high school principal. This information was then supplemented with supporting documentation from campus report cards and principal evaluations. The primary theme threading in each of their journeys was relationships in addition to recognizing their individual drive and identities.

Eddy. Eddy comes from a nontraditional journey into the field of education. He faced obstacles in getting his foot in the door, but due to his perseverance and relationships, he was able to begin this new career. As he became confident and excelled in the classroom, he felt that "not everybody had the opportunity to have me, right? So just the lottery and I didn't think was very fair." So, he moved into a departmental chair role and continued to desire to have a greater impact on student achievement and extract experiences from his previous administrators to determines what he wanted to do versus what he did not want to do.

Eddy's progression in his career resulted from his success with his students and specific relationships that opened opportunities that did not fit the norm, such as personal academic grades and popularity. Once he became an assistant principal, he learned a lesson of humility when a climate survey hindered his opportunity to lean into a campus principal role, not once but several times. Eddy was not necessarily occupied with being "liked," but more so on having an opportunity to create an everlasting effect on the students. So he listened to the feedback, reflected, and allowed himself to grow for the sake of having a broader influence of students.

Allie. Allie had a more traditional journey from college to classroom to leadership. He was born into a family of educators, which planted the initial seed for the field, but it was his relationship with mentors that groomed him into leadership. He took pride in his well-deserved recognitions and continued to strive to be better while he mentored others along the way. Allie was what some would call a textbook educator that journeyed through the proper steps, beginning with an education major in college to becoming a classroom teacher, and then completing graduate school to becoming a high school principal. His was a process assumed by many educators, but that did not make it any easier to stand out from the rest.

Allie was a part of “the first principal leadership program that the district sponsored as an internal pipeline program.” He now teaches in the program while serving on several committees. Allie “just loves education” and because of it, felt like he was not even going to work. He did say, “It’s challenging, but I just love doing it.” His main purpose in becoming a high school principal was because “high school sticks with you” and “everyone has high school stories.” Allie’s desire and pride was to make sure he and his staff understood that they are “now guiding a child, you’re creating a memory in a child’s mind that will stick with them for the rest of their life.”

The insight drawn from Eddy and Allie’s stories resonated a personal desire for success and an aspiration to influence. This personal work passion was supported by the encouragement of and experiences with others, both positive and negative. Understanding this how and why brought meaning to specific principal practices. It was identified that Eddy and Allie’s professional growth in knowledge and practice intertwined with relationships as they were mentored in stages of their own development to becoming a campus principal. It could be suggested that the foundation in situational awareness and relationships were indirectly established or reinforced from their personal journeys. This should be evident in my discussion of the data gleaned in relation to the four research questions in this study.

Research Question 1

RQ1: What gaps do high school principals acknowledge exist between principal standards and actual practice? A gap was not directly acknowledged from the analyzed results. There were plenty of examples in the data that showed Eddy and Allie’s common practices aligned with principal standards. The specific standards for review included standards number 2, 4, 6, and 10 from the PSEL. Practices regarding this mission, vision, and core values’ standard

were built upon being student-centered, goal-oriented, and relationships. The standards for curriculum, instruction, and assessment (standard #4) were commonly addressed with high expectations, teamwork, reflection, and relationships. Building the professional capacity of school personnel (standard #6) was addressed through awareness, reflection, and relationships, in addition to the reflective practices of situational leadership. Lastly, the school improvement standard (standard #10) was addressed with practice patterns of awareness, reflection, relationships, and self-evaluation.

Eddy and Allie's professional practices also aligned with the five sets of leadership practices in Robinson and Gray's (2019) research. Those sets included the practice of setting clear expectations, allocating appropriate resources, safeguarding the quality of teaching, providing teacher development, and creating a safe learning environment (Robinson, 2011; Robinson & Gray, 2019). Robinson and Gray's (2019) conclusion consisted of a positive relationship on student achievement. Although I did not replicate their research, regardless of the similarities, I did not see the same effect in my case study. I should mention that Eddy and Allie were also in the first two years at their respective campus as new high school principals. This scenario could be another example as to why Robinson and Gray (2019) referenced the difficulty of linking principal leadership to student success because of the time it takes to see the effects of a leader's vision and implementations on the learning environment. For this case study, the data analyzed from the principal evaluations and campus report cards reinforced the state's recent report of a gap between high principal evaluations and lackluster student achievement.

While my research question sought to identify gaps between principal standards and actual practice, the results illuminated the influence of the human factor instead. Eddy shared that each "journey is unique for each student." This would include the student that is working

with you and the student that is working against you. For example, Allie mentioned an important factor that he faced: “How do you deal with a child that intentionally fails?” He understood that the guidance was available, but he highlighted that “element of ‘I’m just not going to do it,’” which was the discrepancy he identified between practicing standards and student achievement.

Eddy had a similar realization pertaining to his teachers. Although he honestly believed that “everyone wants to be successful,” he recognized that “my standard is different than your personal standard.” This reinforced the notion that it is not as simple as actively practicing best practices and assuming everyone is on board with your goals because there is a human component that cannot guarantee student success. Each standard and professional practice will probably create an outcome that would still be situational to each teacher and student. This would then lead to a conversation of the importance of relationships and situational leadership.

Research Question 2

RQ2: How do high school principals describe their professional practices that contribute to the improvement and retention of student success? Researchers have acknowledged that principals hold an influential role on the teaching and the learning environment (Xhomara, 2018). Walden University (n.d.) recognized that school principals impact student achievement. For this study, three common themes emerged in response to RQ2. The themes included relationships, awareness, and professional capacity.

Awareness. Awareness is the broadest theme with a lot of hidden potential. Eddy and Allie’s professional practices and areas of focus included knowing their role to lead, build, and support while being proactive and understanding the cascading effect. They were aware of the professional practices that contributed to student success and how to proceed with differing situations. They prioritized getting to know their students and staff to fulfill their purpose as a

campus principal. In Eddy's words, he needed "to create a safe and nurturing learning environment where teaching and learning can happen at a high level." Allie stated that "a learning culture that breeds successful students in the school" was an important factor in making sure the students "have some realm of success" postgraduation. Robinson and Gray (2019) declared that the impact of leadership on student achievement is not just about style or type but is contingent with their purpose. Eddy and Allie both used this awareness to apply reflective practices to build relationships and professional capacity in view of their purpose.

