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# Increasing Instructional Leadership: An Applied Research Study on the Effects of Developing Principals as Instructional Leaders in the Magnolia County School District

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INCREASING INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP: AN APPLIED RESEARCH STUDY ON  
THE EFFECTS OF DEVELOPING PRINCIPALS AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS IN THE  
MAGNOLIA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

A Dissertation  
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Education  
in the Department of Leadership and Counselor Education  
The University of Mississippi

LEIGH ANNE NEWTON

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## ABSTRACT

This applied research study seeks to improve principal capacity as instructional leaders. The need for principals to increase their instructional leadership capacity became evident with the ever-changing requirements of state accountability and student achievement. Using four elements in this study, cohort-based professional development for principals, principal PLCs, data meetings, and consultant and district administrator campus visits, the program sought to develop and grow principal leadership. Surveys, focus groups, and interviews were used in the study. The findings reveal improvement in instructional leadership capacity in the district and can provide educators with information, including an action plan, to implement instructional leadership development.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my supportive family:

To Brian, Reagan, and Wes, I could not have accomplished this without your love, dedication, and support. When I felt like giving up during the long hours, you reminded me of the task at hand and gave me encouragement to stay the course.

To my parents, thank you for your example of hard work and dedication throughout my life. You have always believed in me and been my biggest fans.

I dedicate this work to you, for without you, it would not have been possible.

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To Dr. Davis, Dr. Cabrera-Davis, and Dr. Bunch: Thank you for pushing me to be my best, for believing in my work, and seeing me through until the end.

To my cohort members: we began as colleagues, we became family. I will always remember our many hours spent together and the lessons you each taught me.

Finally, to Jimmy, Steven, Lindsay, and Jason: you never let me quit. I could not have completed this program with you and I will always cherish the time and miles spent together.

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## **Chapter I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Principals have many job responsibilities in order for success in schools to occur. Chris Hadfield (2013) once said:

Ultimately, leadership is not about glorious crowning acts. It is about keeping your team focused on a goal and motivated to do their best to achieve it, especially when the stakes are high and the consequences really matter. It is about laying the groundwork for others to succeed, and then standing back and letting them shine. (p.234)

While a principal cannot do the job without the work of the team, he or she must understand all the parts of the team and support each member. Strong principal leadership is vital to the school's success. With strong leadership, teachers, parents, and stakeholders can work together for greater student achievement. Leaders must not only model the building of relationships but must also facilitate the types of relationships needed for learning organizations. Individuals need to have a certain collegial disposition, or motivation, in order to support organizational change (Davis, Ellett, and Annunziata, 2002).

Leech and Fulton (2008) studied the principals' abilities to create effective learning organizations. Shared decision making between the principal and his or her staff produced the most positive results in school climates. Leech and Fulton (2008) conducted both qualitative and quantitative studies and concluded there are five effective leadership practices which elicit peak performance: challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling

the way, and encouraging the heart. The principal also plays a role in affecting teacher willingness to participate in shared decision making. Principals can empower their staff to work alongside them, instead of as a subordinate. Positive gains were seen when this happened. The importance of the school leader is seen in every aspect of a school's achievement. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) found that leadership is second only to classroom instruction when naming factors that contribute to student achievement.

**Description.**

In my role as the Curriculum Director for Magnolia County Schools, I am responsible for working with principals to help build teacher capacity in each of the schools. I help coordinate their professional development and sometimes prescribe professional development for the teachers. I base my diagnosis on school achievement data, data from common assessments, classroom observations, and conversations with the teachers and principals. The vastness and diversity of the school district make it logistically difficult to give each principal and school the degree of expertise and time they need. Additionally, each school and area of the county is unique in teacher and student needs. There is no "one size fits all" for the district. Although there are three high schools, it is rare I can propose a method that will be completely successful at all three schools. However, good instruction is always good instruction. What is different is the way and means of the instruction and it has to be personalized for each school. The central issue of concern of this applied research is improving principal capacity to become more effective instructional leaders. One type of evidence in the gap of instructional leadership abilities of the seven principals in the district is in the frequency and type of requests for help from the district office by each principal. I work solely with the middle and high schools in the district. Some of the principals call on me for every question about instruction and sound classroom practices.

Others reach out to me for some questions and then make some instructional decisions on their own. Finally, a couple of principals make decisions independently, with mixed results. While one principal can prescribe effective, individualized professional development for his teachers, another is not as confident in his ability to not only be able to pinpoint instructional deficiencies, but also in prescribing the needed intervention. The levels of the instructional leadership of the principals vary greatly in the school district. Additionally, the experience levels of the principals vary greatly. Two principals have almost 25 years of administrative experience, while one principal is in the first year of administrative experience. The Magnolia County School District is seeing achievement levels decrease in many schools, no matter their prior achievement levels or the school's socioeconomic levels. Improvement must occur at all of the district's schools. Because of this, the need is great for each principal to build a cohort of peers and learn with and from them. This group of administrators will ultimately strengthen the district, while strengthening each individual leader.

The school district is comprised of 14 vastly different schools with needs as different as each physical location. Spread throughout the county, some schools have high poverty, while other schools do not deal with poverty to the same extent. Each school presents a unique set of challenges. Parental involvement, student achievement, poverty, teacher retention, and teacher capacity are issues present at each school in varying degrees.

The Magnolia County School District has three high schools, which represent the three distinct communities within the county. Of the three high schools, two high schools have achieved the highest possible rating by the Mississippi Department of Education in recent years, while the third has been in school improvement because of a low graduation rate and declining test scores. Two of the four middle schools are struggling to improve from the lowest state rating

as opposed to the other two middle schools vying for top positions in the district. The poverty level at each school is directly proportional to the achievement level of each school. The struggling schools have an extremely high free and reduced lunch population while the higher achieving schools have a much lower free and reduced lunch population. Additionally, parental involvement is much greater at the higher achieving schools than the lower achieving schools.

The north end of Magnolia County is comprised of one high school, one middle school, one elementary school, and one primary school, with a total of over 3000 students and approximately 250 certified teachers. It is the largest segment of the population of Magnolia County Schools and has a thriving business community and residential housing market. These students come from mostly middle class to slightly affluent families and parental involvement is high. The high school has been awarded Blue Ribbon School status in the past and has been ranked highest in school accountability for several years. The free and reduced lunch rate is around 50%. Although there are many highly involved parents, there are also students in poverty with parents who do not value education. The middle school, elementary school, and primary school have each enjoyed high accountability ratings in the last years. With the change in the state accountability model in the last year, student growth has become the focus of the current state achievement model. These schools have achieved high ratings in the past due to their high student proficiency levels, which was rewarded in the old accountability model. Now, with student growth being the main factor, these schools are for the first time seeing their achievement ratings dip from levels in the past. The leadership in each of these schools has been proud of their ratings and thusly, show slight resistance when discussing any improvement efforts.

The east part of Magnolia County Schools is comprised of one high school, one middle school, and one elementary school with approximately 1700 students. There are approximately

70 certified teachers who serve this area. The community is made up of mostly blue collar families with a few affluent families and families in poverty. The free and reduced rate for these schools is approximately 60%. Many parents are involved in their children's activities, but parent involvement could improve in these schools. This area is the fastest growing in the region and the housing market is expanding. Conversely, there are many families in this area in poverty who do not see the value in education. The schools have been high performing in the past, with the high school obtaining the highest accountability rating in the state within the last several years. Just like the north end schools, accountability ratings declined under the new accountability model at the east area schools due to the de-emphasis on student proficiency and the emphasis on student growth. These leaders are now having to focus on student growth instead of relying only on student proficiency scores.

On the south end of the county, there is one high school, two middle schools, two elementary schools, and one primary school. The socioeconomic makeup differs from the other parts of the county. The free and reduced lunch rate of this area is above 90%. The housing market is non-existent in this area, except for government subsidized housing. The school accountability ratings rank the high school as a failing school for the last five years because of a graduation rate of 56%. The middle school was rated a failing school during the 2014-2015 school year, and the elementary and primary school achieved a D rating. Many efforts have been put forth by the district, school, and community to improve student achievement, and those efforts have helped increase the high school's rating to a C. Parent involvement is not high, although the schools put an increased emphasis on parent and community involvement. Churches and community members are regular partners in the school to help mentor, tutor, and counsel students who need intervention. The schools still find themselves reaching out to a large

majority of parents who are not concerned about their child's education or the advantages of a high school diploma. These schools are facing a struggle of having high teacher turnover rates due to the larger percentages of students in these schools needing additional assistance in the classroom and beyond.

**Justification.**

A principal should be the lead teacher in the building. As lead teacher, the principal should model how to be a life-long learner, diagnose instructional problems, and prescribe improvements to the learning process. Not only does this benefit the teachers with a building leader who understands quality instruction, but it also improves the school climate because teachers trust their principal and have a liaison present, who understands the students, parents, and community when questions arise. A principal can never be expected to know how to handle every situation or how to intervene with every student who is struggling, but the principal should lead the charge in finding answers.

When an instructional leader, one teachers look to for help, is only located at the district level, instructional learning cannot happen on a daily basis. The district leader is not a member of the building each day. Rather, the school's instructional leader should be the school's leader, one who is involved in each aspect of the school. The principal should be the professional teachers turn to when they have discipline problems, parental issues, and also instructional challenges. Understanding instruction involves ongoing professional development, as information is ever-changing and understanding various approaches is required to reach all students. A principal's job description encompasses many areas in which expert knowledge is required, such as being a manager, organizer, supervisor, disciplinarian, and guardian. Because of this tremendous workload, it becomes essential for principals to delegate duties to others. Usually the first duty to

delegate is instructional matters, the ones requiring in-depth knowledge and understanding. Instructional expertise does not need to be a duty delegated to others, but rather, should be one the principal expertly understands and models to lead his or her school. As this happens, individual learning of the principal and the teacher will happen, but organizational learning will take place also as they learn together.

Ideally, principals understand their teachers, students, parents, and community better than anyone. When combined with up-to-date instructional strategies, the principal is the person best equipped to make the instructional decisions that impact his or her school. Collaborating with district personnel will be an integral part of the decision-making process, but empowering principals to be the instructional leaders needed for the campuses is the challenge the Magnolia County School District is facing.

In conversations with the principals in the district, they are forthcoming about their attitudes towards complex instructional decisions. They currently do not feel equipped to decide if their teachers are using best practices and how to prescribe a course of action for the teacher. Some shared uncertainties about the overall course they want their school to take in terms of professional development with areas of focus. I have observed principals' uncertainty and I have also observed times when decisions were made, while it seemed better courses of action could have been taken.

**Audience.**

The participants in this applied research study were principals, teachers, and district administrators in the Magnolia County School District. The results from this study helped to address the gap in principals' ability to make sound instructional decisions. Additionally, it helped build capacity to improve instruction among all stakeholders in the district as

organizational learning takes place. The ultimate goal is increased student achievement, as principals in the Magnolia County School District become instructional leaders on their campus, utilizing district personnel and administrative colleagues across the district for collaboration, in order to advance each school.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this applied research study was to improve principals' capacity as instructional leaders in the Magnolia County School District. The research process began with a description of the problem at each school in the district and a justification of the need to conduct the research. Through a collaborative process with the stakeholders in the district, including principals, teachers, parents, and district administration, the central phenomenon was examined through a review of research on principal leadership combined with both qualitative and quantitative data to develop an action plan to address the issue. The goals of the action plan were used to develop a set of questions designed to support a formative evaluation of the action plan. Implementation of the action plan took place from early steps taken in July 2017 to full implementation until May 2019. The results of the evaluation supported improvement of organizational learning through a cycle of continuous improvements.

The central phenomenon of this applied research study was the need for principals in the district to improve their skills in instructional leadership. Data, such as surveys, interviews, observations, and focus groups were used to gather feedback from participants to improve the process. In conclusion, the purpose of this applied research study is to improve the principal's ability to make sound instructional decisions for his or her school and to continue the cycle of organizational learning in the Magnolia County School District.



## **Research Questions**

This applied research study was guided by two sets of questions used in different points in the process. An initial set of preliminary questions was used to develop the action plan. The purpose of these questions was to provide the information necessary for the collaborative development of a comprehensive action plan designed to address the problem of improving principals' instructional leadership in the district. The first question examined the reasons why principals in the district had a gap in instructional leadership skills and why there was a decrease in student achievement across the district. The second question sought to identify relevant research on effective leadership characteristics, the value of collaboration, and the benefits of a positive school climate. The final preliminary question focused on developing a set of goals to be achieved through the research process consistent with the organizational mission.

Collaborative analysis of the data collected in response to these questions was used to develop the action plan presented in Chapter 3. The goals of the action plan seek to achieve the strengthening of principals as instructional leaders in their schools, while ultimately increasing student achievement. As a result, this research study assessed the implementation process to identify strengths and areas of needs. Based on the needs identified, the following set of research questions were used to evaluate the results of the action plan:

1. Did the principals become better instructional leaders?
2. Did the principals' knowledge of using data to correctly make data-driven instructional decisions increase?
3. To what extent did the principals participate in district PLCs?
4. What areas of success were evident through the implementation process?

5. What problems hindered successful implementation of providing support to principals?
6. Did the organizational learning help improve the capacity of principals to engage in district-wide organizational development?

The evaluation methods used to respond to these questions are discussed in Chapter 3.

### **Overview of the Study**

It is important for the Magnolia County School District to have leaders in each school who understands quality instruction and can navigate the challenges presented in implementation of best practices. In Chapter One, this study establishes the need for improving principal capacity to become better instructional leaders. Chapter Two provides relevant research examining specific characteristics of quality educational leadership. The focus of Chapter Three presents the collaborative development of an action plan, the implementation of the plan, and an evaluation of the plan. Chapter Four presents a review of the evaluation results of the study. Chapter Five presents the conclusions and future implications for further study and continual improvement.

