SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP - A CONTENT ANALYSIS

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by
Deirdre Yvonne Holloway

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to all the current and future Sam Houston State University doctoral students. During my studies as a doctoral student, I faced several challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic transition to online learning and extra duties assigned at work. Additional district duties were assigned to me such as overseeing about 75 elementary schools master scheduling and a substitute teacher due to the shortage of substitute teachers. In addition, the 2021 Winter Storm flooded my home and I lived in a hotel for a month and then moved to an apartment for two months. Also, during my time as a doctoral student, my mother had health issues and twice she had to be rushed to the hospital.

I share all this to say, there were times when I thought I should stop the doctoral program due to all the challenges. All three challenges overlapped each other. I thought the challenges were signs that maybe I had too much on my plate and stopping the doctoral program was the solution. I was blessed to have family, friends, and professors that were understanding, kept my spirit up, and supportive. By participating with counseling services and praying, I decided I could overcome the challenges and graduate with my doctorate.

The challenges taught me a lesson about endurance, the challenges taught me the importance of having faith, and most of all the challenges made me a stronger person.

Don’t Give Up!
ABSTRACT

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**Purpose**

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine school improvement strategies that were recommended to improve the academics of a campus, shifting from low performing to academic success.

**Method**

In this study, a quantitative content analysis was used to identify common school improvement strategies that are shared in school leadership books. The first step of the content analysis involved identifying books that match the topic on school improvement. The researcher developed a rubric to conduct a page-by-page analysis and score each book. The school improvement books with the highest scores were selected as part of the content analysis research. This content analysis includes 10 school improvement books as part of the research. Six steps were followed as I conduct my content analysis on school improvement strategies that are shared in school leadership books: (a) formulate the research questions; (b) decide on units of analysis; (c) develop a sample plan; (d) construct coding categories; (e) coding and intercoder reliability check; and (f) data collection and analysis (Neuman, 2011).

**Findings**

Together, the present findings confirm the school improvement strategy “professional development” was the most recommended strategy for school leaders to implement with staff. The school improvement strategy “professional development”
appeared 86% among all 10 school improvement books for school leaders. The results demonstrate the importance of the campus leaders to; (a) be an instructional leader; (b) value and support staff; (c) support teachers and implement a mentor program for new teachers, and (d) ensure critical questions are part of the implementation of professional learning communities. I suggest examining best practices of campus leaders in the following three areas; (a) best practices of successful school improvement leaders; (b) examine district with school improvement departments, and (c) gathering best practices from successful school superintendents who have improved a low-performing district.

The role of the principal covers a wide variety of areas. An effective school leader can shape a school-wide vision of success by; (a) creating a vision of academic success for staff; (b) promote a climate that is conducive to learning, and (c) foster leadership qualities with staff.

KEY WORDS: School improvement, Every Student Succeeds Act, Title 1, Teacher retention, Professional learning communities, Principal’s role, Funding, and School climate
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Imagine what it would be like if all parents could select their child’s school. Parents would most likely select schools that were high performing academically as well as schools with highly qualified teachers and staff. In addition, parents would probably search for schools that have the latest technology and an abundance of resources and materials available for their children. Finally, parents would want their schools to offer extracurricular programs. Unfortunately, this situation is not reality for all parents. The majority of students living in poverty attend low-performing schools in their communities. In 2019, 60.6% of students in Texas were identified as economically disadvantaged. “Of a total of 8,838 schools, 954 with student poverty rates above the state average received Ds and Fs, whereas 151 at or below the state average scored that low” (Swaby & Cai, 2019, para. 13).

All children deserve a quality education. When children are successful with academics, it provides them with a higher quality of life and the knowledge and skills that they need to achieve their goals and find relief from poverty. An educational quote that is dear to my heart comes from the former governor of Louisiana, Kathleen Blanco, “Think about it: every educated person is not rich, but almost every educated person has a job and a way out of poverty. So, education is a fundamental solution to poverty.”

Statement of the Problem

A major issue in 21st century education practices is rising academic standards in low-performing schools (Swaby & Cai, 2019). This urgency started with the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Mandated in the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) was
the use of aggressive corrective measures for schools failing to meet progress goals if they wanted to continue receiving federal assistance. Following the No Child Left Behind Act was the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015. The Every Student Succeeds Act focuses on advancing equity as a means to guarantee all students in the United States an education that is based on high academic standards designed to prepare them for postsecondary life and to ensure that low-performing schools are held accountable and strive to affect positive change (n.d.).

Developing an effective school improvement plan is a complex process that becomes even more complex for schools in exceptionally disadvantaged areas (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). The expectations placed on principals combined with the challenges of improving a failing school make it essential to examine when and how successful turnaround principals adapt their leadership practices in their unique contexts. Knowledge of these strategies can assist school principals in gaining the tools needed to improve their schools. The importance of school leadership is recognized by schools, yet questions remain concerning the most effective methods for preparing turn around leaders for underperforming schools (Lochmille & Chestnut, 2017).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine school improvement strategies that were recommended to improve the academics of a campus, shifting from low performing to academic success. Several researchers (e.g., Fullan, 2003) agreed that without strong school leadership, the school organization would suffer, and the leader, the principal, should be willing to do whatever is needed to lead the school toward success. In this dissertation, a variety of factors and interventions implemented by school
principals, such as school morale, academic interventions, and principal’s experiences with leadership preparation programs and professional development were addressed. School leaders may be able to determine effective strategies in closing the academic achievement gaps in schools by examining the variety of principal-led interventions that are used in low-performing and challenging schools. Alger (2012) stated that the most challenging strategy of school leadership is to build and sustain an organizational culture with a goal of continual improvement of the skills of teachers, educational programs, and student learning. The retention of effective leaders and improving the development of leadership could help train highly effective leadership teams that can meet and achieve school improvement goals (Carbaugh et al., 2015).

**Research Questions**

In this doctoral dissertation, the following research questions were addressed: (a) What written school improvement strategies were shared in leadership books on school improvement?; (b) What roles were identified that a principal should focus on for school improvement?; (c) What school climate activities were present to improve the academic performance of a campus?; (d) What teacher retention activities were cited related toward school improvement; and (e) What activities were mentioned related to professional learning communities meeting with staff?

**Significance of the Study**

On January 28th, 2021, the Texas Education Agency released its 2020 Annual Report. Emphasized in the 2020 Annual Report was the ongoing improvement of schools taking place as well as areas of focus that Texas schools should continue to monitor in their strategic plan to ensure success for every student. The Texas Education Agency
(2020) emphasized four areas that are integral to school achievement: (a) Recruit, Support, and Retain Teachers and Principals; (b) Build a Foundation of Reading and Math; (c) Connect High School to Career and College; and (d) Improve Low Performing Schools.

In Texas, 20 of the Education Resource Centers collaborated with school systems to focus on the improvement of low-performing schools in each region. The Education Resource Center provided support by introducing the Texas Institution Leadership. Texas Institution Leadership builds capacity for school principals and additional school leaders who support them by offering professional development, implementation support, and coaching. The number of campuses in Texas participating in the Texas Institution Leadership has increased each year, demonstrating an increasing desire for leadership support in low-performing schools. From 2017-2018 to 2018-2019, the participation rate for the Texas Institution Leadership increased by 13 low-performing campuses. From 2018-2019 to 2019-2020, the participation rate for the Texas Institution Leadership increased to 243 low-performing campuses.

The accountability system described by the Texas Education Agency (2018) is designed to evaluate performance in the three following areas: student achievement, school progress, and closing the student achievement gap. Low-performing schools and districts must participate in the required interventions, recruit members to be part of the Campus Intervention Team, conduct a campus needs assessment, and develop and implement a Target Improvement Plan. Schools with two consecutive “unacceptable ratings” are required to develop and submit a school turnaround plan. Schools with three
or more consecutive “unacceptable ratings” are required to implement the approved school turnaround plan (Texas Education Agency, 2018).

All districts with schools that have been identified for school improvement, under state and federal accountability measures are required to select a District Coordinator for School Improvement. The District Coordinator for School Improvement’s role is to oversee all intervention activities and submissions of the campus needs assessment and to develop and implement the school’s Targeted Improvement Plan (Texas Education Agency, 2018). The District Coordinator for School Improvement works closely with the Campus Leadership Team, which includes the principal and additional campus leaders who are responsible for the development, implementation, and monitoring of the school’s targeted improvement plan. In addition, the Campus Leadership Team and the District Coordinator for School Improvement work with the Campus Intervention Team to fulfill the required campus interventions (Texas Education Agency, 2018).

School leadership can have positive effects on closing the achievement gap at low-performing schools. The importance of this study was to add to the existing research literature available on turn-around principals and their interventions to improve schools. The challenge of turning around a low-performing school makes it essential to analyze when and how successful turnaround principals adapt their leadership practices in their unique way. Furthermore, findings from this research investigation will inform district administrators on best practices to support current turnaround principals and develop principal pipelines.
My Experience as a School Improvement Principal

In 2007, I was named principal of a low-performing Title 1/Bilingual elementary school. I was a first-year principal and also new to the school district. Once hired, my supervisor scheduled a meeting with me to discuss the academic and discipline data of the school, concerns with high teacher absenteeism, and the campus’s negative culture and climate. The principal I had replaced had cancer and passed on the last day of school. Due to the principal’s sudden death, the staff never had a chance to grieve together or plan a dedication event in her honor. The passing of the former principal was shared with me so that I could understand the emotional and social support that staff members may have needed. My first step was meeting with school’s team leaders, my secretary, and lead custodian to gain a better understanding of the needs of the school. I also worked with staff to plan a school dedication event in honor of the former principal. I worked with business partners to secure a garden in honor of the former principal and invited the former principal’s family and school stakeholders to attend the dedication. During my summer team leaders’ meetings, I asked the teams to share highlights of the school as well as areas that need improvement. I conducted “root cause” conversations about the causes of the challenges the school faced, and I aimed to have safe spaces where team leaders would feel comfortable and be honest about their concerns. Once we developed our needs improvement plan and campus improvement plan together, it was time to implement the plan.

The team identified school improvement strategies that involved not only teachers, but also parents, all staff, business partners, and support from central office staff. At my school, the following strategies were suggested for school improvement: (a)
principal and assistant principal participation in all team planning meetings; (b) faculty meetings designed as professional development sessions and for recognition of staff members; (c) weekly data conversations to measure areas of concerns and areas to celebrate; (d) staff agreement that all lessons should be engaging, hands-on, and less paper and pencil worksheet activities; (e) incorporate use of technology into weekly lessons; (f) have principal power talk throughout the year to have intimate conversations with each grade level to hear concerns, discuss budgets, and provide resources that each grade level requests; (g) provide opportunities for staff to attend professional development outside of the professional development mandates from the district; (h) have ongoing and clear communication with staff, parents, and the community; and (i) my personal goal to build positive relationships with each staff member by celebrating success every moment that I could and providing monthly incentives and appreciation events throughout the year.

After my first year on the campus, the school’s metrics in reading, math, science, and writing improved. After my second year as principal, the campus was rated “Recognized” by the Texas Education Agency. During year three of my principalship, the campus was rated “Exemplary” by the Texas Education Agency. In addition, the campus was named a “National Distinguished Title 1 School” by the Texas Education Agency and received several “gold awards” for improvement in all subject areas. The superintendent gave recognition to the campus for improved teacher absenteeism and low-teacher turnover rate. The campus was also featured on the cover of the Lead and Learn magazine for school improvement. In 2011 and 2013, I was named Region 4 District Elementary Principal of the Year. With careful attention, planning, and
execution, the school was able to vastly improve its ratings and turn from a low-performing campus to a high-performing one.

**Literature Review Search Procedures**

The strategy used for searching for literature on this topic of school improvement strategies was the Engine Orange database at Sam Houston State University and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC). The search limiters were peer-reviewed articles from academic journals with the date range from 2000-2020. Key terms used to find literature on this subject included *school improvement, school principal* combined with *low-performing schools, underachieving schools, and low-achieving schools*. The search was narrowed down to the following topics: turnaround schools and school improvement strategies.

**Conceptual Framework**

The Effective Schools Framework was the conceptual framework model used in this study (Effective School Framework, n.d.). The framework lays the foundation for effective instruction and schools across the State of Texas. Effective instruction is the core for effective schools (Effective School Framework, n.d.). The instructional core is supported by effective, well-supported teachers, high-quality curriculum, and a positive school culture. The Effective School Framework is built on three foundation areas in the continuous improvement process: (a) identify needs, (b) plan, and (c) implement and monitor. The Texas Education Agency five-year strategic plan for school improvement includes the Effective Schools Framework as a starting point for Texas school districts and schools. Setting the study within the context of this framework provided a way to
interpret school improvement strategies to close the achievement gaps in Texas, improve low-performing schools, and improve the learning for all students.

Definition of Terms

The following definition of terms are defined for the reader to clarify words or phrases in this dissertation.

Additional Targeted Support

Any campus that is not identified for comprehensive or targeted support and improvement is identified for additional targeted support if an individual student group’s percentage of evaluated indicators met is at or below the percentage used to identify that campus type for comprehensive support and improvement. Additional Targeted Support is identified annually (Texas Education Agency, 2019).

