Principals in Two High Achieving Elementary Schools in Rural New Mexico: A Case Study

by

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ABSTRACT

Much has been written regarding the dire educational state of most schools in rural America. This case study profiles two elementary school principals (preK–6) in rural New Mexico whose schools achieved adequate yearly progress (AYP) for the 2009–10 school year. The focus of this study centered on specific characteristics of the school cultures addressed by the principals, and instructional best practices routinely incorporated by teachers into the daily curricular program that have produced successful student outcomes and earned each of their schools AYP standing for the 2009–10 academic year.

The methodology used to determine research findings was performed in three parts: Principals of AYP rural New Mexico schools were asked to complete an online survey on educational leadership according to the standards and functions of the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). The respondents chose either *Almost always, To a considerable degree, Occasionally, Seldom,* or *Never* according to the degree they deemed the leadership function necessary to the successful operations of their schools. The survey results were arranged into tables preceded with explanations and statistical analysis. Interviews were conducted with the two rural elementary school principals along with selected teachers and parents from each school. The researcher made on-site visitations and kept notes of the observations and interactions with staffs from each school.

The main findings of the study arose from the results of the surveys and interviews conducted with individuals from the two focus schools. The researcher arranged data according to the leadership categories that emerged from the interviews. The survey results were divided into two categories: favorable (*Almost always* and *To a considerable degree*) and unfavorable (*Occasionally*, *Seldom,* and *Never* categories). The results for each leadership standard and related function were reported in terms of statistical significance according to frequency counts in the two categories.

Finally, there is a review of current literature focused on principles of educational leadership and rural education, demographic information about the profiled schools, and conclusions with further recommendations for future studies.

In dedication to my beloved grandparents:

Mary C. Lee, Agatha and John Mertz.

This is one of my life’s accomplishments

I wished you could have been here to witness.

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“For I know the plans I have for you” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”
Jeremiah 29:11, NIV

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> Leaders must create a compelling vision that takes people to a new place and then translate that vision into reality.
>
> (Warren Bennis, 1989, p. 3)

Especially since the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, there has been a need to understand and implement the attributes that lead to academic achievement by students. The demand for such information by schools is due in part to federal and state mandates related to school and program funding. In addition, high-stakes testing has come to exert significant influence on teacher employment as well as serving as the assessment vehicle for adequate yearly progress (AYP) in achievement status for each school and district. With such strict demands and stresses on the educational system today, schools need to begin to plot a course for successfully achieving AYP goals. Although this is not an easy task, some competent administrators with effective leadership skills manage to successfully lead their schools to high-achieving AYP status.

Despite the difficulty of achieving AYP, some elementary schools appear to achieve yearly academic growth in part due to certain practices by their chief administrators, the school principals. Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007) stated, "Principals, staff developers, and other designated supervisors have critical roles to play in providing both the social and the structural supports that enhance student learning, and the leadership pathways that can be used to directly influence student learning" (p. 168). To date, no standardized approaches to

school leadership have been proposed in the literature (see Chapter 2). However, different approaches employed by principals could result in different outcomes in terms of student achievement, especially in consistent and steady improvement in collective student achievement over time. The result of being a high-achieving school will not only be evident in higher test scores and the attainment of AYP status, but also other important realms that should be accounted for are the school's overall improvement in culture, school pride, parental involvement, and teacher job performance and satisfaction. These are all resounding effects of what can be achieved when schools are led by principals who possess strong leadership capabilities.

Schools need strong leaders. The principal is the organizational leader of the school and the one best positioned to provide the vision and direction required to lead the school toward achievement. One of the most important goals an elementary school principal could hope to accomplish is to create an atmosphere in which every individual within the organization is utilized and committed to the mission at hand. A good principal taps into the capacities of teachers, students, support staff, and parents to build a sense of teamwork and trust. When individuals enter into a partnership with an organization, it is essential that there be a sense of trust, appreciation for their efforts, maximum use of their strengths, and a shared sense of goals and vision with a commitment to producing extraordinary results. Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007) stressed the distribution of responsibility to teachers by stating:

> In successful schools, collaborative cultures provide the norms and contests for teacher to inquire into, reflect on, and improve their practice as individuals, as colleagues, and as members of communities of practice. Collaborative cultures require that supervisory roles and functions be the responsibility of teachers. (p. 198)

Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007) further stated that schools that have successfully established a "collective responsibility" for the teaching, learning, and achievement of students have been transformed into schools with accepted norms for teacher collaboration, building of a support system, and caring for one another. The principal must consider many factors in the quest to achieve this type of organization at the elementary level. According to Senge (2007), one of these factors is the establishment of "systems thinking" (p. 6) followed by "personal mastery" (p. 7). "Systems thinking" is a set of routine patterns that organizations identify and then adopt as their working process. After this pattern has been accepted and employed widely, those involved in the organization take on the mission of the school and make it an organization through which they can grow professionally and personally—in other words, to achieve "personal mastery." Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007) referred to the advantage of this type of system:

> The effectiveness of teachers in this system is enhanced by the kind of networking that they engage in with their colleagues. Working collaboratively, they can explore new approaches, discuss problem areas, look into research findings, engage in their own research to find out what students are thinking and feeling about their work, and make use of resources. (p. 112)

When teachers actively engage in exploring ways to improve student learning and seek solutions to promote achievement, the knowledge they gain transfers to their professional growth, mastery, and expertise as educators.

The success of systems thinking and personal mastery rests, not solely but squarely, on the shoulders of the elementary principal. In this process the principal is the most influential person involved in the establishment of the operating system for the entire organization. The principal is the individual who builds a shared vision and goals that lead to student success. Shared vision is not easily achieved, but once achieved it can assist the school in realizing its full potential by deepening the commitment of teachers, students, parents, administration, and others connected with the school. Increasing the commitment toward improving student success through more effective daily principles and practices in the schools is the responsibility of school principals.

Rural Schools

Rural schools are as unique in setting as they are in location. These schools have been placed in difficult positions since the enactment of NCLB in 2001. Beeson (2000) described rural America as "being pulled in different directions by disparate pressures; population growth, federal and state legislative redistricting, commerce and poverty. Nowhere are the effects of these pressures more evident than in rural schools" (p. 22). Jimerson (2005), a policy analyst for The Rural School and Community Trust, listed the characteristics of rural and small schools that make implementing NCLB particularly difficult in those settings:

1. Rural schools and districts tend to be small.

2. Rural schools in many locations are poor and often have large concentrations of minority children.
3. Many rural districts are in financial distress.
4. Rural schools in many states are situated in remote areas.
5. There is a strong tradition of local control in many areas.
6. Many rural areas are experiencing depopulation and declining enrollment.
7. Other rural areas are experiencing rapid population increase and rapid ethnic diversification. (p. 1)

One of the primary objectives of NCLB was to target economically disadvantaged and minority students with the intention of improving the achievement gap between them and their peers; however, NCLB has imposed complicated, perplexing dilemmas for rural schools in the arena of student achievement. Jimerson (2005) concluded by stating, "NCLB is basically a suburban-urban law. In general, the law is insensitive to many of the needs and problems of rural schooling. It tends to overlook the reality of rural places" (p. 4). On the contrary, Gibbs (2000) commented:

> Perceptions of rural schools and the quality of rural education have moved away from the condescension of an earlier era. Where rural schools were once viewed as out of touch with modern society, suffering from geographic isolation and the inefficiencies of small enrollments and lack of specialization, they are often now praised by some of those same attributes. Mounting statistical and anecdotal evidence of the benefits of small school size and close ties with the local community have led to favorable comparisons of rural schools with their often oversized urban counterparts. (p. 82)

In today's age of educational reform, the demands on rural schools have not relented and they still have much to live up to. If the task of rural environments and student achievement are to mesh successfully, Beeson (2000) suggested, "Today's rural principals must be part innovator, part negotiator, and part magician to make their schools run smoothly" (p. 5).

Schools Selected for This Study

This study focused on two elementary schools in rural south central New Mexico. The first school was Commodore Elementary School in Commodore, New Mexico, whose principal was Mr. Lewis. The second school was Cirrus Elementary School in Cirrus, New Mexico, whose principal was Mr. O'Dell. The two schools were selected based on the selection criteria described in Chapter 3 of this document.

Purpose Statement

This was a descriptive case study of selected elementary school principals in rural New Mexico. The purpose was to examine the characteristics and practices of two elementary school principals, both of whose schools had achieved "Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP) the previous year (2009-10). All these factors were examined because of their possible relationship to the high student achievement scores on the New Mexico Standards Based Assessment (NMSBA), which resulted in the AYP designations for these two schools.

Research Questions

The following primary questions used in this descriptive case study were as follows:

1. *What are the common leadership practices between principals of high-achieving rural schools?*

Sub-question 1: *What are the attitudes of teachers toward the principal of a high-achieving-school?*

Sub-question 2: *What are the attitudes of parents toward the principal of a high-achieving-school?*

The following secondary question was used in this study:

2. *What are the characteristics of principals in high-achieving rural schools?*

The final question was used in this study:

3. *Are there common characteristics in the school climate among high-achieving rural elementary schools?*

Significance of the Study

Many theories of leadership have been developed by experts in the field of education as well as other fields; however, there is a general lack of understanding about the qualities of leadership that result in student achievement. The lack of clarity regarding effective leadership on the part of education researchers makes this an intriguing topic for investigation.

Gardner (1990) defined leadership as "the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a large group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers" (p. 17). Leadership cannot be defined merely by words alone; it must be demonstrated through behaviors and characteristics. The persona of the school leader must be a "floor of beliefs, opinions, values, and attitudes that provides a foundation for practice" (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007, p. 82). Gurr, Drysdale, and Mulford (2006) categorized principals' beliefs and values as "innate goodness and passion, demonstrated through honesty, empathy and commitment; equity (everyone matters), demonstrated through being open and flexible; and other-centeredness (all can learn), demonstrated through dispensed leadership and responsibility" (p. 375). It is imperative that effective leadership behaviors and monitoring practices occur at the school in a consistently progressive pattern for the school to experience success. To achieve this, Martin, Wright, Danzig, Flanary, and Brown (2005) stated, "A wise leader understands that there is no universal motivation for every individual, but seeks to discover what motivates the people who he/she leads" (p. 82). The principal should evaluate whether the implementation of the change process occurs steadily and successfully.

Definition of Terms

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): "Progress will be determined using annual statewide measurable objectives for improved achievement by all students as well as specific groups, including economically disadvantaged students,

students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and LEP students. AYP is to be based primarily on state assessments" (NMPED website, 2002).

Communities: Those as a group who comprise a "center of shared values, beliefs, and commitments. In communities, what is considered right and good is as important as what works and what is effective" (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007, p. 32).

Culture: Culture is "a set of understandings or meanings shared by a group of people" (Sergiovanni & Starrett, 2007, p. 342).

Educational Plan for Student Success (EPSS): EPSS is a district and school level document of accountability established by the state of New Mexico. The EPSS is defined as

> a strategic improvement plan that is written or revised based on trend data and the academic achievement of the school and district. Each district is required to develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate the plan on an annual basis. Additionally, the district shall ensure that site-level EPSS is developed by each school within the district and by each charter school for which the district is the chartering agency. State-chartered charter schools shall develop a site-level EPSS. (New Mexico Public Education Department, *Title 6 Primary and Secondary Education, Chapter 29, Standards for Excellence, Part 1, General Provisions,* pp. 1-2)

NMAC 6.29.0001 also defines the EPSS as follows:

> A. Duties and powers of the local board of education or governing body of a charter school. In addition to the powers and duties set out in Section 22-5-4 NMSA 1978 and Section 22-1-1 et seq. NMSA 1978 of the Public School Code, the local board of education (or governing body of a charter school, where indicated) shall:
>
> (1) review, approve and support the district's EPSS and each school site-level EPSS, or the charter school's EPSS;
> (2) employ and evaluate the local superintendent or charter school administrator;

(3) develop a planned program of training annually, in which each member of the board participates, to assist in the performance of specified duties; this planned program shall align with the district's EPSS; training shall include the following requirements and procedures.

(a) All local school board members shall receive a total of five hours of annual training.

(b) Newly elected or appointed local school board members, who are in office for less than a year, shall receive three of the five hours from attending a training course developed by the department and sponsored by the New Mexico school boards association (NMSBA). The additional two hours of annual training for new board members shall consist of sessions sponsored by the NMSBA and approved by the department.

(c) All board members who have been in office for one or more years shall attend five hours of annual training sponsored by the NMSBA and approved by the department.

(d) In order to be credited with attendance at these courses, each attendee shall comply with written attendance procedures established by the department. Prior to September 1 of each year, the NMSBA shall provide each local superintendent with a list of training hours earned annually by each local school board member. The school district's accountability report shall include the names of those local school board members who failed to attend annual mandatory training (see Section 22-2C-11(G) NMSA 1978);

(4) delegate administrative and supervisory functions to the local superintendent or charter school administrator;

(5) refrain from involvement in delegated administrative functions;

(6) review district or charter school policies on an annual basis and revise as needed;

(7) award high school graduation diplomas to students who have successfully completed graduation requirements;

(8) ensure the alignment of district or charter school curricula with New Mexico content standards with benchmarks and performance standards;

(9) ensure that district or charter school funds are appropriately managed and disbursed in accordance with laws, regulations and terms of grants;

(10) approve the annual district or charter school budget;

(11) be responsible for oversight of revenue and expenditures within the district or charter school budget; and

(12) coordinate with the district’s superintendent to establish the procedures for discharging and terminating school employees pursuant to Section 22-5-4 NMSA 1978 and the School Personnel Act (Chapter 22, Article 10-A NMSA 1978).

> B. Duties and powers of the district superintendent or the administrator of a charter school. In addition to the powers and duties set out in Section 22-5-14 NMSA 1978 of the Public School Code, the local superintendent (or charter school administrator, where relevant) shall:
>
> (1) administer local board's (or governing body of a charter school's) policies, state and federal requirements and applicable laws, including the Public School Code;
> (2) be accountable for student achievement; budget management; expenditure of funds; dissemination of information; district or charter school communications; development, implementation and evaluation of the EPSS and all other district or charter school business;
> (3) review, approve and support the district EPSS and each school site-level EPSS or the charter school's EPSS;
> (4) attend all local board or governing body of a charter school's meetings or, when necessary, designate a licensed administrator to attend;
> (5) ensure that school patrons and the public are informed and involved in the acquisition, planning and development of school facilities and that students are provided with adequate facilities which conform to state and federal mandates. (New Mexico Public Education Department, n.d., *Title 6 Primary and Secondary Education, Chapter 29, Standards for Excellence, Part 1, General Provisions).*

High-achieving schools: schools that achieved adequate yearly progress (AYP) during the 2009-10 school year.

Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC): a framework developed by the Council of Chief State Officers in conjunction with the National Policy Board for Educational Administration that redefined school leadership through standards for educational leaders (Murphy & Shipman, 1998). For the complete standard of ISLLC see Appendix A.

New Mexico Administrative Code (NMAC): "the official compilation of current rules filed by state agencies" (NMAC, 2010).

New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED)*:* the New Mexico state agency that oversees all public schools. The department is located in the state capital of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

New Mexico Standards Based Assessment (NMSBA): the state mandated testing tool used to assess all state-funded public elementary and secondary schools in writing, reading, math, and science standards based curriculum near the end of each school year.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB): The educational reform bill for all elementary and secondary public schools in the United States, enacted by Congress and signed into law in 2001 by President George W. Bush. One of the main purposes of NCLB is to narrow the achievement gap for economically disadvantaged and minority students. NCLB has placed "greater emphasis on accountability including the loss of funding for programs that fail to produce results" (NMPED website, 2002).

Personal mastery: "The discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively" (Senge, 2007, p. 7).

Professional virtue: "the norms of what it means to be a professional" (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007, p. 32).

Rural schools: DEFINITIONS section 6.34.2.7 states (New Mexico Public Education Department, n.d., *Title 6, Primary and Secondary Education, Chapter 34, Rural Education, Part 2, Flexibility for Rural School District,* n.d.):

A. "Rural local educational agency (“rural LEA”)” means a local school district meeting the following criteria:

(1) the total number of students in average daily attendance at all schools served by the school district is fewer than 600, OR all schools in the district are located in counties with a population density of fewer than 10 persons per square mile; AND

(2) all schools served by the school district have a school locale code of 7 or 8 as determined by the secretary of the United States department of education in its small, rural school achievement eligibility spreadsheet for a given year.

B. “Small rural school achievement spreadsheet (“SRSA”)” means that spreadsheet developed by the United States department of education office of elementary and secondary education for a given fiscal year/school year delineating those New Mexico school districts as eligible for the SRSA program for that fiscal year.

[6.34.2.7 NMAC - N, 08-31-06]

Systems thinking: “a conceptual framework, body of knowledge and tool that have been developed over the past 50 years to make the full patterns clearer and to help us see how to change them effectively” (Senge, 2007, p. 7).