## **Chapter II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

A review of current literature reveals a changing trend in the skills required to be an effective instructional leader (Butler, 2008). The Magnolia County School District is faced with the challenges of excelling in a time when leadership needs are changing. Principals must be leaders in many areas instead of only being the traditional building manager. In order for student success to occur, principals must meet the growing challenges of being proficient in many areas. Empowering principals to be the instructional leaders for their campus is the challenge Magnolia County Schools is facing.

Silvermann (2005) explains qualities of an effective school leader. These qualities included consistency, mentorship, and understanding of quality instruction. Older methods of educating leaders relied on coursework instead of utilizing school settings in preparing leaders (Silvermann, 2005).

Barnett (2004) concluded instructional practices in preparation programs must be authentic, which translates into getting future leaders involved in school setting during their preparation time. Barnett found a systemic overhaul must occur in leadership preparation programs. The word “principal” emanated from the term “principal teacher” where the assumption was the principal had more knowledge than anyone else in the building and would guide teachers in learning to teach. With all of the mandates on today’s leaders, it is becoming more common to see teachers as the experts on pedagogy and curriculum.

Hoerr (2007) suggests the concept of collegiality for the purpose of teachers seeing themselves as partners with the principal and fellow teachers in a network of experts, learning from each other. The current climate of educational reform has necessitated the way principals lead. On-going collaborative adult learning needs to be the norm in today's schools. The content of faculty meetings, peer observations, and district teams are some of ways today's school district looks different than in years past. Behaviors and activities of leaders must show vision, shared leadership, and continuous learning to make strides with less resources and in a shorter amount of time. Understanding how to be an instructional leader is paramount to changing the culture of one's school (Barnes, Camburn, Sanders, & Sebastian, 2010).

Therefore, the literature reviewed for this study pertains to the concepts of shared decision making, positive school climate, collaboration, and gradual change. The literature points to these concepts as being key components in empowering principals to make the best instructional decisions. The literature review begins by looking at literature that supports shared decision making in the school. Then, the need for a positive school climate is discussed. Collaboration among stakeholders, including principals with their peers and district administrators is important in developing instructional leadership. Finally, this development in the instructional climate will be a gradual change, as the research will support. This research was used for the development of the action plan for the Magnolia County School District and will be used for interpreting the results of the study.

### **Shared Decision Making**

As previously stated, principals must work as a collaborative team with teachers and district administration. Leech and Fulton (2008) studied the principals' abilities to create effective learning organizations. Shared decision making between the principal and his or her

staff produced the most positive results in school climates. This correlational study explored the relationship between teachers' perceptions of the leadership behaviors in principals and their perceptions of the level of shared decision making practiced in their schools. The study concluded there are five effective leadership practices which elicit peak performance: challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart. Their findings point to shared decision lending more support to communication and staff development within a school. Empowering teachers with knowledge of decisions, and having a voice, helps in the organizational learning and climate of the school.

The principal also plays a role in affecting teacher willingness to participate in shared decision making. Principals can empower their staff to work alongside them, instead of as a subordinate. Positive gains were seen when this happened. The importance of the school leader is seen in every aspect of a school's achievement. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) found that leadership is second only to classroom instruction when naming factors that contribute to student achievement, based on qualitative and quantitative data in a five year study of 180 schools. This study focused on the principal setting a clear direction and developing the people in the organization. Additionally, success was seen in schools where the principal worked to strengthen the school's culture, modify organizational structures, and build collaborative processes.

Neumerski (2012) uncovered the roles of the principal, teacher, and instructional coach and found success is intertwined in the partnership of these roles through a distributed lens in leadership. The research study found instead of working in isolation, leaders achieved more success when they work together as a team. Even though the principal carries the primary responsibility for the success of a school, the teachers should be empowered to have leadership

capabilities. Instructional coaches, being used in schools more recently, are also needed for success to be seen. This is called a leader-plus approach. Another shared partnership is between the superintendent and the principal.

Fitzsimons (2016) described his work as a superintendent with his principals. Having a visible presence brought immediate improvements to the working condition with the leaders in his district. His experience of developing relationships with the principals in his district supported his theory of the importance of the superintendent and principal partnership. He dedicated amounts of time to being on each school campus each day. This relationship also paid dividends in helping develop a greater relationship with his teachers.

Through observations and interviews, Cudeiro (2005), studied three superintendents who saw increased student achievement in their respective districts when they each focused on promoting principals and giving them the tools to be instructional leaders. These principals were expected to be continually honing their craft and as a result, these principals began to take charge of their own learning. All three superintendents saw positive results in their district when they established a district vision, set clear expectations of the principals, and held principals accountable for being the instructional leader.

Gurley, Anast-May, and Lee (2013) looked at the role an assistant principal plays as part of a leadership team. Their single-case qualitative study found many assistant principals were performing roles they saw as least important, such as discipline and cafeteria duty. The roles they viewed as most important, such as working with teachers and increasing student achievement, were ones they felt were their most important jobs, but they were not likely to be performing them. These types of job duties also did not allow for development of a future principal. An assistant principal academy saw success in developing assistant principals into principals who

functioned as instructional leaders. Assistant principals were given instructional duties, in addition to aiding in strategic planning. Direct observation and systematic interviewing provided insight into the assistant principals' success achieved when given instructional job duties. This research is important in this study because developing instructional leaders should begin with assistant principals, laying a foundation for their future as principals, bringing a greater level of knowledge and experience as the instructional leader.

The literature points to all stakeholders—superintendents, principals, assistant principals, and teachers—having a vital role in the development and success in a school. Shared decision making involves everyone working towards positive student achievement.

### **Positive School Climate**

Effective schools must have a high satisfaction rate from all stakeholders. Effective schools must also have effective principals, instructional leaders who support the professional development of all staff members. Halawah (2005) found a relationship between a positive school climate and increased student achievement. He used two instruments, which measured school climate and communication effectiveness between the principal and teachers. Open climate schools tended to have confident and resourceful principals. Closed climate school tended to have principals who were evasive, traditional, worried, and frustrated.

Glover (2007) found the practice of intentionally listening to teachers' concerns has also resulted in improved relationships between the principal and teachers. Instead of the principal inserting his views and opinions when issues arose, the allowance was made for the teachers to have a voice, and their views and suggestions were not dismissed. This practice of truly listening also produced positive results when dealing with the school board and also while mentoring novice principals. Real leadership challenges the leader before it challenges others (Glover,

2007). Leaders understand improvement begins with them. They want to grow in their knowledge and know this must first happen within themselves before they can expect their followers to grow. It begins with listening. Strong leaders listen to their teachers and other stakeholders and take action together.

Principals must work with stakeholders, which involves interacting effectively with the human element. Mills (2006) contends ethical decision making is paramount to principals' ability to effectively lead. The business world has understood this for years. Since schools deal with people instead of product, it only makes sense school leaders and personnel understand best how to deal with the people with whom they come in contact. Using the Keirsey temperament model--which places people into four main personality categories of artisans, guardians, rationals, and idealists--and applying it to various groups, deeper knowledge of understanding the way people react and process occurred. This knowledge can make a stronger work environment and creates unity among peers, students, and all stakeholders.

According to Bloom (2004), understanding human temperament can be paramount for leaders as they deal with many different personalities represented on their campus. Emotional intelligence, defined as recognizing one's own feelings and knowing how to manage one's emotions, has been found to be important in educational leaders. Principals were interviewed and given one-on-one coaching pertaining to the emotional strain the job can cause. Many pre-service and in-service principal programs do not focus on emotional intelligence, but most principals recognize the emotional toll the job takes. In the past ten years, the vision of the principalship has changed and principals are being required to be responsible for more than ever before. Emotional intelligence is essential to having a healthy work balance and knowing how to handle conflict, manage other adults, and lead for change.



In addition to shared decision making with other stakeholders, findings also point to the need of principals to be visionary leaders more than managers (Gulcan, 2012). As a leader, one must motivate, influence, give good examples, and guide. Survey results point to the need of principals supporting teachers in their professional development. The 675 randomly selected primary and middle school teachers stated they needed a principal who participated with them in professional development and became a partner in the organizational learning. When that happened, teachers had a positive view of the principal. Consequently, student achievement at the particular school increased when teachers had a favorable view of the principal.

Shaw and Newton (2014) pointed to the relationship between perceived servant leadership characteristics of the principal and teacher retention rates and job satisfaction in their quantitative study. The purpose of the research was to determine whether teachers who perceive their principals to exhibit servant leadership characteristics have increased job satisfaction and desire to remain in that school with that principal. This study is important because of the high amount of teacher turnover, especially in novice teachers. The study suggests three to seven years of experience are needed for a novice teacher to become a high-quality teacher. Principals were studied who practiced servant leadership, which is classified as ones who focus on serving the employee and putting others' needs first. Survey data also showed a significant positive correlation on teacher retention levels when teachers perceived their leader as a servant leader.

A positive school climate plays a role in a leader's success. Understanding how personalities work, listening to others' concerns, and handling conflict appropriately are all important to a successful school climate.

## **Collaboration**

Principals must have support in their roles. Instead of operating alone, principals need colleagues for collaboration, support, and ideas for change. The leadership role requires cross-collaboration. Through a qualitative approach, Naicker and Mestry (2015) contend that when a critical mass of school principals is engaged in development, such as instructional leadership, within and across schools, there is likely to be a positive effect on the system. Their findings, through observation and semi-structured interviews from simple random sampling, revealed collaboration between principals collectively and district officials was lacking. After implementing a system to systematically engage in collaboration, the feeling of isolation was reduced and principals felt greater job satisfaction and performance. Developing leaders across a system is crucial to advancing systemic change. This collaboration can manifest itself in Principal Professional Learning Communities. According to deGroot et.al. (2014), learning in communities are expected to improve when members reflect critically and communicate about their reflections, thus adding the social dimension to reflection. Teachers have participated in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for many years, but Principal PLCs are not as common. These communities give principals a group of peers to offer support, ideas, and advice. Implementing this type of support helps not only each individual principal, but also the district as a whole. Professional learning communities provide professional development for the participants without requiring additional resources because the learning originates from the other participants (Dougherty Stahl, 2015). Improving teaching and learning is not effective by the micromanagement of the principal, but rather the collaborative culture of a professional learning community (DeFour and Mattos, 2013).

Honig (2012) studied central office leadership roles as they partnered with principals to develop instructional leadership skills. Honig's research focused on interviews, observations, and data from documents. Rather than outsourcing professional development activities for principals, the top central office leaders became directly involved in the principals' development. These findings lend support for central office leadership in teaching roles. It also shows that engaging in instructional leadership is "joint work." The team approach, with central office and school administrators, provides organizational learning for all stakeholders.

Paired with central office leadership and the other principals in the district, the principals can feel supported by their colleagues and peers. Myers and Myers (1995) first used the phrase, "professional learning communities" to refer to teachers engaging in professional conversations together in order to advance their own learning and that of the organization. They noted the benefits of professional learning communities as reduced isolation of teachers, better informed teachers, and academic gains for students. Using this same concept, the principal PLC can be a time to share questions, challenges, and insights. For central office leadership, this support is one in which they can be the main agent in the work with principals. For principals, the focus on instruction and working directly with teachers improves their instructional leadership abilities. For both parties, the pull to get bogged down in office chores is strong, but real change comes when the focus becomes instructional practices in the classroom and time is spent there.

Umekub, Chrispeels, and Daly (2015) used a single case study design to examine how a district created opportunities for organizational learning through the cohort model. The evidence revealed trusting relationships were vital across the district. The collaboration among principals led to higher levels of social capital and intellectual capital, which in turn led the schools and cohorts to practice organizational learning. The involvement of central office administrators

completed this cycle of organizational learning. Consequently, these schools achieved sustained increases in student achievement. Additionally, Brodie (2014) adds this type of professional learning community supports participants to question their taken-for-granted assumptions and think of ways to see recurrent problems in a new light. Sharing ideas allows principals to see stagnant areas of their own practice and learn from their peers.

Clearly, the research in this section supports the vital nature of collaboration with all stakeholders. Collaborative learning among colleagues strengthens the individual and the organization as a whole.

### **Gradual Change**

Regarding leadership transformation over time, few dramatic transformations of practice have occurred. Instead, gradual improvements of practice have taken place. Questions have been raised about whether it is reasonable to expect dramatic rather than incremental innovations after professional development programs. Sustaining change has been realized with follow-through and follow-up on a regular basis (Barnes, Camburn, Sanders, & Sebastian, 2010). Using daily log data, qualitative typology development, and case studies of change provides a rich portrait of the learning and change process. Fullan (2002) contends change is a complex process and principals must be equipped to handle complex challenges to effectively lead a school. Equipping and empowering teachers is important because quality teachers become quality principals in the leadership pipeline. Forming relationships is important to building trust. Being innovative is important, but being the most innovative is not the goal. Innovating selectively with coherence is better. Thus, leadership development is often a slow process. Principals must mobilize the energy and capacities of teachers. In order for a principal to be successful in all the areas required, the principal must have the help and support of all of the expertise displayed on

his or her staff. Another by-product of gradual change in leadership development is the time needed for change to occur. Principals must first realize change is a slow process and be prepared for small improvements. This gradual change is sometimes difficult to endure, as stakeholders want to see immediate results. Understanding this and preparing stakeholders is important. As principals continue growing as instructional leaders, daily time management is important. The end goal can often be overshadowed by the amount of responsibility placed on a principal each day (Shahid, Chavez, Hall, Long, Pritchard, Randolph, & Wildman, 2001). Shahid et al. (2001) led educational leaders in California through a course designed to help them prioritize their day to maximize their time. Gradual change in leadership, instruction, and school climate will happen when stakeholders intentionally plan the focus of their day.

## **Conclusion**

Educational leadership continues to evolve, due to the ever-changing global society. The requirements of a school leader are different from the past and now move towards a shared responsibility of the staff rather than sole responsibility of the principal. The use of mentors and school experience play a role in the development of new school leaders, while current school leaders are seeing positive results from working as a team with the teachers and staff. Giving teachers a shared responsibility has been credited with a more positive school climate.

Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) found leadership is second only to classroom instruction regarding school achievement. The importance of being in a partnership between stakeholders is evident. Barnes, Camburn, Sanders, and Sebastian (2010) conclude that all behaviors and activities of today's leaders must show vision and shared leadership.

Additionally, according to Halawah (2005) a relationship exists between a positive school climate and increased student achievement. Teacher, student, and principal satisfaction levels are

important for student achievement to increase. Their satisfaction increases when they share decision making processes and collaborate. Collaboration among stakeholders is vital to the development of leaders and to the entire organization. Umekub, Chrispeels, and Daly (2015) studied district-created opportunities for organizational learning using a cohort model. This organizational learning provided gains in trust among the stakeholders, which resulted in student achievement. The changes that occur while building these relationships will be a gradual change. During this time, it is important for stakeholders to be reminded of the importance of improving in order for discouragement to not happen. Fullan (2002) contended leadership development is a slow process. Although slow, when all stakeholders are involved and a trusting relationship is developed, the end result of increased instructional leadership can happen through the process of organizational learning.

## **Chapter III**

### **METHODS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the applied research design and the methods used in this research to improve principals' capacity as instructional leaders in the Magnolia School District. Applied research is designed to both address a problem of practice and to improve organizational effectiveness by developing the capacity for organizational learning. The details of the applied research design guiding this research are presented and explained. Chapter Three is divided into three parts. First, an explanation is presented of the collaborative development of the action plan to address the problem of principal capacity in the area of instructional leadership. This section includes an overview of collaborating stakeholders, a review and timeline of the process, existing research guiding the work, and internal data examined to create the action plan.

The second part presents the full action plan. The research questions presented in Chapter One begin this section. Each research question is designed to guide the evaluation of one element of the action plan. The different elements of the action plan represent a specific collaborative effort to address the problem. Each element includes one or more measurable goal. This section provides the details of exactly what will take place for each element: what systems will be in place, what participants will be expected to do and accomplish, what timelines will be followed, what resources of time and material will be required, and who will be responsible for each activity or effort required of participants.

The final section of Chapter Three presents the program evaluation of the action plan to be conducted following one year of implementation. Formative and summative assessments will be used for each element of the action plan. Each element will be evaluated using multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative data. The focus of the evaluation will be to determine the level of goal attainment and to improve the organization's capacity to improve instructional leadership. The research questions will be answered with data collected and analyzed through the program evaluation process.

### **Development of the Action Plan**

In the spring of 2017, the district leadership team gathered to review school accountability data from the state. District administrators--Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Special Education Director, Federal Programs Director, and Curriculum Director--discovered the need for increased student achievement at each school in the district. Although the three high schools did not see a decrease in overall accountability points represented on the model, the leadership team's concern focused on the underperformance of students currently in middle school transitioning to the high schools. All four middle schools had dropped significantly in accountability points. The district leadership team then met with principals and assistant principals to disaggregate MAP data. The MAP data indicated a decline in overall student achievement for many schools (See Table 1).



Table 1

*MAAP Final Accountability Results Comparison for the Magnolia County School District*

<b>School</b>	<b>Points 2014-2015</b>	<b>Grade 2014-2015</b>	<b>Points 2015-2016</b>	<b>Grade 2015-2016</b>
High School A	765	A	782	A
High School B	695	A	742	A
High School C	447	D	598	C
Middle School A	504	B	363	C
Middle School B	442	B	299	D
Middle School C	404	C	243	F
Middle School D	312	D	216	F

As district administrators met about the immediate need for more data-driven decisions, the suggestion was made to meet individually with each principal. A meeting was held, which included the district administration team and the principal of each middle and high school. Data results were studied. An informal action plan with a timetable was discussed in each meeting. After all seven of these meetings were concluded, the district administrators met to discuss the findings. It was noted each data meeting contained similar themes: uncertainty making data-driven decisions, the need for more collaboration, and the need for greater district support. These meetings also revealed principals making the majority of the school decisions. The assistant principal was notably absent, and teachers were rarely involved. The lack of collaboration, at the school level and the district level, was apparent to all team members.

Based on these meetings, the leadership team identified the need for principal instructional leadership capacity to improve. In addition to individual growth as an instructional

leader, the need for organizational growth was apparent. The lack of collaboration was a concern and it became a priority in the development of the action plan. It was determined that through support from the district level and other principals, principals can develop deeper skills as the instructional leaders of their campuses. Planning began in late spring of 2017 to implement a district team, consisting of the district administration team and the middle and high school principals and assistant principals. This group began meeting together in the summer of 2017 and continued through the 2017-2018 school year.

Through the collaborative process, the leadership team used relevant research presented in Chapter Two in the development of the action plan. For example, Cudeiro (2005) studied districts who provided principals tools to grow as an instructional leader and these districts saw increased student achievement. The leadership team decided to provide district principals tools, such as training and collaboration opportunities, to expand their instructional leadership. Additionally, Gulcan (2012) studied the need for principals to be visionary leaders rather than just managers of their buildings to increase student achievement. This research led the district leadership team to provide training to principals on the qualities of a visionary leader who understands instruction. Finally, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom's (2004) research points to the importance of a principal's leadership, as it is second only to classroom instruction in improving student achievement. This research supports the need for principal training and support. It also underscores the importance of the Magnolia County School District to develop an action plan that guides principals to lead schools effectively.

Following the data review, the district leadership team sought strategies for implementation in the Magnolia County School District in order to empower principals to become more effective instructional leaders in schools. The action plan involved setting short

term and long term goals in efforts to improve each principal's capacity as an instructional leader, while also improving student achievement, which would result in the improvement of each school's state accountability rating.

The action plan began with a need for principals to be effective instructional leaders on their campuses. The district leadership team studied state accountability results and saw the decline of many of the middle and high schools. Additionally, district leadership had conversations with principals who expressed the need to have the knowledge and confidence to make data-driven decisions rooted in best practices. Because of this, the decision was made to provide support to principals in the Magnolia School District through cohort-based professional development for the ultimate goal of increased student proficiency. According to Umekubo, Chrispeels, and Daly (2015), districts and schools have realized educators need more opportunities for collaborating in order to increase their professional learning. The district administrators in the Magnolia County School District understood communication flows more freely among colleagues through informal relationships and this paved the way for an action plan centered upon the two-fold premise of developing individual principals as well as developing the administrators in the district as a whole through a collaboration model where organizational learning took place.

## The Action Plan

Table 2 provides the elements and details of the action plan.

Table 2

### *Action Plan*

<b>Element</b>	<b>Goals</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>Budget</b>
Cohort-based Professional Development	Short term – Principals develop a higher level of expectations in teacher classrooms Long term - Principals develop a deeper understanding of instructional leadership	July 2017	Outside consultant, principals, assistant principals, district administrators	\$4,500
Principal PLC	Short term – Principals feel more supported as they lead their schools Long term - Increased collaboration among administrators	August 2017- Spring 2019	Principals, assistant principals, district administrators	\$13,440
Data meetings	Short term – Principals and teachers will use data correctly for instructional decisions Long term - Deeper understanding of student achievement	August 2017- Spring 2019	Principals and teachers	\$1,600 per school
Consultant and administrator campus visits	Short term - Measure level of instructional leadership Long term – Principal and teachers make better instructional decisions as an organization	October 2017- March 2019	Outside consultant, district administrators, and principal	\$21,000

### **Cohort-Based Professional Development.**

The first step of the action plan involved a consultant with CORE Educational Services, LLC, who trained principals, assistant principals, and district leadership. The consultant provided three days of training in July 2017 regarding the understanding of data, collaborating with teachers and all stakeholders, and effective classroom observations. A principal who does not understand effective instruction cannot adequately evaluate a teacher's classroom instruction. Helping principals understand what to look for during an observation is important to the process of equipping them to serve as instructional leaders. Principals were taught the important constructs of what is important as an instructional leader and district leadership sought to understand the areas of support principals need. The consultant led them through the requirements of each teacher observation, which includes updated lesson plans, standards listed on the board, and objectives for the lesson. She also provided training on how to begin the school year as they lead their teachers in professional development. Each principal received documents to distribute to their teachers, such as school accountability data, student accountability data, and updated standards. The consultant continued to be a resource for each principal and individual, as follow-up visits will be conducted on each campus throughout the year.

Upon conclusion of the training, the principals were given a survey (see Appendix A) about the benefits of the training. This survey was used as a baseline for measurement of growth. Principals were encouraged to detail their growth and understanding from the training on how they will better support the instructional needs of their teachers. Additionally, the district leadership team and the consultant observed classrooms in each school to monitor the use of the training materials provided by the consultant.

### **Principal Professional Learning Communities.**

Following the consultant's initial training, the district leadership team began a monthly principal PLC for all principals and assistant principals from the seven middle and high schools. This team of approximately 30 administrators meet once a month, led by the district leadership team. The leadership team followed up on the initial training and reviewed data from the schools. The school administrators chose topics to discuss and collaborated with their peers for possible solutions. This type of collaborative group has not been utilized in the past. Principals did not have a designated time to meet and collaborate with their peers. Assistant principals had no interaction with other APs in the district. By bringing the entire administrative team from each school together regularly, the school's administrative team work together as a united front, while forming relationships with the other administrators in the district.

During the PLCs, district leadership also shared topics pertinent to the district. Using data as a guide, topics such as dropout prevention, professional development for teachers, and parent/community relationships were discussed. DuFour (2015) contends effective professional learning communities view data as a powerful tool for meeting the needs of individual students and for informing and improving the professional practice of the entire team. Each district leadership team member took time to share information on these topics. Learning walks, which involve the principals visiting other schools in the district, occurred throughout the year. The objective of these learning walks was to see the various cultures present in the schools in the district, looking for similarities, but also looking for differences.

The principal PLCs concluded each month with a focus group. After each meeting, each principal reflected on growth so far during the year. The reflection also included areas of improvement he or she saw. Part of the reflection was shared with the group and part was kept

by the individual as a visual representation of the year-long journey. At the end of the year, the principals were encouraged to share with the group from the journal, if they choose, for discourse regarding their perceptions of their own group. This type of progress monitoring will help guide the improvements to the action plan for the following year.

### **Data Meetings.**

Data meetings were utilized at each school on a regular basis throughout the year. Administrators and teachers regularly met to look at their students' progress and delved deeper in the specific areas of growth and areas of need. Principals prescribed additional professional development and training as they saw the need. They updated their administrative cohorts in their PLCs and discussed their decisions with the outcomes. This gave them practice making instructional decisions on their campus. Along with the curriculum director, the principals analyzed how well their prescriptive measures met their school's need and if additional support is necessary.

At the end of the school year, the district and each school received a state accountability rating. In order for the school's accountability rating to improve, sub scores need to improve. One of the most important sub scores is English Language Arts proficiency. This measures a student's reading proficiency. English Language Arts proficiency is important because reading skills are the foundation of every other skill. If a student is not proficient in reading, deficits occur in other areas. Not only does increasing English Language Arts proficiency help the school's accountability rating, but it helps ensure each student is successful and prepared for the future. Based on previous years, several of the schools have struggled to show an increase in student achievement. While it is impossible to explicitly tie the state test results to the action plan, the goal of this research was to positively effect reading proficiency and student

achievement. Therefore, this research looked at the growth of reading proficiency throughout the implementation period.

Student achievement was monitored at regular intervals during the school year. Every nine weeks, each student took a district-developed English Language Arts common assessment. The principal collaborated with the teachers to disaggregate the student data results. The number of students scoring proficient was recorded and student progress was monitored. Data meetings at the school with the principal and teachers, followed by data meetings at the principal PLCs with the district leadership team allowed stakeholders to look for trends in student performance. These data conversations at the district level also played a role in increasing the organizational learning for the Magnolia County School District.

With the data from each nine weeks common assessment, the school's performance was plugged into the state accountability model to get an estimate of how the school was performing each nine weeks. Based on these results, modifications in instruction occurred in the classroom, with the principal and teachers making collaborative decisions to improve instruction.

#### **Consultant and District Administrator Campus Visits.**

The outside consultant provided follow-up visits during the year to each campus. The consultant spent an entire day with each principal on his or her school campus. They began the day by visiting classrooms. They looked at the teacher's lesson plans, observed student engagement, and observed instruction. After the observations, a debriefing took place. The consultant and the principal discussed what they saw in the classrooms. This gave insight into how well the principal is understanding instruction and if a deficiency existed, they devised a plan of action. Data was studied and discussed. Common assessment scores, which gave a checkpoint at the end of each grading period, were used in monitoring student achievement. The



consultant collaborated with the principal and assistant principal for next steps. Two school visits took place during the school year.

District leadership team members also observed two times a year on each campus. The same objectives were in place. Classroom observations with the administrative team occurred, followed by a debriefing of what was observed. By giving principals both external support from an outside consultant and internal support by district leadership, they were empowered to form relationships with other educators so that collaboration can continue to occur. Some principals formed a closer relationship with an outside consultant and freely discussed problems or limitations. Others formed closer relationships with the district leadership team. By having both external and internal support, all principals felt supported and empowered.

### **Timeline.**

The action plan was begun in June of 2017, as district leadership surveyed the state accountability results. Coupled with ongoing conversations with principals, the district saw the need for intensive support for all principals to become better instructional leaders in their schools. The external consultant provided three days of professional development to all principals, assistant principals, and district administrators during July 2017. In August, principals began meeting monthly with their principal cohort and district administrators.

In October and November 2017, the external consultant visited each school for one day. This consisted of classroom observations, disaggregating data, and debriefing with the principals. The principal conducted data meetings at each school at the conclusion of each nine week grading period with all teachers.

Feedback was sought informally throughout the year. The district leadership was in regular contact with principals and visited their campuses on a regular basis. Revisions to the PLC meeting agenda occurred based on the feedback throughout the year.