If Eddy and Allie were not aware of their surroundings with teachers and students, they would not be able to address the needs in front of them. Allie made it clear that "if there are areas where children are not performing, it's your [my] role to find out why, whether it's something that they're doing, whether it's something that the teacher is doing, or whatever." The strength of this notion is supported with Portin's et al. (2003) discovery that a principal's capability to diagnose needs and address them with solutions was an important expectation and reality for campus principals. Being aware allowed Eddy and Allie to create and understand relationships, strategically address situations, and properly build the capacity of others.

Relationships. Relationships were very important for Eddy and Allie in the realm of improvement and student success. They understood that student success was not a solo practice, but included relationships with all stakeholders. Eddy viewed his role as being "the parent of the student while the parents are at work and the student is under your care." He held the same idea and expectation for his teachers as well. Eddy also expressed specific relational characteristics for his role to include "to be caring, to be supportive, and to have high expectations for all." Allie identified that "there should be no child in the school that doesn't feel safe in having a conversation with their principal." With both statements resonating characteristics of a parent,

this comparison is referenced in Scribner and Crow's (2012) case study: to better understand the influences on professional practices. This could add a layer of support in recognizing a principal's level of commitment to student success, or a reflective piece within professional development.

Allie addressed the importance of relationships with teachers when he shared, "You've got to have a relationship with your staff . . . because if they don't understand what your expectations are, then your children are not going to be successful anyway." Eddy, too, acknowledged that the teachers "are the ones that are on the ground making the magic happen," so it was up to him to set the stage and support for success. This aligns with Tan's (2018) findings that a principal's indirect effect on student success was the outcome of relationships providing support to teacher autonomy and teacher morale. Eddy and Allie's awareness of building relationships was an important building block for them creating a successful working and learning environment. It is, in Eddy's words, a "trickle-down" effect.

Building relationships was at the forefront in Eddy's and Allie's professional practice. It was a topic that left an imprint throughout this case study. This is not surprising because as human beings, relationships are a part of every area in our lives. We receive and contribute to relationships as they encourage us or create stressors daily. There is no reason it would be any different in our professional or academic world. Every aspect of our lives consists of some form of relationship, from personal, casual, or professional. We were not created to do life alone, and a relationship can be the cause of an encouraged teacher and a successful student. There should be a sense of urgency placed on the importance of relationships. It seems that Eddy and Allie were aware and focused early on the importance of relationships with their teachers and students.

Professional Capacity. The capability to successfully build the professional capacity of others depended on the relationship established and situational awareness of the individual and environment. This ability was an important professional practice Eddy and Allie were responsible in accomplishing because they "can't do it all" by themselves, as Allie stated. Allie knew that he had "to work through other people and developing them in their areas to make the school successful." He would collaborate with his teachers triangulating data with observations and state learning objectives. He also recognized situations where he had to slow down and go step by step. Eddy focused on empowering his team by "giving people the skills and the tools to achieve a task and then supporting them" to contribute to the success of the students. Eddy consistently practiced creating a team of "reflective practitioners" that would evolve in to "instructional entrepreneurs." Eddy wanted his team to know that he "was invested in them," but he recognized that "not everyone wants to be excellent."

Collectively, Eddy and Allie expressed using a coaching leadership style to build their teacher's capacity. Eddy shared on multiple occasions that his actions "come from a coaching background," while Allie mentioned that facilitating was more of his philosophy, but with time he came to recognize that other leadership styles were "required in specific situations." Allie also mentioned the details of the coaching philosophies that were encouraged by the district. These practices relied on the relationships and situations being addressed. The credibility of their stories regarding their leadership practices was reinforced with the results of the Situational Leadership Style Summary/Self-Assessment survey. Eddy and Allie both identified the coaching leadership style over the other styles of directing, facilitating, and observing. Their understanding of the importance to be flexible in leadership, as described in the situational

leadership approach (Blanchard et al., 1993; Northouse, 2016; Thompson & Vecchio, 2009), was clear from the survey results and interview data.

Research Question 3

RQ3: How do high school principals identify the level of development for their teachers when addressing daily situations and goals? The levels of development for teachers and staff vary from person to person and situation. However, Eddy and Allie believed that their teachers' success was directly connected to them and their leadership, and it was evident that there was an importance in situational practices to properly address the needs of development. Eddy shared that one of his challenges consisted of "shaping the attitudes and belief systems of adults." Allie recognized that "a growth mindset is difficult for some." The common tactics utilized by Eddy and Allie in identifying and addressing each situation included a cycle of observation, feedback, and reflection.

This real-life scenario led me to the SLII® model because it was developed to focus on how leadership matches the demands of different situations (Blanchard et al., 1993; Northouse, 2016; Thompson & Vecchio, 2009). The SLII® model displays the interrelationship between the developmental levels to the directive behavior of directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating (Northouse, 2016). The flexibility and adaptability in leadership practices for this model were apparent with both Eddy and Allie's observation, feedback, and reflection practices.

Their situational awareness and ability to properly diagnose situations were practiced in observation and then continuing the cycle as needed. Their style of feedback was specific and driven by the level of development required. Eddy reinforced the idea that "the impact of that feedback [is] in trying to create reflective practitioners." However, this was not initially the case for Allie. Allie acknowledged that an area for personal growth included flexibility. With his high

expectations, he thought that “when you are given the tools you need as a professional” it should get done in a timely manner. He quickly learned that it was up to him for “developing them [teachers] in their areas” even if it meant to “slow down and address one piece at a time.” Allie strived to get his staff to trust him so that they could “develop your [their] own understanding.” Examples of Eddy and Allie’s practice also included collaboration and an openness to circle back around if it did not work the first time. It appeared this was possible due to the strong emphasis they each had on building relationships.

Research Question 4

RQ4: What do high school principals identify from their professional development to impact their professional practices in support of student success? Eddy and Allie’s individual experiences of their journey to becoming a high school principal may have inadvertently supported the foundation of situational awareness and the importance of relationships. Although researchers identified that there have been some limitations in support for principal professional development (Huggins et al., 2017; Moosung, 2016; Sala et al., 2013), mentorship, experiences, and district mandates were categorized in this case study as elements that supported the professional growth of Eddy and Allie.

Eddy and Allie recognized the contributions from their mentors in different aspects of their careers. The relationships of support and guidance were expressed as resources to attain knowledge and feedback for different situations in their professional growth, and how to address their campuses. Allie shared that his supervisor would be “pulling our coattail of slowdown,” while shaping his awareness to the diverse development levels of his teachers. He remembered hearing that “it’s clear they don’t understand X, so don’t give them X, Y, and Z.” This supported the notion that development was not a one-size-fits-all for both the teachers and principals.