Delimitations

The delimitations of this case study are as follows:

1. Only two school principals were studied in detail, both leaders of high-achieving rural elementary schools in the state of New Mexico. These individuals were selected from a pool limited to principals whose schools had achieved AYP in the 2009-10 school year and who had been employed within that same school district for at least one year. The principals were selected without regard for age, years of experience, teaching experience, or demographic factors, although these factors were considered in the findings.

2. Only the leadership styles and behaviors of the two principals were studied and taken into account in relation to the effects, if any, as to their respective schools' achievement of AYP.
3. The case study design employed in this study does not lend itself to direct, probability-sampling-based generalizations beyond the two schools examined.

Organization of the Study

This study is divided into five chapters followed by references and appendices. This chapter includes an introduction followed by sections on significance of the study, problem statement, research questions, definition of terms, and delimitations. The next chapter consists of a review of the literature focused on the topic of the study. The third chapter, titled Methodology, consists of a description of the research design and data sources used to compile needed demographic information regarding schools, the measurement tool and other data-collection modes, actual data collection, and data analysis procedures. The findings of the study are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 consists of a summary, conclusions, and recommendations for further study.

The chapters are followed by a reference list of all works cited in this study. This document concludes with the following nine appendices: Appendix A: Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC); Appendix B: ASU IRB Approval Letter; Appendix C: Interview Questions for the Principals; Appendix D: Interview Questions for the Teachers; Appendix E: Interview Questions for the

Parents; Appendix F: Educational Leadership Survey; Appendix G: General Information Letter to Principals, Invitation/Recruitment Letter, and Formal Information Letter.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

> No matter how capable are designated supervisors, as long as supervision is viewed as doing something *to* teachers and *for* teachers but not *with* teachers, its potential to improve schools will not be fully realized.
>
> (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 5)

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has drawn much attention to accountability and placed rigid demands on many areas of education. There is a need for today's school leaders to be more appropriately trained to meet current educational demands. In the school setting teachers have the most direct and immediate effect on student success; however, the bulk of the responsibility for every child's success in school falls on the principal, who is charged with ensuring that teaching and learning are at proficient to advanced levels throughout the school. Wallace Foundation researchers Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) stated: "There are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader. Many other factors may contribute to such turnarounds, but leadership is the catalyst" (p. 5).

Leadership Styles

Principals are the chief catalysts who assume responsibility for all the internal and external occurrences related to their schools. The job of a principal involves working with all types of people and personalities; they must be able to manage reasonably and resourcefully the numerous conflicts and dilemmas that

arise in their schools on a daily basis. The ways in which principals handle both routine and unexpected situations directly affect teaching, learning, and their relationships with their school staffs, parents, and students. The connections principals establish are critical to the success of their school organizations.

The methods principals use to set the tone for their schools primarily depend on the individual. Sergiovanni and Starrett (2007) suggested that there are various types of leadership authorities or types principals can use to manage and guide their schools. The strengths of professional authority and the strengths of moral authority lie in their ability to connect people morally to the school and its purposes.

> Authority refers to power that is used to influence how teachers think and how teachers go about teaching and learning. The success or failure of any supervisory strategy rests on the match between the source of authority that the supervisor relies upon and the specifics that define the situation at hand. (p. 25)

Principals can implement one or more authorities in their schools. Sergiovanni and Starrett (2007) described four types of authorities. The first type is the bureaucratic authority that depends heavily on chain-of-command order, policies, regulations, mandates, and the clear roles, responsibilities, and expectations of subordinates. There is always the clear understanding that in the event of an infraction, consequences will follow. Bureaucratic, authoritative principals place a heavy reliance on predetermined standards and practice policies of "expect and inspect" (p. 27) to ensure compliance in their schools. Many of the standards in place in schools today are measurements of expectations the

professional staff is held to. Often these criteria and associated practices are not well suited to teaching or learning in the school environment.

The second type of authority is personal authority. This type of authority is the supervisor's ability to use interpersonal techniques and skills to motivate members of the organization. It is presumed that by using a personable and "teacher-friendly" approach, the professional staff will accept and comply more readily with their principal's aspirations and requests. Under these assumptions principals generally rely on a reward system in supervising teachers. When teachers become aware of the potential rewards for their exemplary job performance, it leads to an increase in their satisfaction in the work place, which leads them to become intrinsically motivated to produce better results in their classrooms. Hohne (2006) described it this way:

> As a leadership approach, it defines *personal responsibility* [emphasis in original] as what is expected and delivered by both the leader and those they lead. It creates an environment where truth is fostered. In an atmosphere of open and honest dialogue, it provides for optimal growth because it is a philosophy based on clear expectations and results. (p. 122)

The third type, professional authority, relies heavily on the knowledge and skills of teachers. Leaders can help facilitate growth in their teachers' skills and expertise in the most important ways that foster professional maturity. Principals can help teachers acquire a knowledge base that not only can drive and support their purposes as educators, but also serve as a remedy to their practice when problems arise. In a professional authority setting teachers must take charge of the situations that confront them, weigh in on what is right and appropriate, and make

decisions using the knowledge base they have generated from their own unique professional experiences and circumstances. Good teachers tend to develop their expertise based on the realization of what will benefit their students before reflecting on what is best suited for the school. The supervisor's main objective is to promote open means of communication and dialogue among the professional staff so that they develop a sense of code and standard by which they hold one another accountable. Once successfully implemented the principal will merely be there to provide assistance, support, and professional development opportunities for staff because teachers will have achieved an internal code of accountability. Fullan (2007) contributed, "The overall effect was a highly motivating and energized collaborative culture in which people were passionate about their work together and deeply focused on making and continuing to make changes that would get results" (p. 144).

The fourth and final authority, moral authority, is derived from the obligations, shared beliefs, and virtues of the profession. Moral authority positions teachers in a united community of practiced beliefs, values, and shared commitment as educators. In this case, communities are described by Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007) as a "center of shared values, beliefs, and commitments. In communities, what is considered right and good is as important as what works and what is effective" (p. 32). When standards of morals are established, members of the organization feel secure in knowing professional virtues are established in the work place. Professional virtue refers to the norms of what it means to be a

professional (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007). Principals should be resolved to ensure that shared beliefs and values are an important part of their schools' establishment, made a matter of regular practice, and upheld by all stakeholders. These norms are important to forming a customary base of beliefs in a school. In this instance, principals can depend less on outside mechanisms of control and rely more on the inner community of teachers and their convictions to govern the duties and obligations that have been set in their buildings (Sergiovanni & Starrett, 2007).

Norms of Leadership

Schools are organizations in need of effective leaders. Perry Wiseman (2009) referred to this type of leader as a "Foundational School Leader" (p. 8); Davies and Brighouse (2010) used the term *passionate leadership* (p. 4). Foundational school leaders are the people who start by building a firm foundation for the organizations around them. This foundation comes from tapping into the "collective intelligence" that already exists at the local level. Foundational school principals transfigure themselves into the passionate leaders who see the potential of their schools and believe they are not only producing an organization, but also building up people. These types of leaders are optimistic and center on the belief that potential abounds in the existing employees of the organization. Davies and Brighouse (2010) stated, "Passionate leadership establishes a set of values and purposes that underpin the educational process of

the school. Most significantly it is the individual passion and commitment of the leader that drives the values and purposes into reality" (p. 4).

Schools need leaders with vision. Gini (1997) believed that "the first and central job of leadership is that effective leaders must create and communicate a clear vision of what they stand for, what they want to achieve and what they expect from their followers" (p. 328). Because school leaders are the architects of vision for their schools, it is important that their vision be realistic and attainable. Davies and Brighouse (2010) believed "a vision should connect with the reality of the individuals in the organization's current experience as well as the hope and aspirations of the future. In essence it has to connect with the heart as well as the head" (p. 5). Of course, principals need to have visions that are realistic, but they also must be leaders who consider the "cutting edge" of possibilities. School principals who have visions that convey the challenge of "importance and urgency of the journey to new and better futures" (Davies & Brighouse, 2010, p. 5) will spark the interest and support of those they lead.

Shared vision is an important component of effective leadership. School organizations need leaders who invoke shared vision. Leaders must possess the ability to make dreams and goals a reality; however, they should not be the sole solicitors of these ideas (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). To maintain a balance, principals should listen to the school community's opinions and ideas about innovations. This type of shared vision-building will increase commitment and create a sense of collaborative growth among members of the organization. By

being allowed to offer input, individuals are placed in a position of being more obliging to future impending changes to their work and environment, as well as being committed to the overall goals of their respective groups (Wiseman, 2009). When considering the concept of shared vision, Murphy (2007) commented, "Top administrators tend to point in the general direction rather than a specific destination; they are more likely to provide scaffolding for collaboration than a blueprint for action" (p. 54). In this sense, shared vision yields independence and autonomy; effective principals provide the compass, but allow their people to lead the way.

Many practical aspects of leadership are not extraordinary or ground-breaking, but effective leadership practice can make all the difference. Although they are an essential component of the learning organization, principals need to remember that they are only one component. Many of the top leaders in history have promoted their organizations primarily because they truly believed in the product their organizations could offer. School leaders need to possess a confident humility about them so their true leadership qualities and abilities become evident and visible to those around them. Principals are in the people-building business, and it is essential that they establish strong interpersonal bonds with the students, staff, and parents. Leithwood and Montgomery (1982) commented that some of the defining factors of effective principals are their "orientations towards students, teachers, and the larger school system" (p. 320). They further stressed that students should be the principals' utmost concern: "Effective principals place the

achievement and happiness of students first in their priorities" (p. 320). Whether it be students, staff, or parents it is imperative that school leaders not become so wrapped up in the business of school that they develop a pattern of becoming oblivious to the human factor in their schools.

The Virtues of Leadership

The school organization is the community where individuals meet on a regular basis and operate in accordance with set patterns of practices, routines, rules, and interactions. Moral leadership has been given a backseat to other causes that demand more of the principal's attention, such as program accountability, student achievement, and school finances. Moral leadership is the conduct and character of educational leaders; however, it is an essential ingredient to the overall success of the school culture that all members can contribute to. This is not something as simple as pinning a poster of ethical "do's and don'ts" on the wall of the teachers' lounge. According to Zuidema and Duff (2009), three best approaches for establishing a recognized norm of ethics are (a) incorporate the chosen ideals into a mission and values for all to respect; (b) provide formal events and training to the organization that convey aspects of ethical behavior; and (c) emphasize the desired ethical behavior through an organizational philosophy. Just as students are versed in school rules, mission statements, and school mottos to provide a standard of conduct, these same techniques can serve as a basis for orthodox behavior for school personnel.

Lashway (1996) emphasized a point that Greenfield (1991) made when he cast schools in the position of "moral institutions, designed to promote social norms" (p. 1), and principals as "moral agents who must often make decisions that favor one moral value over another" (p. 1). This being the case, principals must not hold themselves above the ethical demands they ask of their staffs; instead, they have a moral responsibility to exercise their authority in ethical ways.

Values affect the roles of leaders, and the role of a leader has a definite imprint on their organizations. Russell (2001) conveyed the message that personal values are developed over time, and as they grow they begin to mature into the social framework of a family. Values help build organizations in a positive manner as they seek to establish themselves as associations of trust and integrity. Leaders must take on the same circumspect of beliefs, values, and humility that will ensure the honor of the organization from the top down. Gini (1997) commented, "Leaders must assume full responsibility for their choices and commitments, successes and failures" (p. 329). Whether it is under the guise of virtues, values, or morals, the strength and determination of the leaders will reflect the growth and stability of the organizations they lead.

School Culture and Organizational Change

In some respects the school can be compared to a shipping vessel, and like most ships its destination depends primarily on the course its captain sets. It is essential for school principals to thoughtfully plot the direction in which their

schools are headed. The school's leadership must place priority on identifying the most important areas in their schools in need of growth. Principals of underperforming schools must plan for two objectives critical to the turnaround of their school organizations: (a) helping their schools secure a solid set of directions, and (b) influencing members of the organization to move in those same directions.

For the school culture to improve, change must occur. This is often a difficult position for school leaders, but despite how unpleasant the task may be viewed, it is a duty that must be performed. Gini (1997) declared, "All forms of leadership are essentially about transformation. Leadership is not about maintaining the status quo; it is about initiating change in an organization" (p. 326). Whether the need for change is warranted or unwarranted, its direction will rarely be clear at the beginning (Fullan, 2007). Principals will be the key element in ensuring that the positive change they seek to bring about is assimilated into their schools in ways that produce shared meaning. Part of the process of shared meaning is an understanding of what needs to be changed, how it can be accomplished, and how it is in constant interaction with the how and the what of change. The solutions for reform are transpired by observations, data collection, experiences, and motives of the principal that foster high-achieving attributes essential to making change happen in a school.

Gurr et al. (2006) noted that "successful school leaders promoted a culture of collegiality, collaboration, support and trust" (p. 376). Being a leader does not

always mean being in charge. Principals who delegate some of their school duties and decision-making to others willing to take on extra responsibilities find that such requests and delegation of additional duties to staff members enhances employee job performance. Gurr et al. (2010) suggested,

> Successful leaders foster shared decision-making to motivate and empower others. Their focus was on distributed leadership, which was facilitated by providing support for distributed leadership processes and practices, promoting a culture of trust which encouraged enthusiasm and a sense of agency amongst staff, students and parents. (p. 376)

Shared responsibilities is an empowerment strategy effective principals use to boost the confidence of their staff. Resick, Hanges, Dickson, and Mitchelson (2006) recommend that "leaders use empowerment strategies that build followers' self-confidence and self-efficacy" (p. 347). When members of the learning organization are trusted and shown confidence in the duties and responsibilities they have been given, their output is greater due to the vested interest they have in the purpose of the school.

System Standards

Effectiveness and accountability are constantly at the forefront of education today. The stakes are high, which translates into placing heavy emphasis and increased pressures from the top down for schools to conform and perform.

Since the matter of standards cannot be evaded, Paul Lingenfelter (2003) commented that "the objective of accountability systems generally is to stimulate more effective innovative approaches and greater effort and discipline in

implementation" (p. 2). For accountability systems to be effective, Reeves (2007) suggested that the framework must have "clear boundaries; within that framework, teacher creativity is encouraged and valued. Neither the leaders nor the teachers need to engage in guesswork about expectations or boundaries" (p. 247). The accountability focuses on the framework, leaving both the principal and the teacher open to work together to make performance improvements within the framework. This approach is better received by the certified staff and gives principals time to help teachers with more meaningful evaluations of their job performance.

In 1994, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) created the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). The ISLLC serves as a standard of practice in the field of school leadership. Murphy (2005) explained,

> The objective of the Consortium was twofold: (a) to create a set of standards that would provide the basis for reshaping the profession of school administration in the United States around the perspectives on school leadership outlined in the next section of the article and (b) to direct action in the academic, policy, and practice domains of the profession consistent with those perspectives across an array of strategy leverage points (e.g., licensure, professional development, administrator evaluation). Thus, the ISLLC Standards were crafted to influence the leadership skills of existing school leaders as much as they were to shape the knowledge, performances, and skills of prospective leaders in preparation programs. (p. 155)

The ISLLC standards were developed from research on principals and district administrators whose schools were yielding high achievement results (Murphy, 2005). The standards have come under much criticism by those in the

field today; however, scholars like Murphy have deemed these standards necessary in the field of educational leadership. Murphy further commented that

> the objective of ISLLC has been to yoke the *Standards* to important leverage points for change. The goal has been to generate a critical mass of energy to move school administration out of its 100-year orbit and to reposition the profession around leadership for learning. (p. 180)

Diversity and Leadership

In education diversity is often viewed as an undesirable complication. Many obstacles present themselves when a diverse population is found in schools, ranging from low economic status, high poverty, language barriers, and discipline problems to name a few. However, depending on how it is interpreted, diversity can be utilized as strength. Hoerr (2007) stated, "Children need to feel valued for who they are, both as individuals and as members of a particular group" (p. 87). The school cannot control the environment beyond the school walls, but it can control what takes place within the confines of the school day. In this manner it can control how diversity is defined, displayed, and shown respect. This type of healthy control makes for a more harmonious school setting and serves students well.

Diversity is inevitable in the world today, and American schools are highly diverse in their student populations. More recently, educators have begun to look past the "blame and befuddlement and [are] working to transform themselves and their schools to serve all their students well" (Howard, 2007, p. 17). Howard found that such measures of transformation occur through five steps: "(a) building trust, (b) engaging personal culture, (c) confronting issues of

social dominance and social justice, (d) transforming instructional practices, and (e) engaging the entire school community" (p.17). These phases take on their own processes and gradually weave themselves into one another until the transformation process is complete. The first step is to acknowledge the challenge in a positive but honest way. The next step is to build teachers' cultural competence. The building of cultural competency helps form genuine relationships despite differences. The third step is to keep educators in a frame of mind that inspires them to remain focused on the job at hand. The fourth step is connected to the previous step in that it helps teachers carry out instruction. For many this means reexamining their methods and the curriculum of their schools. The last phase encompasses all aspects of the five phases in that it helps create schools that are more welcoming of diverse cultures and that provide a welcoming atmosphere for all diverse individuals living within and around the school community.