The external consultant visited each campus for a second time in March and April of 2018. The visit followed the same format as the first visit. The consultant, along with the school's administrative team, observed classrooms, delved into data, and then debriefed on the findings of the day. The consultant collaborated with the administrators to develop the next steps for the following school year.

In June 2018, the PLC met with district administrators to study final state accountability and student results. ELA proficiency was the focus, as overall school ratings were also studied. Formal interviews with each principal took place in the summer of 2018 to gain insight into the principal's perceptions and attitudes regarding the support from the district, specifically the principal PLC. They reflected on their growth as an instructional leader throughout the year. The principal cohort, along with the district administrators, will plan the next steps for the next school year. The support will continue for the next school year and revisions to the program will be made based on results and feedback.

### **Resources.**

The resources needed for this plan include consultant fees and opportunity costs. Development and implementation require extensive amounts of time throughout the year. Consultant fees were \$1500 per day. The consultant provided three days of summer training, then two days of follow up at each of the seven middle and high schools, which cost a total of \$25,500.

Salary costs were the biggest expense of the project. Ongoing professional development required time from district administrators and school administrators. The time spent on three full days of instruction, plus seven monthly, two-hour meetings was a substantial salary cost for 24 administrators in the district. The salary costs of the three day summer training was approximately \$13,440. The salary costs of the monthly PLCs was approximately \$23,040. Total salary costs for the plan was \$36,480.

The cost of printing training materials, paper, and supplies was estimated to be \$1,500. This estimate also included money needed for books or any other resources.

### **Stakeholder Responsibility.**

The majority of the responsibility of the action plan fell on the district leadership team. The leadership team developed, coordinated, and planned the monthly principal PLC agendas. Each team member contributed to the meetings by facilitating sessions to equip principals in instructional leadership areas. For example, the curriculum department focused on standards-based instruction to ensure the principals understood what they should be observing in classrooms. The researcher ultimately led the leadership team to ensure fidelity to the plan. The job responsibilities as chief academic officer naturally demand the leadership role in equipping principals as instructional leaders. The leadership team also offered support to each school campus, keeping in communication through emails, phone conversations, and campus visits. The leadership team secured the external consultant who will provide the services throughout the year. The team kept in constant contact with the consultant for feedback.

The principals and assistant principals were responsible for participation at district meeting and implementation on their campus. The success of the plan depended on how well the principals provided leadership at their schools, so constant feedback and adjustments as

necessary were essential. The plan could be modified for each individual principal when the feedback indicated more training is needed. Ongoing feedback from all stakeholders was sought.

### **Evaluation Plan**

The purpose of the evaluation plan was to determine the success of the action plan in equipping principals to become stronger instructional leaders and to continue the cycle of organizational learning in the Magnolia County School District.

The evaluation of the plan sought to answer the following:

1. Did the principals become better instructional leaders?
2. Did the principals' knowledge of correctly using data to make data-driven instructional decisions increase?
3. To what extent did the principals participate in district PLCs?
4. What areas of success were evident through the implementation process?
5. What problems prevented successful implementation of providing support to principals?
6. Did the organizational learning help improve the capacity of principals to engage in district-wide organizational development?

The logic model lists the elements involved in the action plan, which were derived from the research. A short term and long term goal is provided for each element. The evaluation data to be used to determine the success of the action plan is provided. The chart shows a concise summary of the elements involved in this action plan, the goals to be attained, and the means of evaluation, which will help answer the research questions. Table 3 lists the elements and details of the evaluation plan.

Table 3

*Logic Model/Evaluation Plan*

<b>Elements</b>	<b>Goals</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>Evaluation Data</b>
Cohort- Based Professional Development	Short term – Principals develop a higher level of expectations in teacher classrooms Long term - Principals develop a deeper understanding of instructional leadership	July 2017	Consultant, principals, assistant principals, district administrators	Principal survey (Appendix A) Classroom observation checklist (Appendix B) Principal focus group (Appendix C)
Principal PLC	Short term – Principals feel more supported as they lead their schools Long term - Increased collaboration among administrators	August 2017- Spring 2019	Principals, assistant principals, district administrators	Principal PLC focus group (Appendix D) Principal interview (Appendix E)  Focus group with teachers (Appendix F)
Data Meetings	Short term – Principals and teachers will use data correctly for instructional decisions Long term - Deeper understanding of student achievement	August 2017- Spring 2019	Principals and teachers	MAAP Data  Common Assessment Data  Data meeting observation checklist (Appendix G)
Consultant and administrator campus visits	Short term - Measure level of instructional leadership Long term – Principal and teachers make better instructional decisions as an organization	October 2017- March 2019	Consultant, district administrators, and principal	Campus visit checklist (Appendix H) District administrators focus group (Appendix I) Principal survey (Appendix J)

**Cohort-Based Professional Development.**

The first action plan element to be evaluated was cohort-based professional development.

The long term goal of this training was for principals to develop a deeper understanding of

instructional leadership. The short term goal was for principals to develop a higher level of expectations in teacher classrooms. Following the professional development in July 2017, the principals were given a survey in order to evaluate their understanding of being the instructional leader of their school. This closed-ended survey was used to determine goal attainment of a deeper understanding of instructional leadership. I wanted to find out if and how their understanding of how to effectively lead their teachers changed as they begin the school year. I wanted to find out the degree of their understanding of determining a teacher's instructional strengths and weaknesses. All middle and high school principals were given the survey. Upon completion of the principal surveys, the researcher compiled the data to use for formative assessment.

A classroom observation checklist was used to gauge the principals' understanding of the important elements they should see in their teachers' classrooms and the degree they were observing these elements in their schools. The researcher completed a checklist, following the start of school, to check for implementation in the classroom. Teachers should display standards to be covered that day on the board, lesson plans on the desk, and scaffolding documents used while planning lessons. The principal was responsible for leading teachers in these types of best classroom practices. The researcher visited ten classrooms, selected randomly. This data was used for formative assessment.

Focus group interviews were conducted by the researcher following the professional development. The principals participated in a focus group to discuss their learning of best instructional practices. They must have a clear understanding of classroom practices they should see in each classroom. The focus group allowed for discussion with the principal group in a manner of conversation, exploration, and discussion. All middle and high school principals

participated in the focus group. The focus group data were used for both formative and summative assessment.

### **Principal Professional Learning Communities.**

The next element of the action plan to be evaluated was the Principal Professional Learning Communities. The long term goal for the PLCs is for increased collaboration among administrators. The short term goal was for principals to feel more supported as they lead their schools. After each PLC meeting, the researcher led the principals in a focus group to gauge the amount of support they feel. All seven middle and high school principals in the district participated in the focus group following the PLC meeting. This was used for formative assessment.

The researcher interviewed the principals during the middle of the school year. Each middle and high school principal was interviewed (see Appendix E) regarding the topics of shared decision making, positive school climate, collaboration, and gradual change. The interview results were used to search for themes in the principals' leadership skills as they continue to grow. The results were used to determine if the goals were attained and how to improve the program.

A focus group was conducted with teachers at the end of the school year. Teachers were chosen for the focus group randomly. Using an alphabetical list of teachers from that campus, every fifth teacher was chosen. The teachers were asked about their perceptions of their principal as an instructional leader and if they have observed changes in his or her leadership during the school year. The focus group responses were used for both formative and summative assessment.

### **Data Meetings.**

The next element of the action plan to be evaluated was the data meetings. The long term goal of the data meetings was for the principals and teachers to develop a deeper understanding of student achievement. The short term goal was for principals and teachers to use data correctly in making instructional decisions. MAAP Data was analyzed during the data meetings using document analysis. This data was used for formative assessment to see if goals were attained.

Common assessment scores were evaluated in the data meetings. Every nine weeks, each student took a district-developed English Language Arts common assessment. With the data from each nine weeks common assessment, the school's performance can be plugged into the state accountability model to gauge the current level of achievement and allow for principals and teachers to make modifications to instruction before the end of the year. The common assessment data used document analysis and was used for formative assessment.

The researcher observed one data meeting at each school (see Appendix G). The school leadership team conducted the data meeting, with the researcher only being an observer. The researcher used this information to document the data meetings on each campus. This information was helpful for formative assessment in checking for goal attainment.

### **Consultant and District Administrator Campus Visits.**

The final element of the action plan to be evaluated was the consultant and administrator site visits. The long term goal of the campus visits was for principals and teachers to make better instructional decisions as an organization. The short term goal of the visits was to measure the level of instructional leadership of the principals. The first piece of evaluation data used to evaluate the campuses was an observation checklist. The district administration team observed during a half day on each middle and high school campus, using a checklist as a guide. The checklist was used for formative assessment.



A focus group was held for all of the district administrative team. The researcher conducted the focus group. It pertained to what was observed on campuses, principals' decisions, and questions regarding collaboration. This data was used for both formative and summative assessment.

Principals were interviewed by the researcher following the campus visits. All seven principals were interviewed to learn more about the principal's feelings about the campus visits, specifically how they felt, positively or negatively, about others coming to their campus to make suggestions for improvements. These interviews were used for formative assessment.

### **Formative and Summative Elements.**

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected throughout the program. This continual review of data was used for formative assessment in order to improve the program. After the first year of implementation, the following year can be planned with improvements to the program, based on feedback and themes revealed in the data. Continual improvement will be sought for the program.

Upon completion of the program, a summative evaluation took place to determine whether to continue or discontinue the program. Goals established for the program were used to gauge effectiveness once the action plan is complete. If improvements were made, the summative data revealed the need to continue the program, while constantly making improvements.

### **Conclusion**

Developing principals into effective instructional leaders was the goal of the action plan. As principals understand instruction and collaborate with teachers, they can help improve their

school culture. Organizational learning on each campus and throughout the district improved. Ultimately, school achievement improved because student achievement increased. Stakeholders were a vital key to this action plan. Their voices were important and were a priority. Measureable goals were identified and an evaluation plan was put in place. Chapter Four will address the findings of the research.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### **Introduction**

As described in Chapter III, this applied research study sought to improve the instructional leadership of principals in the Magnolia County School District. Through targeted initial professional development and ongoing collaboration with administrative peers in the district throughout the year, the researcher and district administrative team sought to equip middle and high school principals in the district as strong instructional leaders of their campuses in order to make the best instructional decisions for the benefit of student achievement.

The Magnolia School District has four middle schools which feed into three high schools in a rural setting. The three high schools are located in vastly different parts of the county, which have different resources and industries. Some areas deal with extremely high poverty, while other schools do not. Additionally, the industries and tax base are extremely different in the three parts of the county. Principals at each of these schools face several challenges that are unique to his or her school, thereby requiring support and input of others as they work to solve them. Declining student achievement, coupled with rising and ever-changing accountability standards, dictated the need for equipping principals to effectively provide solutions to the problems they face as they lead their schools.

The action plan to accomplish these goals began with targeted professional development from an outside consultant for all school administrators to provide each one a foundation of making data-driven instructional decisions, ways to support teachers, and understanding how to

support struggling students. As the school year began, the principals participated in monthly PLCs with their peers from other schools and district administrators. This was a time of reflecting and sharing new information. As the year progressed, the principal PLCs became the backbone of the action plan. This time of collaboration, with scheduled monthly meetings, was essential in bringing administrators together from across the district, which had not been done before. Before the end of the year, principals were scheduling additional meetings with their peers because of the benefit they saw in the PLCs. Another component of the action plan centered on principals and teachers working together in data meetings in their schools throughout the year. Finally, district administrators and the outside consultant visited each campus twice per year in order to visit classrooms with the principal and brainstorm ways to overcome the challenges throughout the school year. These research questions were used to evaluate the results of the action plan.

1. Did the principals become better instructional leaders?
2. Did the principals' knowledge of using data to correctly make data-driven instructional decisions increase?
3. To what extent did the principals participate in district PLCs?
4. What areas of success were evident through the implementation process?
5. What problems hindered successful implementation of providing support to principals?
6. Did the organizational learning help improve the capacity of principals to engage in district-wide organizational development?

An applied research study with a program evaluation was used to answer the research questions. Specifically, the program evaluation was used to determine the effectiveness of the study and to make improvements in the program created through the action plan.

The importance of principals as instructional leaders is evident in all aspects of their leadership. Understanding how to be an instructional leader is paramount to changing the culture of one's school (Barnes, Camburn, Sanders, and Sebastian, 2010). The culture change is often a slow process, but consistent, research-based decisions help the culture change to continue. Additionally, organizational learning occurs as principals work as a collaborative team with teachers and district administration (Leech and Fulton, 2008). With all stakeholders working together for a shared goal of school improvement, principals can be better equipped to lead the changes for improvement. This chapter provides the results of each research question.

### **Research Question One**

Research question one asks, "Did the principals become better instructional leaders?" The results are presented for each element associated with this question. The following data is evidence the principals did become better instructional leaders in many areas.

Principals, assistant principals, and district administrators were provided concentrated professional development by an outside consultant before the school year began. This three day professional development provided a foundation for principals to understand the important steps in starting the school year with teachers in the right way. How to use data correctly, how to conduct teacher observations, and how to prescribe professional development for teachers were some of the topics covered during the professional development. I administered a survey to principals following the professional development. This was a measure for principals to provide self-perceptions of their own instructional leadership ability before the program began. A forced Likert scale (see Appendix A) was used. The first statement read, "I make sure the professional development activities of teachers are in accordance with the teaching goals of the school." This question had the most positive responses, with five answering quite often and two answering

very often. The statement that read, “I monitor students’ work” had mostly negative responses from the principals. Four responded seldom and one responded never. One responded quite often and one responded very often. The trends of this instrument showed the majority of principals make decisions about teacher needs, such as in prescribing professional development, observing classrooms, and informing teachers about possibilities for updating their knowledge and skills. While the majority agreed on all statements, whether positive or negative, one respondent did not agree with the others. For example, on the statement reading, “I use student performance results to develop the school’s education goals,” all respondents stated quite often or very often, except for one respondent who answered seldom. The results of the survey show most principals perceive themselves to be somewhat of an instructional leader, evidenced by most of them giving themselves positive scores on each statement. They did, however, give themselves room for growth, noted by none of them responding “very often” to each statement.