The importance of a leader's ability to address the developmental levels of a situation is highlighted in the SLII model (Northouse, 2016). Eddy might have been a step ahead with this concept in his role because his supervisor noted on his evaluation that he was a leader who "employs situational-appropriate strategies." It is unclear if Eddy received specific training in situational leadership from a mentor or district, but there is evidence that he participated in "principal PLCs, central service meetings, and cluster meetings." He did not exclusively identify any specific trainings but did attribute his practices to stem from being a prior athletic coach. Eddy was focused and goal-oriented to create reflective practitioners and a team of instructional entrepreneurs. He was constantly giving and applying feedback to be better. He practiced leading from the middle of his team so that they would not fear his position but trust in their relationship.

Allie acknowledged multiple professional development activities in which he participated that contributed to the success of his students and staff. The most impressionable ones, according to him, were the Name and Need, Invitational Inquiry, and the use of DataWise. These were repeatedly referenced during the interview and explained in further detail. He believed these strategies and practices had a positive effect on his professional development as a campus leader because it was something "to turnkey that with our staff." He grew into differentiating his approaches and leaned more on the coaching aspect of leadership because of the trainings.

Although Eddie and Allie were from different districts, both were under the statewide initiative to follow the PSEL. They may have had different personal views on the PSEL, but it was recognized on their principal evaluations. For example, relationships, culture and climate, and leadership were all referenced in a positive way in Eddy's evaluation. It was evident he understood, respected, and applied the PSEL, even though he was not a fan of its "complexity" or maybe it was just the change. Allie, on the other hand, felt that the PSEL's purpose was "so

you know exactly what the expectations are of a great leader," which in return validated what he was already doing. His principal evaluation was also marked with distinguished performance across the board.

Overall, there was evidence of training with specific initiatives for each principal. It appeared that Eddy and Allie would have been receptive to any type of development because they had already proven themselves as lifelong learners with their earned doctoral degrees. I believe topics may have included building relationships, addressing situational circumstances, building professional capacity, or creating reflective practice because of their focus on how they chose to lead their teachers. Both Eddy and Allie had proven professional practices and strategies, most of them in alignment with the PSEL.

Limitations

For this case study, the limitations included the Covid-19 pandemic, the geographic location, and human factors. The Covid-19 pandemic affected this case study from multiple angles. Restrictions to traditional practices within the educational system across the state were put into place and timelines of normalcy were no longer existent. It affected protocols and data collection due to safety restrictions as districts protected against adding more work on their staffs. It added reservations to potential participants that were already overwhelmed in the educational system as things were getting to a new norm. In addition, the effects of the pandemic halted research-generated documents due to the unknown affects all the changes would have on student learning. This also made the implementation of the PSEL questionable, as it had only been integrated in counties across the state in 2018. There was insufficient time for it to have become well-established.

Another limitation was due to the selective geographic location. Not only could the outcomes differ in a different area of the country because of culture, regional priorities, politics, and so on, but because of a different set of standards and practices that could be in place. This embedded case study only established two subcases and they were purposely restricted to one state, two districts, and two principals, and thus cannot not be generalized.

The last limitation to document is the human factor. The validity of any participant's story and input is frequently noted. An individual's personal beliefs, values, and why they participate could be questionable and skew the data. Some may comply and participate with transparency, while others may forget details that could affect the interpretation and results. The human factor is not constant and is contingent on life's happenings.

Recommendations

Based on this case study's processes and findings, there are areas of opportunity for researchers to explore. In addition, there are also recommendations of application due to the discoveries in this case study. Below are some recommendations for practical application and future research.

Recommendations for Practical Application

A principal's role is a key component of the educational system. Although the role is complex and may vary from state to state, it is important that the findings of this case study do not go unnoticed. After careful analysis and interpretation, the findings within the data revealed an intertwining of key insights for recommendations.

1. A principal's purpose begins with their own journey, which may begin as early as their years as a student, as a teacher, or as their current situation dictates. Looking

into their reasons for becoming a principal would be an important component to analyze when hiring and developing future campus principals.

2. Reflective practices should not be overlooked but purposely integrated in the professional development of principals. This should be a professional strategy that is required to turnkey at each level—from principals to teachers to students.
3. Relationships are a thread, a building block with all stakeholders that are necessary to create a positive learning culture. It is recognized that a principal cannot do it all by themselves. Relationships affect the culture, the professional practices, and the building capacity that directly and indirectly affect opportunities for student success. This should be treated as a definite area of focus.

These insights and recommendations are only a snapshot of ideas to growing the opportunities for development for future principals. The first implication on understanding a principal's purpose is understanding their individual story. This story is foundational to one's true values and ethical norms. It should be encouraged to showcase their true reasons for becoming a principal. This transparency should be included in the training and development of future leaders and used to assist in recruiting the right person for a specific campus. It must be recognized that most principals begin with the same level of expertise with similar graduate studies. It is possible that a difference in success or desire for success might depend on their individual purpose and experiences. That would become the driving force to create meaningful relationships and outcomes.

The second recommendation of reflective practice can be easily overlooked. However, it is a strategy beneficial in everyday life that can be purposely applied in education. Since it is universal in application, integrating this practice in professional development with scenario-

based samples for discussion, follow-throughs with assigned mentorships, or intentionally added to monthly reviews could create a culture of self-reflection and awareness. Once a principal is naturally on board, this could be a practice trickled down to the teachers and the students.

Last, it is recommended to purposely have strategies in place to establish meaningful relationships with all students and teachers. It was evident that building relationships were at the forefront of the principals' practices in this study. It was illuminated as a building block necessary for understanding and creating receptive situations. This should not be surprising as relationships in general is like the air we breathe. We usually do not think about it until we are trying to survive or train better.

Recommendations for Future Research

As a result of this case study's findings, there are multiple opportunities to extend the research in developing principals to enhance their effects on student achievement. The following recommendations include ideas in replicating this study, making addendums to this study, and exploring a few new areas illuminated from this study.

Replicating This Case Study. First, it is important to recognize that the findings in a case study is not a be-all-end-all to the situation. Replicating it would be ideal and add to the current conversation. Researchers might consider using the template of this case study to expand into different school contexts including, but not limited to, different geographical areas, different demographics, or different social characteristics. This would help identify if environmental influences, political influences, or cultural influences contribute to the participants' journeys inadvertently. In addition, the replication could be used to create a comparison between urban and rural campus findings and determine if similar themes evolved from the participant stories. A similar case study could also be taken into different grade-level campuses. Elementary and

middle schools tend to have different experiences and their influencing factors could highlight new information. Last, replicating this exact same case study in the next five years within the same districts might demonstrate evidence of changes in the narrative due to postpandemic affects. Gaining any insight with the replication of this case study at any point in time would be beneficial to the development of principals in understanding the ongoing gap between principal knowledge and practice or the ongoing gap between professional practice and student achievement.