Schools that have met the challenge of establishing change programs have seen a transformation within their schools and among their professional staffs. Many post-secondary institutions recognize these successes and have become engaged in establishing affirmative action programs within their educational leadership program competencies. These programs have helped bridge a gap and achieve a larger goal at hand.

> Specifically, they are indispensable in training future leaders how to lead all of society, and by attracting a diverse cadre of students and faculty, they increase our universities' chances of filling in gaps in our knowledge with research and teaching on a wider—and often uncovered—array of subjects. (Bollinger, 2007, p. 28)

Schools need to consider a modern look at diversity and reevaluate how it bridges the array of society's gaps that manage to filter into classrooms throughout the nation. At school, students can learn and understand the meaning of autonomy; through this process the individual becomes a knowledgeable, competitive citizen who can change the world (Bollinger, 2007). Bollinger justifies this approach by stating, "It is also vital for establishing a cohesive, truly national society—one in which rising generations learn to overcome the biases they absorb as children while also appreciating the unique talents their colleagues bring to any equation" (p. 29).

Leadership for Tomorrow

There are many new understandings and approaches regarding where the future is headed, and regarding the nature of leadership in the future. The accountability factor in NCLB leaves no room for school principals to be relaxed and stagnant about the position of their schools. As technology, research, and methodologies progress, there is an urgent demand for principals to take the initiative to seize advancement opportunities and approaches that will lead their schools into the next century. The American educational system must seek and implement instruction to better prepare students to compete in a steadily advancing global workforce and society.

Levasseur (2004) emphasized the modernization of the world today by stating, "Recent rapid advances in technology, transportation, and communication have ushered in an era of information, globalization, and seemingly constant

change" (p. 147). Schools are faced with the pressing demands to provide programs that will prepare and lead their students with skills essential to 21st century living. Khadaroo and Clabaugh (2009) referred to today's global environment as a "knowledge economy" (p. 3). They maintain that for members of the knowledge economy to thrive it is vitally important for them to have "the ability to articulate and solve problems, to generate original ideas, and to work collaboratively across cultural boundaries" (p. 3). The challenge for schools today is to find innovative ways to teach 21st century skills to students while staying aligned with standardized curriculum and benchmarks. On a positive note, Khadaroo and Clabaugh (2009) conveyed that traditional core subjects are still pertinent to the 21st century knowledge economy and they should continue to be integrated into existing educational state standards. There is a great need to emphasize the ability of students to succeed with skills in modern times (Maurizio & Wilson, 2004). To achieve this, school leaders need to possess greater expertise in becoming more financial and communication savvy so they will be better equipped to make successful business decisions that ultimately aid in the development of individuals (i.e., teachers and students) to take on the challenges of the modern workplace (Humphrey & Stokes, 2000).

In recent times what has emerged as a "cutting edge" approach to organizational change is the "modern leadership model. This model emphasizes the vital importance of people to the survival and success of the modern enterprise. Whereas traditional leaders give orders, modern leaders empower their

followers to achieve common goals collaboratively" (Levasseur, 2004, p. 147). To place the educational system in a better position it is suggested that educational management could be better served following a business management framework. Schools could be viewed as enterprises whose goal is not specifically profit-making, but they are organizations with goals that need to be achieved for the sake of their stakeholders (Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008).

Other challenges for 21st century schools are the heavy and uncertain job demands they place on their principals. Ferrandino (2001) outlined three job-related stresses that contribute to the principal shortages across the nation in recent years:

> (a) Inadequate compensation . . . principals are expected to assume responsibilities of a CEO, make daily decisions that spell success or failure for their school, (b) Job related stress. Burnout has become an all-too-common occurrence as principals try to keep up with increasing pressures and demands of parents, teachers, and supervisors, and (c) Time fragmentation. There are simply not enough hours in the school day for a conscientious principal to fulfill the many responsibilities of an administrator and an instructional leader. (p. 441)

Principals of schools need more than ever to be bold innovators of change to give their students the best advantage possible in the global community. By instilling a modern design of leadership in their schools, principals offer their teachers, parents, and students the advantage of becoming global thinkers. "Today's principals could certainly use the skills of a public relations professional to 'market' their schools and generate community support" (Ferrandino, 2001, p. 442). Educators and education leaders today must prepare for the paradigm shift that is inevitable in education. Levasseur (2004) urged school leaders to

“embrace it and become part of the solution, or ignore it and become part of the problem” (p. 148).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter focuses on the research design and methodology used in this case study of leadership by principals in two schools in rural New Mexico. Sections in this chapter include overall research design; school selection criteria and rationales; descriptions of the sample cases including school, community, and principal demographics; sampling procedures within schools; data collection, including details about the three modes of data collection; and data analysis procedures.

Research Design

Case study was selected for this study because this design facilitates collection and analysis of in-depth data from one or more specific cases. Yin (2009) stated,

> As a research method, the case study is used in many situations, to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena. Not surprisingly, the case study has been a common research method of psychology, sociology, political science, anthropology, social work, business, education, nursing and community planning. (p. 4)

For this case study of two rural New Mexico schools it was imperative that the information the researcher was seeking came from firsthand accounts and observations of the interviewees. Yin (2009) further explained that "the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. In brief, the case study allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-to-life events" (p. 4). The present

study targeted key shared characteristics of the two schools, including AYP status and rural setting. The design also required the consent of the two school principals involved.

The researcher wanted to determine whether the principals whose elementary schools had achieved AYP may have had common characteristics, beliefs, and practices that contributed to their respective schools' successes, although these characteristics, beliefs, and practices may not have been exhibited or otherwise manifested in practice. Therefore, it was important to gather information about personal perspectives, including motives for specific behaviors, directly from the principals. The design types were chosen to identify principal leadership characteristics and behaviors that may have been associated with high achievement as reflected in the AYP status of the two rural New Mexico elementary schools.

Selection Criteria and Rationales

The two schools used in this study were New Mexico elementary schools that achieved adequate yearly progress (AYP) status for the 2009-10 school year. All 820 public, charter, and alternate schools in the state of New Mexico were listed on the New Mexico Public Education Department website (NMPED, 2010b). Based on an administration of the New Mexico Standards Base Assessment (NMSBA) in the spring of 2010, 141 (17%) of the state's 820 (100%) schools achieved AYP status for that year. Of the 141 AYP schools, 99 (70%)

were elementary schools. Some 22% of New Mexico's 460 elementary schools achieved AYP for the 2009-10 school year.

The NMPED refers to the New Mexico Administrative Codes (NMAC) when designating schools under the rural category. DEFINITIONS section 6.34.2.7 states (New Mexico Public Education Department, n.d., *Title 6, Primary and Secondary Education, Chapter 34, Rural Education, Part II, Flexibility for Rural School District*):

> A. "Rural local educational agency ("rural LEA")" means a local school district meeting the following criteria:
> (1) the total number of students in average daily attendance at all schools served by the school district is fewer than 600, OR all schools in the district are located in counties with a population density of fewer than 10 persons per square mile; AND
> (2) all schools served by the school district have a school locale code of 7 or 8 as determined by the secretary of the United States department of education in its small, rural school achievement eligibility spreadsheet for a given year.
> B. "Small rural school achievement spreadsheet ("SRSA")" means that spreadsheet developed by the United States department of education office of elementary and secondary education for a given fiscal year/school year delineating those New Mexico school districts as eligible for the SRSA program for that fiscal year.
> [6.34.2.7 NMAC - N, 08-31-06]

Because this study focused primarily on principals of rural schools, the researcher used the above definition to reduce the size of a compiled list of elementary schools from the 2009-10 AYP Ratings and Designations report located on the NMPED (2010b). The list of schools was narrowed to 17 when the researcher searched on the internet to find the total population and municipalities of where the schools were located.

The selection criteria for schools in this study were:

1. The elementary schools achieved AYP for the 2009-10 school year.
2. The principals were employed by the same respective elementary schools for the entire 2009-10 school year.
3. The principals consented to participate in the study.

The rationale for using the first criterion was to concentrate only on high-achieving elementary schools that achieved AYP, according to the New Mexico Public Education Department, for the 2009-10 school year. The purposes of this study did not include analyzing differences between high- and low-achieving schools, hence the concentration on AYP schools. The second criterion, that the principal was employed by the school in question for the entire 2009-10 school year, was used because one of the main purposes of the study was to examine possible effects of the principal on student achievement. It was assumed that any such effects would be dependent upon, or at least enhanced by, consistent involvement by the principals. The third criterion was used because the design of the study required direct input, in the form of information and opinions, from the principals themselves regarding their leadership behaviors and practices. The third criterion was the most important source of information, and the information obtained was triangulated with that from other sources. The research protocol required the consent of the school to participate in the study. Therefore, it was imperative to obtain the consent of the leader of each school, the principals, not only for personal interviews with those individuals, but for permission to conduct other interviews and on-site observations.

Description of the Sample

Four principals of 17 principals consented to participate in the study, and two of those were chosen based on the selection criteria. Their schools, Commodore Elementary School in Commodore, New Mexico and Cirrus Elementary School in Cirrus, New Mexico, were chosen as the focus of this study. Schools that consented to participate in this study were identified in advance and travel arrangements were made prior to all visits. Table 1 displays the school demographics for the two schools used in this study (Great Schools (2010b):

Table 1

School Demographics

	Commodore Elementary	Cirrus Elementary
School staff		
Principal	1	1
Teachers PreK-8th	21	17
Total enrollment student population (K-12)	539	462
Grade levels student population (K-12)		
Elementary K-5	235	178
Middle 6-8	128	99
High school 9-12	176	185
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	70%	83%
Hispanic	27%	12%
Native American	1%	2%
African American	2%	2%
Asian	0%	>1%
Other	0%	0%

Note: Adapted from *New Mexico schools,* by Great Schools, 2010, from http://www.greatschools.org/schools/districts/New_Mexico/

Data Sources

Qualitative and quantitative modes of data collection were employed in this study. The qualitative forms of data collected were (a) results of interviews with the two principals and some of their respective teachers and parents; and (b)

the researcher's field notes taken during on-site observations of the schools' daily operations. The quantitative form of data came from a researcher-designed and administered online educational leadership survey of elementary principals of AYP schools. One final source of data was a public access site available from the New Mexico Education Department (2010a).

Interviews

The researcher designed three different 11-question interview templates that focused on the principals' leadership practices and behaviors—one each for principals, teachers, and parents. The interviews allowed for one-on-one articulation of leadership behaviors and practices and comments about the rural setting of the schools. Principals, teachers, and parents were interviewed in this study at the two targeted elementary schools in New Mexico. All interviews were conducted during the second week of February 2011.

Interviews with principals. The two principals interviewed were Mr. Lewis (Commodore Elementary) and Mr. O'Dell (Cirrus Elementary). The interviews consisted of 11 open-ended questions to the principals regarding background information, education, certified positions held, years of experience, opinions about their own leadership practices and behaviors, and other information that may have contributed to their respective school's high achievement. The interviews were audio recorded to maintain accuracy of information and each lasted from one to three hours. See Appendix C for the interview questions asked of the principals.

Interviews with teachers. Six elementary teachers each from the Commodore and Cirrus schools were invited to participate in interviews, and all 12 certified teachers consented to participate in the interviews. The teachers ranged in age from 23 through 61 years, had from 3 through 35 years of experience in education, and 11 out of the 12 were females. The interactions between the researcher and interviewed teachers, and the interviews themselves, were conducted in ways that guaranteed the confidentiality of the individuals. The same is true for the reporting of information in this case study. All personal communications were followed by an assumed or fictitious name assigned by the researcher. The interviewees were identified only by fictitious name and general job title; there were no other distinguishing characteristics given such as age, grade level(s) taught, school, or gender. The teachers' interviews were built around 10 open-ended questions and lasted from 60 to 120 minutes each. The interviews with teachers were audio recorded to maintain the accuracy of the opinions and attitudes expressed by the interviewees. See Appendix D for a list of interview questions asked of the teachers.

Interviews with parents. A total of five parents per school were contacted and invited to participate in the interviews. A combined total of seven parents consented to participate in the interviews: four parents from Commodore Elementary and three parents from Cirrus Elementary. The researcher selected parents whose children were currently enrolled at the time (February 2011) and had been enrolled at the school during the 2009-10 school year. The parents were

asked to give their opinions and beliefs in response to a series of 10 open-ended questions that centered on their elementary school principal's leadership characteristics and behaviors, and the rural setting of their school. Each parent's personal communications recorded in this case study was assigned a fictitious name to protect the identity of the interviewee. The parent interviews were audio recorded and lasted from 25 to 40 minutes. For parent interview questions, see Appendix E.

Field Notes

The researcher kept field notes on the visits to the school site, one visit per school. The primary information described in the field notes were details pertaining to the villages of Commodore, New Mexico and Cirrus, New Mexico; the campus layouts and building designs; impressions of the school environment and sense of culture; and interactions between the researcher and school personnel. The researcher's observations were informal and served only as a general overview of the daily functioning and operations of the schools on a typical school day.

Survey

The survey instrument was comprised of a set of 31 questions with a response mode of a five-point Likert-type scale. The survey was designed to help the researcher develop an authentic understanding of each elementary principal's leadership characteristics and practices. The self-assessment of the effective leadership practices was based on the standards for administrators outlined by the

Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). ISLLC identifies six standards essential for leading a school and each standard is accompanied by two to eight functions that effective school leaders utilize on a routine basis. Only the principals themselves were asked to rate the degree to which they incorporated each function of the leadership practice by indicating *Almost Always, To a Considerable Degree, Occasionally, Seldom,* or *Never.* A link to the survey was made available to participants via the Surveymonkey.com website (1999-2011). See Appendix F for a copy of the survey instrument completed by the 11 elementary principals, including the two principals profiled in this study.

Pilot Testing

In early January of 2011 a copy of the invitation letter, survey, and set of interview questions were sent to and reviewed by five to seven principals and educators to check for clarity. These individuals were asked only to review the material for clarity of subject matter and were not participants in the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection for this study began in late December 2010. The researcher used public access information on the NMPED website (2010b) to compile a list of the schools that had achieved AYP status for the 2009-10 school year. When the list was compiled, the researcher sent three waves of written correspondence to school principals within a specific period of time. The initial contact consisted of a general information letter to principals that provided an introduction to the researcher and a descriptive overview of the study. The second wave of

correspondence was an invitation/recruitment letter, and the last letter was a formal information letter to the principals. The letters contained a description of the purpose of the study, contact information for the researcher, a brief description of the survey, and a notification to principals that their completion of the survey qualified their schools as willing participants in the study and further contact and data collection would be made. The general information, invitation/recruitment, and formal information letters to the targeted principals are displayed in Appendix G.

After the third and final letters were sent out, the educational leadership survey was mailed to the principals electronically. Eleven of 17 principals completed the online survey, which qualified them as potential participants in this study.

Part of the collection process included school site interviews. The interviews were conducted to gather information about concrete leadership beliefs and practices on the part of the targeted principals. Another factor in the design of the interview questions was to establish information regarding the communities served by the schools and various kinds of demographic information about the schools and the respective communities. This was necessary to consider to what extent the rural and demographic factors may have contributed to student success and thus the school's achievement of AYP.

The interviews were geared toward gathering information about the leadership of the school from the teachers' perceptions of their principals. The

teachers were asked about their attitudes toward beliefs and practices on student learning, student outcomes, student organization and instruction, and how these factors contributed to student success.

The interview questions for parents were addressed to parents who had children enrolled in the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years. The questions asked were in relation to parent involvement, parent beliefs about outside resources for students, the community connection with the school, and a reflection of the principal's leadership effectiveness.

The researcher looked for evidence of school leadership and parental involvement indicators to verify and supplement information obtained via the surveys, interviews, and official documents. The researcher did not take photographs of the school buildings or personnel involved in the study.

Data Analysis

The researcher organized the collected data into emerging themes and concepts, and then analyzed it. In the sorting of the data, coding categories were developed from the themes and concepts taken from interview transcripts, survey responses, and field notes. The data were carefully examined and the following categories were identified as the themes that emerged from this case study: (a) school culture, (b) motivation, (c) instructional leadership, (d) empowerment, (e) school leadership, (f) trust, and (g) community involvement.

The researcher used the data from the interview transcripts, survey responses, and field note observations to identify themes as they appeared in the

frequency of their context. The emerging themes and concepts were then highlighted and categorized.

Summary

This chapter focused on the research design and methodology used in this case study of leadership in two rural New Mexico schools. The researcher explained that both qualitative and quantitative modes of data collection were used in the form of one-on-one interviews, on-site observations and field notes, and a survey. Other information specific to the schools in this study were gathered using the New Mexico Public Education websites. Sections detailed in this chapter were overall research design, school selection criteria and rationales, description of samples (school demographics, community, principal demographics), sampling procedures within schools, data collection (details about the three modes of data collection), and data analysis procedures.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND RESEARCH

This chapter consists of a presentation of the results of the study, which were derived from the researcher's notes, surveys, and interviews.