I conducted a focus group with the middle and high school principals following the professional development at the beginning of the school year (see Appendix C). One theme which emerged from the focus group was the positive impact of the professional development, evidenced by their answers to the question, “How did the professional development change your leadership practices at the beginning of school?” The principals reported that following the professional development, they went back to their campuses with a more-focused effort in supporting teachers. One principal stated, “I am more consistent with checking that agendas, standards, and goals are posted in an area visible to all students at all times. It also helped me to be consistent with checking that teachers are tracking current data on their data walls for their students.” Another principal stated the addition of instructional rounds has been added to their school’s professional development. Another principal stated he carried the ideas back to his staff

and led the whole staff and small group PLC discussions on standards analysis with a focus on finding patterns in our standards analysis data. Each principal noted a positive change in their practices as school began. When asked about teachers' reception of their presence in their classrooms, one replied, "Our teachers, as a whole, have always been open minded to any direction or strategy that will help them in the classroom. This year was no different." Another responded, "It has been like turning a ship in mud, but the teachers are finally buying-in and realizing what we have been doing has not worked so we must try something else." Finally, one replied, "I had buy-in from my teachers from the beginning of the school year, and they were positive about moving our school forward." The overall sentiment revealed the positive reception from the teachers in their schools and the need to continue honing their skills as instructional leaders.

During the school year, middle and high school principals met monthly in a Principal PLC to discuss instructional topics with their peers, along with assistant principals and district administrators. During the year, I interviewed the principals about topics concerning their leadership, such as shared decision making, positive school climate, collaboration, and gradual change (see Appendix E). When asked how each knows their teachers' concerns, one replied, "I speak with my teachers almost daily in the hallways or in their classrooms." Another said, "I make a point to walk the halls and have informal conversations with the teachers on a daily basis." A novice principal replied, "Some teachers are open with me, while others have 'liaisons' who serve as a voice." Another said, "I have an 'open-door' policy with my teachers." These responses reveal principals maintain communication with their staff, leading to a positive school climate. This enhances their instructional leadership capacity. Each principal indicated they made sure to know their teachers' concerns in these various ways.

Principals were also asked how they have helped shaped their school's climate. Some responded with "I inherited a good school climate when I become principal, so I have managed to keep building on that." Another replied, "I try to operate an orderly, safe school where everyone is respected. Obviously, we have our problems, but if there is mutual respect for all, the climate of the school is one in which learning can occur with fewer distractions." Another said, "I have shaped the school climate by building strong, positive, professional relationships with the various stakeholders. I have also modeled promoting the positive things we are doing at our school." These responses indicate the principals are working toward developing a maintaining a positive school climate, which is a part of instructional leadership.

I conducted a focus group with random teacher representatives from each school (see Appendix F). The teachers provided insight on their observations of their principal's behavior as an instructional leader. All respondents discussed changes and growth to some extent in their principals. Themes emerged from this focus group, including a perception of principals as good managers, a perception of a positive school climate, and uncertainty regarding instructional leadership skills. When asked how they had observed their principal as instructional leaders during the year, one replied, "I have rarely viewed my principal as an instructional leader. He is rather an administrator concerned with the daily managing duties of the school." Another replied, "My principal has very high standards of professionalism and expectations for teachers. However, his knowledge of content and standards are not as strong." Another teacher said, "He is a hands-off leader when it comes to classroom instruction. He sees the teacher as the expert in his or her field and trusts them to make instructional choices that will benefit the students." Finally, another teacher responded, "My principal is very approachable and knowledgeable. He shows his leadership skills in faculty meetings, PLC meeting, and working one-on-one with



teachers. He attends principal meetings and shares the information with the staff, which lets us know other ways we can help our students.” As teachers responded about needed areas of improvement they saw in their principal, responses noted more data meetings, a more-focused classroom observation, and helping teachers understand how to interpret student data that impacts instructional practices. These responses indicate the teachers observed principals growing as instructional leaders to some degree, but some teachers did not see very much evidence in their schools.

The consultant and district administrators visited each school twice during the year to help measure the level of instructional leadership of the principals. Following these visits, principals were given a Likert scale survey (see Appendix J) to rate their feelings about the campus visit and their leadership improvement. All of the respondents stated they felt comfortable with the visits. Five responded they agreed and two responded they somewhat agreed. All seven principals agreed with the results of the campus observations. This response indicates they saw the same successes and challenges as the consultant and district administrators. The statement with the most respondents marking somewhat disagree stated that teachers felt comfortable during the classroom visits. Two respondents marked somewhat disagree, two marked somewhat agree, and two marked agree. The results of this survey indicate principals are identifying research-based areas of focus on their campus. All principals showed a level of growth as an instructional leader, as evidenced by the common findings among the consultant, district administrators, and the principals themselves during the visits.

The findings reveal principals did become better instructional leaders. Beginning with the self-perception survey, principals articulated some instructional leadership, but also recognized room for growth. The principals’ responses in the focus group show principal instructional

leadership improved as a result of the professional development. The principal interviews revealed instructional leadership improved because principals know and recognize teacher concerns while working toward developing a maintaining a positive school climate. However, the results also reveal some teachers did not observe better instructional leadership practices in their principal.

### **Research Question Two**

Research question two asks, “Did the principals’ knowledge of correctly using data to make data-driven instructional decisions increase?” The results are presented for each element associated with this question. The following data is evidence the principals’ knowledge of correctly using data to make data-driven instructional decisions increased.

I conducted one observation of a data meeting at each school (see Appendix G). An observation form with yes or no answers was used to rate various types of participant activity. The overall theme of the findings was most schools held data meetings with fidelity. Teachers came to the meeting prepared with student data to discuss. Collaboration among the participants was observed, and participants developed actionable goals to complete before the next meeting. On the other hand, I also observed several meetings where all teachers did not participate in data conversations. Out of the seven schools, all teachers in four schools participated in the meeting. In the other three, all teachers were present, but not all participated in the meeting. In two schools, the principal was not actively involved in the data decisions during the meeting. In the other five schools, the principal was an active participant in the data meetings. Based on the observations, the principals’ knowledge of correctly making data-driven instructional decisions increased to a degree. Teachers and principals were participants in the data meetings and made instructional decisions based on student data.

I held a focus group with district administrators (see Appendix I). The district administrators discussed how they observed principals making data-driven decisions throughout the year. One administrator noted, “Common assessment data is analyzed during PLCs and used in changing instruction. Administrators attend PLCs and discuss data with teachers.” Another replied, “Data rooms are evident and meetings take place in these rooms. They discuss the data and make intervention type decisions based on the data, but I am not seeing as many changes in Tier 1 instruction based on the data.” On the same note from another administrator, “It (data) plays a role in how students are identified for support and remediation. Data does not seem to have had a big impact yet on general Tier 1 instruction. However, it has had an impact on assessment design. Teachers have begun breaking their tests apart and redoing them to better align with the MAAP assessment.” District administrators agreed improvements have occurred on each campus, but stated areas still in need of improvement. They observed the principals’ knowledge of making correct data-driven instructional decisions is increasing, as evidenced by the instructional decisions made in school PLCs with their teachers regarding interventions and remediation.

The findings reveal principals’ knowledge of correctly using data to make data-driven decisions did, in fact, increase based on the data meeting observations and district administrator focus group responses.

### **Research Question Three**

Research question three asks, “To what extent did the principals participate in district PLCs?” The results are presented for each element associated with this question. The following data is evidence the principals participated in district PLCs to a high degree.

Participation in the PLCs was measured in multiple ways. First, the actual attendance rate of principals was recorded. Out of seven meetings during school year 2017-2018, three meetings had perfect attendance. The other four meetings had only one principal absent because of school responsibilities or personal emergencies. Assistant principals also were invited for the purpose of helping develop a collaborative administrative team on each campus, hopefully leading to organizational learning. Additionally, district administrators participated in each meeting. Until this time, only principals had collaborated together. Assistant principals were not part of district meetings. After the first Principal PLC, one assistant principal commented, “I had never even met a couple of the other assistant principals in the district because we are on opposite sides of the county. Because of lack of proximity, we have never had a chance to even meet.” That comment helped guide my direction for future PLCs and solidified the purpose in bringing administrators together regularly to discuss problems, successes, and questions they can ask of one another. The principals, however, were not as receptive initially to the PLC. They questioned among themselves the necessity of the meetings. They did not interact much at all during the meetings. The thought of “another meeting” was the prevailing attitude in the beginning. As the year progressed, though, several principals were more receptive and began to welcome the time spent in collaboration as they began to actually collaborate during meetings. High attendance and a high degree of participation in the PLCs occurred throughout the year.

I conducted principal interviews (see Appendix E) and discussed what they retained from their time in PLCs. All respondents indicated that their time in PLCs had been well spent. They also all indicated that the PLC meetings have positively affected their leadership. Finally, all principals reported they implemented changes in their school based on information from PLC

meetings, such as school policy, pedagogy, and understanding data. When asked about how they utilized their peers as learning partners this year, one replied:

I have asked other principals in the district to allow our teachers to network with their teachers, especially on standards that our data shows our students need extra work on. Also, I have made my teachers available to their teachers to assist their teachers in areas that they may need assistance. The outcome of this has been networking between my teachers and other teachers in the district.

Another replied, “Not as much as I should, but I probably contact them every two to three weeks.” Another responded, “I emailed them just yesterday for help on an issue that came up. I would not have done that in the past.” The responses gave evidence of participation in PLCs by implementation results carried out at the school.

In a focus group for principals following a PLC, (see Appendix D), the principals were asked what they learned from their colleagues in the session. In that particular session, one of the principals asked for a topic to be placed on the agenda. His school had dropped in its graduation percentage because of clerical errors on the school’s part. He felt it would be beneficial to the other schools to share that information so it would not happen in the future. He shared specifics of things he had learned. This was the first time a principal had asked to lead part of the PLC. Until that point, I had developed most of the agenda, with the principals sometimes asking for specific topics, but never had volunteered to lead a session. After the session, when asked what they had learned, one responded, “I learned many things hearing the discussions concerning high school topics because I will be moving from middle school principal to high school principal next year.” Another replied, “I learned mistakes not to make that will hopefully allow us to get all the credit possible for our graduation rate. I also learned that all schools are facing some of

the same issues we are dealing with, as far as scheduling the ACT prep class and adequately preparing students for the ACT, which helps to know.” A less experienced principal commented, “I learned specific ways they were problem solving on their campuses. Just knowing I am not alone in problems helps me.” In the focus group, the principals were also asked what recommendations they had for future PLCs and almost all of them replied with more of the same format. They stated they enjoyed hearing from the peers, both fellow principals and district administrators, and having a voice in the agenda items. These responses and actions show a high level of participation by principals in the district PLCs.

In answering the research question asking to what extent did the principals participate in district PLCs, the findings show a high level of attendance and participation during the PLC, in addition to the follow up implementation carried out at their schools.

#### **Research Question Four**

Research question four asks, “What areas of success were evident through the implementation process?” The results are presented for each element associated with the question. High principal participation in PLCs, individual principal growth, and campus visits revealing principal implementation indicate areas of success in the program.

The participation of the principals was a success in this program. As the year began, the principals were guarded in their participation. They consented to attending, but did not strive to fully participate. As they became more comfortable with each other, genuine discourse began to happen. Assistant principals, especially, began to participate and ask questions. Even the seating arrangements changed throughout the year. As they grew more comfortable with each other, they began to sit with others from different campuses, rather than just sit with their own administrative team. Toward the end of the year, the middle school principals felt they needed to

each meet with the corresponding elementary principal of their feeder school, since their particular PLC was only attended by middle and high schools. The middle school principals took the initiative to set up meetings with their elementary principal counterpart as they planned for the fifth grade students to transition to sixth grade. This was considered a big success in that principals were taking the next step in collaboration by initiating the contact for collaboration meetings, instead of merely participating in meetings set for them.

In a principal interview (see Appendix E), principals were asked what personal areas of success in the program. One responder said, “Teachers have responded positively to the changes I have made this year. They are learning to better disaggregate data, find weak areas, read standards blueprints, and are starting learning centers in their classrooms.” Another replied, “Though I don’t feel there have been significant changes in my leadership, I have made a concerted effort to depend on the advice of others more. This is because of the connections I have made with my colleagues. I know I can trust their advice.” A seasoned veteran principal replied, “My teachers have responded well to the changes we have made because they are active participants in creating the vision and academic goals we have for our school. I brought in our teachers to be part of every decision making process because I saw the benefit from our PLCs.” These responses reveal principals saw success, both in their own personal leadership growth and the manifestation of their leadership practices on their campus.

During the second semester of school year 2017-2018, district administrators and the outside consultant visited each school campus to observe improvements in instructional leadership. I conducted a focus group with the district administrators who worked with the principals PLCs (see Appendix I). They were asked how the culture changed at the middle and high schools. One replied, “The school had a new principal and assistant principal so I believe

having the monthly PLC meetings gave them the help they needed to make changes and implement new ideas with community involvement.” Noting the culture improvement on another campus, one responded, “I have noticed the teachers seem to be collaborating more. For example, the ELA teachers are trying to be more consistent across grade levels in writing strategies. Teachers are beginning to narrow the focus on testing procedures. These types of collaboration had not happened in the past.” These observations of positive changes in instructional leadership are evidence of success of the program.

Following the consultant and district administrators’ campus visits, principals were given a Likert scale survey to complete in order to gauge their understanding and comfort with the campus visits (See Appendix J). All principals responded positively to the statement that they were able to quickly implement suggestions from the visit. Three agreed while three somewhat agreed. Given the statement that their campus is making positive strides in instructional practices, all respondents responded with agree. These principals’ positive responses to the campus visits provided additional evidence of success in program implementation.

