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## Developing Leadership Dispositions for Preparing Urban School Leaders in Chronically Low-Performing Schools

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# Developing Leadership Dispositions for Preparing Urban School Leaders in Chronically Low-Performing Schools

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## Abstract

This study originated as an institutionally sponsored research residency conducted using utilization-focused evaluation (Patton, 2008) to investigate the nature of dispositional changes in candidates pursuing National Louis University's M.Ed. and Ed.S. degrees leading to educational leadership (EDL) state certification in one large urban school district in a Southern state. The EDL program organized learning objectives intending to develop a specific knowledge base, an operational competency set, and, as this study's focus, leadership dispositions related to preparing assistant principals and principals to lead effectively in chronically low-performing (CLP) schools. The inquiry cross-analyzed data at the intersection of the graduate program's disposition-related learning objectives with 13 leadership dispositions identified in The Haberman Educational Foundation Star Urban Administrator Pre-Screener. EDL program faculty administered the pre-screener to EDL program candidates twice, yielding 187 matched pairs in pre-program and post-program administrations. Statistical analyses yielded a significant difference (improvement) in overall Haberman scores at the .01 alpha level, as well as an effect size considered (Cohen, 1969) to be a medium effect size. Faculty triangulated the data with interviews of alumni and faculty with experience in leading CLP schools, who affirmed that focus on leadership dispositions serves an important developmental role in an EDL program. The study appears to validate the measurable presence and dynamic changes in EDL candidate dispositions as an element of a graduate program focused on developing effective leaders of CLP schools.

**Keywords:** leadership development, children in poverty, chronically low-performing schools, leadership dispositions

## **Introduction**

This study focuses on One Large School District (OLSD, pseudonym) which serves over 190,000 K–12 students. The district faces a substantial systemic challenge with 22% of schools classified with a state-assigned school grade of D or F and 58% of schools classified as Title I with at least 40% of students living in poverty (statistics have been rounded and a citation omitted to preserve anonymity). Identifying improved school leadership as a major focus for systemic intervention, OLSD initiated a concerted effort to address their chronically low-performing (CLP) schools by partnering with local colleges of education, specifically targeting the preparation of new school leaders to serve in urban CLP schools with significant levels of poverty. The school district selected as one of their partnership collaborators National Louis University (NLU), a private university that provides initial educational leadership (EDL) preparation for new assistant principals in the district; NLU also provides EDL preparation for 10 surrounding districts with similar student demographics and challenges.

NLU’s 20-year collaborative relationship with OLSD led us to this research question: what is the nature of the changes in our EDL candidates’ urban leadership dispositions that accompany completion of our EDL M.Ed. and Ed.S. program, as indicated by pre- and post-program Haberman Educational Foundation Star Urban Administrator Pre-Screener scores? Additionally, we posed the following question: by analyzing trends in our candidates’ pre- and post-program Star Administrator Pre-Screener scores, what might faculty learn about dispositional outcomes of our EDL M.Ed. and Ed.S. program curriculum in preparing urban school leaders, and how might we better serve the development of our candidates as urban school leaders?

A cross-analysis revealed that the 13 Haberman dimensions of effective urban school leadership are directly related to 17 out of the 21 current courses in the NLU MED/EDS Educational Leadership curriculum. The purpose of this inquiry and program evaluation was to gather data-based evidence suggesting how effective our EDL program has been, revealing the curricular areas most needing further program development in alignment with the Haberman dispositions and Haberman results generated by our data analysis. In this study, we interviewed EDL program completers, faculty, and adjunct faculty, and we analyzed longitudinal pre-program and post-program student Haberman data, with the intent to utilize the data analysis as one decision-making tool to inform the revision of our M.Ed. and Ed.S. EDL curriculum to improve preparation of new school leaders to better serve CLP schools.

## **Related Literature Dispositions and Competencies**

At the beginning and end of NLU’s 18-month EDL program, the leadership candidates take a 104-item instrument called The Haberman Educational Foundation Star Urban Administrator Pre-Screener. The Haberman Educational Foundation, chartered in 1994 with a particular focus on “providing quality teachers and leaders for children living in poverty” (Haberman, 2016, para.1),

developed and validated the Star Urban Administrator Pre-Screener to measure a leadership candidate's dispositions on 13 dimensions needed by leaders successfully to turn around and lead urban schools with high levels of poverty. The Haberman Educational Foundation describes their 13 dimensions as "administrators' behaviors and predispositions to act" (Haberman, 2016, para. 4). This concept is closely related to dispositions, which may be defined as "tendencies toward particular patterns of intellectual behavior" (Costa & Kallick, 2014, p. 19), and competencies, defined as "a pattern of thinking, feeling, acting, or speaking that causes a person to be successful in a job or role" (Public Impact, 2008, p. 4).

### **Chronically Low-Performing (CLP) Schools**

The recent national focus on turning around CLP urban schools is centered on the primacy of the school leader for effecting student achievement (Waters et al., 2003). The U.S. Department of Education conducted a comprehensive review of the research literature (Herman et al., 2008) regarding turning around low-performing schools and found research-based evidence that indicated four main factors were most often present in successful school turn-around: the school leaders 1) received buy-in from school staff by demonstrating urgency and a commitment to making drastic change in the school; 2) maintained a relentlessly sharp focus on improving instruction; 3) planned incremental improvements that achieved early visible gains in small steps, which aided in overcoming resistance and inertia; and 4) built a qualified staff who were committed to the school's improvement goals.

More recently, Steiner and Hassle (2011, p. 5) in conjunction with Public Impact, a national education policy and management consulting firm, published a report regarding the competencies (defined as "recurring patterns of thought and actions, such as achievement drive") that are essential for a principal to have to turn around a low-performing school. To be a successful school turn-around leader, their report suggests that a leader needs: a commitment to success, enough autonomy to take risks, the ability to engage the community, an accountability orientation, and the ability to develop new leaders in the school. There are multiple overlaps between these competencies and what The Haberman Educational Foundation calls "dispositions" that are needed for successfully leading urban underperforming schools. In the Public Impact report, the authors recommend that school leaders be developed in these areas of competencies specifically related to turning around chronically troubled schools (Steiner & Hassel, 2011). An investigation of our NLU students' Haberman scores would be very timely and could guide us to cutting-edge improvements in our current curriculum and program.

### **Method**

We conducted a utilization-focused program evaluation (Patton, 2008) that included a comparative analysis of longitudinal pre-program and post-program NLU EDL student Haberman data, and interviews of NLU instructors and adjunct instructors who are employed (or recently employed)

in schools that are currently challenged or have recently turned around a challenged school. We also interviewed (see Appendix A: Interview Protocol) NLU EDL alumni who have current experience leading schools with high-poverty and low-achievement rates: schools classified with a grade of D or F by the state department of education.

## **Participants**

An email was sent to 352 EDL M.Ed./Ed.S. program graduates and 25 EDL faculty and adjuncts (see Appendix B: Request for Alumni Participation and Appendix C: Letter of Invitation to Faculty) explaining the purpose of the inquiry as well as the criteria for inclusion in the study: recent experience (within the past five years) of leading a high-needs school with significant rates of poverty and chronically low rates of student achievement. Seven EDL alumni, two adjunct faculty, and two faculty who met the criteria volunteered and were interviewed.

The Star Urban Administrator Pre-Screener data for analysis is from all M.Ed. and Ed.S. students located at one of our regional campuses since the inception of our current curriculum (2012). This is proprietary data accessible to NLU, obtained through NLU's purchase of access codes for the administration of the pre-screener to our students.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Participants who volunteered for the interview were mailed two copies of the informed consent form (Appendix D: Informed Consent Adult Participant Interview) along with a self-addressed stamped envelope and asked to sign and return one copy of the form while keeping the second copy for their records. Pseudonyms were used during the interview and throughout this report to protect participant anonymity and confidentiality. All identifying elements were removed from the Haberman data, and a number was assigned to each student's data to protect the students' confidentiality and anonymity. This study was reviewed and approved by the NLU Institutional Research Review Board.

## **Results**

### **The Haberman Star Urban Administrator Pre-Screener Data**

The researchers accessed the Star Urban Administrator Pre-Screener pre- and post-scores for all candidates enrolled in the EDL M.Ed./Ed.S. program located in OLS and the surrounding school districts. The timeframe of interest for the scores was for our current EDL curriculum: January 1, 2012, through October 21, 2015. The data yielded 187 matched pairs of pre- and post-scores on the pre-screener. To see if there was a significant change in the students' overall (summary) scores,

a dependent t-test was conducted. There was a significant difference (improvement) in our candidates' overall Haberman scores at the .01 alpha level ( $t = 8.24504$ ), one-tailed test (see Table 1).

Table 1  
*The Haberman Star Urban Administrator Pre-Screener Summary Score Results*  
 t-Test: Paired Two Samples for Means  
 alpha .01

	<i>Post- test</i>	<i>Pretest</i>
Mean	60.9144	55.6684
Variance	82.7345	61.8894
Observations	8	8
Pearson Correlation	187	187
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0.48158	
Df	4	
t Stat	186	
P(T < = t) one-tail	8.24504	
t Critical one-tail	1.46E-	
P(T < = t) two-tail	14	
t Critical two-tail	2.34656	
	3	
	2.92E-	
	14	
	2.60252	

Additionally, an effect size (Coe, 2002) was conducted with an observed effect size of .67, which is considered by Cohen (1969) to be a medium effect size.

The Haberman Star Urban Administrator Pre-Screener includes 13 subscales that assess leadership dimensions representing school leaders' habits of mind and action regarding the following dispositions: sensitive to diversity, creates a common vision, develops a positive working climate, instructional leader, data driven, product evaluation, personal accountability, responsible leader, expanded principal's role, bottom-up representative, parents with voice, client advocate, and problem solver. For a description of the 13 dimensions, please see Appendix E. In the data report provided by The Haberman Educational Foundation, the data for each dimension were reported as ordinal data in the form of Low, Acceptable, and High. A Wilcoxon signed rank test was calculated on the ordinal data for each of the 13 leadership dimensions, resulting in no significant difference for any of the 13 dimensions. The researchers believe this is due to the lack of precision in the ordinal data available for the 13 dimensions. We contacted The Haberman Educational Foundation

and asked them to release these data to us in an interval form for a more precise investigation of significant differences on the 13 subscales; The Haberman Educational Foundation declined to provide that data, citing confidentiality concerns.