Descriptions of the Schools and Principals

The researcher made on-site visitations to both schools in this case study. Field notes taken by the researcher provided information for descriptions of the two rural New Mexico schools and their principals.

School Setting: Commodore Elementary School

The Commodore schools are located in the small rural mountain village of Commodore in Abraham County in central New Mexico. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011), in 2010 the population of the village of Commodore was 1,545 and the total population of Abraham County was 21,016. The population breakdown of the village of Commodore was 70% Caucasians, 27% Hispanics, 1% Native Americans, and 2% African-Americans. The Commodore School District includes pre-K through Grade 5 at the elementary level, Grades 6 through 8 in the middle school, and Grades 9 through12 in the high school. At the time of the study the Commodore school campus had three separate buildings to accommodate each of the elementary, middle, and secondary levels. These buildings are located on the same campus and within walking distance of each another. All three school buildings shared a single common cafeteria area for lunch and breakfast meals. Both the high school and elementary school were

equipped with libraries and computer laboratories adjacent to one another. There was one multi-use auxiliary gymnasium and a main gymnasium located at the center of the school grounds. The district's administrative offices, facility management, and transportation yard were also located on the school campus, all within walking distances of all three school buildings.

Upon entering the schools there was an immediate sense of standard and conduct reflective of a learning community. The high school encompassed the length of one hallway with a total of 16 classrooms, eight on each side. Overhead on the ceiling crossbeams were inscribed 11 character traits: Integrity, Attitude, Self-Control, Flexibility, Motivation, Communication, Assertiveness, Organization, Decision-making, Problem-solving, and Consideration. In each of the schools there were many inspirational and motivational posters regarding achievement on the walls of the hallways and classrooms. The school mascot was well themed in many of the classrooms and throughout the school, which contributed to and reflected a sense of school pride. The researcher noted that there were no evident postings of specific school or classroom rules campus-wide; however, there were numerous posters that focused on positive behavior characteristics and motivational slogans.

The total K through 12 student population at the Commodore schools was 539 students. Of those, 67% were Caucasians; 28% Hispanics; 3% Native Americans; and less than 1%, African Americans, Asians, and other ethnicities (Great Schools, 2010a). At the time of this study Commodore Elementary School

had a student population of 235 students. The staff and students at Commodore Elementary School were extremely polite and helpful to the researcher.

Commodore School Principal: Mr. Lewis

The principal at Commodore Elementary School at the time of the study was Mr. C. Lewis. His family had lived in New Mexico for five generations. He completed his elementary school through university graduate education in New Mexico public schools and state universities. Before pursuing the position of school principal, Mr. Lewis was a veteran teacher of 13 years. Other positions he filled included being a special education teacher, a team coach, a secondary history teacher, and a physical education teacher. Mr. Lewis has been a school principal for the past five years. He believed in the strong interpersonal connections educators forge with students and that it makes all the difference when teaching or working with students. “All kids have great potential! Equip them with the right resources for what needs to be accomplished and give them the right opportunities for learning and you’ll see results” (C. Lewis, February 7, 2011).

School Setting: Cirrus Elementary School

The Cirrus Municipal Schools are located in the rural mountain village of Cirrus, New Mexico in Plateau County. The village population for Cirrus was 749 and the total county population was 63,201. The population breakdown of the village of Cirrus was 82% Caucasians, 16% Hispanics, 1% Native Americans, 1% African-Americans, and 0% Asians (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). The Cirrus

Municipal Schools ranged from pre-K through Grade 8 in the elementary school and Grades 9 through 12 in the high school. The elementary school building that housed pre-K through Grade 8 was in a separate building from the high school, which was less than a quarter mile away. The high school was not part of this case study.

The Cirrus Elementary School building had the appearance of a mountain lodge. Upon entering the front of the school, visitors find a corridor with a staircase leading to the second and third levels. At the top of the stairs were double doors that led to the third level of the building. The front office, which housed the secretary's office area, the counselors' offices, and the principal's office, was located on the second level. Visitors were required to check in at the front office. The eastern half of the building housed rooms for pre-K through Grade 4, with a large, open library that extended the entire length of the second level. Bulletin boards that creatively displayed student work were located outside every classroom. At the center of the school was a gymnasium, kitchen, and cafeteria commons area. The western half of the building housed rooms for Grades 5 through 8. The Grade 5 through 8 classrooms were departmentalized according to subject areas such as math, science, language arts and reading, and computer science. There was a large computer laboratory located behind the gymnasium next to the special education classrooms. The Cirrus Elementary School student population at the time of the study was 178 students.

Cirrus School Principal: Mr. O'Dell

Mr. S. O'Dell was born and raised in the state of Wyoming. His parents were in the ministerial and education fields. He attended a New Mexico university for his undergraduate and graduate studies. Mr. O'Dell had spent a total of 33 years in the field of education as an educator and administrator. In the many years Mr. O'Dell has been in education he has worked as a regular classroom teacher, a special education teacher and coordinator, a behavior intervention teacher, and an elementary and middle school principal. Twelve of Mr. O'Dell's 33 years in education were spent as a school administrator, including at the time of the study, holding the position of elementary school principal in Cirrus. Mr. O'Dell believed that education is first about caring for people, and then the learning follows.

> It is important for them [the students] to know and be shown that the people here care about them. Once they see and feel that we care, then learning comes easier and they can begin to value their education. It's very important that we care and love them!" (S. O'Dell, February 10, 2011)

Survey

In the state of New Mexico, 99 (22%) elementary schools made AYP in 2009-10. Schools were asked to participate based on the study's selection criteria that each of the schools had to have achieved AYP status for the 2009–10 school year, be located in rural New Mexico, and operate at the elementary school level. Twenty-one schools fit the profile of this study and the researcher asked 21 principals of preK through Grade 5 public elementary schools to participate in this study. Invitation letters were sent to 21 principals, who were asked to complete their surveys online. Overall, 17 school principals responded to the invitation;

however, only 11 principals completed the online educational survey, for a usable response rate of 65%. Four principals contacted me by telephone and two sent email messages to formally decline the invitation. The information in this section is reflective of responses to the survey from the 11 responding elementary New Mexico school principals. The survey results were collected over a 10-week period and are represented in Tables 2 through 7. The results are represented in a numeric fashion, with the number and percentage of respondents for each category.

Explanation of Tables

Survey results for the six ISLLC standards are represented in Tables 2 through 7. Detailed below each standard are data for the functions that directly support or define the standard. The online educational survey used for this case study asked the principals to select to what degree they utilized each of the six ISLLC standards. The choices the principals had to select from were: (a) *Almost always,* (b) *To a considerable degree,* (c) *Occasionally,* (d) *Seldom,* and (e) *Never.*

Table 2

Table 2 represents data that describe the first standard of leadership behaviors, which involves developing and promoting a vision for the school. The functions center on the development of a school mission statement, how data collection can assist in forming measurable goals; promoting a school-wide plan

to implement the goals; keeping a continuous cycle of improvement; and lastly, assessing, evaluating, and revising the school vision model.

The results presented in Table 2 are based on the responses of principals for Standard 1. For this section, note that not all 11 participants responded to each of the functions listed for the standard. For Function 1, 10 of the 11 responding principals indicated they that they *Almost always* or *To a considerable degree* attempt to "collaboratively develop and implement a shared vision" for their schools. It appears from the responses given by the principals that they deem a collaborative team-building approach essential to the establishment and implementation of a school vision aimed toward promoting student success. For Function 2, all responding principals (n = 1) agreed, stating they *Almost always* or *To a considerable degree* implement collecting and utilizing data as a means to assess their organizational effectiveness and learning as it relates to student success. For Function 3, 9 of 11 respondents (81.8%) strongly agreed that they *Almost always* or *To a considerable degree* promote student success by creating and implementing plans for achieving goals. For Function 4, only 7 out of 10 respondents (70%) indicated that they *Almost always* or *To a considerable degree* promote continuous and sustainable improvement in their schools. For Function 5, 8 of 9 responding principals agreed that it is *Almost always* or *To a considerable degree* necessary to monitor and revise plans to facilitate a vision of learning and promote student success.

The data in Table 2 reveal that as measured by chi-square tests of association, a statistically significant majority of responding principals whose schools had made AYP the previous year indicated strong support for 4 of the 5 functions related to Standard 1. That is, a significant majority indicated *Almost always* or *To a considerable degree* collapsed into a single category, as opposed to indicating *Occasionally, Seldom,* or *Never,* which were also collapsed into a single category. A majority of respondents also strongly supported (*Almost always* or *To a considerable degree*) Function 4, "Promote continuous and sustainable improvement," but the results did not reach the level of statistical significance when compared to those who showed weaker or no support (*Occasionally, Seldom,* or *Never*). The principals of the two focus schools in this study, Cirrus and Commodore Elementary schools, also indicated their belief in school vision. Each reportedly used a team approach to school vision by using the strengths, knowledge, and years of experience of their teachers to effectively collaborate in designing measurable goals, generating plans for implementing student learning, and for making revisions in plans and policies aimed toward school improvement.

Table 2

Results of ISLLC Standards Survey Standard 1

Standard 1: An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.

Function	Almost always	To a consider-able degree	Occasion-ally	Seldom	Never
1. Collaboratively develop and implement a shared vision and mission	6	4	1	0	0
	54.5%	36.4%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%
$X^2 = 7.4, df = 1, p < .01$					
2. Collect and use data to identify goals, assess organizational effectiveness and promote organ-izational learning	7	4	0	0	0
	63.6%	36.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
$X^2 = 11.0, df = 1, p < .001$					
3. Create and implement plans to achieve goals	7	2	2	0	0
	63.6%	18.2%	18.2%	0.0%	0.0%
$X^2 = 4.5, df = 1, p < .05$					
4. Promote continuous and sustainable improvement	5	2	2	1	0
	50.0%	20.0%	20.0%	10.0%	0.0%
$X^2 = 1.6, df = 1, p > .05$ (n.s.)					
5. Monitor and evaluate progress and revise plans	5	3	1	0	0
	55.6%	33.3%	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%
$X^2 = 5.4, df = 1, p < .05$					

Note. The categories for chi-square analysis were *Almost always* and *To a considerable degree* versus *Occasionally, Seldom*, and *Never.*

Table 3

Table 3 defines the second standard of the ISLLC with nine functions that detail leadership behaviors in the area of school culture and academic and

professional growth in the school. More specifically, the functions center on sustaining a culture of trust; building a comprehensive curriculum; fostering a sense of motivation in the learning and work environment; supervising instruction; developing accountability measures for students; pursuing professional development; and finally, promoting technology to enhance and maximize instructional time.

Survey results in Table 3 summarize the responses of the responding principals for the functions of this standard. For Function 1, all eight responding principals indicated that they *Almost always* or *To a considerable degree* believed in nurturing and sustaining a culture of trust, collaboration, learning, and setting high expectations as a means to promoting student and professional development. For Function 2, 85.7% of the responding principals agreed that they *Almost always* or *To a considerable degree* invoked a comprehensive, rigorous, and coherent curricular programs to sustain school culture and instructional improvement. One principal (14.3%) indicated that he *Occasionally* exhibited this function at his school. All eight responding principals agreed on Function 3, the importance of creating a personalized and motivating environment for their students. Similarly, all eight respondents agreed with Function 4, which represented supervising instruction. Respondents gave positive but statistically non-significant support for Function 5, Function 6, and Function 7, which dealt respectively with the development of assessments and accountability systems as a means to monitor student progress, the development of instructional and

leadership capacity of staff, and maximizing time spent on quality instruction. Function 8 pertains to appropriate technologies to enhance learning and support teaching. All eight responding principals responded that this function is *Almost always* or *To a considerable degree* carried out in their schools.

Both Cirrus and Commodore elementary school principals, Mr. Lewis and Mr. O'Dell, used various computer technologies to enhance the teaching capabilities of their teachers within the classrooms. In both schools, Smartboards, computers with video and audio capability for Skype streaming, and iPads were present in nearly every classroom. It was quickly evident to the researcher when visiting the classrooms in these schools that the teachers were well versed with the technology and utilized it regularly to enhance the learning experiences of their students. By contrast, a significant majority of respondents indicated that they *Almost always* or *To a considerable degree* support Function 9, monitoring and evaluating of instructional programs as it relates to student learning and professional development for teachers and staff. Indeed, the on-site observations confirmed that both Mr. Lewis and Mr. O'Dell maintained high visibility while on the school grounds. Teachers and parents confirmed during interviews that both these principals routinely frequented the hallways and corridors of the school buildings to lend assistance to staff and promote safety among students.

The chi-square tests for Standard 2 (see Table 3) show that a statistically significant majority of responding principals expressed strong support (*Almost always* or *To a considerable degree* for 3 of the 9 functions: Functions 1, 3, and 4.

These responses confirm that principals believed that functions were needed to carry out and sustain a positive school culture and promote student success. The least level of agreement for all nine functions, as indicated by the small size of the chi-squared value, and the only one that failed to receive majority support, occurred for Function 7, maximizing time on instruction. Only 40% (n = 3) of principals indicated Almost always or To a considerable degree for this function, whereas the remaining four responding principals selected Occasionally (12.5%) or Seldom (12.5%). The remaining functions—2, 5, 6, 7, and 9—were supported by non-significant majorities of the respondents.

Table 3

Results of ISLLC Standards Survey Standard 2

Standard 2: An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

Function	Almost always	To a consider-able degree	Occasion-ally	Seldom	Never
1. Nurture and sustain a culture of collaboration, trust, learning, and high expectations	5	3	0	0	0
	62.5%	37.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
$X^2 = 8.0, df = 1, p < .01$					
2. Create a comprehensive, rigorous, and coherent curricular program	5	1	1	0	0
	71.4%	14.3%	14.3%	0.0%	0.0%
$X^2 = 3.6, df = 1, p > .05$ (n.s.)					

Table 3 (continued)

Function	Almost always	To a consider-able degree	Occasion-ally	Seldom	Never
3. Create a personalized and motivating learning environment for students	4 50%	4 50%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
$X^2 = 8.0, df = 1, p < .01$					
4. Supervise instruction	5 62.5%	3 37.5%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
$X^2 = 8.0, df = 1, p < .01$					
5. Develop assessment and accountability systems to monitor student progress	4 57.1%	2 28.6%	1 14.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
$X^2 = 3.6$, $df = 1$, $p > .05$ (n. s.)					
6. Develop the instructional and leadership capacity staff	3 42.9%	3 42.9%	1 14.2%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
$X^2 = 3.6$, $df = 1$, $p > .05$ (n. s.)					
7. Maximize time spent on quality instruction	3 37.5%	3 37.5%	1 12.5%	1 12.5%	0 0.0%
$X^2 = 2.0, df = 1, p > .05$ (n.s.)					
8. Promote the use of the most effective and appropriate technologies to support teaching and learning	5 83.3%	1 16.7%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
$X^2 = 6.0, df = 1, p < .05$					
9. Monitor and evaluate the impact of the instructional program	4 57.1%	2 28.6%	1 14.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
$X^2 = 3.6, df = 1, p > .05$ (n.s.)					

Note. The categories for chi-square analysis were *Almost always* and *To a considerable degree* versus *Occasionally, Seldom,* and *Never*.

Table 4

Table 4 describes the third standard for leadership behaviors that most often accompany the organization and operation for a secure learning environment. This standard gives specifics for the operational working of the school to ensure safety for students, teachers, and educational resources.

These results are based on the responses of principals for the functions related to Standard 3. Not all 11 principals responded to each of the functions listed for the standard. A significant majority of responding principals strongly agreed that they monitored and evaluated the management and operational systems of their respective schools. All eight responding principals agreed that they *Almost always* or *To a considerable degree* perform this function to ensure management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment. These principals of high-performing schools appear to place a high priority on protecting the welfare and safety of their students and staff. Observations of the principals of Commodore and Cirrus schools confirm that these leaders seem to support this function by being visible in and around the school buildings throughout the day. Similarly, all seven principals who responded to the questionnaire item on Function 2, "Obtain, allocated, align, and efficiently utilize human, fiscal, and technological resources," indicated that they *Almost always* or *To a considerable degree* supported those objectives. All seven respondents also indicated their strong support for Function 3 and Function 5, "Promote and protect the welfare and

safety of students and staff" and "Ensure teacher and organizational time is focused on supporting quality instruction and student learning," respectively. The responses to Function 4 were somewhat more mixed, with 6 of 7 respondents indicating that they *Almost always* or *To a considerable degree* sought to develop the capacity for distributed leadership. Many of the teachers at the two focused schools indicated to the researcher in interviews that one of their principal's strongest attributes was his ability and willingness to include them in decision-making, and appointing or delegating certain leadership duties to individuals whose talents or interests were a strength in that area.