Comprehensive School

The lowest 5% of schools that receive Title 1, Part A funds are identified for comprehensive support and improvement. Additionally, if any Title I or non-Title I campus does not attain a 67% four-year federal graduation rate for all student groups, the campus is identified for comprehensive support and improvement. Non-Title I campuses are not eligible for comprehensive support grant funding (Texas Education Agency, 2019).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

The Every Student Succeeds Act provides each state the opportunity to chart a path for shifting decisions related to accountability, school improvement, teacher quality, and funding back to the state and local level. Each state is required to submit their goals
and standards to the United States Department of Education (Texas Education Agency, n.d.).

*No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*

The No Child Left Behind Act passed in 2001 and supported standards-based education reform. The No Child Left Behind Act required states to develop basic skills assessments to be given to all students in certain grades, if the states received federal funding for schools (Texas Education Agency, n.d.).

*Title 1 School*

Title 1 schools receive financial assistance based on having high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families. The financial assistance helps ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. Title 1 financial assistance is available to schools where at least 40% of students come from low-income families (USDE, 2018).

**Delimitations**

This dissertation was restricted to school improvement strategies that were identified in educational leadership books about school improvement. In addition, in instances where schools can improve in areas other than test scores, such as student attendance, student discipline, and the morale of a school, these areas were included in this study. Another limitation is the Texas accountability system. The accountability plan that leaders are held accountable for is forever changing from year to year.

**Limitations**

For this doctoral dissertation, only school improvement strategies presented in educational leadership books were examined. The second limitation is a potential bias
with my former role as a principal of a low-performing school that received state and national recognition for school improvement. A third limitation is my current role as Director of State and Federal Programs and working with the principals of low-performing Title 1 schools on school improvement. A fourth limitation is the number of books that were reviewed to identify school improvement strategies.

**Assumptions**

An assumption made for this research study was that school improvement data and information reported by the Texas Education Agency are accurate. Also assumed is that school leaders in Texas participate in professional development in the subject area of school improvement. Finally assumed is that school leaders of low-performing schools are aware of the need for school improvement and are willing to address the challenges to improve the quality of teaching and academics for all students.

**Organization of the Study**

This dissertation is arranged into five chapters about school improvement strategies. Introduced in Chapter I is the background of school improvement and the importance of improving schools for the success of all students. In Chapter II is a review of literature of the following themes: (a) understanding the role of a principal; (b) best practices for principal leadership; (c) educational policies on school improvement; and (d) Texas’ Every Student Succeeds Act Plan. In Chapter III is a description of the research design and data analysis methods. Chapter IV includes the results, the research findings, and analysis of the data. Chapter V is the Executive Summary, an overview of the study and recommendations for future evaluation and research.
CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

School improvement continues to be a priority in challenging schools that involves the following: analyzing student data, finding strengths and weaknesses in the areas of student achievement and the quality of teaching, identifying an improvement goal, and developing a plan to improve learning for all students (Meyers & VanGronigen, 2019). School turnarounds are possible, but they take a concerted effort with strong leadership and persistent academic achievement and collaboration with staff. Underperforming schools are sometimes called “persistently lowest achieving schools, low-performing schools, or, to use recent federal education policy parlance, “priority schools” (VanGronigen & Meyers, 2017, p. 424). Priority schools are Title I and non-Title I schools performing in the lowest 5% of the state for the previous three years (Elementary & Secondary Education Act [ESEA] Waiver, 2020).

The purpose of this literature review was to present research evidence regarding the best school improvement strategies toward student achievement at underperforming schools. School improvement strategies that have been shared in leadership books were collected to identify the most common practices shared. This evidence review is based on an examination of the literature relating to turning around low performing schools.

The Role of the Principal

The culture of the school can be influenced by the principal which leads to promoting innovation and continual learning. Creating a trusting learning environment is led by the principal through their leadership (The Wallace Foundation, 2018). The role of the principal has changed in recent years. The principal was once seen as the building
manager. Principals are now expected to be the instructional leader of the school. The expectation for principals is to understand instruction and understand their staff (The Wallace Foundation, 2013).

Principals are assigned the task to lead schools along with the demands of higher academic standards and increased state and federal accountability. Moving a school from being low performing to being a successful school requires an extensive set of leadership skills. The role of the principal is working with all school stakeholders in a professional learning community (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Principals need to have the ability to influence peoples’ behavior in a certain direction. The principal needs to have an understanding about school leadership, motivation, communication, and teamwork. Reed and Swaminathan (2016) conducted a study on the practices and actions on one urban high school principal who improved student achievement and school climate. They analyzed principal implementation of distributed leadership, professional learning communities, and social justice leadership. Professional learning communities involve a group of educators who work collaboratively toward improving the quality of teachers and academic performance of students. Emphasized in social justice leadership is the belief that all students can and will reach proficient (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). Findings were that the combination of distributed leadership, professional learning communities, and social justice leadership statistically significantly increased student achievement in Grade 10 reading and mathematics. Reading scores from the state assessment increased from 21.2% to 32% and math scores increased from 16.8% to 22.9%. Improvements were also noted in the areas of school culture, climate, and quality of teaching staff (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016).
The concept of turnaround as it relates to schools aligns with efforts to improve schools that are underperforming. The principal is seen as the central figure and agent of change in these efforts. Woulfin and Weiner (2017) explored the turnaround concept from the lens of how educators perceived and implemented four logics of turnaround leadership: instructional, managerial, social justice leadership, and “triggering change” (p. 222). Qualitative interview data were gathered from a cohort of seven northeastern state principals with an aspiration to turnaround schools. These principals were nominated by their home districts to be part of a principal preparation program because they demonstrated promise to improve the academics in schools. The researchers wanted to ascertain which logics of turnaround leadership were most seen and used by the participants as well as how the aspiring leaders navigated those logics within their work. Woulfin and Weiner (2017) determined the dominant logics to be managerial, instructional, and “triggering change” (p. 230), and social justice logic as secondary. In the triggering change logic, the initiator of change is the principal, using positive relationships and culture to build capacity. The researchers asserted that the triggering change logic can be instrumental in leadership, particularly in urban school districts. In addition, they emphasized the need to organize the many ideas of good school leadership and for state and district leaders to develop professional development that presents the logics cohesively, and not in isolation as completed by some of the study participants.

Sustainable initiatives are created to last. They should have staying power because they are aimed at the right priorities, they are solid, and they are built on a strong foundation. Clark (2017) examined sustainable school improvement with elementary principals who received the New York State Award designation and were tenured at their
schools. Findings were that school leaders’ capacity in building practices were connected with the reciprocal effects model. Successful capacity building starts at the school by strengthening individual abilities along with raising the collective efficacy of the school. When principals involve teachers in the process of developing direction and setting goals, they are providing opportunities for teachers to lead. When teachers participate in and are engaged with leadership roles, the value of capacity building will increase.

School improvement plans are created to improve the level of instruction and learning in the school, so that all students can be proficient in core academic subjects (Meyers & VanGronigen, 2019). Using school improvement plans provides a framework to address instructional issues that have not made sufficient progress in student achievement and analyze areas of concern. Isernhagen (2012) examined the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and parents with Title I schools’ improvement plans. Nebraska Title I needs improvement school leaders developed a strong focus on improving student learning. During the interview process, four themes emerged that were not examined in the survey: collaborative culture, resources, leadership, and challenges. Administrators and teachers rated the planning process, professional development experiences, and progression with data with the highest scores. The lowest rating was for parent and community involvement in the Title I school improvement process. Administrators and teachers shared the importance on focusing on planning and developing school improvement goals.

The Together Initiative is a reform model for identified schools that need improvement based on student accountability from the state. The purpose of the model is to raise school autonomy from districts mandates and include teachers, parents, and
community members in decision-making. Mayer and LeChasseur (2013) addressed the principal’s role in the implementation of the Together Initiative. The findings from their research investigation were that school leadership is decentralized. Principals should trust teachers and allow them to try new strategies. Principals should also have the skills to protect the school from pressures from the district. The researchers recommended that principals avoid being caught in the middle of teacher leadership and demands from district officials.

The role of a school principal is pivotal in creating a school culture that supports high-performing schools. Hesbol (2019) addressed principal self-efficacy and the perception that schools are learning organizations. Participants were 300 PK-12 school principals across the mid-western states. Findings from the study were that highly effective principals should have the ability to persuade staff members to perform at a high-levels and believe strongly in their teachers and the organization. In addition, principals should collaborate with others to fulfill their personal goals and the academic goals of the school.

**Best Practices for School Principals**

Lochmiller and Chestnut (2017) addressed the structure and design of a principal apprenticeship program held in the southeastern region of the United States at a mid-sized university. Participants were 27 university faculty members, 36 apprentices, and 24 mentor principals. The researchers conducted individual semi-structured interviews, semi-structured focus group interviews, and analyzed documents. Documents analyzed were course syllabi, electronic copies of students’ written work, and reflections from students. Three specific design features were identified to support the development for
turnaround leadership. The three design features were the experiences of the apprenticeship in a turnaround school environment, the district’s structures, and procedures as focus points for the apprenticeship, and the amount of participation with the district’s improvement plan.

Turning an at-risk school to an excellent school is a challenging task. Students who attend at-risk schools usually lack interest in learning (Nor & Rosian, 2009). According to Tableman (2004), four aspects are present in the school environment. An affective environment is led by school leaders who focus on the priorities of the schools, re-branding the schools and emphasizing the importance of a sense of belonging from all members of the school. The second aspect is improving the physical environment of the school, which allows students to embrace the culture of caring and provides a sense of belonging. The third aspect is the social environment. Therefore, it is important for the school staff to seek opportunities to celebrate the success of their students, from small accomplishments to major accomplishments. The last aspect is the academic environment. Principals and teachers analyzed the background of students and noticed that students were suffering due to language barriers. This barrier led to a school focus on a culture of reading. Alfie Kohn is known for his Student Directed learning theory. This theory allows students to make decisions and for students to have ownership of their learning. Kohn referenced a study on the academic success on student directed learning. “When teachers of inner-city black children were trained in a program designed to promote a sense of self-determination, the student in these classes missed less school and scored better on a national test of basic skills than those in conventional classrooms” (Kohn, 1993, p. 12).
Nor and Roslan (2009) analyzed data from two at-risk schools that had transitioned to exemplary schools. Participants were former principals and current teachers and students from both schools. The principal of one school stated that the most important attribute to improving the school was the sense of togetherness among all staff. Once staff members understood their “why” and the importance of working together to achieve goals, nothing was impossible. Another finding was the role of the principal. A principal must be brave, creative, and persistent and at times may have to challenge established policies and common practices to improve their school. Principals from both campuses agreed overall that it is the students who count and the needs of each student matters.

Thompson and France (2015) examined whether favorable urban researched-based leadership practices from the district had connections to district leaders from suburban areas. The study was conducted with 127 schools in the district of Long Island, New York. Thompson and France (2015) discovered that only three of the five dimensions appeared in the study: principals’ partnership, district stewardship, and district partnership. Principal partnership was rated “very important” in growing principals’ instructional leadership skills among suburban district leaders. District stewardship was also rated “very important” in growing the leadership skills of principals to improve teaching and learning in schools. District partnership was rated “important” in increasing principals’ instructional skills to improve teaching and learning in schools. Overall, all three dimensions were important in strengthening principals. In addition, districts were highly engaged with all three dimensions. Thompson and France (2015)
recommended conducting a qualitative study to obtain a deeper understanding regarding the perception and understanding of relationships between district leaders and principals.

Another group of researchers focused on school improvement interventions from the district level. Honig et al. (2010) developed five dimensions of district leadership. The online survey questions were developed based on the five dimensions of effective leadership, which included (a) learning-focused partnership, (b) assistance to the partnership, (c) refocused organizational culture, (e) stewardship of district leadership, and (f) use of evidence. The close rapport between central office and school leaders refers to learning-focused partnership in schools. Assistance to the partnership refers to the professional development and organizing the principals’ schedules so that they can focus on instruction (Honig et al., 2010). Refocused organizational culture is the responsibility of district office staff and school leaders of owning the responsibility of teacher and learning outcomes. Stewardship of district leaders are the interventions implemented by district office leaders to insulate external forces that have negative effects on the work of school leaders. Therefore, district office leaders should focus on student data in academic performance and data driven decision-making (Honig et al., 2010).

The need for comprehension transformation to improve low-performing schools is a concern throughout the United States (May & Sanders, 2013). Standardized assessments are used to measure student achievement; however, a need exists to focus on the morale of the school and the effectiveness of school leadership. May and Sanders (2013) examined the transformation process of schools and the indicators that lead schools toward success. The study was conducted in 16, K-8 schools in Cleveland Metropolitan School District with 10 teachers and 16 principals. Eight low-performing
schools were partnered with eight traditional schools based on the following variables: student enrollment, free and reduced percentage rates, state report card achievement rating, average teacher tenure, performance index score, number of violent incidents in the area of school safety, and average number of subgroups for adequate yearly process. Results were that teachers of low-performing schools rated their school leader statistically significantly higher than teachers from traditional schools. In addition, the teachers from low-performing schools rated the importance of school climate with higher grades than traditional school teachers (May & Sanders, 2013).