Research question four asks for the specific areas of success through the implementation process. High principal participation in PLCs, which carried over into additional collaborative efforts among principals in the district was the first area of success. Individual principal growth regarding understanding teachers and how to better support teachers was another success. Finally, the consultant and district administrators campus visits revealed principal implementation on their campus, which showed learning occurred and was applied to the school setting.



## **Research Question Five**

Research question five asks, “What problems prevented successful implementation of providing support to principals?” Lack of complete support from all principals, uncertainty of how to provide proper support from district administrators, and existing weaknesses of the principals were problems that prevented successful implementation of providing support to principals. The results are presented for each element associated with the question.

One problem was the lack of complete support from all principals. One principal, the most veteran principal in the group, was present at the PLCs, but did not interact positively. The body language and demeanor by this principal caused other principals, especially novice principals, to hesitate in honest discourse. He was actually present to each PLC, but stated it was only because he wanted the SEMI credit. He did not choose to complete the surveys or interviews, so the feedback from all participants was not achieved. With his feedback, better support could have been given throughout the year.

Another problem which prevented successful implementation of providing support to principals was the district administrators’ uncertainty of the correct support needed. When principals had issues arise, it was difficult at times for district administrators to know how to coach and strengthen the principal’s instructional knowledge. District administrators were also unsure of when support was needed. Because of the nature of their job, district administrators were not always on each campus on a regular basis. Principals shared they did not always reach out to district support sometimes because of time constraints and sometimes because of fear of being transparent about their struggles.

Existing weaknesses of the principals also played a role in preventing successful implementation of providing support to the principals. The difference in experience levels in

principals, coupled with various challenges they faced at their school impacted the amount of success in principal growth. In a survey given to principals (see Appendix E), principals shared their areas of growth as a leader. One respondent said, “There are many. To name a few: organization, procrastination, boldness, knowledge of MDE policy, knowledge of SPED and board policy, and technical savvy skills.” Another replied, “Communication is probably my weakest area. I need to do a better job of communicating with teachers and parents.” Another stated, “I may be too supportive to my staff. I think I am too understanding instead of drawing a line in the sand. I eventually do when I see its effect on the school and I am stern then, but it takes me a while because I try to work with my staff to build capacity.” The respondents gave honest answers to this question. This was seen as a success, because in the beginning, they were hesitant to be open about any shortcomings. These areas of weakness the principals mentioned can be areas of focus in support in the future.

Teachers were given an open-ended survey concerning their perception of their principal’s instructional leadership (see Appendix F). When asked how the principal has promoted a culture of being a lifelong learner and organizational learning, one teacher simply replied, “He hasn’t.” Another teacher from another campus replied, “He expects teachers to be the best they can be, but he does not follow up to ensure this is being done, so it is not being done, more times than not.” The teacher comments suggest the teachers did not see as much of an improvement in their principal’s instructional leadership as the principal perceived himself or herself to change.

While areas of success were evident, some areas prevented a completely successful implementation. Lack of complete support from all principals was a problem that prevented successful implementation of providing support to principals. District administrators’ uncertainty

in providing appropriate support and existing weaknesses in the principals all played roles in preventing a completely successful implementation of providing support to principals.

### **Research Question Six**

Research question six asks “Did the organizational learning help improve the capacity of principals to engage in district-wide organizational development?” The results are presented with each element associated with the question.

The support given to principals during the entire program was designed to improve each school campus, while also improving organizational learning. In a survey of teachers (see Appendix F), teachers were asked if and how they observed their principal growing as an instructional leader. One teacher replied, “I would say that as a staff, because of the leadership, we have been encouraged to dig deeper in our content areas. I think by working closer with our colleagues, we have been able to help each other and improve instruction this year.” Another teacher from another campus replied:

Changes have occurred with focusing more on the lower 25% of students and using data to enhance our classroom planning. With this focus, I am now grouping students based on the district’s common assessment projections, so that I can scaffold more with the lower students. In addition, I have made my groups smaller, so they can get more one-on-one help with me as needed. My principal has been monitoring this expectation from all teachers.

At a different campus, a teacher had a different experience:

I think we have many improvements that need to be made, but I am not sure they have been met yet. We need smaller classes, we need mentors for teaches, we need better communication with our middle school so we are all using the same terms and methods

throughout each grade. My principal has not taken the lead on any of those things, even though it has been a common request from teachers.

These responses indicate mixed results in determining if the organizational learning helped improve the capacity of principals to engage in organizational development. Some teachers observed their principal modeling collaboration on their campus, but others did not see carry-over into an improved instructional leader.

I observed a data meeting in each school during the school year (see Appendix G). Organizational learning was evident as I observed collaboration among participants in each school. Additionally, participants in the meetings questioned their colleagues when misunderstandings arose. The evidence of the growth in relationships among the principal and teachers was apparent. They became comfortable enough with each other to push each other in seeking the correct solution for each student. These observations reveal organizational learning occurred at the schools, with the principal being an active leader.

In the district administrator survey (see Appendix I), district administrators were asked how the culture had changed on the campus during the year. One administrator replied:

The culture of the school has changed this year due to a change in administration (principal, assistant principal, and academic coach). The new administration has worked to set expectations and to overcome negativity surrounding the administration change. New administration has implemented some changes that were designed to improve the culture of the school (murals, dress-up days, themes, etc.).

Another district administrator noted on another campus, “Teachers seem to be communicating better with one another and with administration. The common purpose of the school has improved, and the classrooms have become more equitable. The principal and administrative

team's leadership has played a big role in this taking place." In addition to individual principal and teacher improvement on the campus, an increase in organizational learning occurred as they began to work together to increase student achievement.

These surveys and observations show the organizational learning throughout the year helped improve the capacity of the principals to engage in district-wide organizational development. Participating in PLCs began the organizational learning process for the principals and they followed through in leading organizational learning on their campus, as the observations showed. Consequently, the capacity of principals to engage in district-wide organizational development improved, as evidenced by their participation and knowledge gains.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this applied research study have been presented. In determining the program's success, I do recognize the problems which hindered successful implementation. The data provided areas of improvement, which will be a focus going forward. However, the positive results from the study indicate the program was a success and was a catalyst in developing principals as instructional leaders. Beginning with professional development at the beginning of the year, to regular PLC meetings, data meetings, and campus visits, each part of the action plan contributed to the success of the program. In my role as Curriculum Director, I saw more collaboration than ever among principals in the district. Assistant principals also began working together regularly and it had a positive impact on their relationship with the principal they work with and also a positive impact on the organizational learning. I observed principals gain a better understanding of how to support their teachers. Chapter Five will present the conclusions and future implications for further study and continual improvement.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this applied research study is to improve principal capacity as instructional leaders in the Magnolia County School District. The need for principals to increase their instructional leadership capacity became evident with the ever-changing requirements of state accountability and student achievement. The decline of student achievement, coupled with increasing pressure on teacher quality, determined the need for equipping principals to handle the many demands of school leadership. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Walhstrom (2004) found that leadership is second only to classroom instruction when naming factors that contribute to student achievement, based on qualitative and quantitative data in a five year study of 180 schools. Based on this research, the district administration team decided to implement strategies to improve instructional leadership. I worked daily with the middle and high school principals, making it the reason for the focus on middle and high schools. Using four elements in this study, cohort-based professional development for principals, principal PLCs, data meetings, and consultant and district administrator campus visits, the program sought to develop and grow principal leadership.

Chapter One provides an introduction to the problem and the purpose of the study, which established the need for improving principal capacity. Chapter Two provides relevant research examining specific characteristics of quality educational leadership. Chapter Three presents the collaborative development, implementation, and evaluation of the action plan. Chapter Four

presents a review of the evaluation results of the study. Chapter Five presents the conclusions, limitations, and future implications for further study and continual improvement.

## **Analysis**

As explained in Chapter Two, many areas of support are required when working to equip principals as instructional leaders. In no way do I assert this is a comprehensive list, nor do I assert these elements are the only meaningful tools to improve instructional leadership.

**Cohort-based professional development.** The short term goal was for principals to develop a higher level of expectations in teacher classrooms. The long term goal was for principals to develop a deeper understanding of instructional leadership. Both of these goals were achieved. Before the school year began, the principals, assistant principals, and district administrators met together for three days of professional development from an outside consultant. During the course of the three days, the consultant guided principals through the basics of expectations they should have when walking into a teacher's classroom, how to set the tone for the beginning of school, and how to have productive data meetings with their teachers. This type of professional development had not been provided to principals in the past. Before, each principal conducted observations, data meetings, and faculty meetings in different ways and with differing levels of effectiveness. During this professional development, principals were given collaboration time with their own administrative team from their school, as well as collaboration time with the entire group. Using their school data, they worked together to develop a plan of instructional goals, based on needs represented in the data. After developing a plan, they were able to ask questions of the consultant and others in the group, such as specific ways to intervene with special education students.

Within the group of principals represented, the various levels of understanding were apparent. One high school was already implementing many of the techniques being taught, while two other schools had not been implementing any of the techniques before the professional development. The four remaining schools had varying levels of implementation before the professional development. The high school already in implementation was able to provide assistance to the other schools and continued to be a resource throughout the year. At the conclusion of the two days, all schools had a deeper level of understanding and a common plan of implementation for the course of the year.

The professional development did give principals a definitive set of standards to look for in classroom observations, as evidenced by the principal survey (see Appendix A). This tool would be better used in the future as a pre and post assessment. A classroom observation form (see Appendix B) was used, but the results did not yield the data needed for success to be measured. In the future, the instrument would not be used in an effort to measure the effectiveness of the initial professional development. The principal focus group (see Appendix C) indicated success in empowering principals with a deeper understanding of instruction. The professional development was a crucial part of the study and provided important training for all principals before the school year began. This training ensured principals were equipped with systematic ways to lead their schools and support teachers.

As the program continues to develop, the principals can take ownership of the professional development in the future by each facilitating part of the professional development. The program prepared them to take the next step and they can each lead their peers at the beginning of the next school year rather than relying on an outside consultant. This would also



be beneficial for assistant principals in preparing them to become principals in the future, as they help facilitate training for their peers on a regular basis.

**Principal PLC.** The principal PLC was the crux of the study. Implementing a monthly PLC with principals, assistant principals, and district administrators was the most important part, as it yielded the most results in improving instructional leadership skills. In the past, principals had not met on a regular basis for the purpose of learning and collaboration, only for perfunctory meetings. The PLC provided time to learn, reflect, and collaborate with colleagues each month. In the first two meetings, most participants did not initiate conversation with each other, but simply answered questions or nodded in agreement. The climate of the meeting seemed formal and participants seemed unsure about participating. During the course of the year, though, the climate began to change to a more informal setting and participants became actively engaged with their peers. A little over halfway through the year, principals began contributing to the agenda and leading portions of the meeting. This was a major advancement in the learning. Additionally, a principal brought a complex problem he had faced at school and shared with the group the struggles and lessons he learned through the process. The willingness to share struggles with the group highlighted the positive climate that developed throughout the year.

In studying results for the principal PLC, the focus group held with principals (see Appendix D) yielded quality qualitative data that showed the specific areas of growth from the PLC meetings. Principals responded with specific topics that were valuable to them and could take back to their schools to implement. The short term goal was for principals to feel more supported as they lead their schools. The long term goal was to increase collaboration among administrators. Both of these goals were attained with overwhelmingly positive results. Appendix E was a more in-depth, open-ended survey that yielded valuable insights about the

principals' strengths and weaknesses. Although this was an anonymous survey, a limitation to this study is the question of whether the principals were truly honest with their feedback. The teacher focus group (Appendix F) yielded candid responses from the teachers, as two teachers were quick to share they felt their principal was not acting as an instructional leader. This data piece yielded the most honest responses from any respondent. This could be attributed to teachers wanting someone to hear their concerns in order for things to be improved on their campus.

Going forward, principals will be ready to take ownership of the monthly PLCs. They will set the agenda and facilitate the meetings based on the ever-changing needs of the principals. Additionally, this will strengthen principals to be able to model PLCs for their teachers as they take their learning back to their campus. Teachers will be able to see their principal's growth as an instructional leader.

**Data Meetings.** As part of their instructional development, principals held regular data meetings at their schools with each of their teams of teachers throughout the year. These meetings helped guide teachers and administrators in making better instructional decisions, while improving organizational learning. In the past, data meetings on the school campus only involved teachers; principals were rarely present. By involving principals in the data meetings, both teachers and principals could learn from each other and build collegial relationships as they worked to understand student strengths and weaknesses. Most teachers are more knowledgeable of appropriate instruction than principals because of the nature of their job. These meetings offered principals a chance to learn from teachers in appropriate instructional techniques and pedagogy. Conversely, many principals understand student data better than teachers and can offer support to teachers as they learn how to disaggregate data. These meetings brought

principals and teachers together to learn from each other while providing the best decisions for student achievement.

The short term goal was for principals and teachers to use data correctly in making instructional decisions. The long term goal was for principals and teachers to develop a deeper understanding of student achievement. MAAP and Common Assessment data were disaggregated to track student achievement. Additionally, data meetings were observed (Appendix G) to rate how well teachers and administrators used data to make instructional decisions. The common assessment and MAAP data did not show an increase in student achievement this year at most schools, but the goal of developing a deeper understanding of using student data to make instructional decisions was met. As evidenced in data meetings, teachers were using data to make adjustments in classroom instruction, some of the first time. Principals were also involved in these meetings for the first time, helping them to better understand instructional practices, struggles, and success. In the future, as principals and teachers understand productive data meetings and teachers become comfortable in leading data meetings, teachers will lead data meetings as the expert, with principal participation.

**Consultant and administrator campus visits.** During the year, the consultant and the district administrators visited each campus at least one day each semester to observe the implementation of learning. They visited classrooms, talked with teachers, and met with the principal and assistant principal to look at data trends, discuss what was observed in classrooms, and brainstorm improvements. This also gave principals the opportunity to ask the consultant for suggestions in how to intervene with teachers when instructional deficiencies were observed. Many principals asked for recommendations in how to use student data in providing interventions. The consultant expressed a few concerns about classroom instruction at one high

school and the principal did not observe the same challenges, so they had a beneficial conversation about specific classroom instructional strategies that should be occurring.