The chi-square analysis of the responses to Standard 3 showed that 4 of 5 functions were supported by statistically significant majorities of the responding principals, at the $p < .01$ level, with the other function being supported by a non-significant majority ($p > .05$). Overall, respondents selected *Almost always* (69%) or *To a considerable degree* (29%) as opposed to *Occasionally* (3%), *Seldom* (0%), or *Never* (0%).

Table 4

Results of ISLLC Standards Survey Standard 3

Standard 3: An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

Function	Almost always	To a consider-able degree	Occasion-ally	Seldom	Never
1. Monitor and evaluate the management and operational systems	7	1	0	0	0
	87.5%	12.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
$X^2 = 8.0, df = 1, p < .01$					
2. Obtain, allocate, align, and efficiently utilize human, fiscal, and technological resources	5	2	0	0	0
	71.4%	28.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
$X^2 = 7.0, df = 1, p < .01$					
3. Promote and protect the welfare and safety of students and staff	6	1	0	0	0
	85.7%	14.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
$X^2 = 7.0, df = 1, p < .01$					
4. Develop the capacity for distributed leadership	2	4	1	0	0
	28.6%	57.1%	14.3%	0.0%	0.0%
$X^2 = 3.6, df = 1, p > .05$ (n.s.)					
5. Ensure teacher and organizational time is focused to support quality instruction and student learning	5	2	o	0	0
	71.4%	28.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
$X^2 = 7.0, df = 1, p < .01$					

Note. The categories for chi-square analysis were *Almost always* and *To a considerable degree* versus *Occasionally*, *Seldom*, and *Never*.

Table 5

Standard 4 involves collaboration between the school and community members responding to diverse community needs and mobilizing community resources. The functional leadership addressed by this standard centers on understanding, appreciating, and forming a partnership with the community served by the school.

The results presented in Table 5 are based on the responses of principals relative to Standard 4. Two of the four functions for this standard, Functions 1 and 3, received unanimous support from the respondents. Specifically, all respondents claimed that they *Almost always* or *To a considerable degree* collected and analyzed data and other information (Function 1), and that they built and sustained "positive relationships with families and caregivers." Respondents provided less than unanimous support for promoting "understanding, appreciation, and use of the community's diverse cultural, social, and intellectual resources" and for building and sustaining "positive relationships with community partners." The observations of the principals of Commodore and Cirrus elementary schools corroborate these findings. Both of these principals appeared to view their relationship with the community as a needed and necessary component to the success of students and their schools. Moreover, both schools had well established extra-curricular activities and clubs from outside community agencies that met regularly in their school buildings during non-school hours.

The chi-square analysis for Standard 4 (see Table 5) shows that 2 of 4 functions are statistically significant ($p < .01$) in favor of principals who responded to the categories of *Almost always* or *To a considerable degree*, as opposed to the categories of *Occasionally*, *Seldom*, or *Never*. A majority of the responding principals strongly agreed the leadership behaviors of collaboration, responding, and mobilization demonstrated in Functions 1 and 3 are essential to the stakeholders of their schools. Functions 2 and 4 did not reach statistical significance ($p > .05$).

Table 5

Results of ISLLC Standards Survey Standard 4

Standard 4: An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

Function	Almost always	To a consider-able degree	Occasion-ally	Seldom	Never
1. Collect and analyze data and information Pertinent to the educational environment	5	3	0	0	0
	62.5%	37.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
$X^2 = 8.0, df = 1, p < .01$					
2. Promote understanding, appreciation, and use of the community's diverse cultural, social, and intellectual resources	3	3	1	0	0
	42.9%	42.9%	14.2%	0.0%	0.0%
$X^2 = 3.6, df = 1, p > .05$ (n.s)					

Table 5 (continued)

Function	Almost always	To a consider-able degree	Occasion-ally	Seldom	Never
3. Build and sustain positive relationships with families and caregivers	5	3	0	0	0
	62.5%	37.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
$X^2 = 8.0, df = 1, p < .01$					
4. Build and sustain productive relationships with community partners	4	2	1	0	0
	57.1%	28.6%	14.3%	0.0%	0.0%
$X^2 = 3.6, df = 1, p > .05$ (n.s.)					

Note. The categories for chi-square analysis were *Almost always* and *To a considerable degree* versus *Occasionally*, *Seldom*, and *Never*.

Table 6

Standard 5 promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner. The functions of this standard involve the establishment and evaluation of safeguards for ethical behavior and the promotion of social justice that ensures fair treatment for all.

The results in Table 6 show that for Function 1, principals responded by selecting *Almost always* (87.5%) and *To a considerable degree* (12.5%), which reflects their belief that establishing a system of accountability and working within the parameters of ethics have resounding effects on student learning and achievement. The on-site observations revealed that the principals of Commodore and Cirrus elementary schools advocated setting up initiatives of accountability and standards of ethics and discipline within their school environments. Working

within a framework of accountability and models of success factors appeared to help both principals provide a system of fairness in decision-making, which included guidelines of conduct for teachers, parents, and students. The responses were almost identical for Function 2, which represents ethical behavior within the school. Responses were almost as strong for Function 3, "Safeguard the values of democracy, equity, and diversity." Non-significant majorities of responses were favorable for Function 4 and Function 5, which have to do with evaluating "the potential moral and legal consequences of decision-making," and promoting "social justice" and the consideration of individual student needs, respectively.

The chi-square analysis for Standard 5 (see Table 6) shows that 3 of the 5 functions are statistically significant in favor of leadership behaviors principals of AYP schools tend to carry out on a routine basis. Functions 4 and 5 received support from the majority of respondents, but failed to reach statistical significance ($p > .05$).

Table 6

Results of ISLLC Standards Survey Standard 5

Standard 5: An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

Function	Almost always	To a consider-able degree	Occasion-ally	Seldom	Never
1. Ensure a system of accountability for every student's academic and social success	7	1	0	0	0
	87.5%	12.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

$X^2 = 8.0, df = 1, p < .01$

Table 6 (continued)

Function	Almost always	To a consider-able degree	Occasion-ally	Seldom	Never
2. Model principles of self-awareness, reflective practice, transparency, and ethical behavior	7	1	0	0	0
	87.5%	12.5%	00.0%	0.0%	0.0%
$X^2 = 8.0, df = 1, p < .01$					
3. Safeguard the values of democracy, equity, and diversity	5	2	0	0	0
	71.4%	28.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
$X^2 = 7.0, df = 1, p < .01$					
4. Consider and evaluate the potential moral and legal consequences of decision-making	7	2	1	0	0
	71.4%	14.3%	14.3%	0.0%	0.0%
$X^2 = 3.6, df = 1, p > .05$ (n.s.)					
5. Promote social justice and ensure that individual student needs inform all aspects of schooling	5	1	1	0	0
	71.4%	14.3%	14.3%	0.0%	0.0%
$X^2 = 3.6, df = 1, p > .05$ (n.s.)					

Note. The categories for chi-square analysis were *Almost always* and *To a considerable degree* versus *Occasionally, Seldom,* and *Never*.

Table 7

The sixth and final ISLLC standard outlines the understanding, response to, and influence of the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context. The three functions associated with this standard have to do with advocating for children and families in the school; awareness of local, district, state, and national

decisions that affect student learning; and flexibility and adaptation of leadership strategies as a response to emerging trends in education.

Nine of 11 principals surveyed gave responses for this standard, and data in Table 6 represent this 82% response rate. Function 1, which supports the need to advocate for families, received strong support from 7 of the 9 responding principals (77.8%), whereas the other two respondents indicated *Occasionally* or *Seldom.* Non-significant response majorities of respondents registered strong support for Functions 2 and 3. Six principals supported the need to act on legislation from the local, state, national governments as it pertains to the education of their students (Function 2). However, one principal indicated that he/she *Never* implemented this function. For Function 3, five of seven responding principals (71.4%) selected *Almost always* that they assessed, analyzed, and anticipated "emerging trends and initiatives . . . to adapt leadership strategies." The beliefs of the principals of Commodore and Cirrus elementary schools aligned with these survey results. Both principals commented that there was not much ability at the local level to rectify the state mandates on required instructional times and structure, student progress monitoring, or state testing. Mr. Lewis and Mr. O'Dell both noted that their hands were tied and that the expectations of meeting those mandates were unrealistic. These expectations were viewed by principals as detrimental to the achievement process; however, year after year they continue to strive to fulfill their obligations and remain compliant.

The chi-square analysis revealed statistically significant support ($p < .05$) for Function 1 but non-significant majorities ($p > .05$) for the other two functions. There was one unusual response to this standard; one respondent (14.3%) indicated *Never* in response to the item about acting "to influence local, district, state, and national decision affecting student learning." Similarly, one respondent indicated *Seldom* in response to the item about assessing, analyzing, and anticipating emerging trends and initiatives. These relatively extreme responses seem to reflect at least one respondent's lack of belief in responding to conditions emanating from outside the local area.

Table 7

Results of ISLLC Standards Survey Standard 6

Standard 6: An education leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

Function	Almost always	To a consider-able degree	Occasion-ally	Seldom	Never
1. Advocate for children, families, and caregivers	6	1	1	1	0
	66.7%	11.1%	11.1%	11.1%	0.0%
$X^2 = 5.44, df = 1, p < .05$					
2. Act to influence local, district, state, and national decisions affecting student learning	3	3	0	0	1
	42.9%	42.9%	0.0%	0.0%	14.3%
$X^2 = 3.6, df = 1, p > .05$ (n.s.)					

Table 7 (continued)

Function	Almost always	To a consider-able degree	Occasion-ally	Seldom	Never
3. Assess, analyze, and anticipate emerging trends and initiatives in order to adapt leadership strategies	5	1	0	1	0
	71.4%	14.3%	0.0%	14.3%	0.0%
$X^2 = 3.6, df = 1, p > .05$ (n.s.)					

Note: The categories for chi-square analysis were *Almost always* and *To a considerable degree* versus *Occasionally*, *Seldom*, and *Never*.

Field Notes

The researcher took hand-written notes on the observations that occurred while on the two school campuses. The field notes detailed observations of the following: school lay-out and design, the principals' interactions with staff members and students, classroom and hallway activity, general encounters between the researcher and students and staff, and the overall school climate. The researcher also made notes on descriptions of New Mexico land features that were distinctive to the two villages where these schools are located.

Findings

This section discloses the themes that emerged in this study: (a) school culture, (b) motivation, (c) instructional leadership, (d) empowerment, (e) school leadership, (f) trust, and (g) community involvement. Below the themes are separated into sections, and the opinions of the principals, teachers, and parents

interviewed are given to support the position of the themes in the respective schools.

School Culture

Culture is the underlying feature that brings a group of people together to form an organization. Sergiovanni and Starrett (2007) had this to say regarding school culture:

> No matter how well intentioned the supervisor, and no matter how hard that supervisor tries improve the individual and collective practice of teaching in a school, little will be accomplished without first developing and nurturing the right school climate and culture. School climate and culture are affected by administrative policies; they are affected even more by close, personal contact with the process of teaching and learning. (p. 354)

School culture is the process of bringing individuals together to form strong, stable learning organizations for the common purpose of knowledge. Gurr et al. (2006) stated,

> School capacity was built through good communication and a carefully managed process of change . . . successful school leaders promoted a culture of collegiality, collaboration, support and trust [,] and . . . this culture was firmly rooted in their democratic and social justice values and beliefs. (p. 376)

In the two schools that were the focus of this case study, the meaning of culture was quite prevalent. From the researcher's perspective, the two rural New Mexico villages in which the two schools were located had similar features: the presence of a main street with small businesses, local law enforcement and government agencies, and housing developments. In each of these communities

the schools were the largest organization and the villages seemed to be formed around the school campuses.

Principals. The role of the principal is very demanding. Both principals in this study were strong believers that they were not in the business of school, but in the business of people. They both placed heavy emphasis on forging good relationships with the students, teachers, and parents they interacted with on a daily basis. The researcher's visit took place during the winter season. Both areas had experienced a great deal of harsh weather in the preceding weeks and the communities were still reeling from the after-effects. The schools were dealing with plumbing and heating problems and had been closed for several days prior to the respective visits.

Both principals also placed heavy demands on themselves to be available for all individuals, first and foremost the students. Teacher E. Woodhouse commented, "Mr. Lewis is all about kids and he's also about teachers. He does right for the kids. For teachers, he tries to create an environment where they are comfortable in making their own decisions about their classrooms with his support" (February 7, 2011). Throughout the duration of the school visits, both principals were in constant contact and dialogue with students. Both Mr. Lewis and Mr. O'Dell appeared to have established strong rapport with each and every student they interacted with on an individual basis. The students were very drawn to the principals' presence. The researcher noticed that students tried to solicit some sort of interaction with their principal as he passed by. Individual students

seemed satisfied with having had some attention from principal, even if the time was brief.

Teachers concurred that the principals were indeed important figures in the lives of the students. Teacher H. Smith made a comment regarding the importance of students and staff to her principal, something that apparently could be said about both principals:

> He's very involved with the students and staff at this school. He cares for the students. I would even say that he loves these students and they love him back. You feel comfortable approaching him. If you mess up he's here to help you, and he's always there for the students. That's just the type of person he is, and I am so glad we have a principal like him. (February 8, 2011)

Both principals were present and active in most areas of their schools. They share the belief that providing a safe learning environment is a priority, and thus they frequent the school hallways and grounds to reinforce safety. "It's important to be seen in the hallways and classrooms. By showing yourself or establishing an expectation of your presence keeps everyone on their toes, even me" (S. O'Dell, February 10, 2011). Mr. Lewis stated,

> I think that my walk-throughs are opportune times to interact with students and teachers and make connections. I also use these times to exercise some etiquette and be a good example of the pillars of success we have written on the walls here. (February 7, 2011)

Each principal was constantly on the move, checking the halls during class transitions, looking into classrooms to check in with teachers, and appearing in the cafeteria. One of the principals carried a hand-held radio with him at all times. Being so mobile does have its disadvantages:

> He is just stretched so thin among the grade levels and buildings, but he tries his best. He does come in real quick on a regular basis and asks how we are and if we need anything and that's nice, but I imagine he has a lot to deal with on a regular basis, too. (J. Fairfax, February 11, 2011).

Mr. Lewis stated, "Effective principals have to be in the classrooms. They need to know what is happening in those classrooms on a frequent and regular basis. That's important for me, it's important for the teachers, and it's important for my students" (February 7, 2011).

Long hours are a part of the job. One principal estimated that he works 70–80 hours per week. The long hours are necessary to keep up with the high demands of the job. During the time of the researcher's visit, one of the schools was hosting a home basketball game and the principal thought he would not be able to leave the school until late that evening. He maintained that his presence was important at those types of activities to keep in contact with the students, their parents, and the community. "If it's important enough for them to be here, then it's important for me to stay" (C. Lewis, February 7, 2011).

Teachers. The researcher had two days of conversations and interviews with teachers at each school. The interactions with the teaching staff were pleasant and informative. They had excellent attitudes toward their principal, school, students, and fellow staff members. They were very cordial, professional, and welcoming to the researcher. There was a strong sense of teacher autonomy in the school buildings. The teachers said that they felt trusted and privileged to know that they are allowed to be in control of some of the school's decision-making. "The staff is our strength in this school. We pull together and I think

we're pretty tough. We've all been here for some years, so that's quite a camaraderie that we've built together and that's quite a strength for us" (E. Bennet, February 8. 2011).

Many of the teachers expressed the belief that their principals trusted them. Teacher C. Lucus offered,

> He allows you the right to make the decisions you feel will benefit your class. He's not afraid to give you that opportunity because he values us as professionals. And if you mess up he lets you mess up, but he doesn't come and tell you, "I told you so"; instead he asks, "How can I help?" And that's makes all the difference to a teacher. (February 10, 2011)

The teachers each expressed that they were grateful for the trust and shared decision-making opportunities their principals afforded them. In the event teachers at either school came across a difficult situation with a student or an issue in their classrooms they expressed that they were not hesitant or intimidated to approach the principal for help or advice. Teacher E. Bennet recalled her personal experience with this matter:

> He'll go to bat for you. There have been times I've made a couple of not-so-great decisions, and he knows that I've messed up, but he was still there to help me. He's always there to help, and he doesn't judge you. We do that to ourselves, I think to myself, "Oh, I could have done this or that better," but he's there to help you sort it all out so I can get back on track to teaching. (February 11, 2011)

Many commented they were grateful for the positive problem-solving feedback from their principals. At one of the two schools, several of the teachers mentioned that the previous school administrator reprimanded them unfairly for situations or circumstances that they thought were entirely out of their control. Teachers expressed the belief that this former principal was less interested in

helping them solve problems than in catching them in moments of weakness or failure. In most cases, disciplinary actions would result, so to avoid damaging their professional reputations many stopped seeking help from the school principal and instead turned to one another or handled things on their own. Teacher E. Woodhouse commented:

> In this school and with this principal we may not always all agree with one another or with the direction he's leading us in, but we know that he's got a heart for teachers and a heart for students and those are two things, especially the student part, he is not willing to compromise on. We, as his staff, feel he's been very positive in his contributions to us. He's helpful, fair, and supportive . . . and that makes you want to be a part of this school. (February 8, 2011)

Students. The researcher's first impression was that a majority of the student population at both schools were Caucasian. The next largest group was Hispanic. Another impression was that the students were actively engaged in all of the observed classrooms. Furthermore, the students and teachers interacted respectfully with one another. The mood in a majority of the classrooms was inviting and relaxed. The students were compliant with teachers' instructions and teachers did not waste unnecessary time with discipline or having to repeat instructions. As mentioned earlier, there was no visible sign or posting of classroom or school rules. Yet, the students did not act as though there were no behavior expectations in place. On the contrary, their conduct was positive in the classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, and in other common gathering places on campus.