## **Interview Data**

A total of seven EDL alumni, two adjunct faculty, and two faculty were interviewed for this project. All the interviewees had current or recent (within the past five years) experience as a school leader in a chronically challenged, low-performing school with significant rates of poverty (at least 51%) among the student body. The interviews lasted for a range of 25 to 84 minutes, with the average interview lasting approximately 53 minutes. The interview protocol (see Appendix A) was developed by the researchers and designed to gather data specifically regarding each of the 13 leadership dimensions on the Haberman pre-screener. The interview data were transcribed and analyzed for emergent and recurring themes regarding what the participants see as the most significant challenges school leaders are facing today, as well as how our EDL program can best prepare our candidates to meet those challenges.

General demographic information regarding the interviewees' school leadership experience was collected during the interview. The alumni had leadership experience in high-poverty, CLP schools from 3 years to 17 years, with one participant also having leadership experience at higher district levels; one also had experience in districts with high rates of poverty in two states. The adjunct faculties' and faculties' years of school leadership experience ranged from 5 to 12 years, including two participants who also had leadership experience at higher levels in school districts with high rates of poverty in as many as three different states.

### ***Disposition 1: Sensitive to Diversity***

The first interview question was designed to gather data on the participants' perceptions regarding the first Haberman leadership dimension: sensitive to diversity. The Haberman Educational Foundation defines the disposition of sensitive to diversity as a leader understanding that race, ethnicity, class, and gender provides an important lens for how s/he is perceived as being fair and equitable by the diverse students, teachers, parents, and community in a high-poverty urban school setting (Haberman, 2016). All seven alumni agreed that being perceived as fair and equitable was "extremely important," "critically important," and "huge" to the success of their leadership practice. They discussed how their approach to being perceived as being fair and equitable begins with establishing a trust relationship with all constituents; demonstrating genuine care for individuals is an essential aspect of this. One alum stated a leader needs to demonstrate that "you have a vested interest in who they are and what they need. . . . They have to see you as someone who understands what their needs are," and "people know if you really do care and are empathetic." The trust relationship is further developed by enacting "distributive leadership" by including as many constituents as possible—students, teachers, parents, and community—in

decision-making discussions as much as possible, having an “open door” policy, actively listening to their concerns and ideas, practicing inclusive language, and consistently communicating that the communal focus is “what is best for students.” On the occasion that staff might interpret a situation as not quite equitable, one administrator would “explain the why” behind the resolution and consistently revert to their “common language” of this relentless attention to student needs.

Although being consistent in their fairness and caring was one leadership theme, four interviewees also discussed that “fair does not always mean the same.” In a high-needs school, students come with their own varieties of high needs, and since many teachers in high-needs school are rookie teachers, they also have their needs. One administrator emphasized, “we have to take into consideration the entire child in order for it to be an equitable learning environment for them.” They clearly saw that fairness includes differentiating professional development, instruction, discipline, resources (including human), and budget allocations.

Cultural competence is an important concept in the educational world today, and it is especially important when leading a low-performing, culturally diverse school population that has high rates of poverty. One alum described her experience being transferred to a new high-needs school:

I located the school and drove around the community, and I was like, okay, . . . are people really living in some of these places? But, even in my experience, as a black female, growing up in [the South, in this town], so, even with my background, now going to this elementary school, I was in culture shock. At this school, I had some kids in third grade who could barely say their names. So, that was culture shock for me, you know, looking at kids who can't clean their face and can't go to the bathroom by— Kids coming into kindergarten who don't know the alphabet and don't know the colors. They're starting behind, just coming into kindergarten. So, even my own personal experience, in dealing with that, it was an eye-opener. It was culture shock for me.

Two alums discussed the need for understanding the cultural differences that accompany living in poverty and the importance of being aware of own's own “cultural wheelhouse,” intentionally bridging that difference in order to understand the different “semantic register” of generational poverty. Leaders also need to “help teachers to really understand, you do not have to enable the students through sympathy, you have to enable them through empathy. You understand a situation, but you still hold them to the same high standards.” This includes allowing students “to have that productive struggle” during class discussions. Another alum stated, “It's critically important for leaders . . . to demonstrate empathy, but also high standards as well . . . you cannot enable students to perform at a lower level just because of their socioeconomic or demographic situation.” The theme of empathic rigor—having empathy and high expectations for all students—reverberated throughout all the interviews.

The four faculty or adjunct instructors also agreed that being seen as a fair and equitable leader was very important and discussed mostly the same themes with additional emphasis on nurturing teacher leaders as an important aspect of turning around a low-performing school. They also



discussed engendering equity through their caring, listening, using inclusive practices and language, building relationships that lead to accountability, and constantly applying empathic rigor. Additionally, they discussed the importance of hiring staff that reflects the diversity of the school demographics, using data to support equitable practices, and providing social-emotional learning for students, teachers, and staff to support differentiating instruction and discipline to bridge cultural divides.

### *Disposition 2: Creates a Common Vision*

According to The Haberman Educational Foundation, this leadership dimension refers to favoring building teams and cooperative practices to sustain a common set of goals, rather than pleasing individuals with their own agendas (Haberman, 2016). All seven of the alumni stated that creating a common vision for their school was “very important” or “very significant.” They discussed how participants in the school need to feel a part of formulating and determining what that vision needs to be because “when you have that buy-in and everyone understanding what that vision means and how you’re gonna get there, then you will get the most out of your faculty and students.” Once the behaviors of the school vision, such as “respect, responsibility and pride,” and doing what is best for students become daily practice, this establishes the culture of the school, which then supports the work of their mission, as one alum explained: “Without your vision and your mission, there are no goals. Without any goals, there are no procedures and structures that can have us all going in the same direction, for the ultimate success of the students.” Another alum stated, having a common vision “drives everything else that you do” to be successful at turning around a school.

One alum mentioned how school leaders modeling the vision at all times creates “a cohesive environment” in the school and sets the timbre for teamwork among all staff and all functions, such as collaborative planning and professional learning communities (PLCs). The challenges at CLP schools are so prevalent that the interviewees agreed that cooperative practices are essential in multiple domains to turn around a failing school. One interviewee quoted a passage from the Bible, saying, “without a vision, the people perish,” and went on to share:

When I went to [my new] school, I saw it on arrival. I could see that people were doing whatever they wanted to do and [the principal] was just in retirement mode and as long as you didn’t bother him, he was okay with it.

In contrast to this laissez-faire, individualist type of leadership, the alums shared the urgency of creating a shared vision among all school staff:

We would open every year with team building activities . . . and have heart to hearts with the staff: just sharing our hearts and why we’re here for the kids and how this is for them. And how we felt about them, how we valued them—finding a way to value your teachers is huge, even if you have to fake it sometimes. They have to feel valued and you want them to. They’ll give you the best back.

Once the vision becomes ingrained in the school culture, it is also the foundation for all decision-making and facilitates progress in all areas toward the goals of increasing student achievement and having high standards for all students. As another graduate stated:

Yeah, it was really powerful. During my time as principal, you could talk to any staff member, any teacher, any student at the school at the time, and it wasn't just reciting the mission, vision, values, they could basically tell you why we made certain decisions, why we wouldn't do some things, why we'd do some other things, why we would fund some things and not others. It was pretty well embedded in the culture.

Besides the importance of including the student voice in the creation and implementation of the school vision, some graduates talked about how "sharing data and talking very honestly about the data" helped create buy-in for the vision.

The faculty and adjuncts also related that having a common vision was "very significant" and "completely essential" to leading a high-needs school. In addition to the themes shared by the alumni, the faculty and adjuncts discussed the importance of obtaining parental buy-in for the school vision. As one faculty shared:

I remember when we had preschool orientation, and I spoke to the young parents. I said: "Graduation from high school begins now. This is where you become engaged. This is where you need to be informed about what your students are learning. You need to be an active parent, not only in our school, but at home toward developing growth in learning, and you don't have to have college degrees to do that. You just have to talk about schooling every day."

For the faculty, as with the alums, the spirit of teamwork also extended to the parents, for better or worse. Another faculty discussed,

I always liken it to the co-parenting situation, or the shared parenting, where you have them all week and you train them to do things a certain way. And then, they go with the other parent on the weekend, and all that's undone and every Monday, you have to retrain them.

Although this may sound like an endless battle, both the alums and faculty mentioned that when the vision envelops the culture of the school, eventually the students themselves start to see a difference and want to do better, provided the retraining happens consistently through the school year.

The interview data of both the alums and the faculty or adjuncts were congruent regarding vision. Leaders in both groups talked about the extra challenge of being the new leader at a school that previously had no visionary leadership, describing this as a "really tough situation" since the culture of the school was also negative, perpetuating negative behaviors. As one alum described:

The kids used to have to come through a metal detector every day and be wanded down before they go in school. And, my principal at the time, her concept was, if you treat them like criminals, they're going to act like criminals. So, we're going to make this a school.

After taking leadership of a particularly challenging school situation, one faculty interviewee described how, after the inclusive development, implementation, and inculturation of a new school vision, a synergy developed that led to raising student achievement:

We immediately had the vision that it became our responsibility. We were accountable to one another. Many times, when you have elementary schools and students don't do well in high schools, the high school blames the elementary school. If you're in a pre-K through high school, there's no one to blame. You develop this vision towards success that begins with preschool all the way to high school: it's *all* of our school and we *all* have ownership of what happens with our kids. . . . It really motivated people.

Interviewees in both groups described how all school personnel took ownership for all grade levels. It was not just "the kindergarten teachers have to do this or the first and second grade teachers have to do that." The atmosphere of the school became more familial, and one school leader described how important it was to celebrate the success turning a "tough situation" into a school that felt like family:

We sat down as a school family and had Thanksgiving dinner. We had place settings at the table, tablecloths, centerpieces, the whole nine yards. The kids, some of them had never done that. Their thought of a dinner was having a plate, sitting in front of the TV, just eating food. . . . And, this is what I try to tell teachers. The only experience they're going to get with certain things in this world is what we expose them to because they're not getting it at home where they should be getting it. So, if we don't do it in school, it's not going to happen.

Once a vision was established that created synergy throughout the school, learning conditions improved, student achievement increased, and staff and faculty were happier and more fulfilled professionally, too.