School improvement planning is vital planning by which individuals of the school community conduct an exhaustive assessment of their schools’ instructional program (Thompson, 2018). This step is followed by developing a well written plan that implements continuous monitoring of efforts to improve student outcomes. Overall, a school improvement plan should be the map that guides the school through the changes that need to be made for the success of all students (Thompson, 2018). The researcher explored school administrator’s attitudes and perspectives on the process of school improvement planning. A sample of 15 schools and 91 school administrators and staff members participated with the survey. The major finding from this study is that the most important variable for effective planning is the stakeholder’s involvement in school planning. Nevertheless, school improvement plans are only successful when retaining

**Teacher Retention**

It should come to no surprise that teacher retention is closely tied to student success. When teacher retention at a school is low, it has been documented to affect student achievement negatively due to disruption in the school climate, including
between other teachers (Dahlkamp et al., 2017). Teacher retention also tends to be higher in low-performing schools for many reasons, including low-satisfaction and lack of support from the administration (Boyd et al., 2009). The role of the principal in teacher retention can be pivotal, if the principals are able to foster an environment which makes teachers feel valued, needed, and supported.

Dahlkamp et al. (2017) addressed the relationship between principal self-efficacy and teacher retention. Self-efficacy is “a personal conclusion about an individual’s abilities to produce a desired outcome” (p. 5). The researchers had principals self-assess their self-efficacy and compared it to teacher retention. The outcome of the study was the lack of a relationship between self-efficacy and teacher retention, but the presence of a strong relationship between school climate and teacher retention. School climate or workplace conditions, consisted of three variables: classroom autonomy, administrative support, and behavioral climate. Teachers who reported being satisfied with their school climate were much more likely to stay at their campus compared to teachers who did not feel satisfied with their school climate. Due to the substantial effects that administrative leaders, especially principals, can play in the school climate, having a strong leader who creates a positive school climate tends to have substantially higher teacher retention by providing the support and encouragement needed by teachers.

Ladd (2009) used surveys to find that teachers’ perceptions of school leadership is very predictive of teacher retention, and Boyd et al. (2009) also used surveys to conclude that school leaders play a very large role in teacher retention through working conditions. Teacher retention is in some cases, a no-win situation, where the most underperforming schools also attract and retain lower-quality principals (e.g., new principals). Lower
quality principals can negatively influence school climate and working conditions, which affect teacher retention and student achievement. The researcher recommended policy changes that get to the root of the cyclical problem, where low-performing schools can recruit high-performing leaders, as well as improvement in working conditions, such as pay (Boyd et al., 2009). Though principals may have only small direct effect on student achievement, principal leadership and choices have a large influence on the things that do directly affect student achievement. Grissom (2011) contended that school principals play a very important role in teacher retention, and that “teacher ratings of principal effectiveness are strong predictors of teacher job satisfaction and one-year turnover probability in the average school” (p. 257). Principals were also determined to have a stronger effect on teacher retention in disadvantaged schools compared to high-performing schools, supporting the notion that good leadership can improve teacher retention, even in priority need schools. It is apparent that a good principal can have positive effects on various characteristics of a school, which in turn can have positive influences on teacher retention and student outcomes. By using strong leadership skills to improve the school climate, working conditions of teachers, and provision of professional development, principals are able to improve teacher retention.

Ingersoll et al. (2017) focused on the workplace for teachers and teaching as a career. The number of minority teachers doubled between 1987 and 2012, yet high teacher turnover rates undermined the focus on diversity in the teacher workforce. There needs to be a focus on improving the organization of the school, management, and the need of leadership that can improve the retention rate of minority teachers. The
researchers recommend a change in the teacher’s classroom autonomy and a change in the schoolwide influence from faculty members.

**Professional Development**

Professional development can be a positive supportive practice for teacher staffing, especially in regard to the prevalence of less experienced teachers in Title 1 schools (Desmione et al., 2013). A teacher who has fewer educational credentials or less educational experience can benefit greatly from professional development, as it can fill in gaps between affluent and under-performing school teaching strategies. In a longitudinal study, Desimone et al. (2013) examined the relationship between professional development and mathematics achievement growth. Findings from their study were supportive of previous literature in which researchers revealed that content-focused professional development, which centers on conceptual learning rather than rote memorization, for instance, to be an important factor in boosting student achievement.

Principals are instructional leaders and are responsible for hiring and retaining teachers, including identifying professional development that meets the needs of their staff. Zepeda (2016) investigated principals’ perspective related to professional development for marginal teachers on formal plans. Principals were selected who had experience with personnel, procedures, and expectations for working with marginal teachers. Professional development for marginal teachers was seen as a “quick fix” (Zepeda, 2016, p. 50) and a deficit proposition. Marginal teachers’ deficits could be improved through remediation provided through professional development. Professional development needs to be personalized and provide site-level support that goes beyond the support from school leaders. Teacher collaboration, integration of technology, and
teacher mentors and coaches should be part of the school’s improvement plan regarding quality teaching (Zepeda, 2016). The task of principals supporting teachers who need extra support should continue. District leaders are required to recruit school leaders that can focus on school improvement.

Teacher staffing is a vital aspect of all schooling, and appropriate teacher staffing is particularly important in Title 1 schools. By recruiting and retaining teachers who are experienced and educated, especially for low-income groups, under-performing schools can work toward the closing of the education gap between Title 1 and affluent schools. Professional development can be a valuable tool in the training of teachers who are employed in Title 1 schools, as it can improve the outcomes of students from teachers who may have less experience or education than that of their non-Title 1 colleagues. Teachers should have the experience to develop their professional knowledge to develop the skills and competencies of knowledge-creation in order to help students (Fullen, 2006). Fullen (2006) stated that people learn by doing, reflecting, inquiry, and evidence. When people visualize themselves as shareholders and invest in the success of the system, the ultimate goal of change will be evident (Fullen, 2006).

**Professional Learning Communities**

The ability for teachers to have a collective, collaborative, and sustained group of people who promote and support their shared vision can have a drastic and positive effect on student learning. Professional learning communities are a way to build capacity for sustained change in the abilities of teachers to more effectively engage with one another which, in turn, positively affects their abilities to engage with students. When
professional learning communities are structured well, they can be teams that constantly work collaboratively and work for the best interest of students.

Though no fixed characteristics are present on definitions of professional learning communities, Stoll et al. (2005) identified eight characteristics of a well-functioning professional learning community: shared values and vision, collective responsibility for student learning, collaborative focused on learning, group as well as individual professional learning, reflective professional enquiry, openness, networks, and partnerships, inclusive membership, mutual trust, respect, and support. These facets combine to foster a community which sustains and guides school community professionals as they learn from experiences that can be used to promote “the collective purpose of enhancing pupil learning” (Stoll et al., 2005, p. 1). It is clear how professional learning communities could be so beneficial for the promotion of transformative learning in schools, especially low-resource priority schools where educators may not have many resources for their own development.

Different ways are present in which professional learning communities can be effective, but one of the characteristics of a professional learning community that best fosters change is one that supports learning using innovation and experimentation. This support is also linked to enhanced student outcomes, especially in areas where there are more priority schools. Rosenholtz (1989) and Louis and Marks (1998) determined that higher student achievement was present in schools that implement professional learning communities. Professional learning communities are in line with the concept of collective responsibility and collaboration and also shared values and mutual respect and support,
exist in professional learning communities. These type of enhanced student outcomes are very achievable when a school utilizes this type of system for its educators.

The advantages of implementing professional learning communities are easy enough to understand, but the question of obtaining the will, motivation, interest, and action to implement them is less straightforward. In fact, it is very important for principals to share in the leadership and decision making involved in professional learning communities, to make members feel that they are being democratically represented in the community. A supportive and collaborative principal can make all the difference of a professional learning community (Hord, 1997). Because principals and other types of administrative leaders are usually looked at as being out of the classroom and not as involved with teaching students, thereby limiting their power for driving change. Therefore, it makes sense that their direct support of and involvement in professional learning communities can have a positive effect.

Some professional learning communities do not only exist within one school, but between a number of schools in and out of the district. One example presented by Hord (1997) was of mathematics teachers from several schools across the district who collaborated in a professional learning community manner that enhanced mathematics teaching and achievement. This type of collaboration would also benefit from strong administrative leadership between schools, for many of the same reasons as in-school professional learning communities.

In 16 Southern states, more than half of Grade 8 students scored Basic or Below Basic on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2011 (Nash et al., 2011). Educational leaders from states worked together to transform their schools to improve
student performance. From this collaboration, the educational leaders started a Middle Grades Leadership Academy. The middle school academies focused on the following five areas: (a) focus on direction, (b) build a powerful organization, (c) give life to data, (d) ensure student-focused vision and action, (e) lead learning (Ash & Hodge, 2012: Ash, Hodges, & Connell, 2013).

The faculty, staff, and community were involved with building a community of learners and supporters. The leaders set expectations “by setting directions-charting a clear course that the faculty, staff, and community would understand” (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 3). As a result, student learning increased due to collegial conversations that focused on effective instruction. In addition, the collaboration of faculty, staff, and community created a positive school culture.

When leaders share a variety of student data, it helps identify concerns with student progress (Knapp et al., 2006). Qualitative and quantitative data about professional practices for academic improvement can produce productive conversations and lead to problem solving among stakeholders (Nash, 2014). When having conversations with parent groups, faculty, and staff concerning the performance of students as it relates to instructional practices, it is helpful for all involved to understand data analysis. “In the hands of a skilled leader, data becomes a tool or focusing on professional learning on the improvement of daily practice” (Knapp et al., 2006, p. 12).

The improvement of student learning needs a collaborative environment and culture that includes “spare time, access to new ideas, an expertise” (Fullan, 2001, pp. 64-65). High level of student learning happens when school leaders protect time, provide resources, and support staff by developing and maintain a focus on the improvement of
instructional strategies. By providing routine schedules for staff to collaborate to plan lessons and provide time to analyze students’ work, leaders are promoting student-centered practices (Ash et al., 2013).

It is great to have a staff who understand the importance of being a life-long learner. Leaders can model this expectation by providing scheduled time and resources for staff to collaborate, reflect on student learning, and learn instructional practices. If barriers are present for improving student learning, leaders can overcome them by challenging and supporting their staff to be innovative (Ash et al., 2013).

Although billions of dollars have been invested in the implementation of school improvement practices by supplemental funding (United States Department of Education, 2016), mixed reviews are present when it comes to student outcomes from districts and schools. Fuller et al. (2007) referred to the mixed reviews as a “jagged mountain range, erratically moving up and down as tests are changed and proficiency bars are moved” (p. 268). The mixed results of student outcomes are due to the traditional implementation of school improvement with a school-by-school approach and without involvement of the larger school system - central office staff. The gap that exists between funding school improvement and student outcomes could be a result of the lack of consistency in programs and level of support among schools even in the same district.

A conceptual model provided by the social network analysis visualizes the collaboration within a system and a look at the capacity that central office provides to support school improvement (Borgatti & Ofen, 2010; Scott, 2000; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Several researchers concluded that participation and support from central office is essential to developing high-quality teaching, which supports school improvement.
Mania-Singer (2017) conducted a study about the relationship between the members of district central office and principals of elementary schools. The high-performing school principals received more support and resources from central office members than the principals of low-performing schools. In addition, principals from high-performing schools served on more district level committees and had more of a two-way relationship with central office staff.

Members from the district’s central office shared that they have a strong focus on data and encourage schools to use data to make school improvement decisions. Yet principals stated that they only receive spreadsheets of data from central office and that it takes a large amount of time to make sense of the data. In summary, the researchers confirmed that the relationship between district central office and principals was distance (Mania-Singer, 2017). Principals of higher performing schools had more opportunities to participate in decision-making and provide feedback to central office staff, than principals from lower performing schools. The lack of participation from principals of low-performing schools hinders the efforts to improve schools.

Implementing and sustaining professional learning communities is hard work (Defour, n.d.). School leaders should guide their staff to focus on learning rather that teaching. In addition, staff should work collaboratively on issues related to learning, and hold all staff accountable for results that will lead to school improvement. Educators should focus hard to implement these principals for the improvement of student learning. The success of professional learning communities depends on the commitment and persistence of the school staff within it (Defour, n.d.).
Educational Policies on School Improvement

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act was created to replace No Child Left Behind in an effort to improve upon the prior act’s shortcomings. The Every Student Succeeds Act intended to provide equitable, comprehensive education to all K-12 students while giving school districts and state governments greater control over the direction of their schools’ individual reforms (Knight, 2019). The Every Student Succeeds Act sought to create a comprehensive system which could holistically measure the progress of a given underperforming school and aimed to empower the state governments by allowing them to set their own standards of student success. The Every Student Succeeds Act allowed school districts to create new metrics of student success which more accurately demonstrated progress (Knight, 2019).