Addendums and Alterations to This Case Study. This case study only included two campus principals. I would recommend a transition from case study to a more narrative approach, so that research could expand on the number of participants. Much information was collected from listening to the stories of the two campus principals; more could be uncovered from multiple first-hand experiences. If it is to be kept as a case study, I would recommend expanding the case study to include a layer from the teachers in a survey format to validate the principal's leadership practices from a teacher's perspectives. I would recommend reviewing the data collected in this study to see if any alternative PSEL standards needed to be changed. Adding or altering this case study would allow new information to be collected for evaluation. Any continuation to better understand campus leaders, the principals, would be beneficial to the developing stages at the graduate level and professional development. The key is continuing the conversation because society, politics, and other influential factors are on a continuous revolving spectrum that affect education. It is important to stay ahead, if not, at least keep up the momentum. The other benefit would be for the educational system be on target with a rhythm where any principal could jump in ready to go because they are already in the know. This would

allow principals to begin at the starting line versus feeling like they begin as if they are already behind.

Stretching New Ideas. When developing the blueprint to this case study, only certain categories or markers were identified in the forefront. Now that it has been completed, participant stories highlighted other avenues for interest. Areas of supplemental ideas that deserve attention for research and conversation include relationships and reflective practices.

First, the intentionality of relationships was repeatedly appearing in the participants' day-to-day practices. The importance seemed evident to all stakeholders. Future studies should examine human relationships and their effects on student achievement. One study could explore principal relationships, the wellness of teachers, and student achievement. Another could research to better understand how principals form and build relationships within their school buildings. An alternate could explore the value high school students acknowledge within relationships with school personnel in relation to their success. This concept could be examined from a variety of perspectives and is one that should not be ignored.

The next category for recommendation should include future studies related to the effects of reflective practices. This idea was pulled from one of the participants whose end goal was to create a community of reflective practitioners. A study could be used to identify the effects of campus-wide reflective journaling on student achievement. An alternate study consideration could focus on understanding the influence of integrating reflective practices for principals and teachers. Last, researchers could investigate if principals take the initiative to purposely reflect on their professional growth.

Conclusions

Principal leadership is essential to the success of the teachers and students. Their role is and will continue to be complex with many responsibilities and challenges. The more educators understand all the connecting pieces, the better they will be in developing and addressing principal professional development. In this case study, I formulated the research to help identify the level of a principal's practice to their knowledge in the production of student success. Such knowledge could help establish foundational information for the ongoing development of principals and those aspiring to be principals. This case study was in response to the gap evident between successful principal evaluation ratings to students' below average ratings.

As the case study developed, it was the participants' awareness and focus on relationships and reflective practices that became apparent. Their interviews showed that there was minimal gap in principal knowledge and practice as these principal practices were aligned with the PSEL and used in response to individual situations. Choosing appropriate practices in reaction to situations was summarized with the situational approach to leadership. Each participants' engagement in addressing and building the capacity of their teachers at the level of development necessary was demonstrated in the findings of this case study. With observation, feedback, and reflection, the participants were able to differentiate their professional strategies to fit the need. Although the principal evaluations and student test scores did not positively correlate to one another, it is important to acknowledge that even with the participants' first two years, there was some growth. In the end, the two participants had their own story to tell to illuminate new areas of focus. As Eddy shared, "you can learn something every day."

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

December 8, 2021

Maritza O. Braxton
Department of Graduate and Professional Studies
Abilene Christian University

Dear Maritza,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "A Narrative Study to Better Understand the Gap between Principal Knowledge and Professional Practice",

(IRB# 21-171)is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix B: Professional Standards for Educational Leaders

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015 - NPBEA

National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015). Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015. Reston, VA: Author.

Standard 1.

Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of *each* student.

Effective leaders:

a) Develop an educational mission for the school to promote the academic success and well-being of each student.
b) In collaboration with members of the school and the community and using relevant data, develop and promote a vision for the school on the successful learning and development of each child and on instructional and organizational practices that promote such success.
c) Articulate, advocate, and cultivate core values that define the school's culture and stress the imperative of child-centered education; high expectations and student support; equity, inclusiveness, and social justice; openness, caring, and trust; and continuous improvement.
d) Strategically develop, implement, and evaluate actions to achieve the vision for the school.
e) Review the school's mission and vision and adjust them to changing expectations and opportunities for the school and changing needs and situations of students.
f) Develop shared understanding of and commitment to mission, vision, and core values within the school and the community.
g) Model and pursue the school's mission, vision, and core values in all aspects of leadership.

Standard 2.

Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote *each* student's academic success and well-being.

Effective leaders:

a) Act ethically and professionally in personal conduct, relationships with others, decision- making, stewardship of the school's resources, and all aspects of school leadership.
b) Act according to and promote the professional norms of integrity, fairness, transparency, trust, collaboration, perseverance, learning, and continuous improvement.
c) Place children at the center of education and accept responsibility for each student's academic success and well-being.
d) Safeguard and promote the values of democracy, individual freedom and responsibility, equity, social justice, community, and diversity.

e) Lead with interpersonal and communication skill, social-emotional insight, and understanding of all students' and staff members' backgrounds and cultures.
f) Provide moral direction for the school and promote ethical and professional behavior among faculty and staff.

Standard 3.

Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote *each* student's academic success and well-being.

Effective leaders:

a) Ensure that each student is treated fairly, respectfully, and with an understanding of each student's culture and context.
b) Recognize, respect, and employ each student's strengths, diversity, and culture as assets for teaching and learning.
c) Ensure that each student has equitable access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, academic and social support, and other resources necessary for success.
d) Develop student policies and address student misconduct in a positive, fair, and unbiased manner.
e) Confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status.
f) Promote the preparation of students to live productively in and contribute to the diverse cultural contexts of a global society.
g) Act with cultural competence and responsiveness in their interactions, decision making, and practice.

Standard 4.

Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote *each* student's academic success and well-being.