### ***Disposition 3: Develops Positive Working Climate***

The Haberman Educational Foundation describes this leadership dimension as an understanding that it falls to the school leader to manage a "complex set of interpersonal relationships" in a way that fosters a positive working climate, rather than mindlessly enforcing rules that can lead to a climate of "depersonalize bureaucracy" (Haberman, 2016, para. 3). The alumni all reported that creating a positive working climate was "very important," "significant," and "critical" because "without a positive culture you are going to have a toxic environment that's counterproductive to

all the structural efforts or instructional efforts you've made to try and improve student achievement." Another alum shared:

In a high-needs schools you have to have a positive climate. It's a very hard job. There's a lot of work that needs to be done and it's easy to get beaten down because it's so challenging. It's emotionally challenging, it's intellectually challenging, everything [is challenging].

As one graduate shared, "For students, in a system where they feel it is a negative environment or they don't feel safe, then they're not able to function either, because they're focused on other things, rather than instruction and learning." For these school leaders, clearly, the working climate includes the conditions necessary for students to accomplish their work, not just adults. After arriving at a new school, one leader fired the food service manager and hired a real sous-chef as a replacement. In the interview, she related the success that resulted from her decision:

The sous-chef, he was amazing. He could take commodity cheese products and he could really do some fantastic things. He always presented it. He always had time to concept. All because, a lot of our kids, whatever meals they got from us, that was the best meal they were going to have that day. Our participation went up from about maybe 45% in our food nutrition program to almost 93% by the time I left. It was just because he knew how to present things. He took money that he made from his à la carte sales. We made a Dog Rock Café at the time, based on the model of the Hard Rock Café. He put up memorabilia from past classes and things about our school and made it just a really fun and attractive place for kids to come.

These school leaders were clearly aware of the gamut of student needs, from basic safety to making school a fun and enjoyable place that children look forward to attending. Working climate for students also applied to their academic work and learning climate. As another graduate stated:

We monitored attendance data. We formed an early warning system, before we even knew what to call it frankly, about any kid who was absent for a certain number of days or tardy a certain number of days. We called it PAWS, which is Providing for the Academic Welfare of Students. Basically, it was an advisory group in middle school and high school that met every Thursday for 30 minutes, and nobody became anonymous in our school. Bad things happen in secondary schools when kids are anonymous. [It was like] having wrap around services for each and every student, on an individual basis. To be able to understand exactly what the early warning signs are that impede their academic achievement.

Building relationships with students was a frequently reported theme, and the basic formula for not having anonymous students at school. As another graduate shared, if you build a relationship with a student, "they're going to share with you what goes on at home. You're going to know that, okay, Bobby has no food when he leaves school Friday evening until he comes back for breakfast

Monday morning.” Several graduates related efforts made by them, or school psychologists, counselors, or social workers, to connect parents with basic needs, such as food, clothing, shoes, coats, school supplies, and assistance to keep the lights or the heat on at the child’s home, to create a supportive learning environment for students.

Another alum started an academic incentive card while leading at three different CLP schools. Students who maintained a good grade point average were awarded points they could exchange for various rewards. She stated: “Children aspire to be able to have this card in hand with the actual reward to be able to skip the lunch line” or receive other rewards they coveted. The academic incentive program appeared to help students “take ownership for their own grade and get them to become willing participants, if you will, of their own academic achievement,” increasing student motivation for learning. Several alums also discussed using positive behavior support (PBS) programs at their schools, which also had success in reducing negative student behavior; again, a key was providing rewards that interested the students. As one graduate succinctly asked: “If the kid didn’t have lights and water at home, how in the world can you expect them do their homework the night before?”

There were other reflections alumni shared on the importance of a positive school climate. These included showing empathy and caring in working with others, and holding accountable all stakeholders based on their roles. Other themes that were important for a positive working climate for adults were “being attentive, [using] active listening always giving the staff an opportunity to speak and share their side of what happened.” Another graduate discussed “making sure teacher appreciation [week] is always a big hit, making sure that the administration’s voice is in that, draft a speech about what do teachers mean to you”; he conveyed that a thank-you was essential and appreciated by teachers and went a long way toward creating a positive working climate. Another school leader shared:

In order for your faculty to function at their optimal performance . . . they may not agree with every initiative, they may not agree with every decision, but at the end of the day they have to feel good about where they work and who they’re working with. [You] must establish that in the beginning stages, which involves including them in decision-making, which involves building trust by being consistent.

Acting consistently based on shared values and data sources and leading through earned trust based on knowledge, integrity, and engagement were strategies the leaders employed to help build a positive working climate. A positive working climate also involves supporting staff through mandates handed down by the state, as described by another alum:

But positive environment does not always mean that it was always happy and pleasant. There was a productive struggle that both the teachers and students had to endure, as well as the administration, throughout the process when the state was raising the standards, and [we were] closing the achievement gap at the same time, which is a heavy lift.

As one alum previously shared, challenges abound when attempting to turn around a struggling school; leaders must be ever ready with supporting staff through praise and coaching as needed.

All the faculty and adjuncts agreed that creating a positive working climate was “huge” and “essential.” Much of what the faculty discussed mirrored what the alumni reported. One faculty discussed the importance of “the environmental climate of the school. I spent a lot of summer just on the facility aspect of it, putting down new flooring, painting, landscaping.” Students and staff all noticed the improvements, and that helped to create school pride and positivity.

Guidance and coaching for teachers regarding student discipline was also discussed by the faculty, as one stated:

The climate of moving to a positive atmosphere is one that we’re having a little bit of struggle because teachers want to still focus on a punitive, rather than a positive measure, and so we meet as administrative staff to say, “Okay, how can we combat this to turn things around into a positive climate so that kiddos really want to come and enjoy and participate in an engaging classroom?”

These school leaders are attentive to all domains, cognitive, behavioral, and affective, as they endeavor to surmount the challenges of CLP schools.

Another common theme that emerged from the data was the difficulty high-poverty schools have in maintaining a preponderance of highly qualified teachers. According to the interviewees, the most challenging schools tend to have a high rate of teacher turnover, which is problematic. Since those schools have teaching positions open every year, it is common that the teachers hired are fresh out of college and have not yet had the experiences that would support highly-qualified first-year teacher performance. Add to that a new leader coming into a school that has been underperforming due to poor leadership, amid other challenges, and as one new principal shared, she immediately saw that “probably half of my staff needed to go for one reason or another.”

The next problem was acclimating the existing staff to new and higher standards; the new principal knew that “establishing routines and procedures to build that positive climate was something that we had to focus on all summer. . . . We needed to establish how we do things.” But until the school climate reaches a healthier homeostasis, the annual cycle of teachers churning in and out of schools continues. As a principal shared: “Then to lose over half my staff [again] this year, that was a blow. That’s been hard.” Other notable ideas the faculty shared were establishing new routines (e.g., “here’s how we sharpen pencils, here’s how we go to the bathroom”) and explaining the *why* to students, teachers, and parents behind new policies (e.g., “this is why we don’t spend a lot of time going to the bathroom because we’ll be missing instruction time”). After some “standing firm” and monitoring to support participation in new procedures, the new climate becomes established, and leaders can then “develop the teacher leadership piece.” Some leaders built teacher leadership capacity by having teachers go out for part of the day to other nearby schools and observe what was going on.

#### *Disposition 4: Instructional Leader*

According to The Haberman Educational Foundation, this disposition is about leaders prioritizing their role first as the leading educator in the organization, as opposed to the manager who oversees the maintenance of the facilities. All of the seven alumni thought this disposition was “very important”; however, two of the alumni reported that it also “depended on the situation,” explaining “I don’t think it mattered to them. Especially with the students, and even sometimes the faculty. They just wanted to know: Are you fulfilling the need that I have at the time? They just wanted their needs met.” Another graduate equated the role of the principal with “good customer service.” Applying Maslow’s hierarchy of needs to the situation of any CLP, high-poverty school, it is quite apparent that both students and teachers can easily have more needs or greater needs than schools that are high-performing; when the basic necessities of life interfere with a person’s school day, providing for those necessities would indeed be essential to preparing to learn.

Yet a third alum said he viewed managing the facilities as important as being the instructional leader, stating, “Somebody on the team has to manage the building. The conditions in the building are critically important for instruction to take place as well. There needs to be a good balance.” Given the funding mechanisms in American school systems, schools that serve mostly impoverished students commonly also have impoverished resources and funding. Given that technology has become more central and important in today’s educational practice, not being able to obtain or maintain physical resources for learning can be a widening gap between the schools that “have” and those that “have not.”

Still, a fourth alum indicated that “instructional leader and manager to me are equal. They have to see us as the instructional leader, but they also have to see you as the school manager and leader.” These responses may reflect one aspect of the Haberman pre-screener that needs to be revisited and updated. There have been significant advances in learning technology since the chartering of The Haberman Educational Foundation in 1994 and the copyright of the Haberman dispositions in 2008.

Although four alumni thought that managing the facilities was nearly as important, all the alumni thought serving as the instructional leader was important. One alum summarized that perspective as such:

I think being an instructional leader is probably one of the top [dispositions] because if you’re in a turn-around school, they’re not doing well, [and] you need to be able to look into a classroom and figure out what the problem is. You have to be able to recognize that and you have to be able to coach them, coach the teachers into what it is that they need to do to be able to hit the standard. You might need to be able to model it.

Another graduate prioritized the role of instructional leader as “I’m not sure you could ever have the street cred with the teachers if you couldn’t speak and talk about instructional practice. So, I personally believe it’s extremely important.” These, along with being able to model instructional

techniques for teachers, were the summary themes the alumni discussed regarding the importance of being an instructional leader in a high-poverty, low-achieving school.

The faculty and adjunct interviewees were unanimous in their perspective and saw being the instructional leader as “very important” and “absolutely vital.” As one leader summarized: “If you’re not talking about instruction on a regular basis, you’ll be stuck right there, which I think is where a lot of urban schools are.”

The faculty and adjuncts added some extra nuances to themes presented by the alumni. Besides modeling instruction to help struggling teachers, the leaders realized they needed to build that capacity in their teachers to reach academic goals. One faculty member stated: “We couldn’t grow unless I understood instructional practices and not just me ’cause some of those buildings were huge. We needed to develop some other teacher leaders who could do that work with me.” And another leader offered, “It’s not just our jobs to lead, but it’s our job to develop leaders.” The current emphasis in educational literature regarding the development of teacher leaders is another recent issue that is not explicitly addressed in the Haberman leadership dimensions.