To address diversity of needs, the Every Student Succeeds Act allowed every state applying for funding with an option to design their own achievement plan. This process meant that states could address whatever set of issues they could argue most affected their state’s educational obstacles, provided they could create data driven evidence of improvement needed (Herman et al., 2016). States were able to keep their success standards in areas such as reading proficiency, math proficiency, college readiness, and graduation rates; they were also allowed to identify improvements in school climate and safety as indicators of scholastic improvement. In exchange for a self-directed plan, states had to identify the bottom-performing 15% of their school’s base on assessment data; those schools then had to enact a state-approved intervention program in order to receive additional funding (Federal Register, 2016). These interventions were placed on a 4-tiered scale of effectiveness. Tier 1 interventions possessed strong evidence
of effectiveness whereas Tier 4 interventions were expected to improve student outcomes, but generally lacked an evidence base to suggest their effectiveness (Federal Register, 2016). Tier 4 interventions were often understood as easy to implement but less likely to demonstrate effects, allowing educational leaders to enact more involved reforms (Knight, 2019). However, schools with limited resources, usually those schools in the bottom-performing 15%, lack the finances, manpower, and knowledge base to implement a state-selected intervention program (Herman et al., 2016).

Educators are encouraged to use “evidence based” strategies for school improvement under the Every Student Succeeds Act policy. In 2018, two surveys were administered to all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and to representatives of 713 school districts, as part of the Study of Implementation of Title 1 and Title II Program Initiatives (Wei & Johnson, 2020). Both surveys included questions to provide data use to recognize evidence-based school improvement. Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, evidence-based means for the following: (a) strong evidence from well-designed and well-implemented experimental study, (b) moderate evidence of a well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study, (c) promising evidence from a well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias, and (d) demonstrate a rationale based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation of likelihood to improve student outcomes or other relevant outcomes, including ongoing efforts to examine effects (ESSA, n.d.). Wei and Johnson (2020) reported several findings from their study.

The first finding was that a majority of the states with low-performing schools implemented evidence-based strategies (Wei & Johnson, 2020). Overall, 49 states
promoted at least one of the number of approaches to promote evidence-based improvement strategies. Almost all states that applied for school improvement funds included evidence-based strategies as part of their improvement plan. Another finding was that one-third of the districts and schools partnered with federal technical assistance centers. Technical assistance vendors provided trainings and materials for more than half of the districts, which majority of districts, 89%, rated evidence of effectiveness as ‘very important’ when selecting school improvement strategies based on federal support. In addition, one of the most important findings from the study was that school improvement was the best guidance when provided from the state or the technical assistance centers from each state (Wei & Johnson, 2020). Understanding how the federal government, states, and districts support schools through providing substantial evidence-based practices is important. The knowledge of best practices that support school districts will help educators develop research-based plans for individual school improvement.

Struggling students are often poorly advocated for under the Every Student Succeeds Act. While the aforementioned No Child Left Behind Act data results are extremely useful tools for identifying achievement gaps in different geographic and demographic context, this data aggregation has led to the utilization of super subgroups, in which catch-all solutions are created for several different demographic classifications at the same time. State government officials may argue that data allows districts to provide more comprehensive support for a larger group of students, mass identification of students as at-risk prevents administrators from identifying and addressing particular demographic trends (Federal Register, 2016). Contracted by this practice is the original purpose of education reform, which is to find ways to accommodate students from all
demographic backgrounds. Classroom differentiation under the Every Student Succeeds Act is often decreasingly individualized (Young et al., 2017). State and local superintendents who accept the Every Student Succeeds Act money are expected to create a tiered system of identification and differentiation protocol for students with challenges and disabilities, many leaders have neglected this requirement altogether (Lee, 2018).

In this time of school improvement, it is essential for policymakers to transition from the two-component framework shaping school reform policy to the three-component framework for improving schools (Adelman & Taylor, 2011). The two-component framework includes direct facilitation of learning and governance and resource management. The three-component framework includes direct facilitation and governance, resource management, and learning supports to address barriers to learning and teaching. In implementing the third component, districts and schools have the ability to combine all interventions addressing barriers to learning and teaching and initiate efforts to engage students who have become disconnected. In addition, district and school leaders have the ability to establish efforts to invite home and community resources to assist with systematic gaps.

Many states are adopting the three-component framework policy and refer to the third component as learning supports (Adelman & Taylor, 2011). Learning supports include strategies, resources, physical, social, emotional, and intellectual practices. The purpose of learning supports is to ensure that all children have an equal opportunity to succeed in school.
Title I Funding

Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is a grant method for providing additional funding to schools that have high numbers of students (at least 40%) from low-income families (USDOE, 2018). These schools are known as Title 1 schools, where this additional funding is used to provide support for all students, in the hopes of helping the lowest-achieving students succeed (USDOE, 2018). The allocation of funding for Title 1 schools is also dependent on its relationship with funding received from sources such as the state and city, where funding is only distributed after equal distribution of funds from these other sources and compared to non-Title 1 schools (USDOE, 2018). During the 2015-2016 school year, Title 1 funds were used in more than 55,906 public schools and served more than 26 million children (USDOE, 2018).

Beneficial outcomes of Title 1 funding have been somewhat disputed in the literature, though researchers have obtained evidence that, when properly used, Title 1 funding can have positive effects on low-performing schools (Kainz, 2018). An increase in reading scores has been established for African American students in high poverty schools that used Title 1 funding for reducing class sizes. African American and Latinx students in these schools made gains in mathematics scores in those schools that used Title 1 funding for professional development (Kainz, 2018). An issue with these results is in their universal applicability, or lack thereof. For example, an attempt in California to mandate class size reduction was unsuccessful, due to various issues, including teacher availability, severely limited the potential of academic changes for underperforming students (Kainz, 2018). Therefore, Title 1 funds can create positive change in academic
outcomes when paired with other interventions, including teacher staffing and training and awareness of economic inequality gaps.

Title 1 schools, as stated above, are designated by their proportion of low-performing students, who largely come from low-income families. Extensive research has been done on interventions and issues which can have transformational or detrimental effects on Title 1 schools, specifically targeting low-performing, high-risk students. MacMahon (2011) explored some of these interventions and issues in a Title 1 school in the Florida panhandle, especially the role of administrative turnover, testing paradigms, and teacher training and salary. Administrative turnover is very common in Title 1 schools, and in this specific study, was detrimental to school climate. The administrative team in this school was comprised of different staff for four consecutive years, highlighting the need for administrative teams to have time to implement change (MacMahon, 2011). The focus of minimal testing scores is also harmful to schools and the administrative team, as it places undue pressure on school leaders which are both hard to achieve in a short period of time and narrow in scope.

MacMahon (2011) recommended “shifting” from testing paradigms to inclusive multicultural education that honors students’ identities” (p. 210). Lastly, teacher salaries are a major issue in all schools, but notably with Title 1 schools, as salaries tend to be lower and attract less experienced teachers. Although raising teacher salaries is not a perfect solution to this problem, it can help attract experienced and high-quality teachers who can have large effects on student achievement. Teachers should also be able to receive professional development to affect meaningful change for students.
Though Title 1 funding can aid under-performing schools in meeting transformational goals for students, it is not the be-all-end all for change. Other interventions should be considered in addition to using Title 1 funds, including class size, administrative turnover, teacher salaries, teacher development, and multicultural education. These factors can all contribute to meaningful change in Title 1 schools.

Teachers can, understandably, have a strong influence on the outcome of students, especially in under-performing schools. Commonly said is that great teachers can make a difference, but teachers need support from other levels of administration in order to be able to exert sway in outcomes of students. Appropriate pay, supportive administration, and classroom size all play a role in the ability of teachers to improve student outcomes as well as for administrators to retain their teaching staff, which is another important facet of improvement in all schools, but especially in Title 1 schools. Similarly, Title 1 schools have an unequal distribution of quality teachers compared to affluent schools, as well as higher pupil-to-teacher ratios, which both have negative effects on student outcomes.

The comparability provision in Title 1 funding, which allows for average district salaries for teachers rather than actual salary to be reported, creates issues with teacher staffing because of an unequal reporting and distribution of funds for teacher salaries. Uneven distribution of funding often results from the use of average district salaries rather than actual labor costs; for instance, a school that employs Teach for America teachers (often Title 1 schools) can employ those teachers for significantly less cost than another school which employs teachers with master’s degree, but this scenario does not correspond to higher funding for this salary discrepancy (Rivera-Rodas, 2019). The
hiring of inexperienced teachers with lower salaries places Title 1 schools at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to other schools in the same district, because the “loophole” exacerbates funding differences in relation to experience or education level of educators. In addition, because of these differences in teacher salaries, novice teachers often end up in Title 1 schools, where their experience corresponds to an extent with their pay, and experienced teachers end up in more affluent schools, further widening the gap between teacher competency and outcomes within districts (Rivera-Rodas, 2019). Though simply paying teachers more does not equate to an instantaneous fix with teacher staffing issues, decreasing the pay gap between disadvantaged and affluent schools can improve outcomes by attracting educators who have more experience, education, or both to disadvantaged schools.

**Inequality and the Need for a Positive School Climate**

As the prevalence of low-income students is the basis for Title 1 funding, it logically follows that economic inequities inherently affect the students enrolled in Title 1 schools; economic inequities and racial discrimination are common factors that influence students and student outcomes (Kohli et al., 2017). Historically and due to economic structures in the United States, economic inequalities have predominantly affected people of color. Students of color are most likely to experience racial discrimination, which often corresponds with their low-income background. They have less faith in their school system and perform worse in typically measured outcomes (Kainz, 2018). When students feel a lack of investment in them, they are less likely to invest themselves into their educational outcomes.
Hope et al. (2014) examined racial discrimination and inequity through the experiences of eight Black high school students. These students, as many Black students do, evaluated their experiences of racism and inequity in schools through a complex lens. The students in this study felt, for instance, the desire for an egalitarian approach to their education- one that embraces diversity rather than one that shoves it under a rug, as it was. One student reported “that the curriculum is insufficient in terms of exposure to racially diverse history within the curriculum and how multicultural education is integrated into instruction” (Hope et al., 2014, p. 16). Students felt that the lack of including of racially diverse history and social studies was a “missed opportunity” for schools and teachers to prove their commitment to racial including, which is another important factor in student outcomes (Hope et al., 2014). These Black students also readily experienced inequitable disciplinary practices, where they were less often given the benefit of the doubt compared to their White peers, which was irrespective of teachers’ own racial background.

Not all educational racism and inequity is overt in nature. Kohli et al. (2017) examined some of the more subtle racist structures in K-12 education and emphasized the importance of not glossing over issues of race simply because they are not as prominent. For example, though racial slurs may be rarer in formal educational relationships between teachers and students, racial discrimination such as microaggression, or aforementioned, punishment disparities are still very common, especially in Title 1 schools (Kohli et al., 2017). The value of establishing a positive school culture including recognition and valuation of racial diversity, cannot be overstated. Positive school culture toward students of color in Title 1 schools can have a large effect on student engagement and satisfaction,
and in turn, student outcomes (Kohli et al., 2017). These students include Black, Latinx, and indigenous populations—those groups who are most likely to have issues with subtle racial discrimination and racial inequity within their schools. Ensuring the comfort and inclusivity of all students is vital in student satisfaction and student outcomes. For Title 1 schools that have a large proportion of low-income students of color, fostering this positive environment can establish a collective culture of support and acceptance, which then translates to better academic and non-academic student outcomes.

The learning environment is a critical role in the ability for children to learn. Students need a positive school climate where they feel safe and a sense of belonging and trust (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). A positive school climate improves academic achievement, state assessment scores, grades, and student engagement. Teachers, school leaders, and district leaders need to develop relationships by creating school and classroom structures. Each year, 16 million U.S. children encounter child abuse, homelessness, neglect, hunger, death of parent, or violence in the community (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Teachers need time and opportunity to build positive relationships with students, recognize the needs of each student, provide help as needed, and build a bridge between the school and home. Schools should provide personalized school structures for each student in order to secure positive relationships for all students.

Darling-Hammond and DePaoli (2020) shared the following principles of practice that provide a positive school climate. Teachers and students are able to build positive relationships when students are grouped in smaller teams. When students work in smaller classroom settings, it builds community and decreases the risk of failure. Small group instruction provides the opportunity for the implementation of advisory systems.
Advisory systems give teachers the opportunity to advise, advocate, and assist with students’ academic, social, and emotional development. Looping is a strategy in which teachers stay with the same students for more than one school year. This strategy allows teachers to maintain consistent and positive relationship with students and parents. It also allows the teacher to gain a deeper understanding of their students. Parent engagement is another principle that helps to build a positive school climate. Parents need to be seen as valued partners in the school. This practice helps schools and families have stronger connections. Throughout the school year, ongoing exchanges need to occur between home and school. Time should be scheduled for teachers to conduct home visits, make positive phone calls to parents, and be available for student-teacher-parent conferences in a flexible schedule.

A fundamental approach to support school improvement begins with a positive school climate (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). The heart of strong schools lies in the educator’s abilities to forge a strong relationship with students (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). Educator practices and policies should include the understanding and importance for every student to receive a safe and supportive learning environment.