The short term goal was to measure the level of instructional leadership of the principal. The long term goal was for principals and teachers to make better instructional decisions as an organization. The campus visit checklist (Appendix H) was not a valuable instrument in determining if instructional leadership and better instructional decisions. In the future, this instrument would be discontinued. The district administrator focus group (Appendix I) yielded rich conversations about the day-to-day campus activities. A theme of slow, positive culture improvement emerged from these observations. District administrators noted while much more growth is needed, there is evidence of greater collaboration between teachers and administrators on each campus. Principals were more receptive than in the past, with the exclusion of one principal. The principal survey (Appendix J) indicated positive principal perception of campus visits, with teachers not being as comfortable with the visits. In the future, principals will ensure they are regularly visiting classrooms in order for teachers to be more comfortable with guests observing.

**Goal achievement.** Many positive gains were seen throughout the program of developing principals. First, principals began to respond and contribute to collaboration during the PLCs. At the beginning of the year, the principals participated minimally, and assistant principals participated even less. I led most of the meeting, which was informative in nature, because there had been a lack of concerted effort to continuing support principals with ongoing professional development provided by the district. While the informative meetings met the need of providing information to them, it did not meet the definition of a true PLC, which is guided by the participants. I felt the assistant principals were looking to their principals for the lead in how

much to participate, because of the principal being their superior. Collaboration improved slowly at each monthly meeting, but it felt like norms had to be reestablished at the beginning of each monthly meeting. Each meeting began with the participants being very guarded in their feedback and questions, but as the meeting progressed, this changed. As stated in Chapter Two, leadership development is often a slow process (Fullan, 2002). This slow process was realized during the study. However, gains were made during each meeting throughout the year, however small.

One of the biggest successes of the PLCs occurred when one of the high school principals requested to share insights on improving graduation rates, based on mistakes he had made at his school. His comment to me was, “I (and my school staff) made these mistakes and it is too late to fix them for us, but maybe I can help the other high school know what not to do, and improve their graduation rate. Do you mind me sharing during the next PLC meeting?” At the next meeting, he did share, with data, charts, and emails from MDE, which resulted in many questions and answers from the participants. He spent almost an hour on this topic, whereas in the past, many topics would take only about ten minutes because of the small amount of participant interaction. Additionally, assistant principals asked questions and even contributed to answers for others as one of them had experience in working with how to ensure students are being tracked correctly in graduation rates. The participation of the participants, but more importantly, the fact that a principal wanted to help his peers. Even though it was too late for the information to help him, this indicated these meetings to be of value in the program, although much more work is still to be done.

Collaboration among principals also increased as evidenced in their collaboration outside of the PLCs. Several times throughout the year, principals reached out to their peers on their own to set up formal and informal meetings. Sometimes district administrators took part and others

were just for principals. Another gain occurred when one of the middle schools had a professional development for teachers at their school, but had open seats and invited the other middle schools to participate. They also reached out to the other principals during the year for help with struggling teachers on their campuses. One middle school sent some of their successful teachers to other schools to help struggling teachers on that campus. That has resulted in ongoing collaboration, on their own, between teachers in the district. These types of collaboration have rarely happened in the past. The three attendance zones in the district are very different and many times can feel like “us against them.” It has been easy for schools to think in order for them to be successful, others cannot be successful. In reality, school success, especially in the same district, it is not a competition. In the future, as principals collaborate and facilitate PLC meetings and principal professional development together, the unity between schools will grow as competition decreases.

The collaboration among school building administrators and district administrators improved also. The time spent together made participants feel more at ease when reaching out for a problem. When district administrators were on a school campus, the deepened relationship between principal and district administrator was evident and made the principal feel more at ease. Principals reached out to district administrators more often. They called, emailed, and asked for campus visits when they had questions. This was an increase from the past. The research findings did suggest, though, the teachers were not very comfortable with classroom visits, nor were principals much more comfortable with others being in their teachers’ classroom. This area is an area for growth in the future. Possibly, as principals understand the team concept better of district and building administrators, they can feel more confident in their ability to monitor teacher classrooms and help teachers be more comfortable with visitors in their

classrooms. I feel some of the angst the teachers felt stemmed from angst the principal might have felt as “outsiders” visited classrooms on each campus. With regular classroom visits by the principal, teachers can feel more comfortable with others observing their classrooms.

**Limitations.** One limitation to the study may be my role related to the participants. As a central office administrator, the principals did not seem to feel as though they could be completely honest in their feelings about the program. The nature of job responsibilities could be a limitation. When asked specifically if they thought the PLCs were beneficial, all said yes, but would they have been honest if their answer had been no? Would they have shared that?

Another limitation to this study would be the instruments used and the nature of the research. In measuring instructional leadership, it is impossible to measure all of the factors in leadership. Student achievement, in itself, is difficult to measure because of all of the variables involved, so coupled with using student achievement as one of the factors of success in measuring instructional leadership, it becomes exponentially more difficult to truly attribute the specific factors in instructional leadership growth. The specific instruments would need to be improved, specifically by completely removing some instruments and then changing questions on some interviews and surveys.

I presented a limitation to the study. The study directly related to my job duties, but the newness of this type of research possibly inhibited the study. For example, as instruments were selected for use in measuring the goals of the action plan, I did not always select instruments that best answered the questions being sought. As a novice researcher, decisions I made in the beginning of the study would not have been made as the study progressed and my understanding of research emerged.

The time factor also posed a problem in the study. Organizational growth, culture change, and leadership improvement are slow processes. The study only measured one year of a district's growth in instructional leadership. To get a more accurate picture, the study of the district needs to continue for many years in the future, with consistent revisions throughout the process.

**Implications.** This study was designed to find ways to help principals become stronger instructional leaders. One implication of this research is it showed instructional leadership to be an area where more work is needed in the school district. This study began the process of supporting and equipping principals with instructional skills. It will continue to be refined in the future. While every element was not as successful as anticipated, each element was important, and the focus needs to remain on continuing the elements in the program. Providing support to principals as they learn and lead is critical throughout the year.

Some of the steps of this research were more important than others. The principal PLC was the most important element which provided change in the school district. This was the crux of the study and should be continued in the future. The relationship-building that evolved from the PLCs laid the foundation for the openness among peers and incentivized them to take back things learned to their campus for cultural change to occur. The organizational learning that developed from the PLCs was also important.

The findings suggest principals do need continued support as they lead their schools. The principal position often feels lonely. Many decisions are made on a daily basis, often with very few colleagues with which to brainstorm. Not only will this program help their instructional knowledge, it will also help principals feel more supported as they lead their schools. Principals are considered the expert of many areas; yet, they are not always provided with adequate training



and resources to actually be the expert in the area. They also need relationships with their peers in other schools to use a resource in their leadership.

### **Recommendations**

Overall, based on the success of the program, the district needs to continue utilizing the four elements of the program. The professional development provided by outside consultants at the beginning was beneficial, but as data indicated principals' instructional knowledge increased, principals will facilitate the beginning of the year professional development going forward. An outside consultant will not be necessary in the future because principals will apply the knowledge gained through the program and continue the organizational learning. This foundation of learning set the tone for the school year and gave each principal a foundational knowledge of instructional practices. Principals will use the knowledge gained through the implementation period to continue to assess their needs and modify future professional development based on the needs. Improvements are needed in the instruments used to assess the professional development. The principal survey (see Appendix A) needs to be administered as a pre and post survey. It needs to be given before the school year begins and at the conclusion of the school year. The classroom observation checklist (see Appendix B) did not yield sufficient data and needs to be discontinued.

The evidence of improved collaboration necessitates the continuing of PLCs. The PLCs provided the avenue of the most learning during the program. In the future, however, the principals will set the agenda and facilitate the meeting, rather than me. The data revealed principals increased in instructional leadership knowledge as evidenced by the way they began to take ownership of the PLC meetings during the year. Because of this, they will have complete autonomy concerning meetings in the future. They will set agendas and facilitate the meetings.

As principals grow in their understanding of instructional leadership, the next step is leading their peers in learning and collaboration. I will continue to be part of the collaboration, but they will take the lead. The instruments used to collect data yield rich results, so I recommend to continue using the instruments to evaluate the principal PLCs.

Another recommendation is to implement an assistant principals' academy, based on the data received from assistant principals. They reported increased instructional leadership knowledge, support, and collaboration among other assistant principals. In the future, specific professional development in the form of an assistant principals' academy will be developed to specifically target their development into transitioning into the principal role.

Data meetings should continue to occur regularly on each campus. Based on data meeting observations, the principal and teachers made better instructional decisions based on the data because of the collaboration. In the future, teachers will facilitate the meetings, as they grow in their confidence of using data correctly. Principals will continue to take part, but teachers will facilitate the meetings. The data observation checklist (see Appendix G) did not yield enough beneficial information, so it will need to be enhanced by adding a section of specific instructional strategies suggested based on the data discussed.

Just as the consultant and district administrators routinely visited each campus during the program, the campus visits need to continue. During the study, evidence of transparency of principals occurred. They shared struggles with each other and trust developed among principals, assistant principals, and district administrators. The transparency and trust will be the basis to help principals feel comfortable with campus visits and use feedback appropriately, without fear of being perceived as having deficits. The openness during the study revealed the need of improvement at every campus. The trust that was built during the study will help make

principals and teachers comfortable with regular campus visits. The campus visit checklist (see Appendix H) did not yield beneficial data, so I recommend it be discontinued. During the study, principals began to initiate campus visits with other principals. This collaboration will be encouraged to continue in the future.

Overall, the support provided to principals outlined in the study should continue in the Magnolia County School District. Improvements of the program will be made each year as program evaluations take place. More extensive research needs to occur in other areas of instructional leadership development, which would improve the future studies.

## **Conclusions**

The study in empowering principals as instructional leaders was a worthwhile study for the Magnolia County School District. For the first time, principals were given direct and indirect support by district administrators, outside consultants, and their peers. Relationships were created and strengthened, which will continue to grow. Organizational learning occurred as all participants worked together for the growth of the district.

As a leader, I learned the value of collaboration and building relationships. Relationships are key to any success and this study was no different. Although I had somewhat of a relationship with the principals and assistant principals, our relationship has strengthened. I am welcomed on each campus and the principals do not have as much apprehensiveness when I arrive as they may have had in the past. Working together, problem solving, and finding success all played roles in more open communication between the principals and all of the district administrators. Additionally, the relationships forged between the principals also grew. During the course of the program, principals began to reach out to each other on their own, instead of just collaborating during PLC meetings. They met together to discuss specific problems and

involved other principals who could benefit from the information. In the future, I want to strengthen the relationships of all stakeholders.

This process was a valuable learning experience for all stakeholders. I feel this is the beginning of bringing the stakeholders in the district together for greater student achievement. Although seeing gains is at times a slow process, several successes were seen during the year. I anticipate the growth to continue as the program continues to evolve to meet the needs of the district.

The cycles of continuous learning will be obvious going forward. Using the knowledge, relationships, and common practices learned during the program will move the program forward in the future. At the end of each school year, an evaluation will take place to see the best way to continue moving forward in the district. As principals become stronger instructional leaders, they will be able to take on a bigger role in mentoring new principals in the district, while possibly even taking on the responsibility of the program itself. Finally, the principals can possibly develop teacher leaders through this program in the future. The knowledge and experience they have gained will better prepare them to develop their teachers' skills, both as an instructor and as a leader. This will also continue the cycle of continuous learning in the Magnolia County School District.

This subject matter is complex and there are many variables in improving leadership. While everything cannot be achieved at once, slow, steady improvements can occur, which is evidenced in this study. Even the seemingly small improvements, such as increased collaboration among principals, lay the groundwork for principals continuing to reach out to their peers. This collaboration can possibly result in larger problems being solved in the future.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: PRINCIPAL SURVEY PROTOCOL

### Principal Survey Questions

**General Research Topic:** Increasing instructional leadership capabilities in principals

**Specific Research Question:** What areas of success were evident through the implementation process?

**Conceptual frameworks:** *shared decision making, positive school climate, collaboration, gradual change, instructional leadership*

#### Statement of Consent:

*This survey is part of an applied research study to fulfill partial requirements for a Doctor of Education degree for Leigh Anne Newton from The University of Mississippi. The study is analyzing the effects of increasing instructional leadership capabilities in principals. Any questions regarding the project and its findings can be emailed to:*

*leighanne.newton@leecountyschools.us  
lanewton@go.olemiss.edu*

*Any questions can also be directed to the Dissertation Chair, Dr. Doug Davis, by email or by phone at The University of Mississippi:*

*drdavis@olemiss.edu; (662)915-1459 (office)*

*The information you provide today will help us understand the implementation of supports to principals and the long-term sustainability of the program. Protecting your rights is of utmost importance to us. Any identifiable information will be removed from the responses you give. Below you can find statements about your management of this school. Please indicate the frequency of these activities and behaviors in this school during the current school year. Please mark one choice in each row.*

	Never	Seldom	Quite often	Very often
1. I make sure that the professional development activities of teachers are in accordance with the teaching goals of the school.....	1	2	3	4
2. I observe instruction in classrooms. ....	1	2	3	4
3. I use student performance results to develop the school's educational goals. ....	1	2	3	4
4. I give teachers suggestions as to how they can improve their teaching. ....	1	2	3	4
5. I monitor students' work. ....	1	2	3	4
6. I inform teachers about possibilities for updating their knowledge and skills. ....	1	2	3	4
7. I check to see whether classroom activities are in keeping with our educational goals. ....	1	2	3	4
8. I take exam results into account in decisions regarding curriculum development. ....	1	2	3	4
9. I ensure that there is clarity concerning the responsibility for coordinating the curriculum.....	1	2	3	4