Another current trend in the educational literature is the emphasis on life-long learning, specifically how leaders should model and promulgate this value with their staff. One faculty/adjunct engendered the concepts of life-long learning and being the lead learner in the school beautifully when he shared:

When we had staff development sessions, I wasn’t one of those principals that just went to the office even though I had so many management responsibilities. I stayed with them to the end of each session, so I would be learning with them and we would be able to implement together. I also covered classrooms when teachers had emergencies. If a teacher was absent half day, sometimes I would like to cover that and be in the classroom and interact with students, and that showed them that I was one of them working with them for instructional improvement strategies.

In the Haberman literature, the idea that principals are not only the lead instructor but also the lead learner in a school is currently not directly addressed.

### ***Disposition 5: Data Driven***

This leadership dimension addresses the propensity of a leader to base decision-making, policy, and procedures on careful assessment of data-driven evidence, rather than hortatory reliance on tradition, interpersonal charisma, or individuals’ personal agendas. All seven of the graduates perceived this dimension as being “very important” or “essential” when successfully leading a struggling school. As one graduate stated: “As you get to higher needs schools, and you’re involved with federal programs, data is your life.” Another offered: “For the school to become more successful you have to base it around the data because that’s all anybody is looking at. They’re not looking at the happy rate, there’s no happy scale. [Data is] a big one.” Yet another



graduate said, “I never have a conversation without it.” It appears that these school leaders consistently use data not only because it is essential, but also because it is helpful.

Data can be a helpful tool in leading staff for instructional improvement, as this alum described:

I have found the data is the easiest piece because it’s not mean, it’s not personal. When we’re having a conversation about numbers on a paper, it’s about that. And the conversation then becomes safer in a way for me and for the teacher because it’s about the data. They may still get upset about the data. There’s emotion tied to that data, but I’m not attacking anything personal. It’s just: how can we get better at this or how can we work with this?

Data can also be a useful leadership lever for change. Another graduate shared, “If you need change, people feel threatened by that. But if you have data that can back-up your reason for making the change, then they are more likely to buy-in. You can set the tone using the data.” Additionally, “You can’t argue with data. So, being able to show, here’s our three-year trend data, they can’t argue with it when you show the stats.” These leaders use data to reach a common understanding, build trust, and formulate a plan to make progress on goals.

Once data-driven practice is established in a school, the next leadership step is to build capacity with the data. An alum stated: “A key point for me as an instructional leader was to be able to discern which data points and elements were important, and then sharing that with my leadership team, and helping them to become more data driven.” Building teacher capacity with data has also become important, as described by this alum:

We’ve started collecting data if they have it. When teachers come to me, I say show me the data. Is this truly a problem? How many times has he gotten out of his seat? Do you have anything to show me? That helps them understand how to collect data and why to collect data and it supports them in the MTSS [multitiered system of supports] process, too.

Yet another graduate felt that building data capacity was also building distributed leadership capacity because leaders need to discern which data were important. The alums were clear that the focus on data is centered on the students and student achievement.

The recurring topic of Title I, high-needs schools having a plethora of novice teachers surfaced in this discussion as well. One leader shared:

The problem is there are so many first and second year and third year teachers in these high-needs schools that they’re learning how to teach as well as having to get their arms around this whole other piece of using the data with the behavior.

Several leaders identified this as a systemic problem for high-poverty, low-achieving schools. Given all the challenges outside a school leader’s control, this is one element that can be influenced

by district and state funding, and has the potential to greatly benefit students, staff, and leaders. It would behoove all constituents to demonstrate sufficient political will and demand support in this arena.

The faculty and adjuncts also perceived the data-driven disposition to be “very important” and “essential.” In addition to the themes the alumni discussed, the faculty and adjuncts added a few more nuances to the topic of leading with data. One faculty emphasized her person-centered approach to data: “It’s not just a number, it’s not just a second-grade class with a percentage. It’s this student, it’s John Smith, Jane Doe. They’re there. You’ve seen where they are and you see where they’re struggling.” All the leaders were sensitive to the personal experience of schooling for teachers and students.

Data may be important in the school environment; however, they are also time-consuming to use properly, as described by a faculty member:

I did individual student data chats with teachers. We sat down and talked about every kid in their room across the board. Be it academic, behavior, or social issues. It’s obviously time-consuming, and thankfully I don’t have a huge school this time, but they knew that data was important to show the needs and really talk about it. If I’m going to spend that much time with them, they understood that.

The faculty also discussed how building data capacity with teachers can create a culture of data for students. One principal explained:

One of the things I’ve found in the urban school is, no one’s talking to them about college and career or military options. I feel it’s vitally important that we connect this with a real purpose. In order for you to be a pediatrician, a police officer, or whatever it is, you’ve got to be able to read at this lifestyle level. I would say to students, “Hey, how’s it going? What’s your lifestyle level? What’s your goal?” They’re really starting to take ownership, like whenever a student would get excited and say, “I’m at this level. I’m going to be at this one by December!” It’s making a difference. It’s an interesting thing because oftentimes, some of the teachers here didn’t believe our students were capable, and I am positive that they are. It’s showing that as well.

The faculty expressed a reliance on data to drive decision-making and instruction, provide safe spaces for difficult conversations, and nurture relationship-building.

### ***Disposition 6: Product Evaluation***

As described by The Haberman Educational Foundation (2016, para. 6), this dimension predicts whether the respondent maintains focus on improved learning as the ultimate value to be preserved,

or whether the programs in his/her school are evaluated based on procedures followed, and how the programs are implemented.

In response to this interview question, all seven respondents indicated that as the leader, they need to pay attention to both the process and the end results of an instructional program. Many interviewees stated that it was “hard to tell which one was more important.” However, all participants were clear on one point: “The focus, ultimately, is the outcome, which is the product. Our goal is to have them at the highest level, at the end.” The leaders struggled a bit with the chicken and the egg conundrum, as described by one alum:

Initially, [I would focus] on student results, but as I learned more it became about the process because if you’re going through the process, the results are going to follow. And, if not done with fidelity, we can’t truly gauge the effectiveness.

The leaders also discussed that, especially when implementing a new program, progress monitoring to assess whether the process was working was “critical.” As another graduate described:

What’s critical is the feedback and coming back and revisiting it with follow-up. That’s the critical piece. And, if we found that an instructional strategy or the folks that we decided to use were not being effective, we were flexible in the moment, to change and alter. To me it is the secret to trying to really improve and move a turn-around school because you have to have your finger on the pulse of every single aspect, going on, at all times. To help and support before it’s too late, obviously. Can’t wait for some mystery exams.

Another alum talked about regularly monitoring the data and doing classroom observations during the program implementation time to keep data on instructional practices. As she mentioned, “That’s even beyond fidelity, and so you have to take all of those things into consideration to see if it’s going to be best for this school.” She would then show the data to the teachers so they could discuss the data in their PLCs to see if students were making progress or not. As another alum shared, “The district is always going to look for data. They’re going to be looking at the data.” Data has become ubiquitous in education, and leaders of struggling schools keep up with the data and leverage it for improvement.

The adjunct and faculty data themes were similar to the alumni data themes—they all thought both process and product were important. Another variation on the theme emerged for one adjunct/faculty who is currently at “the most challenging school in [her] whole life.” When newly coming in to lead a challenged, failing school, she stated: “Obviously when you just look at data that the state gives, no matter what state you’re in, you can see effectiveness pretty quickly.” Next, she had to monitor the fidelity not only of the program, but the instructional process: “When I got here it was, ‘I need you to teach all day. We need to just teach *all day*. And we’re going to use this curriculum’.” She went on to describe the practices that led to improving student achievement:

I really had to do fidelity first, because fidelity wasn't happening. Now that fidelity is there, it's all of what the students are doing and is it meeting the full intent and rigor of the standard. There's no blame. We're not getting into that. There's no badges. We're all here because the kids aren't able to do what they need to do. We're just here to see what we can do to fix it. It made a huge difference.

She went on to relate that “sometimes I have to ask people to practice it before they believe it. They may never believe my kids can do what my kids can do. . . . It's practice before belief with some of our teachers.” She then shared:

In one year, we got off of the failing list. Student achievement increased more than it had ever increased, and the slate is clean. I have one document that says we closed the gap in achievement by 12.9 points, and the state said that was just remarkable in one year, despite the challenges I've had.

Today in the practice of education, teachers and leaders at times have “too much data,” making it difficult but still “important to discern which data is important.” The product—student achievement data—appears to have become integral to the process and, for some leaders, practically indistinguishable.

### ***Disposition 7: Personal Accountability***

According to The Haberman Educational Foundation, this dimension “predicts the respondent's willingness to hold him/herself accountable for people and processes which s/he cannot completely control” (Haberman, 2016, para. 7), as opposed to seeing only other personnel as accountable for student learning and school success. In response to this question, all the alumni saw this disposition as “very significant” and themselves as personally accountable for student learning and success in their schools. Additionally, they saw student success as a group responsibility, as one alum stated:

We're all accountable. I'm accountable, you're accountable, and we got to get it done and this is how we get it done or this is how I can help you. We are a massive family. If you're hurting, then I'm hurting. If you're struggling, I'm struggling because I'm only going to be as good and show the data that you can produce. I'm here to support you and at the end of the day they know I have to own that school grade. It's a critical, courageous conversation at the beginning of the year. I might have to do it again, but I'm in it with them and you have to have that attitude or it's a big division and there's not that unity.

As another graduate said, “I've always felt, like a doctor takes an oath, as an educator, my job is to educate.” She further described: “Every child is different. Many of them walk in with lots of trauma. While they're with me, they will be nurtured. They will be cared for. They will be taught. They will leave better than when [they arrived].” Yet another graduate modeled a personal appeal to parents and staff, as described as:

I have pictures of my daughter on my counter here and I always say, somebody's taking care of my child while I'm here taking care of your child. So, just know that the time I'm with your child, I'm going to treat them how I want my child to be treated. So, I have their best interest in mind and I'm going to do what I can to help your child.

Regarding the challenges of getting all stakeholders on board with the idea of personal responsibility, another graduate shared, "We have a cross section of teachers who are from the old model of 'I taught it. It's up to them to get it'." One alum thought it was important to "convey to teachers: your students are not just the ones on your roster. All the students in this school are your students. And we're doing what we can do to help all of them." He noted the importance of making that mindset a cultural norm at the school and went on to describe his approach to build group unity:

I constantly tell my teachers it's a heavy lift and not all of us lift the same, so let's all lift together. If we're all lifting together, you've got to trust that the person next to you is lifting. If we're all in it together pushing forward then we're going to naturally grab everybody else's strength as we go. To model that on a daily basis, not enough could be said.