Bronfenbrenner (1995) ecological systems theory views the development of a child as a complex system of relationships from multiple relationships that range from the settings of family and school to cultural values, laws, and customs. In order to understand the development of a child, it is important to look at the child’s immediate environment as well as the child’s interaction with a larger environment. Bronfenbrenner (1995) developed five environment development system. The five systems include the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem.
The microsystem is the most influential level of the ecological system. The microsystem setting contains the development child, such as family and school (Bronfenbrenner, 1995).

**School Improvement in Texas**

State educational leaders are permitted by the Every Student Succeeds Act to make decisions on student achievement, looking beyond test scores as the only factor to determine the performance of a school. According to Lee (2018), states have control to create their own education plan while following federal government guidelines. The plan must include a description for annual assessments. The state assessment guideline includes reading and mathematics assessments for Grades 3-8 and high school. Students are also required to take a science test in elementary, middle, and high school. It is mandatory for states to provide accommodations on these tests and document any accommodations in the students’ IEP or 504 plans. Students with cognitive disabilities are given an alternate test. Only 1% of students can take an alternate test (Lee, 2018).

The Texas Education Agency released the Texas’ state plan in the fall of 2016. The strategic plan was developed by conducting extensive research and engagement from stakeholders. Texas’ plan included four strategic priorities and three enablers that serve as the foundation of Texas Education Agency and the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

The U.S. Department of Education reviewed Texas’ proposed plan and reported the presence of problems. Texas continued to place a heavy focus on student assessments in elementary and middle school. One of the Every Student Succeeds Act provisions is for states to use measures from the School Quality/School Success indicator with regard
to school accountability. The measures included educator/student engagement, school
climate, and school safety. The Texas plan was focused on student performance with the
State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness test only. The indicators of
performance were the number of students who met Approaches, Meets, and Mastery
levels. Texas decided to not include the other measures and that the only focused measure
would be elementary and middle school students’ performance of the state assessment.
Therefore, elementary and middle school accountability was based only on student
performance on the state test, which excluded other factors (“Texas revised ESSA, 2018).

Despite these shortfalls, the Texas’ Every Student Succeeds Act plan outlined
rigorous goals that were achievable for all student groups. In addition, low-performing
schools would receive additional support and interventions to help with school
improvement. In 2018, Betsy DeVos, U.S. Secretary of Education, announced the
approval of Texas’ Every Student Succeeds Act plan (U.S. Department of Education,
2018).

Malfaro (2016), former president of the Texas American Federation of Teachers,
stated that ESSA “will give Texas plenty of flexibility to create something that focuses on
struggling students instead of labeling them as failures and prescribing punishments”
(para. 12). The Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System and the Texas Principal
Evaluation and Support System includes the reporting of student growth as a measure of
the appraisal system. One of the measures of ESSA is student growth, but it is not
mandated that the form of student growth is only student annual assessments. The
implementation of the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System and the Texas
Principal Evaluation and Support System in school districts in Texas will be “without the burden of federal interference” (para.5).

Educational leaders in Texas are developing an innovative approach to achieve school improvement. The Systems of Great Schools initiative was launched in 2017 by the Texas Education Agency. The new initiative requires school districts to “reimagine” their plans for school improvement (Opalka et al., 2019). Some of the new programs and policies that are encouraged for school districts to implement are the following: (a) develop a system of great schools by pairing participating school districts with an experienced executive advisor who will assist with the district plan and execute the Systems of Great Schools strategy; (b) pair school districts with charter schools to create new schools and turnaround low-performing schools; (c) implement a School Action Fund that will allow school districts to create a new school, replicate a successful school, restart a struggling school, and reassign students; (d) the Texas Education Agency may sanction school districts that oversee low-performing schools in addition to restarting a school and appointing new members to the local school board; (e) school districts and charter schools will have the availability to develop a plan to evaluate their schools with the approval of the Texas Education Agency; and (f) provide trainings to “governing leaders” such as school board members and the superintendent. Participants will focus on their role on improving student outcomes through a five-point framework (Opalka et al., 2019).

The Every Student Succeeds Act allows states to have flexibility to create their own school improvement strategies. To achieve student success, state educators should seek new initiatives for improvement. State education leaders in Texas are developing a
plan to achieve meaningful improvement in schools (Opalka et al., 2019). The focus of the Systems of Great Schools initiative is on the transformation for districts to improve schools. In this initiative, districts are required to seek innovative ways to manage school performance, provide a variety of school choice options, and to take an effective approach to managing all schools in the district.

Four levers for school improvement were identified in the Systems of Great Schools (Opalka et al., 2019). The first lever is managing school performance by holding schools accountable to a school performance framework that is locally crafted. The purpose of the performance framework is to identify what success looks like for students and communicate the results to members in the community. The expectation is for districts to use this framework to evaluate the performance of schools each year. The evaluation would then be used to drive strategic actions to increase the number of low-performing schools to top-rated schools.

The second lever identified in the Great Schools Initiative is to increase the number of high-quality schools. A “Call for Quality Schools” is expected from district leaders to administrator annually. The lowest performing schools are staffed with new leadership and enrollment is increased in high-performing schools to serve more students.

The next lever is improving access to options. Districts under the Systems of Great Schools are expected to provide families with public school options, allowing students to enroll in a high-quality school of choice. The last lever is creating new organizational structures. Central office staff members are expected to support the reform for school improvement. School districts are required to develop an Office of Innovation that takes the lead in reallocating staffing in the district and authorizing and reviewing financial
policies (Opalka et al., 2019). School districts are expected to change the way they operate. Districts should stop managing instruction in schools and refocus on efforts to manage school performance, provide support to families that would like to participate with school choice, and ensure a variety of school options are present that will continue improvement in the community.

**The Teaching Profession**

The role of the principal has transformed from a manager to an instructional leader with a strong focus on accountability, student achievement, and school improvement (Cieminski, 2018). Several states and school district leaders focus on the issue of principal workforce trends; however, little attention has been placed on succession planning within schools (Hargraves & Fink, 2016; Mascall et al., 2011). Succession planning is a long-term approach to achieving the present and future needs of an organization for the mission and objectives to meet expectations.

In 2016, the State Board of Educator Certification adopted new standards for school principals. The new standards focus on the role of the principal, with an emphasis on instructional leadership. The Texas Education Agency partnered with principal preparation programs to certify Texas principals with a new test framework and new test instrument (Texas Education Agency, 2021). The need for new standards is necessary due to the critical role of the principal as an instructional leader. An effective instructional leader should have the skills to coach and develop teachers, to develop and lead professional development, to engage with the school community, and to strategically solve problems. Principals will be better prepared as instructional leaders by having a
strong knowledge of the new State Board for Educator Certification principal standards (Hoover, 2019).

Cieminski (2018) conducted a study into succession practices in five Colorado school districts with high principal turnover rates. Her research questions were centered on succession practices and principal retention. One of her findings was the importance of relationships between teachers and principals. Principals stressed the input from stakeholders, especially the valuable input from teachers. The teachers present in the study stated that principals must care about their staff and students. It is important for the teacher and principal to have a positive relationship. School district leaders also shared that school leaders must be leaders who people will follow (Cieminski, 2018). Leaders in the school district shared characteristics of their school district that attributed to retaining principals. Having strong community support and a positive reputation was important. Another contribution to high principal retention was training current and future leaders. The ability to empower teachers as leaders was important to principals. Another factor for principal retention was supportive relationships between principals and their supervisors (Cieminski, 2018). Supervisors who focused on the professional growth of the principal transitioned them from serving as managers to developing instructional leaders.

Recently, a longitudinal case study on school improvement policies was conducted. A new leadership paradigm is emerging among beginning principals (Hefferman, 2018). Beginning principals’ responses to mandated policies and requirements are different than principals with longer experience in the role. The majority of new principals who participated with this study were “compliance driven” and had a short-term focus on school improvement (Hefferman, 2018). Beginning principals
urgently want and need solutions for school improvement. The need for school improvement has been identified as a quick fix that will result in a rapid academic improvement in school data (Hefferman, 2018). Beginning principals are monitoring and reacting to school data instead of having the skills to implement long-term programs and plans for continuous improvement. The requirements for new principals to focus on school improvement have added pressure to the role of the coachable principal, which has led to a desperation for solutions to improve school data quickly. New principals do not want to be viewed as asking for support; instead, they want to be seen as independently successful against system metrics (Hefferman, 2018).

**Summary**

Provided in this chapter was a review of the existing research literature on school improvement. Described in the overview of school improvement was a variety of school improvement strategies that led to improving student achievement at low-performing schools. Several researchers explained why the role of the principal is critical in school improvement, as well as best practices in turning an at-risk school to an excellent school. Furthermore, the need for professional development and professional learning communities is a powerful approach and a potent strategy for school change. Educational policies on school improvement includes specific goals, measurable goals, and evaluations of the school’s interventions for student success. Researchers also explained how the use of Title 1 funding helped close the achievement gaps and enable the students to meet the needs of challenging state academic standards. Last, the need of a positive school climate to promote a supportive academic environment for students and staff was
discussed. Chapter Three includes the description of methodology that were used to answer the research questions.
CHAPTER III

Method

Research Questions

The following research questions guided my study: (a) What written school improvement strategies were shared in leadership books on school improvement?; (b) What roles were identified that a principal should focus on for school improvement?; (c) What school climate activities were present to improve the academic performance of a campus?; (d) What teacher retention activities were cited related toward school improvement; and (e) What activities were mentioned related to professional learning communities meeting with staff?

Research Design

In this study, a quantitative content analysis was used to identify common school improvement strategies that are shared in school leadership books. Content analysis is a method of research for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest of content of communication (Berelson, 1952). A content analysis study typically has several parts. The parts include developing a hypothesis or research question defining the content to be analyzed, sampling the media content, selecting units of coding, develop a coding scheme, assigning each occurrence of unit in the sample to a code in the coding scheme, and counting the occurrences of the coded units and report the frequencies. The communication can be written, visual, or spoken and includes books, newspapers, presentations, videos, and official document. Content analysis can be used at any state of a project, but it is particularly useful at the beginning to help analysts learn about the project’s substantive area.
Role of Researcher

I have been an educator for the past 26 years in the public sector. During those years, I was an elementary principal for seven years and a middle school principal for three years. Both of these campuses were low-performing before I started my role as principal at each campus. While serving as principal for 10 years, the district scores and state ratings improved for both campuses. Out of 24 Title 1 campuses in my district, my elementary campus was the only one with an “Exemplary” rating and was also recognized as a “National Title 1 Distinguished School.” I am interested in investigating “school improvement” due to the increasing demands of accountability and to provide research-based strategies that will help future administrators. Due to my years of experience with “turn around” schools, it is important to make sure I am not biased with my study.

My role as the researcher is to identify school improvement strategies that are shared in school leadership books. I selected 10 school improvement books for school leaders. My next step was to develop a coding scheme, start the coding process, and analyze the frequency counts of common school improvement strategies to summarize the findings. Lastly, I shared my findings with school leaders and districts with low-performing schools.

Selection of Participants

The first step of the content analysis involved identifying books that match the topic on school improvement. The researcher searched for school improvement books that were available to educators in Fort Bend ISD’s Professional Library. The researcher also checked the availability of school improvement books in the Newton Gresham
Library at Sam Houston State University. Once books were identified, the researcher selected books that were published from 1992-2011. In addition, the researcher reviewed the table of contents and index of each book to determine the presence of direct references to professional development, teacher retention, professional learning communities, the role of the principal, and funding. Once a list of books was identified, the researcher checked the availability of the books for immediate check-out or interlibrary loan. Next, this researcher analyzed the books in various phases that helped ensure reliability. The researcher developed a rubric to conduct a page-by-page analysis and score each book. School improvement books with the highest scores were selected as part of the content analysis research. This content analysis includes 10 school improvement books as part of the research.

**Rationale for the Selection of School Improvement Books for School Leaders**

A total of 10 books were selected to conduct the content analysis research. The first book the researcher selected is titled *Leadership Capacity for Lasting School Improvement* written by Linda Lambert (2003). This book was selected because the author shares her discussions with educators to get their view of leadership enhancement techniques in practice. The second school improvement book selected is titled *The Learning Leader: How to Focus School Improvement for Better Results* by Douglas B. Reeves (2020). Douglas B. Reeves introduced the Leadership for Learning Framework, which helps school leaders reconceptualize their roles in the school improvement process and how to serve their students through motivation.

The next book selected on school improvement is titled *The Data Toolkit: Ten Tools for Supporting School Improvement* by Robert Hess and Pam Robbins (2011). The
“Data Toolkit” provides tools that can be implemented in a timely manner and facilitated problem-solving at the classroom, school, and district level. In the school improvement book *Align the Design: A Blueprint for School Improvement* written by Ann Mausbach and Nancy Mooney (2012), the authors introduced the core processes that are essential for school improvement efforts. Ann Mausbach shared the “power tools” a school leader should have to be successful. The next book selected is titled *Connecting Teacher Leadership and School Improvement* by Joseph Murphy (2005). Explored in this book were core concepts of teacher leadership and the second part can be used to show educators how to establish the contest in the school to cultivate and support teacher leaders. Some of the topics covered in the book is the role of the lead teacher and cultivating teacher leadership through professional development.