Effective leaders:

a) Implement coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that promote the mission, vision, and core values of the school, embody high expectations for student learning, align with academic standards, and are culturally responsive.
b) Align and focus systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment within and across grade levels to promote student academic success, love of learning, the identities and habits of learners, and healthy sense of self.
c) Promote instructional practice that is consistent with knowledge of child learning and development, effective pedagogy, and the needs of each student.
d) Ensure instructional practice that is intellectually challenging, authentic to student experiences, recognizes student strengths, and is differentiated and personalized.
e) Promote the effective use of technology in the service of teaching and learning.
f) Employ valid assessments that are consistent with knowledge of child learning and development and technical standards of measurement.

g) Use assessment data appropriately and within technical limitations to monitor student progress and improve instruction.

Standard 5.

Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of *each* student.

Effective leaders:

a) Build and maintain a safe, caring, and healthy school environment that meets that the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of each student.
b) Create and sustain a school environment in which each student is known, accepted and valued, trusted and respected, cared for, and encouraged to be an active and responsible member of the school community.
c) Provide coherent systems of academic and social supports, services, extracurricular activities, and accommodations to meet the range of learning needs of each student.
d) Promote adult-student, student-peer, and school-community relationships that value and support academic learning and positive social and emotional development.
e) Cultivate and reinforce student engagement in school and positive student conduct.
f) Infuse the school's learning environment with the cultures and languages of the school's community.

Standard 6.

Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote *each* student's academic success and well-being.

Effective leaders:

a) Recruit, hire, support, develop, and retain effective and caring teachers and other professional staff and form them into an educationally effective faculty.
b) Plan for and manage staff turnover and succession, providing opportunities for effective induction and mentoring of new personnel.
c) Develop teachers' and staff members' professional knowledge, skills, and practice through differentiated opportunities for learning and growth, guided by understanding of professional and adult learning and development.
d) Foster continuous improvement of individual and collective instructional capacity to achieve outcomes envisioned for each student.
e) Deliver actionable feedback about instruction and other professional practice through valid, research-anchored systems of supervision and evaluation to support the development of teachers' and staff members' knowledge, skills, and practice.
f) Empower and motivate teachers and staff to the highest levels of professional practice and to continuous learning and improvement.
g) Develop the capacity, opportunities, and support for teacher leadership and leadership from other members of the school community.

h) Promote the personal and professional health, well-being, and work-life balance of faculty and staff.
i) Tend to their own learning and effectiveness through reflection, study, and improvement, maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

Standard 7.

Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote *each* student's academic success and well-being.

Effective leaders:

a) Develop workplace conditions for teachers and other professional staff that promote effective professional development, practice, and student learning.
b) Empower and entrust teachers and staff with collective responsibility for meeting the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of each student, pursuant to the mission, vision, and core values of the school.
c) Establish and sustain a professional culture of engagement and commitment to shared vision, goals, and objectives pertaining to the education of the whole child; high expectations for professional work; ethical and equitable practice; trust and open communication; collaboration, collective efficacy, and continuous individual and organizational learning and improvement.
d) Promote mutual accountability among teachers and other professional staff for each student's success and the effectiveness of the school as a whole.
e) Develop and support open, productive, caring, and trusting working relationships among leaders, faculty, and staff to promote professional capacity and the improvement of practice.
f) Design and implement job-embedded and other opportunities for professional learning collaboratively with faculty and staff.
g) Provide opportunities for collaborative examination of practice, collegial feedback, and collective learning.
h) Encourage faculty-initiated improvement of programs and practices.

Standard 8.

Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote *each* student's academic success and well-being.

Effective leaders:

a) Are approachable, accessible, and welcoming to families and members of the community.
b) Create and sustain positive, collaborative, and productive relationships with families and the community for the benefit of students.
c) Engage in regular and open two-way communication with families and the community about the school, students, needs, problems, and accomplishments.
d) Maintain a presence in the community to understand its strengths and needs, develop productive relationships, and engage its resources for the school.

e) Create means for the school community to partner with families to support student learning in and out of school.
f) Understand, value, and employ the community's cultural, social, intellectual, and political resources to promote student learning and school improvement.
g) Develop and provide the school as a resource for families and the community.
h) Advocate for the school and district, and for the importance of education and student needs and priorities to families and the community.
i) Advocate publicly for the needs and priorities of students, families, and the community.
j) Build and sustain productive partnerships with public and private sectors to promote school improvement and student learning.

Standard 9.

Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote *each* student's academic success and well-being.

Effective leaders:

a) Institute, manage, and monitor operations and administrative systems that promote the mission and vision of the school.
b) Strategically manage staff resources, assigning and scheduling teachers and staff to roles and responsibilities that optimize their professional capacity to address each student's learning needs.
c) Seek, acquire, and manage fiscal, physical, and other resources to support curriculum, instruction, and assessment; student learning community; professional capacity and community; and family and community engagement.
d) Are responsible, ethical, and accountable stewards of the school's monetary and non- monetary resources, engaging in effective budgeting and accounting practices.
e) Protect teachers' and other staff members' work and learning from disruption.
f) Employ technology to improve the quality and efficiency of operations and management.
g) Develop and maintain data and communication systems to deliver actionable information for classroom and school improvement.
h) Know, comply with, and help the school community understand local, state, and federal laws, rights, policies, and regulations so as to promote student success.
i) Develop and manage relationships with feeder and connecting schools for enrollment management and curricular and instructional articulation.
j) Develop and manage productive relationships with the central office and school board.
k) k). Develop and administer systems for fair and equitable management of conflict among students, faculty and staff, leaders, families, and community.
l) Manage governance processes and internal and external politics toward achieving the school's mission and vision.

Standard 10.

Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote *each* student's academic success and well-being.

Effective leaders:

a) Seek to make school more effective for each student, teachers and staff, families, and the community.

b) Use methods of continuous improvement to achieve the vision, fulfill the mission, and promote the core values of the school.
c) Prepare the school and the community for improvement, promoting readiness, an imperative for improvement, instilling mutual commitment and accountability, and developing the knowledge, skills, and motivation to succeed in improvement.
d) Engage others in an ongoing process of evidence-based inquiry, learning, strategic goal setting, planning, implementation, and evaluation for continuous school and classroom improvement.
e) Employ situationally-appropriate strategies for improvement, including transformational and incremental, adaptive approaches and attention to different phases of implementation.
f) Assess and develop the capacity of staff to assess the value and applicability of emerging educational trends and the findings of research for the school and its improvement.
g) Develop technically appropriate systems of data collection, management, analysis, and use, connecting as needed to the district office and external partners for support in planning, implementation, monitoring, feedback, and evaluation.
h) Adopt a systems perspective and promote coherence among improvement efforts and all aspects of school organization, programs, and services.
i) Manage uncertainty, risk, competing initiatives, and politics of change with courage and perseverance, providing support and encouragement, and openly communicating the need for, process for, and outcomes of improvement efforts.
j) Develop and promote leadership among teachers and staff for inquiry, experimentation and innovation, and initiating and implementing improvement.