Yet another alum described his leadership activities to promote buy-in: "We took ownership with the teachers. We provided support in the classroom. We were a part of the PLCs, in those conversations on a regular basis, so that they did see us as a part of the work."

There are many aspects of students' lives that are beyond the control of educators, and in high-needs school, those aspects can have profound impact on student learning. The leaders spoke about addressing that with their staff:

How do you work with children from poverty and their families and stuff? You've got to sell that, as well, because they don't come with the same background knowledge, ready to learn. They don't come sitting in the chair. You're right. We can't affect their sleep at night. All those things—what can we do? So, it's having the positive attitude of saying, right, we can't control that so what can we control?

It was evident that the alumni considered personal accountability coupled with group responsibility to be a key factor in turning around a struggling school.

Another participant discussed how important it was to promote the idea of self-efficacy among all staff: "There has to be a sense of self-efficacy. You certainly have to believe that you have enough in your control that you can affect and impact the outcome." She shared her approach to make this happen:

You just got to focus on what you can control. Every federal or state regulation, law, whatever comes in, there's a lot of stuff we don't agree with or whatever, but let's make it the best we can do, make it work for us. Even if we don't agree with every single aspect of it, let's figure out how to work around it, through it, or whatever to make it work for us to get the results we all know we are responsible for and can ascertain.

The leaders were cognizant of the need to “ensure that we get a year's worth of learning from where they start.” As another graduate summarized, “I feel that everybody owns the success or failure of every child because it's a community.”

The adjuncts and faculty also saw this dimension as “vital” to the success of a school. One school leader affirmed the crucial role of the leader in modeling this disposition by saying, “I think your actions as a leader have to show it more than anything. You've got to show it. . . . You have to be there.” Another adjunct/faculty shared:

My personal accountability came through with my work with my people. I was in it with them. In urban schools, the work is so difficult and usually your teachers are so new that if you aren't in it with them and you aren't sharing what you've learned, if you don't build those strategic relationships, I don't think it works. I think those are the differences between the leaders that make it work in urban schools and the ones that don't.

Finding ways to work around the issues that are beyond personal control and developing partnerships was another theme the adjuncts and faculty delved into. One urban school leader, upon surmising that many school children need eye glasses, described her efforts:

The LensCrafters people—they do this thing where they'll give free glasses to people who need it in urban schools. So, we put [the students] on buses and had the LensCrafters people do their exam. Eighty-five kids came back with prescriptions that said they needed to have glasses. We sent those prescriptions home with parents. After about two weeks, we still had 50 kids who didn't have glasses. Parents didn't have time . . . maybe because parents are working too much with their jobs, maybe they forgot, maybe they didn't have transportation. Then we got another bus, and we put all those 50 kids on a bus, and we took them to the LensCrafters, and we got the glasses. We think outside of the box, and we figure out how to make that happen because we gotta make it happen for kids. Because you can't have kids in classes that can't see or hear or whatever.

Another adjunct/faculty discussed, “I think we always addressed that we cannot do everything, but we had partners. Our partners helped us accomplish those things.” He then went on to describe how he arranged partners to provide numerous wrap-around services to his school community, including providing dental and medical services in the school, and a law firm to assist the large immigrant population in his school with obtaining residency status.

### ***Disposition 8: Responsible Leader***

The Haberman Educational Foundation describes this dimension as the leader's inclination to see their role "to be primarily one in which s/he will be the responsible authority for performing major functions, or does s/he believe that the leader's role is primarily one of delegating as much as possible to others and overseeing their work" (Haberman, 2016, para. 8). The researchers did not include an interview question that addressed this dimension, as we saw the general topic of this question to be covered in other interview questions and, therefore, redundant.

Much data were gathered through other interview questions (and already shared) that supports the behaviors of shared accountability and responsibility as reported by the interviewees. Additionally, in several data excerpts, the leaders discussed participating in professional development and school tasks with the staff to obtain buy-in and "street cred" with teachers. Regarding the concept of delegation, the leaders interviewed clearly placed high value on creating a climate of "family" and inclusiveness, as well as mentioned "distributive leadership" especially as needed to accomplish all the work of successfully running a school. Clearly, these school leaders feel that these dispositions are a substantial aspect of leading a school through a turn-around process.

### ***Disposition 9: Expanded Principal's Role***

The Haberman Educational Foundation describes this dimension as predicting "the respondent's propensity to connect the school with the resources needed to serve diverse children in urban poverty, or to be limited to only the district's budget, personnel and resources." To the alumni, this dimension was least important. Two of the alumni considered this dimension to be least important or optional in comparison to the other dispositions. As one alum described:

This is probably the least. . . . You could probably never do this and be okay at the school. I'm not saying you shouldn't and there's great resources out there to connect to, but I've seen principals not tap into the resources and then I've seen teachers do a great job. It is important if you can do that and build those relationships. Some principals I think look at it as another thing to manage. One more thing.

She went on to discuss how she does, in fact, have some partnerships. She developed one partnership with a church to mentor some high-risk boys and girls at her school; she also has a few business partnerships that provide "free ice cream for my fifth graders." Her perception of partnership tended toward, "You'll get more free stuff" and "It's a frugal way." Another alum described her experience with outside partners:

At the last school and at this school, as far as community involvement and parent involvement, it's very minimal. My last school, even though it was fairly large, the only

time the parents really came to the school is if we were gonna feed them. If we had a program, they wouldn't always come for the program. They would just come for the food.

However, her district recently obtained a grant that pays for a partner-organization to provide social emotional learning curriculum and instruction. She was excited about this partnership, stating "That's gonna be a great resource to help with the children because that's the part that I recognize that I have to fix first before I can layer in the academics." This perspective was also present with one of the adjunct/faculty.

In contrast, the other five alumni thought that partnering with community organizations was important, as one graduate stated, "I think without it, kids would be in even worse shape." Another alum explained:

You can't leave that out, because the school itself may not have all of the resources available there. So, that's why that connection to the community is essential. You have to use the community as an extension of the school as a resource.

Yet another graduate related how forming partnership with organizations was essential "now, more so than ever" due to district budget cuts.

Another theme that surfaced was the effects of generational poverty, as another graduate illustrated that "students in poverty come from parents in poverty who often don't do things because they lack the resources or they don't know how to attain the resources. They don't know what to do." Many of the leaders gave examples of how they provided information for parents to connect with resources, such as food banks in the area, food backpacks every Friday for students to take home, organizations that provided assistance to pay a family's utility bill, help with applications for family assistance, a clothes closet onsite for children in need, and adult education classes onsite to promote adult literacy.

School leaders who are unable to capitalize on partnerships would likely benefit from assistance from the district. One alum has moved into a high-level district position and described the efforts underway by district leaders to support school leaders:

There's quite a bit of generational poverty there. So, we've had to do wrap-around services. I have a medical clinic. A medical group comes in, and they've actually set up a clinic in the school to help with the dental care and some other needs with the children right there, as well as their parents because some of them just simply can't afford it for various reasons. So, while they're there they will actually do a health check on the parents. It's a number of things that we're trying to wrap services around a school and help them change their trajectory of what would normally be generational poverty.

He then discussed more issues associated with generational poverty and his efforts from the district level to help school leaders:



We received a mental health grant. Mental health—I think every community has issues with that. But you see, I think it’s growing more. I don’t have any quantifiable data to support this, but I do think that you see more mental health issues as it relates to the impacts of poverty. We’re one of three districts with Project Aware here to work with identifying and providing awareness around mental health services that are provided in and through the community.

From the data, one theme that emerged was that in the most challenging situations, a school leader may view developing outside partnerships as just “one more thing to manage.” One adjunct/faculty provided another dimension to the challenge of making partnerships viable, as she shared:

[Partnerships] have to really align with what the needs are in your building because other than that, you’ll just have too much going on and really not satisfy the needs, so figuring out the needs, figuring out the resources that are in the city, or in that community, is necessary.

All the adjunct/faculty saw partnerships as important to their efforts to turn around a struggling school; however, garnering partnerships can be difficult. Another adjunct stated:

In [this state] there wasn’t a lot of connectedness to the community. You would have business partners if you had a family that owned the business and the student went to your school. In a Title I school, that was very rare. The parents were working class folks or not working at all.

However, she then described her experience leading a high-needs school in a different state: “In the community in [another state], it’s been very different. It’s a Chamber of Commerce plan. Every school has a partner in education or two or three.” She also felt the support the school received from partners was an integral part of turning around student achievement in her school.

Another faculty touched on the topic of mental health support in low-income communities and the role of partnerships:

It was vital because, especially in terms of mental health issues, like a lot of times the budget didn’t allow for a social worker or a counselor, and we had over 700 kids in a neighborhood in [one large urban city] where 100% of the kids were on [free and reduced lunch]. You don’t have the resources necessary within your building to help them in all the areas.

The adjunct and faculty themes were similar to the alumni themes, including leveraging partnerships to provide for essential student and family needs, as previously discussed. Additionally, one faculty described efforts to help undocumented students go to college:

Many times, we found out when they were approaching their senior year, that they were undocumented and they did not qualify for any loans. There, we connected with our elected officials, our alderman, our council, to be able to do this.

Developing and managing partnerships was viewed by most the participants as important activities to support CLP schools, if the leader can bring the most urgent student issues under control to free up time to cultivate partnerships. Support from the district or state has allowed district and school leaders to further leverage the benefits of partnerships.

### *Disposition 10: Bottom-Up Representative*

This leadership dimension seeks to predict “whether the respondent will protect and enhance effective practices in his/her school or simply follow orders” (Haberman, 2016, para. 10). While all seven alumni recognized that “you got to do it. When it comes to the policies that either come down from the State or the district, we’re mandated. We don’t have much choice,” all seven alumni also recognized that “you have to be an advocate for your school and your students” and discussed how at times, they would try to adjust the mandate to fit the needs of their school: “kind of keep myself out of trouble, but yet do what I knew needed to be done for the success of my students.” One alum characterized her hedging approach:

If it’s not what’s best for students I deal with it the best way that I can. I am the type of person who is somewhat of a rule follower, you might say. If there is latitude, a little bit of latitude, a certain way of doing it, with accomplishing what the mandate is, but also making it better for my students, I’m going to create whatever that looks like. Sometimes there are ways to make things a little bit better.