*Enhancing Student Achievement- A Framework for School Improvement* was written by Charlotte Murphy (2002). The book is divided into three sections. Introduced in Section 1, the Four Cycles are used to define the criteria for school improvement. A framework is provided in Section 2 for improving schools. Guidelines are presented in Section 3 for the reader on how to implement the framework using action planning.

Richard Sagor wrote *Guiding School Improvement with Action Results* (2002). In this book, the author explored the process for improving teaching and learning in classrooms from all levels. The book may be used as a guide for educators through the action research process. The next book selected is titled *Reframing Teacher Leadership to Improve Your School* by Douglas Reeves (2008). Reeves proposed a new framework to promote effective change efforts through teacher leadership that can help improve student achievement and educational equity. The school improvement book titled *Improving
Achievement in Low-Performing Schools was written by Randolph Ward and Mary Ann Burke (2004). In this book, the authors provided steps to overcome low performance. In addition, they shared how school leaders can create a school culture that supports the goals for student achievement and expects the same standards for all students.

The last book selected is titled The Keys to Effective Schools: Educational Reform as Continuous Improvement by Willis Hawley (2006). Hawley’s book includes exemplary practices on teaching and learning for a multicultural society, narrowing the achievement gap, and continuous school improvement. Overall, the author’s primary message is how to change a school’s organizational structure and culture to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

**Instrumentation**

Berelson (1952) noted that content analysis is a research method for objective, systematic, and quantitative description. Content analysis is counting what can be seen to create categories to analyze from speech, text, or screen. Six steps were followed as I conduct my content analysis on school improvement strategies that are shared in school leadership books: (a) formulate the research questions; (b) decide on units of analysis; (c) develop a sample plan; (d) construct coding categories; (e) coding and intercoder reliability check; and (f) data collection and analysis (Neuman, 2011).

**Data Collection**

After this study was approved by this researcher’s doctoral committee, an application was submitted to the Sam Houston State University Institutional Review Board. Once approval was received from the Institutional Review Board, the content analysis process commenced. The first step of the content analysis involved conducting a
search to help identify educational leadership books on school improvement. Once each book was read and school improvement strategies were identified, the researcher started listing each school improvement strategy identified in each book, noting the total number of school improvement strategies identified in each book. Once school improvement strategies were collected, the researcher started organizing the collected data.

**Data Analysis**

The unit of analysis was common words and phrases from educational leadership books on school improvement. Once I collected the information from educational leadership books, next I conducted a reliability check by implementing a percent agreement, by pairing with another coder to discuss coding decisions. Once coding was completed, I looked for patterns and drew conclusions in response to my research questions.

**Validity**

Content analysis research should speak as truthful as possible (Riffe et al., 1998). According to Krippendorff (2019), “a content analysis is valid if the inferences drawn from the available text withstand the test of independently available evidence, of separate observations, of competing theories of interpretations, or of being able to inform successful actions” (p. 361). The researcher implemented various verification strategies to ensure that the research is valid. The first validity strategy for the researcher to ensure that the method of research reflects the type, format, and depth of data that was collected to answer the research questions. The second validity strategy was to ensure that the school improvement strategies shared in the school leadership books provided an adequate number of responses and can answer the research questions. The researcher
checked for validity by starting at the beginning of the research and when the data are collected. In addition, the researcher ensured that the method and measurement procedure is of quality and was targeted to measure what the researcher was seeking to know.

**Reliability**

Johnston and Christensen (2020) stated that reliability refers to the stability and consistency of a set of data. This content analysis study involves the coding of school improvement strategies from school improvement books for school leaders. Reliability was addressed by making sure the categories for coding are clear. Two coders assisted this researcher. A code book was created when the researcher works through the narrative and code the improvement strategies to theoretical reasoning. The collection of data, coding of data, and interpretation of data was be made by the researcher. Data were recoded by this researcher to verify that the final coding is consistent. To address reliability for this study, the researcher shared the results of the study with a colleague from the cohort. In addition, the researcher shared results with a school improvement officer from the researcher’s school district.

**Objectivity**

Payne and Payne (2004) stated that objectivity is the demand for researchers to be distant from what they study so that the findings will depend on the nature of what was investigated, instead of on the personality, beliefs, and values of the researcher. In addition, given that the research methodology and design is a quantitative content analysis to identify the number of common school improvement strategies that were shared in educational leadership books, I was able to assess what patterns naturally
emerged without interfering directly. In this manner, the results can be non-biased. To avoid any possible bias, I maintained a neutral stance.

Summary

The purpose of this dissertation was to determine the most common school improvement strategies that are shared in educational leadership books about school improvement. A quantitative content analysis was conducted for this study and involved the analysis of school improvement strategies that are shared in educational leadership books on school improvement. Dependent variables for this study were school improvement strategies. Independent variables were 10 books on school improvement. The researcher examined the most common school improvement strategies that are shared with school leaders by collecting and coding the data. Once data were coded, the researcher identified the most common school improvement strategies that are shared with school leaders into categories. The researcher checked for reliability to ensure that the measuring procedure produces the same results after several repeated trials. In addition, the researcher checked the validity of the results by implementing various verifications strategies to ensure that the research is valid. The researcher’s final step was to write the scope and nature of the research and share the findings with readers. Findings from this research investigation should be of value to educational leaders and to school administrators.
CHAPTER IV

Results

Presented in this chapter are the research findings, which involved a content analysis of the school improvement data collected from 10 school improvement books for school leaders. Data and findings were keywords that identified and described the most school improvement strategies from 10 school improvement books. The 10 selected school improvement books were published between 1992 and 2011. The keywords that were counted in each book were professional development, teacher retention, professional learning communities, funding, and school climate. In addition, the researcher also collected additional school improvement strategies that were recommended for schools and districts to implement for school improvement. Findings were organized by each of the five research questions. Data were reported in narrative form and the word count of each school improvement strategy from the 10 school improvement books was reported in tables.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine school improvement strategies that were recommended to improve the academics of a campus, shifting from low performing to academic success.

Research Questions

In this doctoral dissertation, the following research questions were addressed: (a) What written school improvement strategies were shared in leadership books on school improvement?; (b) What roles were identified that a principal should focus on for school improvement?; (c) What school climate activities were present to improve the academic
performance of a campus?; (d) What teacher retention activities were cited related toward school improvement?; and (e) What activities were mentioned related to professional learning communities meeting with staff?

**Method**

The literature used to collect data for this study were 10 leadership books on school improvement, an excel spreadsheet to document the number of strategies from each book, and a code book to identify common themes. The process for collecting data allowed the researcher to analyze the five identified school improvement strategies for this research: professional development, teacher retention, professional learning communities, funding, and school climate. The researcher analyzed the most common identified school improvements shared and the least amount of identified school improvement strategies shared in the 10 leadership books. In addition, the researcher analyzed themes and commonalities among all 10 school improvement books. Any additional school improvement strategies shared in the 10 school improvement books was documented on the excel data collection spreadsheet.

**Research Question 1**

RQ1: What written school improvement strategies were shared in leadership books on school improvement?

The focus of the first research question was to determine the number of occurrences of five identified school improvement strategies listed in 10 school improvement books. The five identified school improvement strategies were the following: (a) professional development, (b) teacher retention, (c) professional learning communities, (d) funding, and (e) school climate. A total of 958 of school improvement
strategies were counted among all 10 school improvement books. The school improvement strategy “professional development” appeared 827 times among all 10 school improvement books (86%). Teacher retention appeared eight times (1%). Professional learning communities had 59 occurrences (6%). The school improvement strategy “funding” appeared 53 times (6%) whereas the school improvement strategy of school climate had 19 occurrences (2%). Together, the school improvement strategy “professional development” appeared the most among all 10 school improvement books. Teacher retention was the school improvement strategy that appeared the least in the school improvement books. The strategy “professional learning communities” and “funding” word frequencies were equal.

A total of 70 of the identified five school improvement strategies were counted in the book “Leadership in Capacity for Lasting School Improvement.” The strategy “professional development appeared 68 times (97%) whereas the strategy “funding” appeared only two times, 3%. The strategies of teacher retention, professional learning communities, and school climate did not appear in the book. Together, the school improvement strategy “professional development” appeared the most often in the school improvement book. Table 1 contains the frequencies of the five identified school improvement strategies identified in “Leadership in Capacity for Lasting School Improvement.”
Table 1

*From Capacity for Lasting School Improvement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified School Improvement Strategy</th>
<th>Number of Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Retention</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Communities</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


A total of 32 of the identified five school improvement strategies were counted in the book “The Learning Leader: How to Focus on School Improvement for Better Results.” The strategy “professional development” appeared 24 times (75%). The strategy “professional learning communities” appeared 6 times (19%) whereas the term “funding” appeared twice, 6%. The strategies “teacher retention” and “school climate” did not appear in the book. Together, the school improvement strategy “professional development” appeared most often in this school improvement book. Delineated in Table 2 are the frequencies of the five identified school improvement strategies identified in “The Learning Leader: How to Focus on School Improvement for Better Results.”
Table 2

From The Learning Leader: How to Focus on School Improvement for Better Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified School Improvement Strategy</th>
<th>Number of Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Retention</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Communities</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Counts taken from Reeves, D. B. (2020). The learning leader: How to focus school improvement for better results. ASCD.

A total of 25 of the identified five school improvement strategies were counted in the book “The Data Toolkit: Ten Tools for Supporting School Improvement.” The strategy “professional development appeared 14 times (56%). The strategy “professional learning communities” appeared six times (24%), whereas the strategy “funding” appeared twice (8%). School climate appeared three times (12%). The strategy “teacher retention” did not appear in the book. Together, the school improvement strategy “professional development” appeared most often in this school improvement book. Table 3 represents the frequency of the five identified school improvement strategies identified in “The Data Toolkit: Ten Tools for Supporting School Improvement.”
### Table 3

*From The Data Toolkit: Ten Tools for Supporting School Improvement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified School Improvement Strategy</th>
<th>Number of Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Retention</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Communities</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


A total of 310 of the identified five school improvement strategies were counted in the book “Align the Design: A Blueprint for School Improvement.” The strategy “professional development” appeared 293 times (95%), whereas the strategy “professional learning communities” appeared 12 times (4%). The strategy “funding” appeared twice (0.6%). School climate appeared three times (0.9%). Not present in this book was the strategy “teacher retention.”. Together, the school improvement strategy “professional development” appeared most often in this school improvement book. Table 4 contains the frequencies of the five identified school improvement strategies identified in “Align the Design: A Blueprint for School Improvement.”
Table 4

*From Align the Design: A Blueprint for School Improvement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified School Improvement Strategy</th>
<th>Number of Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Retention</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Communities</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


A total of 59 of the identified five school improvement strategies were counted in the book “Connecting Teacher Leadership and School Improvement.” The strategy “professional development” appeared 55 times (93%). The school improvement strategies “teacher retention, professional learning communities, funding, and school climate” each appeared one time in the book. Together, the school improvement strategy “professional development” appeared most frequently in this school improvement book. Contained in Table 5 are the frequencies of the five identified school improvement strategies identified in “Connecting Teacher Leadership and School Improvement.”
Table 5

From Connecting Teacher Leadership and School Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified School Improvement Strategy</th>
<th>Number of Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Retention</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Communities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


A total of 52 of the identified five school improvement strategies were counted in the book “Enhancing Student Achievement – A Framework for School Improvement.” The strategy “professional development appeared 41 times (79%), whereas the strategy “funding” appeared nine times (17%). School climate appeared twice (4%). Not present in this book was the strategy “teacher retention.” Together, the school improvement strategy “professional development” appeared most often in this school improvement book. Delineated in Table 6 are the frequencies of the five identified school improvement strategies identified in “Enhancing Student Achievement – A Framework for School Improvement.”
Table 6

*From Enhancing Student Achievement – A Framework for School Improvement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified School Improvement Strategy</th>
<th>Number of Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Retention</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Communities</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


A total of 23 of the identified five school improvement strategies were counted in the book “Guiding School Improvement with Action Research.” The strategy “professional development” appeared 13 times (57%). The strategy “funding” appeared five times (22%). School climate appeared five times (22%), whereas the strategies “teacher retention and professional learning communities were not present in this book.

Together the school improvement strategy “professional development” was the most frequent strategy cited in this school improvement book. Table 7 contains the frequencies of the five identified school improvement strategies identified in “Guiding School Improvement with Action Research.”
Table 7

*From Guiding School Improvement with Action Research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified School Improvement Strategy</th>
<th>Number of Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Retention</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Communities</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Counts taken from Sagor, R. (2000). *Guiding school improvement with action research.* ASCD.

A total of 49 of the identified five school improvement strategies were counted in the book “Reframing Teacher Leadership to Improve Your School.” The strategy “professional development” appeared 41 times (84%). The strategy “teacher retention” and “funding” each appeared one time (2%). Professional learning communities appeared six times (12%), whereas the strategy “school climate” did not appear in the book. Together, the school improvement strategy “professional development” appeared most frequently in this school improvement book. Revealed in Table 8 are the frequencies of the five identified school improvement strategies identified in “Reframing Teacher Leadership to Improve Your School.”
Table 8

From Reframing Teacher Leadership to Improve Your School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified School Improvement Strategy</th>
<th>Number of Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Retention</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Communities</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Counts taken from Reeves, D. B. (2008). Reframing teacher leadership to improve your school. ASCD.