Appendix C: State Campus Report Card Sample

[redacted]

[redacted]

2018 - 2019 School Report Card

3 OUT OF 5 STARS
Percentile Rank: 33 (High)

[redacted]

[redacted]

HOW DID MY SCHOOL DO OVERALL?

Overall school performance is determined by a combination of academic and school quality indicators. The total earned points percent is provided as well as a percentile rank and a star designation.

INDICATOR	POSSIBLE POINTS	EARNED POINTS*	ANNUAL TAI
Academic Achievement	30.0	14.9	✗
Graduation Rate	15.0	12.9	✗
Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency	10.0	4.5	✓
Readiness for Post-Secondary Success	10.0	8.7	na
School Quality and Student Success	35.0	12.1	na
TOTAL POINTS:	**100.0**	**53.2**	

Total Earned Points: **53.2** / Total Points Possible: **100.0** = **53%** TOTAL EARNED PERCENT

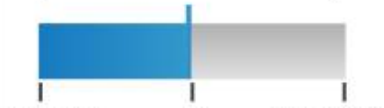
* Earned points may not equal total points due to rounding. ✓ =Met ✗ =Not Met

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

HOW DID STUDENTS PERFORM ON STATE TESTS?

The academic achievement indicator is a combination of the percent of students scoring "proficient" or higher on state tests in Math and English Language Arts, and the average performance level of students on state tests.

14.9
EARNED POINTS
(TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE: 30)



MEASURE	RESULTS	EARNED POINTS*
Percent Proficient Mathematics	29.6%	2.2 out of 7.5
Percent Proficient English Language Arts	49.5%	3.7 out of 7.5
Average Performance Level Mathematics	2.6	3.9 out of 7.5
Average Performance Level English Language Arts	3.4	5.1 out of 7.5
		14.9 EARNED POINTS

GRADUATION RATE

ARE STUDENTS GRADUATING ON TIME?

12.9
EARNED POINTS
(TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE: 15)

MEASURE	RESULTS	EARNED POINTS*
Four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate	84.8%	8.5 out of 10.0
Five-year adjusted cohort graduation rate	89%	4.5 out of 5.0
		12.9 EARNED POINTS

PROGRESS TOWARDS ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

HOW MANY ENGLISH LEARNERS ARE MAKING PROGRESS TOWARDS LEARNING ENGLISH?

The Progress towards English language proficiency indicator measures school success of English learners on track toward achieving proficiency in the English language.

4.5
EARNED POINTS
(TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE: 10)

MEASURE	RESULTS	EARNED POINTS*
English learners making progress towards learning English	45.3%	4.5 out of 10.0

4.5
EARNED POINTS

READINESS FOR POST-SECONDARY SUCCESS

HOW MANY STUDENTS ARE ON-TRACK FOR SUCCESS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL?

This high school indicator is a combination of the percent of 9th grade students earning four credits, and the percent of students completing high school meeting a variety of standards beyond their required coursework.

8.7
EARNED POINTS
(TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE: 10)

MEASURE	RESULTS	EARNED POINTS*
Credit for Well Rounded Curriculum	92.3%	4.5 out of 5.0
On track in ninth grade for graduation	83.5%	4.2 out of 5.0

8.7
EARNED POINTS

SCHOOL QUALITY AND STUDENT SUCCESS

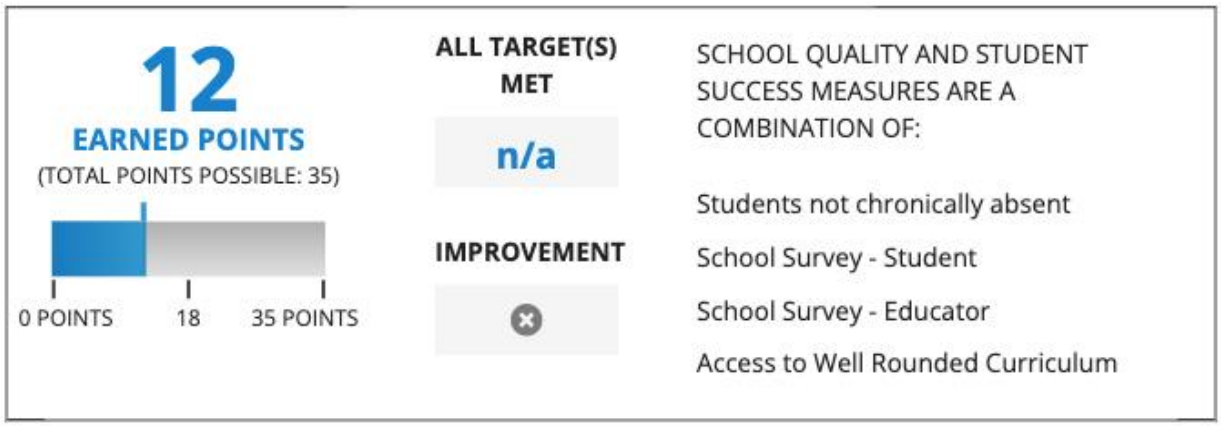
WHAT IS THE QUALITY OF THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT?

This indicator includes the percent of students not absent 10 percent or more school days during the year, a school survey, and the percent of students enrolled in a well rounded curriculum.

MEASURE	RESULTS	EARNED POINTS*

HOW DID MY SCHOOL DO ON ACADEMIC MEASURES?

HOW DID MY SCHOOL DO ON MEASURES OF SCHOOL QUALITY AND STUDENT SUCCESS?