Other graduates discussed tactics for “selling” the new rules to faculty, with “It’s all how you frame it. That goes back to transparency. That goes back to clarity of how you communicate and give the why. Always beginning with the why in mind.” Another graduate discussed a different “selling” approach as “We had to do A through G. I really need you all to do A, B, and C. I’m going to do all the other stuff. Show them how you make it a bit easier on them.”

Another graduate described his noncompliance approach to dealing with the district, “Sometimes you just got to be an advocate and say, hey, can we not do this? And this is why. Make sure you have data to back it up.” Another alum discussed being caught in the nexus of changing leadership styles in her district regarding taking chances:

The mindset is usually, we have to do what the district says, you have to do what the district says, you have to . . . and, while that is true, the new leadership in our district is saying, “We want you to take chances. We want you to not be afraid to try something at your school level.” Because, every school is not the same. If you see something, or you think something is gonna work in your school, then you try that within the parameters of what

the district gives. Or you call and you say, “Hey, this is what’s going on at school ‘A,’ and we want to try this.” So, you have to be willing to take chances when you know your population, and you have to be willing to step outside of the norm and in those barriers sometimes and say, “Hey, you know, we’re just crazy enough to see if this works for our kids, because we know this over here is not working.” That’s one that we had to get comfortable doing.

Another alum summarized, “For the majority of the time, it’s not really all that difficult. I do what I need to do for the district. Period. Then I do what I need to do with my school.” The alums suggested that when a time comes for noncompliance, one needs to have prodigious, data-based evidence to support the alternative view.

The alum working at the district-level provided an added perspective on mandates and compliance, based on his real-life experience as a school leader. He shared:

I think there needs to be a certain amount of structure and requirements from a district perspective, for poverty and transients [students] like we have, to ensure the students don’t get lost along the way. Then from there, my big thing has always been performance grants autonomy. If you’re getting good results, meaning that they’re performing above what the state has identified as performing beyond expectations, then I give a little more autonomy.

The concept that “performance grants autonomy” is a noteworthy addition to possible nonconformist arguments; however, school leaders may well note that this district leader is also looking for performance “above” what is expected.

The four adjuncts and faculty discussed similar themes in their interviews. One faculty described his experience with autonomy:

Schools that demonstrated substantial progress could be part of what we called the autonomous management schools. I was one of the first neighborhood schools to do that, having demonstrated this growth. That allowed me to really be engaged in the schools and in the classrooms, more than just going through so many bureaucratic needs.

Another faculty member described her function in mitigating mandates as acting as the “buffer between some regulations and things teachers are expected to do. Maybe I do the report instead of asking the teachers, or get coaches to do some of those things in order not to overload them.” Yet another faculty would converse with her superintendent and explain how parts of a new mandate would not work or “fit” with her school; she appreciated her superintendent’s assistance in “tempering” the mandate to fit her school. All the faculty saw it as important to attempt to implement a mandate with fidelity as much as possible, in a reasonable manner.

As an addendum to this disposition of bottom-up advocacy, we also asked the alumni and faculty adjuncts how significant it was to advocate for students versus teachers. Both groups of leaders

were united in their approach, which can be summarized as: “I always put students first, I tell them that up front. I’ll always have [teachers’] backs. I’ll never embarrass them in a meeting or anything like that. The students have to come first because they have no voice.” However, again, the theme of an abundance of novice teachers that typically serve Title I schools emerged. As one faculty shared:

Having 75% of your staff be first-year teachers, you’ve got to advocate for their needs. They don’t know how to teach yet. And so of course our achievement scores should go up and we’re not making excuses, but we got 75% new teachers, so here’s what we can do. We have to put extra emphasis on helping those teachers, so that they accelerate past what first-year teachers should be able to do because our kids need them.

According to these school leaders, attracting and retaining more experienced and proficient teachers to serve in CLP schools with high rates of poverty is a system improvement that has the potential to yield significant benefit and improvement for these children and schools.

### *Disposition 11: Parents with Voice*

This leadership dimension is described by The Haberman Educational Foundation as predicting “the likelihood that the respondent will seek to involve parents and community as genuine partners, or limit them to homework helpers and visitors” (Haberman, 2016, para. 11). Two of the seven alumni have not yet had enough return on investment in the area of parental support and view this leadership dimension as “minimally” important. For one alum, authentically including the parental voice in her school life was regarded as a compliance item: “Because it’s being mandated, we’re going to do it. I see it as being helpful in some ways. I don’t think it’s necessary for our success because . . . it’s just another one of those check off things.” Another graduate described how attending to student achievement has been her all-consuming immediate priority:

We don’t have people really that come in. As far as outside community support, parent support, I haven’t seen it at all. We haven’t got there. That wasn’t as important to me as raising academics and the climate of the school. It would be nice if I could get there for that, but as long as in-house we take care of what needs to be done, we can do it. It would be easier with outside help but we just haven’t had success in getting it. We were hoping to build that up because that’s what distinguishes a low performing school from a more elite school, of what parents think about is a good school, parents helping out.

If school districts are going to mandate parental involvement, then perhaps it would also be wise to provide assistance to schools who struggle with forming those relationships, as yet another graduate stated: “The district said with this community involvement vision that they’ve set up, ‘We’re going to help principals with that even more.’”

The other five alumni considered this dimension to be “very important” because “[parents] need to feel welcomed and they need to know that you’re working with them and not against them.” Another alum with a viable parent base stated, “You have to extend home to the parent, sometimes helping to meet some of their needs in order for them to be involved.”

The alums readily acknowledged the challenges parental involvement encompassed, such as significant time investment: “This takes a lot of [the] principal’s time because relationship is huge and you also have to educate. You play the middleman in this role a lot.” Part of educating the parents included, as one graduate explained, “You have to have adults in the building who have a mindset that things aren’t fixed, that we can change, that we can change the trajectory, we can change the outcomes.” When recruiting parental help first involves “meeting some of their needs” and “educating,” clearly this could be a time-intensive activity.

Another challenge that emerged from the data revolves around parenting. As one alum shared, “It sounds cliché and trite, but it does take a village to raise a child, especially one in poverty. I’m seeing that become very much the case here. Parenting is really lacking.” Another graduate stated, “Parenting is the single biggest deterioration I’ve seen related to teaching over my career.” To fill the gap, this leader reached out to ministry associations, grandparents, and members of the Retired Educators Association for tutoring and reading instruction after school. Yet another alum shared:

I think probably in my experience I’ve seen [parenting] lacking across all demographic levels in that regard. I don’t think it’s just a poverty issue. I just had to turn in a children-and-families report on one of the most affluent families in the community because they decided to take a skiing trip and left their 10-year-old and 8-year-old at home for a week and a half by themselves.

Undoubtedly, school leaders would be happy to meet the needs of parents; sometimes leaders cannot meet the parents’ needs until the students’ needs are stabilized.

From the adjunct and faculty perspective, the inclusion of an authentic parental voice in the daily life of the school was also a mixed bag: three out of the four adjuncts and faculty considered this dimension to be “minimally” important or not essential. As one turn-around school leader said, “That’s a tough question. I think school leaders need to figure that out. I don’t think I’ve figured out that balance because I’ve not had a good experience, a great experience with any of that.” She added, “That’s one of the harder parts of my job.” Based on her experience, another faculty shared her ambivalence on the subject:

I think it was significant, but I also think that we had to “get it done” sometimes without those people and those roles actively working with us at the school. I think they start out with good intention a lot of times, but it ends up being where you spend so much time trying to get them together to have their meetings that it takes time away from what I had to do. I haven’t really seen . . . I mean I’ve been in schools . . . the role is there, but it doesn’t really feel like it expands into the operations of the school.

Leaders must budget their time investments judiciously; when a leader hasn't "really seen people in these roles actually have a huge impact" with return on their investment, it is understandable that they are cautious about making the time investment.

Another aspect to parental inclusion that requires time investment is recruitment of parental participants. As another faculty stated, "I'm one of the people in charge of getting the parents there. It takes a lot of my effort. I make personal phone calls, send out ads. I all but sky write [the invitation]." As another faculty related, "It's important, but it is very difficult . . . because people work so many hours, and long hours. It's difficult to find people in a Title I school that can devote that type of time." Leaders are aware that parenting in the twenty-first century includes challenges.

One adjunct/faculty described the successes he had with parental involvement in his school.

We offered classes for parents for high school completion every day. We had a partnership with a community college, and that was free because we had many parents participate, and they sent us a free instructor. We also offered English classes for especially newer [parents who were] new arrivals as an immigrant community. We also had technology sessions for parents where students would be able to come with their parents and use our computer lab and show them what were they doing in our computer labs in our classrooms.

He related that at the inception of this community school, parental involvement was included in the school development plan as a top priority: "the parent piece, getting them engaged in learning." Including this stipulation in a school start-up plan may indeed provide impetus for parental inclusion.

### *Disposition 12: Client Advocate*

According to The Haberman Educational Foundation, this dimension predicts "the respondent's ability to implement the school's commitment to serve diverse students and families in poverty and simultaneously represent the professional staff" (Haberman, 2016, para. 12). The researchers felt this dimension was similar to the earlier dimension of bottom-up advocate. Therefore, we addressed the staff versus student perspectives as an addendum to our discussion of disposition 10.

### *Disposition 13: Problem Solver*

The Haberman Educational Foundation states that this dimension predicts "whether the respondent will be a dynamic, creative leader, or whether s/he will passively wait for problems and solutions to be presented to him/her" (Haberman, 2016, para. 13). All seven alumni saw this disposition as "important, but not essential," probably because they interpreted dynamic as having an extroverted personality. As one graduate stated, "That's in the eye of the beholder. I think it's more important

to be consistent in your value system. Dynamic is great, but you can only cheerlead so long. At some point you gotta get things in place.” Another alum related:

I think dynamic is nice. It’s an aside. I mean, that only takes you so far. Of course, you gotta have knowledge and skill base, and all the things that are important, but I think at the very root of it, if you’re gonna be a turn-around leader, you’ve gotta have a passion. I think that kind of transcends everything.

Another graduate related her personal journey on being dynamic: “Dynamic? I’m working on that because I’m not a social butterfly, per se. I do what I have to do to get students involved in doing things, and staff. That’s a learning curve that I’m on right now.”