A total of 40 of the identified five school improvement strategies were counted in the book “Improving Achievement in Low-Performing Schools.” The strategy “professional development” appeared 17 times (42%). The strategy “funding” appeared 23 times (58%). The strategies “teacher retention, professional learning communities, and school climate” did not appear in the book. Together, the present findings confirm the school improvement strategy “funding” appeared the most in the school improvement book. Delineated in Table 9 are the frequencies of the five identified school improvement strategies identified in “Improving Achievement in Low-Performing Schools.”
Table 9

From Improving Achievement in Low-Performing Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified School Improvement Strategy</th>
<th>Number of Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Retention</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Communities</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


A total of 298 of the identified five school improvement strategies were counted in the book “The Keys to Effective Schools: Educational Reform as Continuous Improvement.” The strategy “professional development” appeared 261 times (88%). The strategy “professional learning communities” appeared 26 times (9%), whereas the strategy “funding” appeared six times (2%). The strategy “school climate” appeared five times (2%). Teacher retention did not appear in the school improvement book. Together, the school improvement strategy “professional development” appeared the most often in the school improvement book. Table 10 contains the frequencies of the five identified school improvement strategies identified in “Improving Achievement in Low-Performing Schools.”
Table 10

*From The keys to effective schools: Educational reform as continuous improvement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified School Improvement Strategy</th>
<th>Number of Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Retention</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Communities</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Research Question 2**

RQ2: What roles were identified that a principal should focus on for school improvement?

The role of a principal who is leading a school toward improvement were collected by reading the 10 identified school improvement books. The book “Leadership Capacity for Lasting School Improvement” focused on “leadership capacity.” A principal who is collaborative, open, and inclusive will accomplish remarkable improvements in schools and will deeply affect student learning. The data gathered from “The Learning Leader: How to Focus on School Improvement for Better Results” were that the principal should be able to: (a) articulate a compelling vision and clear steps; (b) have interactions among student achievement, attendance, health, behavior, and grading policies; (c) take time to record the small wins and setbacks and consider any conflicts between values and practice, and notice trends that emerge over time; (d) share decision
making and willingness to concede one’s own agenda; and (e) challenge long-term held assertions and expose biases in the system and speak the uncomfortable truth. The authors of Data Toolkit: Ten Tools for Supporting School Improvement stated the need for principals to attend educational conferences with teachers, and classroom visits.

In addition, the authors noted the importance of the principal having knowledge of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Principals should be able to bring data in every context, setting, and improvement effort. They need to “think out the box” to drive change for student improvement. The authors of “Align the Design: A Blueprint for School Improvement emphasized the role of the principal is to align school improvement with the professional learning plan. It is important for principals to work side by side with their teachers with professional development. Principals check and monitor professional development by collecting data on the participants’ reactions and learning, and share data with teachers in order to improve adult learning experiences. The book “Connecting Teacher Leadership and School Improvement” highlighted the power to relinquish decision-making authority is important. The principal needs to be seen less as a manager and more as a change agent. Leadership is based on the dialogue relationship with teachers.

The authors of “Enhancing Student Achievement- A Framework for School Improvement noted six key functions in which principals engage their staff for school improvement. The six functions include: (a) crafting a vision and delineating expectations for teacher leadership in the school; (b) identifying and selecting teacher leaders and linking them into leadership; (c) legitimizing the work of teacher leaders; (d) providing direct support; (e) developing the leadership skill set of teacher leaders, and (f) managing
the teacher leadership process at the school level. Identified were 12 norms emphasized in the book “Guiding School Improvement with Action Research.” The norms include: (a) collegiality; (b) experimentation; (c) high expectations; (d) trust and confidence; (e) tangible support; (f) reaching out to knowledge base; (g) appreciation and recognition; (h) caring, celebration, and humor; (i) protection of what’s important; (j) involvement of stakeholders in decision-making; (k) traditions; and (l) honest, open communication.

The author of “Reframing Teacher Leadership to Improve Your School” presented several short-term wins for school leaders. The principal should design plans for student achievement in the spring or summer that will provide short-term wins within the first few weeks of school. Formative assessments are valuable for monitoring student achievement, as well as skills to address. The principal needs to set clear expectations and provide on-going communications. In addition, throughout the year, the principal should recognize effective practices simply and clearly throughout the year. To change the culture, principal must be prepared to stand up for effective practices even if changes are initially unpopular.

In “Improving Achievement in Low-Performing Schools” were six school reform outcomes for principals to focus on. The six reform outcomes were: (a) improving student achievement in the core subjects; (b) aligning teaching and learning with student performance; (c) linking professional development for all staff to the goals for students; (d) providing a safe, clean, and secure school facilities; (e) forging stronger linkages with parents, families, and the community and (f) increasing management effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability. Last, noted in “The Keys to Effective Schools: Educational Reform as Continuous Improvement” was that principals need to focus on
building and sustaining school cultural by focusing the staff’s energy on instruction. It is also important for the principal to have a reflective dialogue with teachers, build trust among staff, and internal accountability within the school.

**Research Question 3**

RQ3: What school climate activities were present to improve the academic performance of a campus?

School climate activities were collected by reading the 10 identified school improvement books. Indicated in “The Data Toolkit, Ten Tools or Supporting School Improvement” was principal support for students and staff and building positive relationships helps with school improvement. Also, school climate improves when the principal value and supports everyone. “Align the Design: A Blueprint for School Improvement” focused on well-designed professional development to promote a cooperative study and practice. The authors of “Connecting Teacher Leadership and School Improvement indicated the decision-making process by teachers has an impact on school climate. When teachers are involved with decision-making for the campus, it helps promote a general sense of ownership among staff.

The school improvement book “Enhancing Student Achievement – A Framework for School Improvement” highlighted block scheduling as a key school climate activity towards school improvement. Block scheduling will cause fewer discipline referrals, fewer class changes each day, and greater student commitment to the work and potential. “Guiding School Improvement with Action Research” outlined bias-based decision making as a school climate activity. All staff is invited to take a look at materials or listen to the argument made by those advocating for each side. Teachers are asked to vote. The
district of school declared the winner to be the “best available method.” The authors of “The Key to Effective Schools, Educational Reform as Continuous Improvement indicated the “Keys to Excellence for Your Schools Initiative” as a school improvement activity. Some of the components of this initiative is teacher’s acknowledging student’s goals and interest, reducing the teacher’s workload and excessive paperwork. In addition, removing duties from teachers such as hall monitoring, bus duty, and lunch suspension will improve the climate of a campus. The staff experience a widely shared sense of community and have meaningful parent partnerships.

Research Question 4

RQ4: What teacher retention activities were cited related toward school improvement?

Teacher retention activities were collected by reading the 10 identified school improvement books. The book “Connecting Teacher Leadership and School Improvement” indicated teachers with leadership roles helps build expertise by retaining good teachers. According to the authors of “Reframing Teacher Leadership to Improve Your School”, teachers continue their career on campus when they have strong support from the principal and fellow teachers. In addition, a thoughtful teacher mentor program is effective in helping to retain teachers.

Research Question 5

RQ: What activities were mentioned related to professional learning communities meeting with staff?

Professional learning communities meeting activities were collected by reading 10 identified school improvement books. The book “The Learning Leader: How to Focus
on School Improvement for Better Results” outlined several key components to conducting a professional learning community meeting. Colleagues should casually share practices and related student achievement with one another daily, such as assessments, writing prompts, and students’ work. Data walls serve as a living document and provide evidence that students and teachers are getting better and better. During a professional learning community, teachers should set clear and specific expectations for students, implement a guaranteed and viable curriculum, and use common formative assessments.

Key questions should be part of the professional learning community meeting conversations: (a) What do we want students to learn? (b) How will we know if they learned it? (c) What will we do if they have not? (d) What will we do if they already have? The authors of “The Data Toolkit: Ten Tools for Supporting School Improvement” outlined gathering data, analyzing data, and the use of data as a meaningful way to improve outcomes for students and working conditions for staff. In addition, staff should take time to review students’ work by observing students’ learning settings and reflect upon what they see.

Three critical questions should be the foundation for every professional learning community meeting: (a) What do we want students to learn?; (b) How will we know when each student has learned it?; and (c) How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning? Teachers need time in their schedule to review student data in teams, work together to analyze teaching objectives, develop learning targets, and design assessments that will measure progress by targets.

Highlighted in “Align the Design: A Blueprint for School Improvement” were several key factors to help schools implement an effective professional learning
community meeting. Teacher teams should review and select resources that align with the standards and grade-level expectations. School administrators should help teachers understand the implications of test scores beyond the scope of their own classroom. Teachers should work in vertical teams among other teachers to help broaden understanding of major curriculum issues. School administrators should help teachers see curriculum connections between content areas, promote integration with teachers and specialist outside of core context, such as a special education teacher and library media specialist working together. It is important for teachers to align relevant concepts in their curriculum with classroom curriculum topics that occur during the year.

Indicated in the “Connecting Teacher Leadership and School Improvement” leadership book was that a professional learning community meeting should include collective thought in which the whole is more than part of the sum of parts. Teachers should share information, as well as share resolution to problems. Present in “Reframing Teacher Leadership to Improve Your School” were statements that professional learning communities should be structured, timed, and leadership should allow time for meaningful reflection. “The Keys to Effective Schools: Educational Reform as Continuous Improvement” supported five key teacher actions that should take place during a professional learning community meeting: (a) Openly discuss practices with fellow teachers; (b) Use different and more active methods with students; (c) Engage in collegial social relationships; (d) Blur the lines of expert and novice, provide a more egalitarian ethos among more experienced and new teachers, and (f) Collectively build a technical culture that will enhance student learning. Professional learning community meetings should have protocols, guided and structured conversations about teachers and
student’s work. During a professional learning community, teachers should have new experiences in creating caring communities, and have discussion about them and learn from them. In addition, teachers should gain support from administration and learn how to handle conflict with peers about learning new ways of teaching. The focus should always be on students. The best conditions for professional learning communities are interpersonal trust, the teacher team have collaborative processes, and teachers have access to evidence that is important towards student learning and effective practice.
CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine school improvement strategies that were recommended to improve the academics of a campus, shifting from low performing to academic success. Discussed in this chapter will be the most common school improvement strategies shared in 10 identified leadership books. Chapter V is a review of the purpose of the study, research questions, and the methodology. Last, Chapter V included the summary of results, implications for policy and practice, recommendations for future research, and the conclusion.

School improvement strategies that were recommended to improve the academics of a campus, shifting from low performing to academic success were examined. A quantitative content analysis was used to identify common school improvement strategies that are shared in school leadership books. My role as the researcher was to identify school improvement strategies in the following areas: (a) professional development; (b) teacher retention; (c) professional learning communities; (d) funding, and (e) school climate.

Research Question 1

The first research question for the study was: What written school improvement strategies were shared in leadership books on school improvement?

Together, the school improvement strategy “professional development” was the most recommended strategy for school leaders to implement with staff. The school improvement strategy “professional development” appeared 86% among all 10 school improvement books for school leaders. As mentioned in the review of literature, many
studies were conducted by Fullen that were supportive of the benefits of providing professional development opportunities for teachers. Fullen (2006) stated that people learn by doing, reflecting, inquiry, and evidence. When people visualize themselves as shareholders and invest in the success of the system, the ultimate goal of change will be evident (Fullen, 2006). Teacher retention, professional learning communities, funding, and school climate all appeared less than 10% among all 10 school improvement books.

**Research Question 2**

The second research question for the study was: What roles were identified that a principal should focus on for school improvement?

Principals influence the culture of the school which leads to innovation opportunities for staff and continual learning. Principals are expected to be an instructional leader and understand their staff (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). The various roles of the principal were collected from all 10 school improvement books for school leaders. From the results, it is clear that the role of the principal is to have a vision that is shared with all staff and develop expectations for students and teachers. Together, the need for principals to be instructional leaders was clearly present. Principals should have knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Themes were interpreted to mean that a strong need is present for principals to build positive relationships with teachers and to include teachers in decision making for the campus. Another promising finding was the need for the principal to establish “trust” among staff.

**Research Question 3**

The third research question for the study was: What school climate activities were present to improve the academic performance of a campus?
Clear support for a positive school climate was present in the findings. Three clear results were present. First, it is important for principals to value and support all of their staff. One of the ways to value staff is to have the staff involved in decision-making process when it comes to campus planning. Second, block scheduling for students helps improve the morale of the campus by having fewer class changes throughout the day, few students discipline issues, and leads to student ownership of their school work. Last, reducing or removing some of the teachers’ daily duties will help improve the climate of the campus. Some of the recommended reduction of teachers’ daily tasks includes less paperwork, removal from bus duty and hallway duty, and lunch duty. Teachers also expressed the need for the need to have meaningful relationships with parents and the community.

**Research Question 4**

What teacher retention activities were cited related toward school improvement?