There was a strong sense of trust among students and their teachers, and among the students themselves, including an apparent sense of security in the surroundings. In one classroom the researcher observed, a student was curious about the reasons for my presence. He eventually turned around and asked, “Are you from the state?” After I assured him that I was not from the state education department he seemed to be more accepting of my presence.

Parents. In the respective villages of the Commodore and Cirrus schools parents are trusting and highly supportive of their children attending the schools. Due to the rural locations of the schools, each school serves an area with a radius of 45–60 miles. Many students rely on school transportation or their parents to get them to school.

> Since we’re in a very rural location we have many students that come here from beyond the town limits of Cirrus. We have a 60-mile radius we take care of and although it may not be ideal that’s where we find ourselves situated. Our kids are on the buses a great deal . . . (S. O’Dell, February 11, 2011)

Despite the rural locations of the schools many parents expressed that they were quite content with the size and intimacy of the schools. Many reflected on their experiences of attending larger schools when they were students and remarked how they often felt overlooked or misguided. Parent L. Steele reflected on her experiences as a student in a large school:

> I think being in a smaller school—there isn’t a chance that any child would be left behind. In a big school like the one I went to in California—they can’t help it—they’ve got tons of kids in one classroom. How can you learn in an environment like that? I’d rather have my kids here. I don’t want my kids some place like that. I really enjoy the small, small town. (February 8, 2011)

Another parent commented,

> I believe that being in a small community helps because in these classes there are fewer students than there would be in a larger location. The teachers have more one-on-one time for their students and it helps especially if there's a student that needs more help; then they [the teaching staff] have the time to spend with the student. (E. Dashwood, February 7, 2011)

Parents were frequently in contact with their children's teachers or with the school in some other way. Parents stated that timely and positive feedback is important to them. Parent A. Elliot remarked, "A strong behavior for the teachers here is that they are on top of things. They have positive behaviors in how they express a concern or problem. They are always positive and never negative" (February 11, 2011). Teacher C. Lucas commented on her attempts to meet parents half way by commenting, "To the best of my ability I try to be here when parents need me. Many of them have my phone number and I do get those after-hours calls, but if that's what that parent needs then I'm here" (February 11, 2011). Parent G. Darcy agreed that most teachers are helpful, but they differ in their various approaches:

> It depends on the teacher. Most of them are very encouraging and helpful, but they differ in their methods on how to get the kids to learn. But whatever approach they use, I believe that it is all to make the school a good school. (February 8, 2011)

Many parents were involved or had been involved in the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) at their community's schools. They believed it was an excellent way to create a link between the school and community.

There was a strong faith-base in both villages where these schools are located. Many of the local churches had after-school programs on Wednesdays. The churches arranged to pick students up at school and transport them to church until 6:00 p.m. or 7:00 p.m. A majority of the parents said that one or more of their children was involved in the Wednesday church activities. It appeared that the churches had coordinated the various programs that were being offered. Depending on the age or grade level of the student, children from the same family were involved with different church organizations; however, the fact that their children were involved with different church denominations did not seem to be of a particular concern to parents. Parents seemed unconcerned about the denominations or faiths of the particular churches, but were concerned instead that the services these churches were providing were important to the socialization and development of the youth in the community.

> My kids go to church on Wednesday nights. A lot of the kids go to church. Some go down here to that church by the fairgrounds, and other places. That's their Wednesday night thing. They [churches] come to the school and pick them up. They love it, my kids love it. (J. Austen, February 8, 2011)

Another parent, C. Brandon commented,

> We have some great churches around here. You know, Cirrus is not a big place and these churches try to offer activities and a safe place for the kids to gather after games and other times when school is not in session. (February 11, 2011)

Motivation

Motivation is a factor that can make a good school exemplary. It is a factor that can motivate and drive the students, teachers, and others linked to the

school into a high-performance mode that has the potential of resulting in high achievement and AYP. Good principals must be willing to harness this motivation and allow it to foster a learning culture in their schools that is conducive to genuine innovation and risk-taking (Gurr et al., 2006).

Principals. The principals in this study understood the importance of having a motivated staff. Motivation yields productivity and the best way to bring this about is to have an open-door policy with open lines of communication. "You have to establish open lines of communication with your teachers. You have to be willing to understand where they're coming from and their points of view and tap into those ideas to give them ownership" (Mr. Lewis, February 7, 2011). When teachers are allowed to voice their opinions and feel like their contributions are taken in to consideration they are more apt to take part in being part of the solution.

> I have a great staff. I set the tone. If I don't set a positive tone, then I've set up obstacles for myself that will lead to difficulty or failure. I can't afford that! I need to establish a team mentality with my teachers. We're a team, we're here for each other and we can get this done together. (S. O'Dell, February 10, 2011).

Teachers. Teachers' motivation is a necessary ingredient in schools that have high expectations of achievement. The precursor to teacher motivation in the high-achieving schools in this study is that both schools have well-balanced school cultures. When people are content in their situations, it is easier to rally the willingness to participate in activities related to their jobs. Teacher M. Elton remarked, "He treats us like professionals. He asks us what our 'educated guess'

is a lot of times when we're faced with a problem. He acknowledges that we have years of teaching experience in the classroom" (February 10, 2011). G. Darcy, a teacher, added,

> Our principal is not at all hesitant to ask us to help him make decisions. He values our opinions and ideas. I think it's great that he gives us a say-so in matters that are concerning us and our students. After all we're the ones who are going to have to live with the decision. (February 8, 2011)

Parents.

> We are very supportive of the school. We tell our kids that education is very important . . . you know, the principal and teachers have an important job to do. My part in all this is that I get my kids to school, make sure they're getting their work done, talking with their teachers and stuff. (M. Goddard, February 11, 2011)

Parent support is a precious commodity to schools. Having strong parental support is a much needed component to getting students to achieve in school.

> I know that the principal considers the parents a lot. He takes time to explain things to us, and some of those things are just out of his control, but because he took the time to tell us it's a little bit easier to accept. (J. Austen, February 7, 2011)

Instructional Leadership

Principals. Instructional leadership is indeed of major importance to principals and teachers in a school. Principals are the chief instructional leaders, the individuals responsible for providing a clear format that outlines and defines the instructional plans for their schools. "I'm a teacher who's a principal. I remind myself of this often and it continues to give me perspective. I consider those things when I find I have to ask things of my teachers. I take a step back and ask myself, 'Is this fair? Is this realistic?'" (Mr. Lewis, February 7, 2011).

Teachers. The researcher's observations in these schools revealed that neither had a formatted lesson plan template or a routine of turning in lesson plans to the principals. Most teachers said that writing lesson plans was a habitual routine that they performed most weeks, but they confessed that they regarded their lesson plans as notes to themselves. Lesson plans primarily served as a starting point for where the rest of their week was headed. Many teachers stated that they felt comfortable in knowing that their principals had enough confidence in their abilities as professionals not to press the issue.

> He trusts that we're not going to fill our time with unnecessary or meaningless "fluff." He knows that I teach . . . I teach every day all day. I have in mind a plan. I don't just ever "wing it"; that's not how I work because the kids will see right through that. I jot down ideas and areas of importance, but not just things that are important to know for [the state] test, but things that are important for content and comprehension purposes. (C. Lucas, February 8, 2011)

Parents. A majority of the parents believed that the teachers are at these schools because they genuinely want to see students achieve. Most parents want a quality education for their children; they realize that in a public school there is really only so much a public education can afford, and they are content with that notion so long as "free and appropriate" covers a standard of adequacy and quality in the academic skills their children are taught. E. Dashwood stated,

> I think that most of them [the teachers] are here for the students and they're here to see that our kids get a good education, even here in "small town Commodore, New Mexico." In the community they were able to pass or make AYP and that was a big thing here! We were all so proud, and that brought pride to the school. I believe that shows through our test scores that teachers are doing what needs to be done. (February 8, 2011)

J. Austen conveyed,

> Teachers have to teach all this stuff, and here they do a good job of trying to meet the needs of the kids. I know they spend extra time on certain subjects when they feel it will benefit their students. They act as facilitators and use different approaches, and I think that gives them a lot of freedom. Teachers need the freedom to teach the best way they know how and I think that is something that is able to happen here. (February 7, 2011)

Parent M. Goddard commented that she also takes those same principles to heart at home:

> I put my kids to work at home. When they put their hands to something and they work until the job is done it gives them an appreciation for what they can do; this can apply to their school work or any other type of work. (February 8, 2011)

Empowerment

Principals. Giving the teachers they work with part ownership in the school organization has many benefits. The teachers viewed this as the principal not dictating to them, but working alongside them to achieve the same goals, all related to student success.

> You have got to have buy-in. These teachers are like the students. You know, if you walk into a room full of kids unprepared they're going to know it, and teachers are the same exact way. They know when you're patronizing them or when you mean business. I know they are competent individuals; that's why it is imperative that I tap into their areas of strength and use them in the capacity that I know they are able to do. (Mr. O'Dell, February 10, 2011)

Mr. Lewis added,

> My teachers are highly diverse. They are a group of talented, capable people. After working awhile with your staff you begin to see their personal strengths. You target those people that are willing to take on extra responsibility, or those you feel have the potential to be really good in this one area if you were to provide the opportunity. (February 7, 2011)

Both principals had the attitude that empowerment comes in numbers and does not rest individually on the principal. The anxiety of placing too much "privilege" on the teachers does not factor into the equation as far as they are concerned; they prefer to see this as shared leadership in many respects.

> I don't worry about giving a teacher a role or responsibility if I know they are willing to accept the challenge. I never demand, because I think that really defeats the purpose of empowerment, and that's really what I'm trying to achieve. (Mr. O' Dell, February 10, 2011)

Teachers. Teachers in each of these schools believed that they were a valued part of the schools' success equation. Teacher L. Musgrove stated,

> In the type of teaching community we've built here, I believe any one of us could stand up to a challenge. Everyone steps up and takes a share of the responsibilities for our students. We don't say, That's a 4th grade or 5th or whatever grade's issue and it doesn't concern me! No, we're a team here, and we need to depend on one another because when it really comes down to it we fail or we achieve as a school, not as individuals. (February 10, 2011)

"This is an important thing. We need to center ourselves. If we're disorganized as a staff how in the world will we ever accomplish anything or ask more of our children? I want to be able to have my principal rely on me" (H. Smith, February 7, 2011).

Parents. Competent teachers are necessary if the classroom is to be a place where there is both learning and positive reinforcement. Parents realize that teachers' classrooms and instructional organization are big factors in student learning.

> The teachers here try hard. They have positive behaviors. It's not negative, especially when they approach a child who has misbehaved or something. It's never negative, and I think that when you have a classroom like that it places the teachers in a better position to ask more of the kids and they

> want to do more because it's already been a positive experience for them. (E. Dashwood, February 8, 2011)
>
> I have a daughter who attends the university and she tells me that now she understands why they were so demanding of her. She tells her younger sister to listen to her teachers and do what they tell her because there is a good reason for it. (C. Wentworth, February 11, 2011)

This is a clear example of the effectiveness of good teachers who aim to establish excellence that resonates beyond the classroom walls and in the minds of the students they teach and their parents.

School Leadership

Gardner (2007) said, "Leadership is the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leadership and his or her followers" (p. 17).

Principals.

> My philosophy is to have an open-door policy where anyone from teachers to students to parents or grandparents can come into my office and express a concern. I do ask them to be a part of the solution, whether it be directly or indirectly. By indirectly I mean I will ask them their thoughts or suggestions on how they may see fit to correct the situation. We've come to many a solution by taking this approach. As the principal, I merely facilitate the plan of action. (S. O' Dell, February 10, 2011)

Mr. O'Dell explained that he takes some of the suggestions and recommendations of the whole and all applies them to work for the good of the school. This approach establishes a positive system of networking among all areas of the schools. When individuals believe their input is valued and when their suggestions are put into action it yields an environment of commitment (buy-in) and trust. Sergiovanni and Starrett (2007) explained this concept as "supervisors

need[ing] to explore those conditions necessary to establish and maintain trust and honesty and open communication" (p. 68).

These manners must be established and practiced to some extent so the principals and their schools can work effectively to see that progress is achieved in all areas of the school.

> I need to be creative as a principal. I have to consider all the factors on a daily basis. I collaborate and I ask my teachers to collaborate vertically and horizontally among their grade levels. I involve everyone, and it's important that I not let anyone opt out . . . because this will affect everyone, and their classrooms. Communication is a key element. We've worked hard and need to keep working hard at maintaining open lines of two-way communication. (C. Lewis, February 7, 2011)

Mr. Lewis said it best when he mentioned that communication is the key, and he went on to further clarify his meaning by describing the process as two-way communication. This is a sensitive subject that most schools leaders find difficult to achieve because individuals are often leery and distrustful due to past circumstances that may not have included the present school leadership. Most principals spend a considerable amount of time building confidence between themselves and their staffs. Sergiovanni and Starrett (2007) quoted Reina and Reina (1999) regarding this issue:

> Communication trust is evident in human interactions that communicate shared understandings and good intentions. Clear, high-quality, open, and frequent communication is the hallmark of communication trust. So too is sharing information, telling the truth, keeping confidences, and being willing to admit mistakes. (p. 462)

"I am always willing to listen when it has to do with something that will ultimately benefit students" (S. O' Dell, February 10, 2011).

Teachers. The principals understanding the value of their respective staffs seems to be an outstanding feature at both of these schools. Knowing the people in one's organization and the worth they bring as individuals to benefit the whole is an invaluable concept that can be overlooked at times. Developing staff into teacher leaders is an approach that deserves some attention from principals. Teacher A. Elliot remarked, "We have a wide range of teachers here who have various strengths and talents worth using. Our principal is good at acknowledging those strengths and making us feel valued for the contributions that we've made or can make" (February 11, 2011). Teacher R. Ferrars added,

> He was a coach and he still uses that same approach as a principal. He encourages you, he builds you up and gives you confidence to the point you want to commit and help in areas you feel you're good at. The important thing is that he lets you realize that first before he asks anything of you. (February 11, 2011)

> I know where my limitations are, and he [the principal] knows where my talents lie, but he doesn't let me use it as an excuse. He's supportive and encouraging, and that makes me want to go little by little out of my comfort zone and give a little more because I know he will appreciate it. (E. Bennet, February 7, 2011)

Fullan (2007) stated, "Schools become effective when (1) quality people are recruited to teaching, and (2) the workplace is organized to energize teachers and reward accomplishment. The two are intimately related. Professionally rewarding workplace conditions attract and retain good people" (p. 129).

Many of the teachers found favor with their principals and the type of school leadership that existed in their schools.

> He gives us freedom to help make decisions on school matters. At times, he puts me in administrative roles to see how we'll do because he has that kind of confidence in me as a professional. He's gives good feedback,

> even if it may be something that I don't want to hear; he says it for reasons that, in the end, I know will benefit my students and make me a better teacher. (E. Woodhouse, February 20, 2011)

Teacher J. Fairfax explained,

> He does what he can to help you. He will stand in and back you when necessary, and that means something to teachers. There is a security in knowing that you have a principal who will support and stand up for his teachers . . . I appreciate him. (February 7, 2011)

Finally, R. Ferrars commented,

> He's one of the best principals we've had at this school in a while. He always tries to find the 'win-win' in all scenarios. He recognizes the strengths of the teachers and is great at working with parents. He focuses on team building and that's pretty much how we approach matters of the school, student issues, curriculum, etc.— as a team. (February 11, 2011)

Parents. Fullan (2007) stated, "*The closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on child development and educational achievement*" [emphasis in original] (p. 189). The parents of students in these two rural schools stressed the importance of the positive educational interactions their children are experiencing that play an intricate part in motivation at school. Parent J. Austen commented regarding school leadership:

> We are lucky to have someone like him. He really cares about students. He welcomes input and at times has asked us [the parents] to network with one another and organize ourselves on school issues. I can see how that might backfire on you, but to use it in an effective way to pass on information so that parents are aware of what's going on is important. (February 11, 2011)

"My child loves to go to school. The principal is very personable. He knows the kids by their names, he's easy-going, and he talks to them. He's makes the kids feel really special and kids really respond to that" (M. Knightly, Feb. 11, 2011).