On the dimension of creativity, however, all seven alumni agreed it is “extremely significant . . . to think out of the box,” or as another graduate described it, “paint outside the lines.” Another alum likened dynamic leadership to dynamic teaching: “It is the same thing we expect in the classroom. We expect students to be engaged, and you do that by being creative. As leaders we have to do the same thing.” Yet another alum interpreted *dynamic* as selling the American dream of social mobility through education: “You’re selling your dream and their dreams back to them, to your faculty and your students. You claw, you get every single piece, nugget of knowledge you can. No one can ever take that away from you.” Still another graduate had another view of how being dynamic is important:

You have to be a dynamic systems thinker. If you’re not a dynamic systems thinker, then there are going to be many things that come at you for which you will not be capable of overcoming or solving. You have to be able to also sometimes create something out of nothing. That takes that creative juice as well. I think that is also an aspect of being a turn-around leader—definitely thinking out of the box and trying new things, without worry of repercussions. It’s all about the kids.”

These leaders saw dynamic creativity as essential in their work. Yet another alum summarized: “When you’re going into a turn-around school, obviously what has been in place isn’t working, so you need to be creative in figuring it out. You have to be creative with your funding, all sorts of things.” Clearly, dynamic, active creativity is fundamental for their working environment.

The adjunct/faculty had a similar split in their perceptions about being a “dynamic, creative” leader. One faculty not only saw dynamic as extroverted but also as a public persona, as she shared:

You’ve got to put that acting face on every day. I am tired of the image that was portrayed by my school. I feel like as often as I can, I have to get out to the business leaders, become a part of the community, in order that they hear the good things going on because the media is not our friend. The poor people at the nail salon have to listen to how great my school is because they’re captive audiences.

She also considered charisma to be an aspect of *dynamic* and added, “I feel like if I wasn’t as charismatic as I am, you wouldn’t be able to do this as easily. If I had a different personality, I think this would be very difficult.”

The other three faculty interpreted being dynamic as being creative, just as the alumni did. One leader thought it was hugely important “to be creative and to step out of the box that you might have grown up in or live in, especially in a diverse community. You want to show students what type of leader that they should be.” Another faculty member interpreted *dynamic* by describing all the wrap-around services he developed at his school and stating that he was able to accomplish this only “with community assistance and engaging parents. We all worked together to develop an improved quality of life that connected academics to everything else. I think creativity has to be shown in that matter.” These leaders displayed dynamic, proactive leadership in addressing their challenges, and they felt that creativity was a crucial aspect of their success. Table 2 is a graphic summary of the 13 Haberman leadership dimensions and the qualitative descriptors presented by the interviewees. The graphic scale in each cell indicates at a glance whether the perceptions for each group were consistent or mixed. One can also see at a glance whether the perceptions between the two populations were in agreement.

Table 2  
*Summary of Leadership Disposition Perception Data\**

Leadership Disposition**	EDL Graduate Responses	EDL Faculty Responses
1. Sensitive to Diversity vs. Insensitive to Diversity	“extremely important,” “critically important” ++	“very important” ++
2. Creates a Common Vision vs. Fosters Personal Preferences	“very important,” “very significant” ++	“very significant,” “completely essential” ++
3. Develops Positive Working Climate vs. Enforces Rules	“very important,” “significant,” “critical” ++	“essential” ++
4. Instructional Leader vs. Building Manager	“very important,” “depended on the situation” + / 0	“very important,” “absolutely vital” ++
5. Data Driven vs. Idiosyncratic	“very important,” “essential” ++	“very important,” “essential” ++
6. Product Evaluation vs. Process Evaluation	“hard to tell which one was more important” +	“both are important” +
7. Personal Accountability vs. Others Accountability	“very significant” ++	“vital” ++
8. Responsible Leader vs. Delegator	see #2, #7 ++	++
9. Expanded Principal’s Role vs. Traditional Principal’s Role	“important,” “least important,” “optional” + / 0	“important” +



10. Bottom-Up Representative vs. Top-Down Representative	“mandatory compliance” balanced with “advocate for your school and your students” 0 / +	“mandatory compliance” balanced with “advocate for your school and your students” 0 / +
11. Parents with Voice vs. Parents as Helpers	“minimally important,” “very important” - / ++	“minimally important,” “essential” - / ++
12. Client Advocate vs. Staff Advocate	see #10 0 / +	see #10 0 / +
13. Problem Solver (Dynamic and Creative) vs. Reactor	“important, but not essential,” “extremely significant to think out of the box” + / 0	“important, but not essential,” “extremely significant to think out of the box” + / 0

\* Scale: ++ = very important; + = important; 0 = “depends” or tie; - = not very important

\*\* From The Haberman Educational Foundation Inc., 2008.

### Discussion

The purpose of this program evaluation was to determine how effective the NLU’s EDL program has been and to reveal the curricular areas most in need of further development. A cross reference showed that 13 of the 17 Haberman Star Urban Administrator’s dimensions of effective school leadership are directly related to 21 of NLU’s M.Ed./Ed.S. Educational Leadership (EDL) curricula. We interviewed alumni who completed either the EDL master’s or the Educational Specialist degree, or both, as well as faculty and adjunct faculty with current experience leading schools with high-poverty and low-achievement rates (i.e., state-rated schools of D or F). We also analyzed longitudinal pre- and post-program Haberman data as one means to address needs to revise our M.Ed. and Ed.S. EDL curricula to improve emerging school leaders.

We aimed to answer the research question concerning the type of change that occurred in our EDL candidates’ urban leadership dispositions from our EDL M.Ed. and Ed.S. programs as indicated by the results of the pre- and post-scores on the Star Urban Administrator Pre-Screener, their trends, and lessons faculty might learn about the dispositional outcomes of our EDL curricula to better prepare our students as urban school leaders.

In analyzing The Haberman Star Urban Administrator data in this study, it was promising to see a significant improvement in overall student scores. This seems to suggest the instruction in this program had a positive impact in areas considered important to persons who may become educational leaders in urban schools. Based on this research project, we conclude that the inclusion in our curricula of the 13 dimensions measured by the Haberman is important for urban school leaders, particularly for those of CLP schools. It appears NLU’s continued focus on these dimensions in its M.Ed. and Ed.S. program is justified. Since NLU’s current EDL program addresses only 13 of the 17, it seems important that the remaining four also should be incorporated. The one caveat is that our study revealed some overlap in these dimensions, and this overlap needs to be further assessed as part of any incorporation effort.

The sensitive to diversity dimension was identified in this program evaluation as “critically important.” This is not a surprise since urban schools’ enrollment include a majority of various racial, ethnic, and special learner groups. It appears that trust in school leaders depends in part on their understanding the importance of equity or fairness in addressing students’ various individual needs. Educating all students in the same way is not equitable. Nothing could be more inequitable. Another important identified idea that emerged from the study is having school leaders who are culturally competent and caring enough to be sensitive to and empathetically address cultural backgrounds when teaching a diverse group of students. The latter addresses the potential need for the EDL curricula to incorporate new or improved activities and experiences leading to more diversity sensitivity and cultural literacy.

Creating a common vision was identified in this study as another critical dimension. An educational vision must flow from purpose. If the purpose of education is to facilitate learning, then one must develop a vision of what teaching and learning should be and should achieve. Goals, objectives, and instructional strategies must flow from both purpose and vision. Responses indicated that these must be developed as a product of the school as a family seeking common ground. This points to the EDL department’s need to enhance its leadership curricula on developing students’ skill sets related to planning and collaborative decision-making, and training their own staff members in how to be more effective participants.

Developing a positive working climate has clear implications for building relationships with teaching and non-teaching staff members, parents, and community members. This dimension is about having a safe and attractive school, welcoming all who come into the building. The study revealed the importance of providing social and psychological development services to students and even supporting the students and families with such basic needs as food, clothing, and shelter. The challenges of acquiring and maintaining a highly competent staff were identified as vital but difficult to achieve in some urban environments. This points to the importance of the EDL department’s enhancing its curricula related to internal and external relationship-building related to expanded social, counseling, and psychological services for its students and their families.

The study identified the role of instructional leader as a priority, but described the instructional and non-instructional responsibilities as equally important. It indicated that the non-instructional aspects can be addressed by better utilization of office staff and time management efforts to ensure sufficient time is spent on instruction. The study also addressed the idea that low-performing urban schools are different and require more resources, especially in the area of technology. The study also suggests the importance of emphasizing students as lifelong learners. The implication for the EDL curricula is to enhance its current experiences related to sound management practices and strategic budgeting for low-performing students that include the allocation of new funding and/or the reallocation of current funding. This should include the funding of non-instructional areas focused on enhancing instruction for all students.

The data-driven dimension was identified as important, even essential. The results indicated that schools have turned those two words into a daily mantra. The study addressed the idea that data in

low-performing schools play a major role in improving instruction through helping teachers identify individual learning needs and guiding their instructional decision-making. The study revealed the use of data as most important to support change efforts. The data and information gleaned from this dimension assessment suggest the need for the EDL curricula to continue to focus on and enhance students' learning how to collect, organize, and interpret data in more effective and efficient ways to improve both instructional and non-instructional programs in response to new research-based strategies.

The product evaluation dimension is self-defined and was identified as a necessary process. The study revealed the importance of focusing on the results of programs and their processes. It indicated the importance of ongoing monitoring of both. The issue of fidelity was also addressed. Whether or not a program is effective depends on how faithful the implementers are in implementation. The assumption underlying these responses is the existence of a continuous process of evaluation that includes making changes in a plan or program even during implementation, as needed. The implication for the EDL curricula is to continue and enhance its instruction related to product evaluation that does not focus solely on learning outcomes as the ultimate value. The study also indicated the critical nature and quality of implementation processes and their faithful use, and the importance of using data to make changes in the implementation process as necessary and possible.

The study found the personal accountability dimension "very significant." It addresses personal accountability for results even though a person may have limited control. The notion of both an individual and group responsibility for results also was revealed. It was suggested that some teachers hold only the students accountable for poor results and tend to use students' backgrounds as an excuse for poor performance, not as source of information for determining how to address their unique learning styles or needs. This has significant implications for the EDL curricula. Programs must address this dimension in terms of cultural issues related to personal and shared responsibilities. When it comes to teaching and learning, it is important to address the accountability of different stakeholders and who is accountable for what. The study's findings also have implications for preparing future leaders to be effective in developing a culture of high expectations for all learners (noting some students' high expectations may be lower than others at different times and in different subjects) and a culture of personal responsibility for unsatisfactory results.