From these results, it is clear that providing leadership opportunities for teachers helps retain teachers. Strongly implied was that the presence of a strong support system from the principal leads to teacher retention. Finally, I obtained evidence that a well-planned teacher mentor program is an effective strategy to help reduce high teacher turnover.

**Research Question 5**

What activities were mentioned related to professional learning communities meetings with staff?

Several key findings were noted for activities that should take place during a professional learning community meeting. Superior results are seen when critical
questions about student learning are part of the professional learning community meeting structure; (a) What do we want students to learn?; (b) How will we know when each student has learned it?; and (c) How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning? Second, teachers should collaborate to have meaningful conversations to review and select instructional resources that are aligned with grade level objectives. In addition, teachers should discuss among each other about student’s work and their own instructional practices. During a professional learning community meeting, teachers should share information as well as have opportunities to problem solve. However, even better results are achieved by interpersonal trust and teachers having access to effective teaching practices.

**Connections to the Conceptual Framework**

The Effective School Framework was the conceptual framework model used in this doctoral dissertation (Effective School Framework, n.d.). This framework is built on three foundation areas in the continuous improvement process; (a) identify needs, (b) plan, and (c) implement and monitor. In addition, the framework includes five levers that are essential for high performing schools; (a) strong school leadership and planning, (b) strategic staffing, (c) positive school culture, (d) high-quality instructional materials and assessments, and (e) effective instruction.

When comparing my findings with the Effective School Framework, several school improvement strategies are aligned. The first connection of my findings and the Effective School Framework is the importance for the campus leader to have clear roles and responsibilities. In addition, the campus leader should have the ability to implement and to monitor school improvement plans. Additionally, my findings of a positive school
culture included the importance of valuing and supporting staff, the same as the framework’s key practice of compelling an aligned vision, mission, goals and values focused on a safe environment and high expectations. Furthermore, my findings of the value of professional development are similar to the Effective School Framework key practice of campus leaders providing job-embedded professional development for staff. Last, one of the key practices of the framework is high-quality instructional materials and assessments. This key practice is similar to my findings of the benefits of teachers participation with professional learning communities. Professional learning community meetings is a time for teachers to discuss use of high-quality instructional materials and formative assessments.

In conclusion, my findings and the Effective School Framework both indicate the importance for school leaders to have a clear vision for what school leaders should do to achieve student success. The connections between my findings and the conceptual framework are well-supported teachers, high quality curriculum and instruction, and a positive school culture. The school leader’s focus on best instructional practices will have a significant impact of student learning.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

The findings of this content analysis research investigation provide useful insight into the way to support principals who leads schools in need of improvement. School leaders, principal preparation programs, and central office staff should reference these results when developing plans for school improvement, especially in the area of support and resources for principals. Professional development was highlighted as the key school improvement strategy for principals to provide to their staff.
The Every Student Succeeds Act provides each state the opportunity to chart a path for shifting decisions related to accountability, school improvement, teacher quality, and funding back to the state and local level. One suggestion is for all states to provide opportunities for professional development, outside of the typical “sit and get” presentation. My recommendation is for the Every Student Succeeds Act policy includes funding and opportunities for teachers to receive professional development by visiting schools and observing other teacher’s professional learning community meetings. Such school visits provide a network for teachers to collaborate and share ideas. The funding will help the cost for substitute teachers, teacher’s mileage, and lodging when visiting schools. In addition, I would like the Every Student Succeeds Act to add a mandate for principals to conduct a principals professional learning community meeting, so that principals can learn best practices from each other. The principal’s meetings would count toward the school leaders professional development hours. Funding should also be allocated for teachers to participate with professional development through technology opportunities. The Every Student Succeeds Act should provide funding for teachers to have technology resources such as laptops, cameras, and conference call tools that would provide the opportunity for teachers to collaborate across the United States from the teacher’s campus or the teacher’s home. School leaders can play an important role in encouraging their staff to collaborate through technology, such as the use of Google classrooms. Professional learning opportunities through technology could include teachers sharing classroom presentations, lesson plans, and formative assessments. All of the suggestions would provide opportunities for teachers to participate with professional development that is quite different than the typical training meetings for teachers.
Title 1 schools receive federal funding based on high number of high percentages of children from low-income families. Some districts require teachers to complete a set number of professional development hours within the academic school year. Some teachers complete their required professional development hours after their contract time, such as after school or during their summer vacation break. My next suggestion is for additional Title 1 funding allocated to pay teachers for their time completing professional development hours outside of their contract time. It is my opinion that professional development compensation will increase the number of training hours that teachers would complete, which could lead to better instruction in the classroom and closing the academic gaps with students. The benefit of additional professional development opportunities could help teachers learn instructional practices and how to work with students with learning challenges.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Speaking from experience, leading a school in need of improvement can be challenging and stressful, as well as rewarding. During my career as an educator, I have seen numerous principals removed from their campus due to decreasing scores and low accountability ratings. I have also seen principals resign or ask for re-assignment to a less challenging campus, due to the challenges of leading a low-performing school. My recommendation for future research studies involves additional support for school leaders as well as examining best practices among successful principals.

First, I recommend continued learning on school improvement strategies for leaders of school that are in need of improvement. I examined five school improvement strategies that were identified in 10 school improvement books, it would be beneficial to
investigate additional support for campus leaders. I suggest examining best practices of campus leaders in the following three areas: (a) best practices of successful school improvement leaders; (b) examine district with school improvement departments, and (c) gathering best practices from successful school superintendents who have improved a low-performing district.

It would be useful to understand the daily struggles of principals who lead a low-performing school and seek supportive measures to help principals and students to be successful. Some of the challenges of a principal are working with a challenging staff to understand and accept the need for change and providing support for a struggling or weak teacher. Principal turnover rate is becoming a growing concern just like high teacher turnover rates. I recommend future research studies be conducted into incentives or areas of support that will help principals maintain longevity and opportunities for the principal’s career to grow in the district. A detailed study could be conducted to examine how professional development could assist campus leaders close academic learning gaps.

Some school districts are starting to develop a “school improvement department” which has a primary focus on low-performing schools. I recommend a study comparing numerous districts with a school improvement department in the following areas; (a) personal structure; (b) resources; (c) district and school improvement plans; (d) meeting structure between campus leaders and central office staff; (e) program evaluation; (f) partnerships, and (g) plans to address federal and state accountability.

Next, I recommend a study of superintendents who have experiences success in improving a low-performing district. The study should include academic programs and effective resources and strategies. In addition, the research should include the relationship
between the superintendent and the school board and how to gain the board of trustees support and vote when implementing new initiatives for school improvement.

Further research in this area may include another content-analysis study on school improvement strategies from 10 additional leadership books. This research would be great to compare the findings and to compare if professional development opportunities continue to be most highly recommended strategy or is there another highly recommended school improvement strategy for school leaders. This would give some indication to principals of additional strategies to implement in their school and further improve the principal’s leadership skills.

My last recommendation is for future research on school climate and teacher retention due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers are resigning at very high rates and the climate of schools is decreasing. For the last two years, teachers had to be flexible with face to face and remote teaching, they had to teach additional students due to high teacher absenteeism rates, and teachers were asked to take on additional duties on campus. The additional tasks have lowered the morale of teachers, which is causing large numbers of teachers and school leaders to leave the teaching profession. An additional study on teacher retention and school climate may help school districts retain teachers and motivate teachers to love their profession.

**Conclusion**

All school leaders want their students and teachers to succeed. When schools focus on specific goals and strategies for improvement, it can make a lasting impression (Education Improvement Commission, 2020). I examined school improvement strategies that were recommended to improve the academics of a campus, shifting from low
performing to academic success. In this doctoral dissertation, “professional development” was the most recommended school improvement strategy from 10 identified books for school leaders. The data and findings from this study identified the number of counts each of the five identified school improvement strategies were listed in the school improvement books for leaders; (a) school climate; (b) teacher retention; (c) professional learning communities; (d) professional development, and (e) funding. In addition, activities were identified from each of the five school improvement strategies that are useful for campus leaders. The goal of this study was to contribute toward the research on school improvement and what school improvement strategies are recommended from leadership books.

I hope my study will be beneficial to school leaders and help close the learning gap among students. In my school district, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed a strain on student learning, with a decrease in student’s reading, writing, and mathematics skills. During this pandemic, school leaders are expected to provide additional interventions for students, as well as meet state and federal accountability. I have always been a believer that educators should be proactive by providing quality lessons, with high student engagement. I hope my findings will guide principals with proactive measures for student achievement and reduce the number of low performing schools.
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Date: Jan 28, 2022 4:31:06 PM CST

TO: Deirdre Holloway Cynthia Martinez-Garcia
FROM: SHSU IRB
PROJECT TITLE: School Improvement Strategies For School Principals Closing the Achievement Gap- A Content Analysis
PROTOCOL #: IRB-2021-387
SUBMISSION TYPE: Initial
ACTION: No Human Subjects Research
DECISION DATE: January 28, 2022

OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK: To access the survey, click here. It only takes 10 minutes of your time and is voluntary. The results will be used internally to make improvements to the IRB application and/or process. Thank you for your time.

Greetings,

In accordance with applicable federal law governing the use of human subjects in research the SHSU Institutional Review Board (“IRB”) has reviewed your proposed project entitled “School Improvement Strategies For School Principals Closing the Achievement Gap- A Content Analysis “ and determined that this project does not meet the definition of human subjects research as defined in Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations Part 46 et al (also known as the “Common Rule”) - specifically, secondary data analysis. Therefore, this project is not subject to further SHSU IRB oversight. Even so, please remember that you are responsible for ensuring that your study is conducted in an ethical manner and in accordance with applicable law and SHSU policies and procedures. Please contact the IRB office at irb@shsu.edu or (936)294-4875 if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,
SHSU Institutional Review Board
## APPENDIX B

### Content Analysis School Rubric for School Improvement Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Book</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Search Term</th>
<th>Number of terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Capacity for Lasting School Improvement</td>
<td>Linda Lambert</td>
<td>Professional Development, Teacher Retention, Professional Learning Communities, Funding, School Climate</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Learning Leader: How to Focus on School Improvement for Better Results</td>
<td>Douglass Reeves</td>
<td>Professional Development, Teacher Retention, Professional Learning Communities, Funding, School Climate</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Data Toolkit: Ten Tools for Supporting School Improvement</td>
<td>Robert Hess and Pam Robbins</td>
<td>Professional Development, Teacher Retention, Professional Learning Communities, Funding, School Climate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Align the Design: A Blueprint for School Improvement</td>
<td>Ann Mausbach</td>
<td>Professional Development, Teacher Retention, Professional Learning Communities, Funding, School Climate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connecting Teacher Leadership and School Improvement</td>
<td>Joseph Murphy</td>
<td>Professional Development, Teacher Retention, Professional Learning Communities, Funding, School Climate</td>
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<td>Title</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhancing Student Achievement- A Framework for School Improvement</td>
<td>Charlotte Murphy</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guiding School Improvement with Action Research</td>
<td>Richard Sagor</td>
<td>Teacher Retention</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reframing Teacher Leadership to Improve Your School</td>
<td>Douglas Reeves</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improving Achievement in Low-Performing Schools</td>
<td>Randolph Ward &amp; Mary Ann Burke</td>
<td>Teacher Retention</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Keys to Effective Schools: Educational Reform as Continuous Improvement</td>
<td>Willis Hawley</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
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</table>
# APPENDIX C

List of Strategies and Activities Shared in School Improvement Leadership Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of School Improvement Book</th>
<th>List of Strategies/Activities</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Climate Activities</td>
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<td>Teacher Retention Strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Communities Strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Roles of a Principal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VITA

Graduate Student Educational Leadership
Sam Houston State University
Department of Educational Leadership

ACADEMIC DEGREES

Master of Education, Prairie View A & M
Educational Administration

Bachelor of Science, Sam Houston State University
Academic Studies

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2021-Present     Fort Bend Independent School District, Director of Student Affairs

2017-2021 Fort Bend Independent School District, Director of State and Federal Programs

2014-2017 Fort Bend Independent School District, Lake Olympia Middle School Principal

2007-2014 Fort Bend Independent School District, Blue Ridge Elementary Principal, TEA Exemplary School and National Title 1 Distinguished School

2000-2007 Aldine Independent School District, Carroll Academy and Raymond Academy Assistant Principal

Professional Licensure and Certifications

Texas Life, Teaching Certificate 1st-8th
2025 Principal Certificate
Rice University REEP (Rice Education Entrepreneurship Program) Certificate
Georgetown University, McCourt School of Public Policy, Education Finance Certificate

State and Local Presentations

Holloway, D. Y. (2019, February). *Alumni Kat Chats.* Invited presentation at the Sam Houston State Alumni event for undergraduate students whose major is Education, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX.


**Honors and Awards**

Member of the Kappa Delta Pi Educational Honor Society
Member of the Society for Collegiate Leadership and Achievement
2020 Sam Houston State University Alumni Board of Directors
2019 Sam Houston State University Black Alumni Board
2018 Sam Houston State University Dedre Jefferson Humanitarian Award
2011 and 2013 Fort Bend Independent School District Principal of the Year
Nominated twice for the Sam Houston State Distinguished Educator Award
Received Proclamation from former Mayor Anise Parker