PERCENT PROFICIENT

Achievement (E/M/H)	MATH			ELA		
	PERCENT	ANNUAL TARGET	IMPROVEMENT	PERCENT	ANNUAL TARGET	IMPROVEMI
Asian	63.2 %	✓	✓	63.2 %	✗	✓
Black/African Amer.	28.9 %	✗	✓	45.5 %	✓	✓
Hispanic/Latino	17.9 %	✗	✗	48.1 %	✓	✓
White	39.2 %	✗	✗	62 %	✓	✗
Two or more races	23.8 %	✗	✗	57.1 %	✓	✓
Students w/Disabilities	13 %	✗	✗	13 %	✓	✗
English Learner	7.1 %	✗	✓	6.7 %	✗	✗
Econ. Disadvantaged	8.2 %	✓	✓	31 %	✓	✓
All Students	**29.6 %**	✗	✓	**49.5 %**	✓	✓

* Only Student Groups with 10 or more students are reported. Student Groups include the following; American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino of any Race, White, Two or More Races, Economically Disadvantaged, Students with Disabilities, or English Learners.
✓ =Met ✗ =Not Met

Graduation Rate (HIGH GRADE SPAN)	ADJUSTED COHORT GRADUATION R				
	FOUR-YEAR				
	PERCENT	ANNUAL TARGET	IMPROVEMENT	PERCENT	ANN
Black/African Amer.	85.88 %	✓	✗	90.4 %	
Hispanic/Latino	85.71 %	✗	✓	87.18 %	
White	79.71 %	✗	✗	83.33 %	
Students w/Disabilities	59.38 %	✗	✓		
All Students	**84.82 %**	✗	✗	**89.04 %**	

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Hello, my name is (interviewer name) and I would like to first thank you for taking time to speak with me today. As mentioned in our prior communication, my study is focused on identifying and understanding any gaps between principal knowledge and practice regarding student success. Before we begin, do you have any questions regarding the consent form you turned in?

Great, well, let me tell you a little bit about myself. I am not only a student but an educator as well. I began my journey back in 2004. The first hat I wore was one of a high school science teacher then curriculum coordinator and next as a campus principal to a director of C & I. I have also had the privilege of being in the role of college lecturer. However, my current focus is on my doctoral studies., but as you can see, I have had the blessing of being a part of this wonderful world of education in a variety of capacities. So--

Part 1:

1. Could you tell me a little bit about yourself? (Follow up with a reactive question to help establish rapport.)
2. Could you tell me what influenced you to be an educator? a high school principal?
3. How long have you been in your administrative role? How long have you been at your current campus? What is it like or describe your school in a few words?
4. How are your experiences with your staff? and students? Can you share some challenges you have faced or had to endure?
5. As an educator in this state, are you familiar with the identified gap between principal evaluations and student assessment scores in the state?

Currently, do you have any questions for me? If not, let's keep moving forward.

Part 2:

1. How would you describe the purpose of your role as a campus principal?
2. In your words, what type of relationships exist or should exist between a campus principal and the success of the school's students? What do you consider to be key attributes for a campus principal to be successful with their student success?
3. As a part of this school system, I understand the PSEL is rather new and has only been in place 1-2 years prior to the pandemic for principal evaluations. How would you describe its purpose? Its validity?
4. Which standards stand out the most to you? Are there any that tend to resonate with you more regarding student success?
5. Let's talk about student success, how do you define student success? What does it look like for you at your campus? Would you describe any discrepancy on principal evaluations to student achievement?
6. For the sake of my research study, I would like to only focus on standards 1, 4, 6, and 10—
    a. Standard 1 state "effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student"—what is your understanding of what this looks like? Where do you feel your strength or area for growth lie within this standard?
    b. Standard 4 states "effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote student success and well-being"—how is this represented at your campus under your

leadership? Where do you believe you could use some support for growth? What successful practices could you share? How does the county/district support you to fulfill this standard?

c. Standard 6 states "effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student's academic success and well-being"—how do you feel most successful in motivating your teachers and staff? Do you prefer to direct, coach, facilitate, or observe? Have you had to adapt your leadership from high directive to low directive or vice-versa to meet a specific goal? Please share any insights on an experience that includes one or all.

d. Standard 10 states "effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being"—how would you rate yourself with this standard? What are your plans for self-development, staff development, the students, and/or curriculum? What professional developments have contributed for you to be successful agents of continuous improvement?

7. Last, would there be anything you would add as a support mechanism or personal goal that would allow you to fully engage your knowledge to your daily practice?

Again, thank you so much for your time. Is there anything else you would like to share or ask? I will be in touch with you in a few days to go over the transcription and make sure I have properly captured your story. Please remember that everything will be secured to protect you participation in my study. If anything comes to mind from now until the next time you hear from me, please feel free to reach out.

Appendix E: Situational Leadership Style Summary/Self-Assessment

Situational Leadership Style Summary/Assessment

Adapted from: Hersey and Blanchard

Self-assessment questions: Read through the Situation questions and then choose the response (only one) from the corresponding Alternative Action statements that most appeals to you or that you feel seems the most characteristic of you. **Please circle or highlight your selection.** In some cases none of the responses may be appealing or characteristic of you. Nonetheless, please select the statement that you prefer or feel suits you best.

Situation	Alternative Action
1. Your group is not responding lately to your friendly conversation and obvious concern for their welfare. Their performance is declining rapidly.	**A.** Emphasize the use of uniform procedures and the necessity for task accomplishment. **B.** Make yourself available for discussion but do not push your involvement. **C.** Talk with them and then set goals. **D.** Intentionally do not intervene.
2. The observable performance of your group is increasing. You have been making sure that all members were aware of their responsibilities and expected standards of performance.	**A.** Engage in friendly interaction, but continue to make sure that all members are aware of their responsibilities and expected standards of performance. **B.** Take no definite action. **C.** Do what you can to make the group feel important and involved. **D.** Emphasize the importance of deadlines and tasks.
3. Members of your group are unable to solve a problem themselves. You have normally left them alone. Group performance and interpersonal relations have been good.	**A.** Work with the group and together engage in program solving. **B.** Let the group work it out. **C.** Act quickly and firmly to correct and redirect. **D.** Encourage the group to work on the problem and be supportive of their efforts.
4. You are considering a change. Your group has a fine record of accomplishment. They respect the need for change.	**A.** Allow group involvement in developing the change, but do not be too direct. **B.** Announce changes and then implement with close supervision. **C.** Allow the group to formulate its own directive. **D.** Incorporate group recommendations,