C. Brandon, an active member of the school's parent committee, said,

> The principal is open and available to meet with you if you need to speak with him. I've always known him to want to work with people. He's been in this community a long time, so he's familiar with the families in this area. He volunteers himself and gives a lot of his off-time [non-duty hours]. (February 11, 2011)

The parents conveyed to the researcher that they felt welcomed when going to the school to discuss issues or concerns with the principals of either school; they believed that the principals were supportive and many felt comfortable going to the schools for discussions. In situations where the discussions on students or school issues may have been less than favorable, parents still said that the principals were never confrontational and that they acted professionally.

Trust

Trust is a one of the essential factors to achieving school culture. Sergiovanni (2005) defined trust this way:

> In role sets, no single person has the power to make things work. Members of an effective role set are interdependent and held together by relational trust. Trust is the tie that binds roles together and allows for the creation of role sets that embody reciprocal obligations. (p. 117)

Role sets are defined by Sergiovanni (2005) as "relationships that, when linked to common purposes, evolve into friendly networks or communities of practice" (p. 117). Despite the good intentions of people within certain role sets, the absence of trust will lead to self-protection, limited capacity for collaboration and learning, and decreased job performance (Sergiovanni, 2005). When trust deficiencies are prevalent in schools, the results are: "(a) . . . the more people keep

things to themselves, (b) . . . the more often ideas are hoarded, and (c) . . . the less likely people are to be helpful and open" (Sergiovanni, 2005, p. 118). These deficiencies are something that principals must avoid if they want their schools' cultures to flourish.

Principals. Mr. Lewis strongly conveyed that to build trust it is essential for the principal to become acquainted with the people in his school:

> I try very much to look beyond my own perspectives and consider the other person's. For the most part, the people who do come in here to see me I've pretty much established a relationship with them beforehand, so conversations usually start in a very different manner. You've got to get to know people on a personal level . . . it's all about people. (February 7, 2011)

> The environment has to be positive, but not perfect. You have to have an atmosphere of cohesiveness. We need to stand united in what our mission is here. We've got to show these kids that we're for real, so they can have confidence in what we're trying to bring to them. (Mr. O'Dell, February 10, 2011)

Both Mr. Lewis and Mr. O'Dell expressed that being in the position of principal for a number of consecutive years has been an advantage in forming connections with the community. Being a member of the community, as well as the school community has afforded them the advantage of getting to know the students and their families.

Teachers. Teachers at both schools conveyed that the defining attribute their principals demonstrated was trust. Teachers often thought their principals valued them as professionals and treated them as such. Because such trusting conditions existed, teachers expressed that they were more willing to accept change, volunteer for other duties and responsibilities, follow the

recommendations of their principal, and actively participate in events geared toward promoting the school in general (e.g., sporting events, fundraisers, food drives, Box Tops, or Labels for Education).

Teachers generally described their school leaders' conduct as professional, being open and fair, and personable. "He's fair . . . he asks us for our opinions and feedback; he's always willing to hear new ideas" (R. Ferrars, February 11, 2011). "I think he's one of the best principals we've had since I've been here. He's dependable. He checks in with you regularly and asks if you need anything. He's very people-oriented" (E. Woodhouse, February 10, 2011). "I know that he was a teacher for sometime before he became a principal. I think that has some bearing on how well he understands the needs of teachers in the classroom and as professionals" (C. Wentworth, February 8, 2011).

Parents. A majority of the families in the Commodore and Cirrus communities had lived there for years. A significant number of the parents of students who were attending these schools at the time of this study were once students in the respective school systems. In fact, because these two schools are situated in rural locations, a large percentage of members of many students' families had completed their formal education in the same school systems.

The parents interviewed were very much in favor and quite supportive of the principals at the schools. They were pleased with the school leadership and the functioning of the schools. These parents said that they had good rapport with the principal and staff, and were satisfied with the quality of education their child or

children were receiving. Parents reported that they felt comfortable going to the schools and addressing concerns, academic needs, or social problems with the principals and staff. They believed that their concerns were well received and taken into consideration. The parents said that they left the meetings satisfied that their concerns would be addressed. The interviewed parents did not think, based on their experiences, that the principal or school was being passive or difficult to deal with. Parent M. Knightly, who had brought a concern to the principal, stated that "

> the principal and teachers are very accessible. I've not had a problem getting a hold of someone at the school. One time I brought an incident of bullying to the principal. He listened to my concerns, was polite, and said that this also was his concern. He assured me that he would be more diligent about bullying and that it would not be tolerated . . . I knew he'd take care of it. (February 10, 2011)

Another parent, L. Steel, offered,

> He's wonderful! Just by having a few conversations with him I know that it all comes from in here [points to heart]. I think it does because he deeply cares for these kids. He treats them well and I think that's just great. I trust that he's going to do the best he can for them. (February 8, 2011)

Community Involvement

In some respects the principals, teachers, and parents are in agreement that the small size of their respective rural villages is beneficial to the upbringing of their children. Students are far from the busy lifestyle of city dwelling, as well as the criminal and drug activity often associated with heavily populated area. Each of these villages is located about three to four driving hours from large metropolitan areas.

Mr. Lewis commented regarding the village of Commodore and the people who reside there: “This is a great little community. Families have been here for generations, and these are some great, hard working families. All they want is what every parent wants, and that’s a quality education for their children” (February 7, 2011). Mr. O’ Dell replied, “Cirrus is a wonderful community, and it’s just a great place to raise your kids. We’re a small community, but we do have tremendous support from parents and the people in this town” (Feb. 10, 2010).

Both of these schools had tremendous support from various churches and church-affiliated organizations in the villages. There was a co-op of three to four churches that worked together to offer clubs, group activities, and student events after school hours. A majority of the activities were not located on the school grounds, but at the church sites or alternate locations. The churches offered transportation to the students from the school facility for all sponsored events. The most popular church-sponsored clubs were Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed (Awana Club), and Key Club. Other more religious-themed groups geared toward young people were also available to students. It was explained to the researcher that the churches divided the youth groups up by age and grade level. Parents commented in interviews that each of their children was involved in youth groups that met at different locations on Wednesday nights. One popular student event mentioned that took place occasionally after sports games was “Fifth Quarter.” Teacher and parent L. Musgrove explained,

> Fifth quarter is an activity that is arranged by one of the local churches. They call it Fifth Quarter because it's meant to follow right after a basketball or football game. What they do is they set up food, have music, games, and stuff like that for the kids. It's just an alternative place for them to meet, be safe, and stay out of mischief, because you know in a small town there's really not all that much to do for fun. (February 11, 2011)

The schools also offered many extra-curricular activities for the students with some offering a variety of opportunities to invite parents and the community to the school. The rural settings of the schools did cause a disadvantage to both the schools and their students in that many of the students' homes were located many miles from the villages. Mr. O'Dell commented,

> Because we have students who live a great distance from the school, that causes us to place some limits on organizing afterschool activities . . . we just don't have the funds available to run an after-school bus to make those sorts of things happen on a regular basis. (February 10, 2011)

The schools have experienced some success with other school-sponsored family events such as Math Night, Science Night, Literacy Night, and family movie night. Committee sponsor and teacher E. Bennet commented on such school outreach activities:

> We have a math night where everyone is involved; we have a movie night where the community can come; we encourage them to some of the games and stuff, but it's a hit or miss proposition . . . you know. We need the community to float. (February 8, 2011)

The principals realized that in these small communities their schools are a hub for a majority of the community events and activities. Mr. Lewis conveyed this realization by commenting,

This is a great place to live, but you have to admit there really isn't too much to do around here. I realized that we [the school] are a gathering spot for the community. We need to use that to our advantage. Whether people are there for parent-teacher conferences or a big game, it's important for us to represent what we're all about here in this school, and that's a standard of excellence. (February 7, 2011)

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The fifth and final chapter of this case study summarizes the research, provides conclusions, and offers recommendations for further research.

Summary

This descriptive case study involved gathering data on two school principals from two different rural New Mexico schools that had successfully achieved AYP for the 2009-2010 school year. The researcher sought to focus on two components: (a) the steady leadership practices of the school principal that may be considered a contributing factor to the schools' AYP achievement, and (b) the rural location of each of the schools. A quantitative measurement came from online surveys of participating principals. The data were compiled to gauge the level of importance principals placed on certain leadership characteristics. Qualitative data were gathered from interviews conducted with principals, certified teachers, and parents. The researcher's notes of observations of the schools were also used to provide in-depth details regarding school setting, environment, and other defining factors. The data generated by this study were organized and analyzed based on the research questions.

In Chapter 2, an extensive review of the literature centered on identifying and detailing successful leadership behaviors practiced by principals. Current and noted leadership models of success were examined, models that provide evidence as to whether when practiced by principals in a school setting the leadership

behaviors produce positive student achievement results that contribute to a school achieving AYP.

The third chapter describes how a case study model was selected for this study because this design facilitates collection and analysis of in-depth data from one or more specific cases. Yin (2009) stated,

> As a research method, the case study is used in many situations, to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena. Not surprisingly, the case study has been a common research method of psychology, sociology, political science, anthropology, social work, business, education, nursing and community planning. (p. 4)

The chapter focused on the research design and methodology used in this case study of leadership in two rural New Mexico schools. The researcher described that both qualitative and quantitative modes of data collection were used in the form of one-on-one interviews, on-site observations and field notes, and a survey. Sections included in this chapter were the research design, school selection criteria and rationales, description of samples, sampling procedures, data collection, and analysis of the data procedures. Research questions, related to the association of leadership behaviors with student learning outcomes, were formulated. The questions guided the overall study.

Chapter 4 of this study focuses on the results of the surveys and the interviews conducted by the researcher with individuals from the Commodore and Cirrus schools in central New Mexico. The setting of each school and the participating principals are described in this chapter. A total of 21 interviews were conducted and the results were arranged according to the leadership categories

that emerged from the interviews. The findings from an educational leadership survey based on the ISLLC policy standards were presented and analyzed. The findings from the interviews and surveys were organized and matched to the research questions to define trends of leadership present in both schools. Survey responses are shown in Tables 2–7, with explanations of the survey results according to each ISLLC standard and the respective related functions.

Restatement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to conduct a descriptive case study of selected elementary school principals in rural New Mexico. The study focused on the characteristics and practices of two elementary school principals whose schools had achieved AYP the previous school year (2009–10). All these factors were examined because of their possible relationship to the high student achievement scores on the New Mexico Standards Based Assessment (NMSBA), which resulted in the AYP designations for these two schools.

Restatement of the Research Questions

The primary questions used in this descriptive case study were as follows:

1. *What are the common leadership practices between principals of high-achieving rural schools?*

Sub-question 1: *What are the attitudes of teachers toward the principal of a high-achieving-school?*

Sub-question 2: *What are the attitudes of parents toward the principal of a high-achieving-school?*

The following secondary question was used in this study:

2. *What are the characteristics of principals in high-achieving rural schools?*

The final question was used in this study:

3. *Are there common characteristics in the school climate among high-achieving rural elementary schools?*

Overview

The purpose of this study was to develop a descriptive case study of two selected rural New Mexico schools. There were three types of data incorporated into this study: field notes, surveys, and interviews. Some 21 schools were identified as meeting the selection criteria for this study. General information letters and invitation/recruitment letters were sent to the 21 school principals, and a survey was electronically mailed to all of them. Of the 21 principals, 11 principals responded to the electronic survey, giving consent for participation in the study. Two principals were selected from the group of 11 responding principals. The two selected principals were visited and interviewed. The researcher visited both of the principals' schools and interviewed a combined total of 12 certified teachers and 7 parents from Commodore and Cirrus elementary schools.

Conclusions

The analyzed data revealed some significant similarities and differences in the leadership behaviors practiced by the two rural school principals profiled in

this study, along with all the principals surveyed. The findings have implications for both general and specific conclusions that contributed to the AYP success of Commodore Elementary School and Cirrus Elementary School:

1. A majority of the reviewed research studies concentrated on alleged deficiencies faced by schools in rural areas. The findings of the present study, and the 2009–10 academic AYP achievement of the two rural New Mexico schools profiled in this study, contradict these findings gleaned from the literature. The elementary schools in the villages of Commodore and Cirrus, and their school leaders, have successfully exhibited many of the defining characteristics that have promoted success in schools. These two New Mexico elementary rural schools have managed to establish basic routines of best practices that have provided a positive effect on the attitude and culture of success. There are indicators of achievement in schools that possess high standards in their routine practices. This research on Commodore Elementary School and Cirrus Elementary School provide evidence of the successes of these two rural schools. Commodore and Cirrus elementary schools have raised the bar in academic expectations for small rural schools in New Mexico, and have put to rest the mistaken belief about the academic crises of all rural schools.
2. Commodore and Cirrus elementary schools have similar characteristics that may be generalized to other rural schools of their

size, location, and demographic factors. This study has provided evidence that academic success is not limited to schools with large student populations and lie in urban areas. Commodore and Cirrus elementary schools, under the direction of experienced school principals, have established a culture of best practices that resulted in the attainment of AYP for the 2009-10 school year. Commodore and Cirrus elementary schools are exemplary examples of how all New Mexico schools, namely those in rural areas, have equal opportunity to share in the academic successes of their schools. The best practices exhibited by Commodore and Cirrus elementary schools and the leadership characteristics demonstrated by Mr. Lewis and Mr. O'Dell could be presented as a model to other rural schools of similar size and demographic make-up. The information gleaned from the interviews of the principals, teachers, and parents, as well as the survey results, can serve as an invaluable resource for schools across rural New Mexico, when officials are considering changes in the organizational culture of their schools and for other reasons. In the case where a school has failed to achieve AYP and is placed on academic corrective action by the New Mexico Public Education Department, it may choose to adopt the best practices models of Commodore and Cirrus elementary schools.

3. The paradigm demonstrated by the Commodore and Cirrus elementary schools can be written as intervention strategies of the school's Educational Plan for Student Success (EPSS). The EPSS is defined as

> a strategic improvement plan that is written or revised based on trend data and the academic achievement of the school and district. Each district is required to develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate the plan on an annual basis. Additionally, the district shall ensure that site-level EPSS is developed by each school within the district and by each charter school for which the district is the chartering agency. State-chartered charter schools shall develop a site- level EPSS. (New Mexico Public Education Department, *Title 6 Primary and Secondary Education, Chapter 29, Standards for Excellence, Part 1, General Provisions*, pp. 1-2)

4. Principals of AYP schools surveyed in this study indicated strong support for Standard 1 of the ISLLC Standards. The emphasis of this standard is on the ability of the educational leader to facilitate, implement, and steward a vision of shared and sustainable learning. Principals commonly use the task of collectively developing and implementing a shared school vision and mission that is pertinent to the needs of their student population. A majority of the AYP principals reported that they actively act on this principle in their schools to ensure that their school's mission statement is developed and then communicated and understood by all students, staff, and parents. Commodore and Cirrus elementary schools continuously petitioned and collaborated with their staffs and parents on implementation and camaraderie relative to their respective school's vision and mission statement.

5. Like the principals in Commodore and Cirrus, many principals are utilizing student data to identify not only needs, but also strengths and areas of interest in their schools as it relates to student success. The data from this study provides significant insights about the needs of students at different grade levels, and of different genders, and various bilingual and special education statuses. Utilizing the data also provides essential information for classroom teachers to plan lessons more effectively and routinely organize the manner in which concepts and objectives are presented. This same concept can be linked not only to grade level organization, but to school-wide organization of curriculum reading, math, and science programs that in the end may render better results when students are tested.
6. Commodore and Cirrus elementary schools, as well as other AYP elementary schools, rely heavily on systems for developing and implementing learning goals and objectives for each grade level in their schools. Teachers meet regularly with their colleagues to discuss, maintain, and make adjustments to their present learning goals. These meetings have various names at the school level: learning communities, grade level meetings, and coaching sessions, to name a few. The meetings include regular classroom teachers, special education teachers, and academic intervention coaches. The teachers keep records of their meetings, including items discussed, and record

changes that will be implemented, and reported to the principals. Most schools kept their information in a file or binder to provide quick evidence of their meetings for accountability purposes.