## APPENDIX B: CHECKLIST

### Classroom Observation Checklist

#### Statement of Consent:

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*The researcher will observe ten classrooms district. The researcher will fill out the observation form upon the end of the classroom visit. The ten classrooms will be chosen at random.*

<b>Steps</b>	<b>Evidence (Check all that apply)</b>
<p>1. <i>Student Involvement</i> Do students appear to be actively engaged when you first walk in the room?</p> <p>Yes                      No</p>	<p>A. Independent Work B. Hands On C. Small Group D. Large Group E. Technology F. Other _____</p> <p>Notes:</p>
<p>2. <i>Standards-Based Classroom</i> What standard(s) has the teacher chosen to teach at this time?</p>	<p>Standard:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>3. <i>Instructional Practices</i> What instructional practices is the teacher choosing to use at this time to help students achieve standard?</p>	<p>A. Direct Instruction B. Teacher/Learner Interaction C. Assessment D. Sit at Desk E. Higher-Order Questioning F. Other _____</p> <p>Notes:</p>
<p>4. <i>Walk the Walls</i> What evidence is there of the past standards being taught?</p>	<p>A. Past EQs B. Word Walls C. Student Work D. Graphic Organizers/Teaching Materials</p> <p>Notes:</p>

## APPENDIX C: PRINCIPAL FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

### Principal Focus Group Questions

**General Research Topic:** Increasing instructional leadership capabilities in principals

**Specific Research Question:** What areas of success were evident through the implementation process?

**Conceptual frameworks:** *shared decision making, positive school climate, collaboration, gradual change, instructional leadership*

#### Statement of Consent:

*This focus group is part of an applied research study to fulfill partial requirements for a Doctor of Education degree for Leigh Anne Newton from The University of Mississippi. The study is analyzing the effects of increasing instructional leadership capabilities in principals. Any questions regarding the project and its findings can be emailed to:*

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*Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about your experiences as a principal. The information you provide today will help us understand the implementation of supports to principals and the long-term sustainability of the program. Protecting your rights is of utmost importance to us. Any identifiable information will be removed from the responses you give. We want you to feel comfortable answering any questions fully and honestly. With that being said, are you willing to proceed with the focus group?*

1. How did the professional development change your leadership practices at the beginning of school?
2. What practices did you begin for the first time and why?
3. What areas of growth do you have following the training?
4. What instructional changes did you see in your teachers' classrooms?
5. How did the teachers respond to your leadership at the beginning of school?
6. What instructional practices do you look for in your teachers' classrooms?

## APPENDIX D: PRINCIPAL PLC FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

### Principal PLC Focus Group Questions

**General Research Topic:** Increasing instructional leadership capabilities in principals

**Specific Research Question:** To what extent did the principals participate in district PLCs?

**Conceptual frameworks:** *shared decision making, positive school climate, collaboration, gradual change, instructional leadership*

#### Statement of Consent:

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1. What did you learn from your colleagues during this session?
2. How did you feel about sharing your struggles with the group and why?
3. What recommendations do you have for future PLCs?
4. How can this group meet your needs as an instructional leader?
5. What can you take back with you today to implement in your school this week?
6. What classroom practices are important for you to concentrate on?

## APPENDIX E: PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Principal Interview Questions

**General Research Topic:** Increasing instructional leadership capabilities in principals

**Specific Research Question:** Did the principals' knowledge of using data to correctly make data-driven instructional decisions increase?

**Conceptual frameworks:** *shared decision making, positive school climate, collaboration, gradual change*

#### Statement of Consent:

*This interview is part of an applied research study to fulfill partial requirements for a Doctor of Education degree for Leigh Anne Newton from The University of Mississippi. The study is analyzing the effects of increasing instructional leadership capabilities in principals. Any questions regarding the project and its findings can be emailed to:*

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*Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about your experiences as a principal. The information you provide today will help us understand the implementation of supports to principals and the long-term sustainability of the program. Protecting your rights is of utmost importance to us. Any identifiable information will be removed from the responses you give. We want you to feel comfortable answering any questions fully and honestly. With that being said, are you willing to proceed with the interview?*

#### Icebreaker:

1. How long have you been in education?
2. Describe a typical day for you as a principal.



### **Shared Decision Making**

3. What is the mission/vision for your school?
4. How do teachers take leadership roles in your school?
5. Do teachers seek out leadership roles?
6. How do you prepare teacher leaders in your school?
7. Do you feel the district helps teachers become leaders?

### **Positive School Climate**

8. How do you know your teachers' concerns?
9. How does the staff influence the school climate?
10. How have you shaped the school climate?
11. As the principal, what is your definition of a positive school climate?
12. What steps do you need to take to improve your school climate?

### **Collaboration**

13. What areas do you feel confident in as the leader of your school?
14. What areas of growth do you see for yourself as the leader?
15. Have the principal PLC meetings effected your leadership?
16. How has your leadership changed during the course of this year?
17. How much have you utilized your peers as learning partners this year?
18. Did you feel your time was well spent during the principal PLC meetings?
19. Were there changes you implemented in your school based on information from PLC meetings?

### **Gradual Change**

20. What are the first steps you plan to take as a leader this year?
21. What changes do you envision for next school year?
22. How have teachers responded to any changes you have made?
23. Do you feel your staff supports your vision? Why or why not?

## APPENDIX F: TEACHER FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

### Teacher Focus Group Questions

**General Research Topic:** Increasing instructional leadership capabilities in principals

**Specific Research Questions:**

- Did the principals' knowledge of using data to correctly make data-driven instructional decisions increase?
- What areas of success were evident through the implementation process?

**Conceptual frameworks:** *shared decision making, positive school climate, collaboration, gradual change, professional learning communities, instructional leadership*

**Statement of Consent:**

*This focus group is part of an applied research study to fulfill partial requirements for a Doctor of Education degree for Leigh Anne Newton from The University of Mississippi. The study is analyzing the effects of increasing instructional leadership capabilities in principals. Any questions regarding the project and its findings can be emailed to:*

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*Any questions can also be directed to the Dissertation Chair, Dr. Doug Davis, by email or by phone at The University of Mississippi:*

*drdavis@olemiss.edu; (662)915-1459 (office)*

*Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about your experiences as a teacher. The information you provide today will help us understand the implementation of supports to principals and the long-term sustainability of the program. Protecting your rights is of utmost importance to us. Any identifiable information will be removed from the responses you give. We want you to feel comfortable answering any questions fully and honestly. With that being said, are you willing to proceed with the focus group?*

1. How have you observed your principal as an instructional leader?
2. Suppose you were the principal. What would you do differently as an instructional leader?
3. How did your principal promote a culture of being a lifelong learner and organizational learning?

4. How has your principal's instructional leadership changed this year?
5. What improvements in instruction have occurred on your campus this year? What do you think contributed to those improvements?
6. Of all of the things we have talked about, what is the most important to you?

APPENDIX G: CHECKLIST

**Data Meeting Observation Checklist**

**Statement of Consent:**

*This observation is part of an applied research study to fulfill partial requirements for a Doctor of Education degree for Leigh Anne Newton from The University of Mississippi. The study is analyzing the effects of increasing instructional leadership capabilities in principals. Any questions regarding the project and its findings can be emailed to:*

*leighanne.newton@leecountyschools.us  
lanewton@go.olemiss.edu*

*Any questions can also be directed to the Dissertation Chair, Dr. Doug Davis, by email or by phone at The University of Mississippi:*

*drdavis@olemiss.edu; (662)915-1459 (office)*

*The researcher will observe one data meeting at each school. The school leadership team will conduct the data meeting, with the researcher only being an observer. The researcher will note the participants and the events by taking field notes. Upon completion of the meeting, the researcher will use the observation checklist for data collection.*

<b>Look Fors</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1. Did teachers come to the meeting prepared with their students' data in the tables?		
2. Did all teachers participate in the data conversations?		
3. Were instructional decisions made (concerning lesson plans, assessments, etc.) based on the data studied during the meeting?		
4. Was the principal actively involved in making data decisions?		
5. Was collaboration among the participants observed?		
6. Did the participants make actionable goals to complete before the next meeting?		

APPENDIX H: CHECKLIST

**Campus Visit Checklist**

**Statement of Consent:**

*This observation is part of an applied research study to fulfill partial requirements for a Doctor of Education degree for Leigh Anne Newton from The University of Mississippi. The study is analyzing the effects of increasing instructional leadership capabilities in principals. Any questions regarding the project and its findings can be emailed to:*

*leighanne.newton@leecountyschools.us  
lanewton@go.olemiss.edu*

*Any questions can also be directed to the Dissertation Chair, Dr. Doug Davis, by email or by phone at The University of Mississippi:*

*drdavis@olemiss.edu; (662)915-1459 (office)*

*The researcher and district administrator team will observe each campus. The researcher will note the participants and the events by taking field notes. Upon completion of the campus visits, the researcher will use the observation checklist for data collection.*

Look Fors		Strongly Agree (Teacher Name)	Needs Attention
Engagement	Science		
	Math		
	ELA		
	SS		
Agenda	Science		
	Math		
	ELA		
	SS		
Adherence to Lesson Plan / Adequate Lesson Plans Submitted	Science		
	Math		
	ELA		
	SS		

## APPENDIX I: DISTRICT FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

### District Administrators Focus Group Questions

**General Research Topic:** Increasing instructional leadership capabilities in principals

**Specific Research Question:**

- Did the principals' knowledge of using data to correctly make data-driven instructional decisions increase?
- What areas of success were evident through the implementation process?
- What problems prevented successful implementation of providing support to principals?
- Did the organizational learning help improve the capacity of principals to engage in district-wide organizational development?

**Conceptual frameworks:** *shared decision making, positive school climate, collaboration, gradual change, instructional leadership, organizational learning*

**Statement of Consent:**

*This focus group is part of an applied research study to fulfill partial requirements for a Doctor of Education degree for Leigh Anne Newton from The University of Mississippi. The study is analyzing the effects of increasing instructional leadership capabilities in principals. Any questions regarding the project and its findings can be emailed to:*

*leighanne.newton@leecountyschools.us  
lanewton@go.olemiss.edu*

*Any questions can also be directed to the Dissertation Chair, Dr. Doug Davis, by email or by phone at The University of Mississippi:*

*drdavis@olemiss.edu; (662)915-1459 (office)*

*Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about your observations as district leadership team. The information you provide today will help us understand the implementation of supports to principals and the long-term sustainability of the program. Protecting your rights is of utmost importance to us. Any identifiable information will be removed from the responses you give. We want you to feel comfortable answering any questions fully and honestly. With that being said, are you willing to proceed with the focus group?*

1. What instructional practices, positive and negative, did you observe on the campuses?
2. What areas of improvement do you see for each campus and why?
3. How did the principal make instructional decisions at his school?
4. How was data driving instructional decisions at each school?
5. How did principals collaborate throughout the school year?
6. Did, and if so, how did the culture change during the school year on each campus?

## APPENDIX J: PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Principal Survey Questions

**General Research Topic:** Increasing instructional leadership capabilities in principals

**Specific Research Question:**

- Did the principals' knowledge of using data to correctly make data-driven instructional decisions increase?
- What areas of success were evident through the implementation process?
- What problems prevented successful implementation of providing support to principals?

**Conceptual frameworks:** *shared decision making, positive school climate, collaboration, gradual change, instructional leadership*

**Statement of Consent:**

*This interview is part of an applied research study to fulfill partial requirements for a Doctor of Education degree for Leigh Anne Newton from The University of Mississippi. The study is analyzing the effects of increasing instructional leadership capabilities in principals. Any questions regarding the project and its findings can be emailed to:*

*leighanne.newton@leecountyschools.us  
lanewton@go.olemiss.edu*

*Any questions can also be directed to the Dissertation Chair, Dr. Doug Davis, by email or by phone at The University of Mississippi:*

*drdavis@olemiss.edu; (662)915-1459 (office)*

*Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about your experiences as a principal. The information you provide today will help us understand the implementation of supports to principals and the long-term sustainability of the program. Protecting your rights is of utmost importance to us. Any identifiable information will be removed from the responses you give. We want you to feel comfortable answering any questions fully and honestly. With that being said, are you willing to proceed with the interview?*



		<b>Agree</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
<b>1</b>	I felt comfortable with visitors on my campus to observe the school day	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2</b>	Suggestions offered were helpful	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3</b>	Time during the visit was used wisely	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4</b>	I was able to quickly implement suggestions from the visit	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5</b>	Teachers felt comfortable during the classroom visits	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>6</b>	My campus is making positive strides in instructional practices	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>7</b>	I agreed with the results of the campus observations	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>

## VITA

### **Leigh Anne Newton**

#### **EDUCATION**

- 2013  
Specialist in Education, Educational Leadership, Arkansas State University
- 2004  
Master of Arts, Curriculum and Instruction, Nova Southeastern University
- 1997  
Bachelor of Science, Elementary Education, Mississippi State University
- 1993  
High School Diploma, Saltillo High School

#### **ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT**

- 2015-Present  
Chief Academic Officer, Lee County Schools
- 2014-2015  
Director of Student Services, Lee County Schools
- 1998-2014  
Middle School English Teacher, Lee County Schools, Guntown Middle School

#### **PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALS**

- K-6 Elementary Education, Mississippi License
- 7-12 English Education, Mississippi License
- Administrator, Career Level, Mississippi License
- National Board Certified Teacher, English Language Arts/Early Adolescence
- Trained Facilitator, National Institute for School Leadership (NISL)

## **PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS**

National Institute for School Leadership (NISL)

Mississippi Professional Educators (MPE)

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) member

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

Mississippi Association for Middle Level Education (MAMLE)

Mississippi Association of School Administrators (MASA)

## **AWARDS**

Teacher of the Year, Guntown Middle School, 2012

Teacher of the Year Finalist, Guntown Middle School, 2011

Who's Who among America's Teachers, 2004

Teacher of the Year, Guntown Middle School, 2003

Phi Theta Kappa Teacher of the Year, 2003