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	but you direct the change.
5. The performance of your group has been dropping during the last few months. Members have been unconcerned with meeting objectives. Redefining roles and responsibilities has helped it the past. They have continually needed reminding to have their tasks done on time.	**A.** Allow the group to formulate its own direction. **B.** Incorporate group recommendations, but see that objectives are met. **C.** Redefine roles and responsibilities and supervise carefully. **D.** Allow group involvement in determining roles and responsibilities but do not be too direct.
6. You stepped into an efficiently run group. The previous leader tightly controlled the situation. You want to maintain a productive situation, but would like to begin having more time building interpersonal relationships among members.	**A.** Do what you can do to make the group feel important and involved. **B.** Emphasize the importance of deadlines and tasks. **C.** Intentionally do not intervene. **D.** Get the group involved in decision-making, but see that objectives are met.
7. You are considering changing to a structure that will be new to your group. Members of the group have made suggestions about needed change. The group has been productive and demonstrated flexibility.	**A.** Define the change and supervise carefully. **B.** Participate with the group in developing the change but allow members to organize the implementation. **C.** Be willing to make changes as recommended, but maintain control of the implementation. **D.** Be supportive in discussing the situation with the group but not too directive.
Situation	**Alternative Action**
8. Group performance and interpersonal relations are good. You feel somewhat unsure about your lack of direction in the group.	**A.** Leave the group alone. **B.** Discuss the situation with the group and then you initiate necessary changes. **C.** Redefine goals and supervise carefully. **D.** Allow group involvement in setting goal, but don't push.

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9. You have been appointed to give leadership to a study group that is far overdue in making requested recommendations for change. The group is not clear on its goals. Attendance at sessions has been poor. Their meetings have turned into social gatherings. Potentially they have the talent necessary to help.	**A.** Let the group work out its problems. **B.** Incorporate group recommendations, but see that objectives are met. **C.** Redefine goals and supervise carefully. **D.** Allow group involvement in setting goals, but do not push.
10. Your group, usually able to take responsibility, is not responding to your recent redefining of job responsibilities as a result of one member leaving the city.	**A.** Allow group involvement in redefining standards but don't take control. **B.** Redefine standards and supervise carefully. **C.** Avoid confrontation by not applying pressure, leave situation alone. **D.** Incorporate group recommendations, but see that new job responsibilities are met.
11. You have been promoted to a leadership position. The previous leader was involved in the affairs of the group. The group has adequately handled its tasks and direction. Interpersonal relationships in the group are good.	**A.** Take steps to direct the group towards working in a well-defined manner. **B.** Involve the group in decision-making and reinforce good contributions. **C.** Discuss past performance with the group and then you examine the need for new practice. D. Continue to leave the group alone.
12. Recent information indicates some internal difficulties among group members. The group has a remarkable record of accomplishment. Members have effectively maintained longrange goals. The have worked in harmony for the past year. All are well qualified for the tasks.	**A.** Try out your solution with the group and examine the need for new procedures. **B.** Allow group members to work it out themselves. **C.** Act quickly and firmly to correct and redirect. **D.** Participate in problem discussion while providing support for group members.

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Appendix F: Situational Leadership Style Summary Rubric

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Situational Leadership Style Summary/Self Assessment
Adapted from: Hersey and Blanchard

Scoring your self-assessment: Circle the responses from your self-assessment Situation questions on the scoring sheet below. Add up each column to determine your preferred leadership style according to the Hersey and Blanchard model.

SITUATIONS	ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS			
1	A	C	B	D
2	D	A	C	B
3	C	A	D	B
4	B	D	A	C
5	C	B	D	A
6	B	D	A	C
7	A	C	B	D
8	C	B	D	A
9	C	B	D	A
10	B	D	A	C
11	A	C	B	D
12	C	A	D	B
TOTAL				
LEADERSHIP STYLE	TELLING (DIRECTING)	SELLING (COACHING)	PARTICIPATING (FACILITATIING)	DELEGATING (OBSERVING)

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Situational Leadership Model: *Situational Leadership depends on the readiness of the followers and the situation.*

Follower development level

Leadership style in response to follower development level

Low — D4 — D3 — D2 — D1 — High

Task / directive behavior

Relationship / supportive behavior	Low	High
High		**S3 Participating (Facilitating)** / **S2 Selling (Coaching)**
Low	**S4 Delegating (Observing)**	**S1 Telling (Directing)**

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Leaders should adapt their style to follower development style (or 'maturity'), based on how ready and willing the follower is to perform required tasks (that is, their competence and motivation). There are four leadership styles (S1 to S4) that match the development levels (D1 to D4) of the followers. The four styles suggest that leaders should put greater or less focus on the task in question and/or the relationship between the leader and the follower, depending on the development level of the follower. If the leader focused more on the relationship, the follower may become confused about what must be done and what is optional. The leader thus maintains a clear 'do this' position to ensure all required actions are clear.	
S3: Participating / Facilitating / Supporting *Follower*: D3: High competence, variable commitment / Able but unwilling or insecure *Leader*: Low task focus, high relationship focus When the follower can do the job, but is refusing to do it or otherwise showing insufficient commitment, the leader need not worry about showing them what to do, and instead is concerned with finding out why the person is refusing and thence persuading them to cooperate. There is less excuse here for followers to be reticent about their ability, and the key is very much around motivation. If the causes are found then they can be addressed by the leader. The leader thus spends time listening, praising and otherwise making the follower feel good when they show the necessary commitment.	**S2: Selling / Coaching** *Follower*: D2: Some competence, variable commitment / Unable but willing or motivated *Leader*: High task focus, high relationship focus When the follower can do the job, at least to some extent, and perhaps is over-confident about their ability in this, then 'telling' them what to do may demotivate them or lead to resistance. The leader thus needs to 'sell' another way of working, explaining and clarifying decisions. The leader thus spends time listening and advising and, where appropriate, helping the follower to gain necessary skills through coaching methods. Note: S1 and S2 are leader-driven.
S4: Delegating / Observing *Follower*: D4: High competence, high commitment / Able and willing or motivated *Leader*: Low task focus, low relationship focus When the follower can do the job and is motivated to do it, then the leader can basically leave them to it, largely trusting them to get on with the job although they also may need to keep a relatively distant eye on things to ensure everything is going to plan. Followers at this level have less need for support or frequent praise, although as with anyone, occasional recognition is always welcome. *Note*: S3 and S4 are follower-led.	**S1: Telling / Directing** *Follower*: D1: Low competence, low commitment / Unable and unwilling or insecure *Leader*: High task focus, low relationship focus When the follower cannot do the job and is unwilling or afraid to try, then the leader takes a highly directive role, telling them what to do but without a great deal of concern for the relationship. The leader may also provide a working structure, both for the job and in terms of how the person is controlled. The leader may first find out why the person is not motivated and if there are any limitations in ability. These two factors may be linked, for example where a person believes they are less capable than they should be may be in some form of denial or other coping. They follower may also lack self-confidence as a result.

Appendix G: Permission to Use SLII® Model