7. AYP school principals, including the Commodore and Cirrus elementary school principals, engage in school reform interventions that advocate, nurture, and sustain a school culture that promotes both student learning and professional development for staff. The most favored approach by principals to assure that this standard is carried out and demonstrated in the classrooms of their schools is through supervised instruction of specific instructional programs. Typically, reading and math instructional programs receive the primary focus of professional development to ensure that the teachers are grounded in the techniques of the programs and that the programs are presented to the students in the most effective manner. The goal is to provide a personalized and motivating learning environment for students.
8. Research data created from this study strongly suggests that principals from successful AYP schools, including Commodore and Cirrus elementary schools, place a strong reliance on building a culture of collaboration, trust, and high expectations among their students and teaching staff. Commodore and Cirrus school principals were described by their staffs and parents as team-building individuals. They incorporated a team approach when handling school issues

ranging from curriculum to discipline. The principals were very interested in gathering the opinions and gaining the professional consent from their staffs on major school matters that would directly affect students and teachers in their classrooms. These two principals have created an effective sense of team among the teachers in their schools. The principals have helped the teachers recognize and engage in positive collaboration that ultimately led to shared governance within the school, which has helped create a close-knit relationship among all levels of the school hierarchy. As a result, through building an environment of shared ownership, Mr. Lewis and Mr. O' Dell established a culture of trust in their schools. This sense of trust formed partnerships among the school principals, staff, parents, and other stakeholders of the schools such as the respective communities. This sense of buy-in created a camaraderie that positively affected the progress in terms of student achievement.

9. The survey results indicated that many leadership standards and the specific functions of those standards were *Almost always* or *To a considerable degree* incorporated into the schools' daily or weekly routine. These practices established standards of expectations that ultimately led to student achievement and school-wide success. Mr. Lewis at Commodore Elementary and Mr. O' Dell at Cirrus Elementary have mentored their teachers and staffs to encourage them

to take ownership of certain academic situations that will directly affect their jobs in the classroom and with students. This sense of commitment has greatly increased involvement in instructional strategies and implementations, which has led to student success and academic achievement at these two particular elementary schools in rural New Mexico.

10. A characteristic from Commodore and Cirrus elementary schools, as well as a strongly agreed-upon standard from a majority of AYP school principals surveyed is the establishment of a safe and efficient learning environment that makes student success possible. Strong indicators of a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment are monitoring and continuous evaluation of the school's management and operational systems. Principals need to develop creative ways of utilizing human, budgetary, and technological resources, especially when school measures of accountability become more rigid and budgets tighter. More importantly, schools like Commodore and Cirrus elementary schools provide a safe environment for both students and staff.
11. AYP schools located in rural New Mexico communities like those of Commodore and Cirrus are keen to mobilize community resources to enhance their relationships and communication with the surrounding villages where their schools are located. Commodore and Cirrus

elementary schools had after-school programs established in their schools that supported both academic and extra-curricular activities sponsored by outside independent organizations, although many of the activities offered were tied directly to school activities, such as sporting events. Both Commodore and Cirrus school principals understood the importance of networking with community resources that were available in each of their respective communities to give their students the full benefit of the school and community working together to support student success. A further strength added to the stability of these rural communities is the longevity of the families represented in the student populations of these schools. The relational ties among the community members were long standing and many of the individuals who left for college or job-related reasons eventually returned and become residents of Commodore and Cirrus.

12. Both Mr. Lewis and Mr. O' Dell stressed the need to maintain a school with structured expectations of character and conduct for both staff and students. The schools had self-awareness and reflective practices of model behavior posters and murals clearly displayed in the hallways and classrooms; however, the presence of posted school rules or classroom codes of conduct were virtually non-existent. The lack of posting of school rules was by no means a detriment to acceptable conduct in either of the schools, at least according to the observations

of the researcher. The student conduct was orderly and at the time of the study did not interfere with the retrieval of data in support of the study. Both principals were highly active and participatory in the daily functioning of their schools in the classrooms. Both Mr. Lewis and Mr. O' Dell walked the grounds of their schools daily and maintained a constant presence in and around the classrooms so that they could be readily available to assist staff and students. Strict adherence to their schools' discipline policies provided clear parameters for both of these principals to function within, so that the integrity, fairness, and ethical manner of their schools would be clear and consistent.

Recommendations for Further Study

Following are the researcher's suggestions for further study in the field of educational leadership:

1. The information gathered from this study centered on two rural schools in New Mexico. This same study could be conducted in a similar manner using multiple rural schools to broaden the understanding of principals in rural school settings.
2. This case study incorporated perspectives from school principals, teachers, and parents of students. A future study could be expanded to include students' perspectives on leadership practices that affect them and their achievement in the learning environment.

3. A majority of recent relevant literature describes the difficult conditions and academic underachievement found in most schools in rural locations. The schools in this study directly defied the current understandings of rural schools by producing high achievement on the part of their students. Further study could include this same model, but in non-rural school locations to determine whether the same principles of school leadership practices align themselves with rural school leadership practices.
4. School principals may want to utilize the ISLLC framework or another evaluation tool to account for their performance. The information should serve as an assessment tool employed to pinpoint areas of strength and disclose areas of potential growth for the purpose of professional development.
5. School districts should use the information from the educational leadership survey and its findings to determine whether incorporating the ISLLC standards and functions into the principals' evaluation process may be useful in fostering professional improvement.

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APPENDIX A

INTERSTATE SCHOOL LEADERS LICENSURE CONSORTIUM STANDARDS (ISLLC)

Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium is comprised of six leadership standards with accompanying functions.

Standard 1: *An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders*

Functions:

A. Collaboratively develop and implement a shared vision and mission.
B. Collect and use data to identify goals, assess organizational effectiveness, and promote organizational learning
C. Create and implement plans to achieve goals
D. Promote continuous and sustainable improvement
E. Monitor and evaluate progress and revise plans

Standard 2: *An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.*

Functions:

A. Nurture and sustain a culture of collaboration, trust, learning, and high expectations
B. Create a comprehensive, rigorous, and coherent curricular program
C. Create a personalized and motivating learning environment for students
D. Supervise instruction
E. Develop assessment and accountability systems to monitor student

progress.

F. Develop the instructional and leadership capacity of staff
G. Maximize time spent on quality instruction
H. Promote the use of the most effective and appropriate technologies to support teaching and learning
I. Monitor and evaluate the impact of the instructional program

Standard 3: *An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.*

Functions

A. Monitor and evaluate the management and operational systems
B. Obtain, allocate, align, and efficiently utilize human, fiscal, and technological resources
C. Promote and protect the welfare and safety of students and staff
D. Develop the capacity for distributed leadership
E. Ensure teacher and organizational time is focused to support quality instruction and student learning

Standard 4: *An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.*

Functions

A. Collect and analyze data and information pertinent to the educational

environment

B. Promote understanding, appreciation, and use of the community's diverse cultural, social, and intellectual resources
C. Build and sustain positive relationships with families and caregivers
D. Build and sustain productive relationships with community partners

Standard 5: *An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.*

Functions

A. Ensure a system of accountability for every student's academic and social success
B. Model principles of self-awareness, reflective practice, transparency, and ethical behavior
C. Safeguard the values of democracy, equity, and diversity
D. Consider and evaluate the potential moral and legal consequences of decision-making
E. Promote social justice and ensure that individual student needs inform all aspects of schooling

Standard 6: *An education leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.*

Functions

A. Advocate for children, families, and caregivers

B. Act to influence local, district, state, and national decisions affecting student learning

C. Assess, analyze, and anticipate emerging trends and initiatives in order to adapt leadership strategies

APPENDIX B

ASU IRB APPROVAL LETTER

ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development

Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To:	Jere Humphreys MUSIC
From:	Mark Roosa, Chair JM Soc Beh IRB
Date:	12/02/2010
Committee Action:	**Exemption Granted**
IRB Action Date:	12/02/2010
IRB Protocol #:	1011005744
Study Title:	A Case Study of Two Rural New Mexico Secondary Schools and Principals: School Location and Effective Leadership that Contribute to AYP Results

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(1) (2) .

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE PRINCIPALS

Interview Questions for School Principals

1. Would you please introduce yourself?
    a. Full name
    b. Age
    c. Marital status
    d. Number of children
    e. Places lived
    f. Schooling
        i. Undergraduate
        ii. Graduate
    g. Years of professional experience
        i. Certified positions
        ii. Administrative positions
2. Current what position do you hold and how long have you been acting in this capacity?
3. What beliefs do you have about student learning?
4. What do you believe drives your student population's willingness to achieve?
5. A philosophy or platform can be described as a framework of beliefs, values, and opinions that tailors one's decision making, organization, and planning of instruction. Can you describe the positions you deem important in the daily function of your school in the following areas:

a. In student learning?

b. Student outcomes?

c. Instructional climate?

d. Instructional organization?

e. Community involvement or external support?

f. Leadership behaviors?

6. What belief do you have that your demographic area plays a part in your school's AYP success?
7. What types of extracurricular school-related or non-school related activities do you feel play a positive role in student success?
8. What was a turning point in your professional career that led you to seek a position as a school principal?
9. How do you zero-in on to your staff's capabilities and use them to the advantage of achievement?
10. How do you feel the overall contributions you've made to your school have helped to yield success at making AYP?
11. Do you have any advice for potential principals?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE TEACHERS

Interview Questions for the Teachers

1. Would you please introduce yourself?
    a. Full name
    b. Age
    c. Marital status
    d. Number of children
    e. Places lived
    f. Schooling
        i. Undergraduate
        ii. Graduate
    g. Years of professional experience
        i. Certified positions
        ii. Administrative positions
2. Current what position do you hold and how long have you been acting in this capacity?
3. What do you believe drives your student population's willingness to achieve?
4. What is your philosophy of education?
5. Can you describe your beliefs in the following areas:
    a. Student learning?
    b. Student outcomes?
    c. Instructional climate?

d. Instructional organization?

e. Community involvement or external support?

f. Leadership behaviors?

6. Do you believe the demographic area/region of your school plays a part to your school's success in AYP?
7. What types of extracurricular school-related or non-school related activities do you feel play a positive role in student success?
8. What are some of the principal's strengths and weaknesses?
9. How does your principal target your leadership capabilities and other strengths and utilize them to benefit student achievement and the overall working of the school?
10. What contributions do you feel you've made that you believe attributed to AYP?

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE PARENTS

Interview Questions for the Parents

1. Would you please introduce yourself?
    a. Full name
    b. Age
    c. Marital status
    d. Number of children
    e. Highest level of education
    f. Residential status
2. Explain how being a part of the school's parent organization is beneficial to you and the school?
3. To what extent do you see your involvement in the school to help improve student learning is meaningful part of achieving AYP?
4. What beliefs do you have about student learning?
    a. How do you apply those beliefs in your own household?
5. Do you believe being in a rural environment has anything to do with the motivation of your child and other students performing so well in school?
6. What types of extracurricular school-related or non-school related activities do you feel play a positive role in student success?
7. Explain the community service supports (such as volunteering programs, Big Brother/Big Sister, Boys & Girls Club, etc.) that contribute to the success of your school?
8. What are the strong teacher behaviors displayed by the teacher?

Weaknesses?

9. What are the strong leadership behaviors displayed by the principal? Weaknesses?
10. Please describe what goes on in your household on an average school day or week.

APPENDIX F

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP SURVEY

Q1. Standard 1: An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.

	Almost Always	To a Considerable Degree	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
A. Collaboratively develop and implement a shared vision and mission	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. Collect and use data to identify goals, assess organizational effectiveness, and promote organizational learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. Create and implement plans to achieve goals	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. Promote continuous and sustainable improvement	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
E. Monitor and evaluate progress and revise plans.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q2. Standard 2: An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

	Almost Always	To a Considerable Degree	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
A. Nurture and sustain a culture of collaboration, trust, learning, and high expectations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. Create a comprehensive, rigorous, and coherent curricular program	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. Create a personalized and motivating learning environment for students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. Supervise instruction	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
E. Develop assessment and accountability systems to monitor student progress	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
F. Develop the instructional and leadership capacity of staff	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
G. Maximize time spent on quality instruction	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
H. Promote the use of the most effective & appropriate technologies to support teaching & learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Almost Always	To a Considerable Degree	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
I. Monitor and evaluate the impact of the instructional program					

Q3. Standard 3: An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

	Almost Always	To a Considerable Degree	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
A. Monitor and evaluate the management and operational systems	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. Obtain, allocate, align, and efficiently utilize human, fiscal, and technological resources	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. Promote and protect the welfare and safety of students and staff	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. Develop the capacity for distributed leadership	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
E. Ensure teacher and organizational time is focused to support quality instruction and student learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q4. Standard 4: An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

	Almost Always	To a Considerable Degree	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
A. Collect and analyze data and information pertinent to the educational environment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. Promote understanding, appreciation, and use of the community's diverse cultural, social, and intellectual resources	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. Build and sustain positive relationships with families and caregivers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. Build and sustain productive relationships with community partners	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q5. Standard 5: An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

	Almost Always	To a Considerable Degree	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
A. Ensure a system of accountability for every student's academic and social success	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. Model principles of self-awareness, reflective practice, transparency, and ethical behavior	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. Safeguard the values of democracy, equity, and diversity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. Consider and evaluate the potential moral and legal consequences of decision-making	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
E. Promote social justice and ensure that individual student needs inform all aspects of schooling	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q6. Standard 6: An education leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

	Almost Always	To a Considerable Degree	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
A. Advocate for children, families, and caregivers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. Act to influence local, district, state, and national decisions affecting student learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. Assess, analyze, and anticipate emerging trends and initiatives in order to adapt leadership strategies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

APPENDIX G

GENERAL INFORMATION LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

INVITATION/RECRUITMENT LETTER AND

FORMAL INFORMATION LETTER

General Information Letter to Principals

PRINCIPALS IN TWO HIGH-ACHIEVING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN RURAL NEW MEXICO: A CASE STUDY

[Date]

[School address]

Dear (administrator's name):

It is with great pleasure that I extend my congratulations on your school's achievement for the 2009-2010 school year.

My name is Deborah Tom. I am an educator and a long-time resident of northern New Mexico. I am currently nearing the completion of my studies in the Native American Educational Leadership Doctoral Program with Arizona State University. As a final requirement of my doctoral studies, I am conducting research to complete a dissertation. The purpose of my study will be primarily concerned with studying leadership characteristics and practices along with factors of community that might that have yielded high-achieving results in your school. I will be primarily dealing with elementary public schools for this study. This letter will be followed by additional letters: formal information letter, recruitment letter, and, once you agree to participate, an informed consent letter will be sent. Each letter will seek your agreement to participate in this study which will involve a survey, an interview, and an observation of your school. Additionally, I'll ask permission to invite teachers and parents to participate as well. I will not be working with students; they will only be observed in general

circumstances. All data garnered from the interview will be kept anonymous through use of fictitious names. You will have the option to deny my invitation, but I will send all invitations with optimism.

It is with anticipation that I embark on this endeavor and look forward to working with you. Please keep an eye out for future correspondence from me. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Debi Tom

ASU Doctorial Candidate

Invitation/recruitment letter to principals

PRINCIPALS IN TWO HIGH-ACHIEVING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN RURAL NEW MEXICO: A CASE STUDY

[Date]

[School Address]

Dear (Administrator),

I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education under the direction of Professor Humphreys in the College of Music at Arizona State University. I am conducting research to develop a descriptive case study of selected rural New Mexico schools. The study will have an emphasis on examining factors of success that might be attributed to the rural environment of the schools in combination with the characteristics and practices of the principals that led to achievement of AYP in school year 2009-10.

I am recruiting individuals who will provide their perspective through a survey and interview questions that will help determine factors of success in relation to their location and leadership which will take approximately one month. Students will be observed, but data will not be collected from them in the form of surveys or interviews. Interviews will be audio-taped to ensure accuracy of responses. All audiotapes will be properly stored in a secure location for the duration of the study and erased upon completion of study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you have any questions concerning my study, you may reach me at:

Debi Tom

[email address and phone contact]

Thank you,

Deborah F. Tom

ASU Doctoral Candidate

Formal information letter

PRINCIPALS IN TWO HIGH-ACHIEVING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN RURAL NEW MEXICO: A CASE STUDY

[Date]

[School name and address]

Dear (Participant)

I am doctoral candidate in the College of Education under the direction of Professor J. Humphreys in the College of Music at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research to develop a descriptive case study of selected rural New Mexico secondary schools. The study will have an emphasis on examining factors of success that might be attributed to the rural environment of the schools in combination with the characteristics and practices of the principals that led to achievement of AYP in school year 2009-10. I am inviting your participation, which will involve completing an electronic survey, a personal meeting for an interview, and an informal observation of your school's operation. The survey will take about 40 minutes while the interview will take approximately one hour. I will be observing routine school functions. Additional phone and e-mail contact may be necessary after we leave your campus for clarification of survey and/or interview responses.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can skip questions if you wish. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.

Your participation in this study will contribute to literature on rural

education. The results of the research will be available to you upon completion if you are interested. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

Confidentiality is of the utmost importance and your identity, responses, and school will be kept anonymous. Fictitious names will be used to identify people and schools used in the study. The results only will be used in my dissertation; additionally, the results may be used in reports, presentations, or further publication.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact either one of us listed below:

Primary Investigator:	Co-Investigator
Dr. Jere Humphreys	Deborah F. Tom
[email address and phone contact]	[email address and phone contact]

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

Return of the questionnaire will be considered your consent to participate.

Sincerely,

Deborah F. Tom

ASU Doctoral Candidate