The next dimension is the responsible leader. This dimension assumes one can distinguish clearly what major functions belong to whom, either in a district or school. The law in every state identifies those responsibilities, and they are found (or referenced) in all state and local districts' policies, including job descriptions. Although the researchers did not address this dimension through their questions, the study results necessarily touched on it. The participants saw the responsible leader as one delegating specific functions to competent staff in areas of need. The notion of staff, students, parents, and community engagement speak to the idea of recognizing and providing others the opportunities to share defined responsibilities in a school or district. It seems the most difficult issue in the dimension is defining engagement opportunities for those other than the

instructional staff. The EDL curricula can be enhanced in areas related to defining a responsible leader, particularly regarding his/her use of non-instructional, external stakeholders.

The expanded principal's role dimension relates to a broader use of community agencies and other resources for students. This dimension received mixed reviews from participants in the study in terms of importance. However, the study revealed community partnerships dealing with basic human services as essential, particularly for children in poverty. It suggested that this dimension be addressed jointly with the district, given its broader influence and capacity to serve an entire district. This has some implications for the EDL curricula. More emphasis can be placed on the importance of and ways to help school leaders play an active role in providing students and parents better access to community social and human services.

The bottom-up representative dimension deals with whether school leaders can be effective and direct in protecting effective programs against their superior's denial. This is sensitive since it relates to a school leader arguing against orders to do something else. This dimension was similar to the client advocate dimension in which a person must have the capacity to support school or district policies while simultaneously advocating for students. Bottom-up representation involves courage. It requires making a distinction between a district policy (written or unwritten) regarding program development or purchase and the school's practical need. This dimension also has implications for the leadership's capacity to influence others and effectively use data as an essential component of his/her arguments. The implications for the EDL curricula are to enhance its students' leadership skills in the areas of curriculum planning and development, including activities designed to develop leadership capacity to influence and persuade—the fundamental skills of leading.

The dimension of parents and voice relates to the interest in seeking parental and community engagement. This was another dimension that received mixed reviews, from “minimally important” to “very important.” Many school leaders find it difficult to clearly identify how to engage parents and the community in nontraditional, direct, instructional support roles and may find their personal availability and capacity to help limited. They appear to be more comfortable with more traditional non-instructional activities. Much of the reluctance to engage parents and volunteers in decision-making roles and instructional support (aside from state-mandated roles on advisory groups) stems from a lack of sufficient knowledge about implementation and insufficient time to lead and manage. The implication for the EDL curricula is to include more specific knowledge and skill-development information and activities in how to engage multiple stakeholders as well as educate them to maximize their contributions to student learning.

The problem solver dimension addresses the capacity for leaders to be dynamic or creative in identifying solutions for chronic problems. Some of the participants in the study considered dynamic leadership as desired but not essential. The word *dynamic* seems to hold the connotation of charismatic or charm-driven leadership. The study showed a problem in the participants' defining leaders using the term *dynamic*, but they gravitated toward the idea of being creative and thinking beyond the ordinary, considering these very important. Solving problems in diverse

low-performing schools may require thinking in new and creative ways. NLU's EDL curricula can be enhanced by incorporating additional experiences and activities in problem solving that inspire creative thinking in seeking solutions specific to diverse low-performing urban schools.

Most of these dimensions can be best served in relevant settings through actual performance and practice. Learning needs to be constructive in which graduate students in EDL work on real-school issues in CLP schools with opportunities to focus on policy and program development tasks, while being held accountable for their actions. The results of the study support the continued utilization of relevant and related internship projects, case studies, work, readings, and subsequent discussions in class and online or in some other form of idea exchanges. Discussion prompts addressing specifically Haberman's 13 dimensions may be useful in developing future leaders for CLP schools.

### **Limitations of the Study**

### **Conclusions and Future Prospects**

We the faculty authors of the Developing Leadership Dispositions research project approached this as a collaborative inquiry encouraged by NLU's research program and mission as a progressive educational institution. We believe our findings as presented can add to the further development of our Educational Leadership Program at the master's, educational specialist, and doctoral levels, as well as the participating school district and other districts seeking to develop an effective pipeline of future school leaders informed by curricular practices that develop relevant leadership dispositions. Pre-kindergarten through grade 12 (P12) students should benefit ultimately from effectively educated new school leaders, and NLU should continue to realize gains in evidentiary data of continuous program improvement helpful in future National College of Education (NCE) Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) review.

The purpose of this program evaluation was to determine how effective the NLU's EDL program has been and to reveal the curricular areas most in need of further development. A special cross reference showed that 13 of the 17 Haberman Star Urban Administrator's dimensions of effective school leadership are directly related to 21 of NLU's M.Ed. and Ed.S. curricula. We interviewed alumni who completed either the NLU EDL master's or the Educational Specialist degree, or both, as well as faculty and adjunct faculty with current experience leading schools with high-poverty and low-achievement rates (i.e., state-rated schools of D or F). We also analyzed longitudinal pre- and post-program student Haberman data as one means to address needs to revise our M.Ed. and Ed.S. EDL curricula to improve emerging school leaders.

As we aimed to answer the research question concerning the type of change that occurred in our EDL candidates' urban leadership dispositions, we identified a significant positive change in performance on the Haberman assessment by our students. In addition, we found our study was

able to identify through its interviews evidence that supports the relevancy of the Haberman as a pre- and post- assessment tool for current and future leaders of diverse low-performing students.

NLU used the Haberman in this context because it focuses on the need for educational leaders in CLP urban schools. This is important because of the impact academic failure can have on diverse students of poverty. The public and parental concern about children in low-performing schools is growing, and the loss of too many children and youth to lives of failure is unconscionable. One of the important keys to addressing this incredible problem is to help develop more school leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to make a meaningful difference in saving the lives of these young people. NLU began several years ago to use the Haberman assessment because of its potential to measure the dispositions necessary for school leaders to assist instructional staff members to help our most needy students succeed in school and life. The dimensions it measures can also drive the curricula necessary to develop the kinds of leaders needed. Our study was another step to improve this effort.

Although four dimensions out of Haberman's 17 are not directly addressed in the current NLU EDL curricula for the master's and Educational Specialist degree programs, our study indicates that these unaddressed dimensions overlap to some degree within the 13 that are included. We also were able to identify from our study's interview data some general suggestions from our subject matter experts for enhancing the leadership curricula to address all the 17 dimensions. So, our results have included receiving affirmation of the dispositional Haberman-related EDL program elements through our internal institutional-level peer review as well as through reaffirmation of accreditation by our programmatic accrediting body and specialized professional association (National Louis University, 2019). The study validates measurement of the present and dynamic dispositional changes in the context of an educational leadership program designed to develop content knowledge, operational competencies, and, especially, leadership dispositions targeted at developing effective leaders of CLP schools.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

### Introduction

The purpose of this interview is to consult your leadership expertise in the context of studying leadership dispositions related to supporting chronically underperforming high-needs schools

The Haberman Educational Foundation describes leadership dimensions as “administrators’ behaviors and predispositions to act” (Haberman, 2016, para. 4).

This concept is closely related to dispositions, which may be defined as “tendencies toward particular patterns of intellectual behavior” (Costa & Kallick, 2014, p. 19), and competencies, defined as “a pattern of thinking, feeling, acting, or speaking that causes a person to be successful in a job or role” (Public Impact, 2008, p. 4).

1. Briefly summarize your leadership career in no more than one paragraph: describe your experiences in a school that is performing adequately versus a high-needs Title I school that is low performing.
2. Based on your experiences leading a high-needs school, how significant was it for faculty and students to perceive **leadership as equitable**? Talk about things you typically did or said that helped build or reinforce that perception with faculty and students (e.g., sensitivity to diversity).
3. Based on your experiences leading a high-needs school, how significant was **creating a common vision** for the school to become more successful? Talk about things you typically did or said that helped build or reinforce that common vision with faculty and students (e.g., building effective work teams and cooperative activities).
4. Based on your experiences leading a high-needs school, how significant was **creating a positive working climate** for the school to become more successful? Talk about things you typically did or said that helped build or reinforce that positive working climate with faculty and students (e.g., taking into consideration individual context and extenuating circumstances when applying rules).
5. Based on your experiences leading a high-needs school, how significant was it for you to be seen as the **instructional leader** for the school to become more successful? Talk about things you typically did or said that helped build or reinforce your function as the school’s leading educator with faculty and students (e.g., being seen as the instructional leader vs. being seen as a building manager).
6. Based on your experiences leading a high-needs school, how significant was it for you to model **leading based on data-driven evidence** as the primary basis for setting school policies and procedures for the school to become more successful? Talk about things you typically did or said



that helped build or reinforce the disposition to use data with faculty and students (e.g., using data vs. school traditions, personal charisma, or pleasing the staff).

7. Based on your experiences leading a high-needs school, how did you **assess the degree of effectiveness or ineffectiveness of an instructional program**? Example: Did you focus more on product (student results) or process (implementing with fidelity)?

8. Based on your experiences leading a high-needs school, how significant was it to convey a sense of your own **personal accountability**, even for people and processes that you could not completely control, for the school to become more successful? Talk about things you typically did or said that demonstrated to faculty your disposition for your personal accountability for student learning, even when some issues in the environment are beyond personal control.

9. No school is an island. Based on your experiences leading a high-needs school, and as you think about schools and their communities, how significant was it to **connect the school with the resources needed to serve diverse children in poverty** for the school to become more successful (e.g., resources that were beyond the district's budget, personnel, and resources)?

10a. Based on your experiences leading a high-needs school, how significant was it to **balance top-down district requirements with bottom-up advocacy for your students' needs** for the school to become more successful? Talk about things you typically did or said that helped advocate for your stakeholders (e.g., taking into consideration individual context and extenuating circumstances when applying rules and policies).

10b. How significant was it to balance **staff needs with advocacy for your students' needs** for the school to become more successful?

11. In today's educational world, there are school and district advisory committees, school community volunteers, and PTAs that have expanded the role of parents and community members. Based on your experiences leading a high-needs school, how significant was it to work with these **expanded roles** for the school to become more successful? Talk about things you typically did or said that helped leverage various stakeholders to become genuine partners in meeting students' needs and cultivating achievement.

12. Based on your experiences leading a high-needs school, how significant was it to be a **dynamic, creative leader** for the school to become more successful? Talk about creative and dynamic actions and attitudes you engendered to proactively address problems.

13. Is there anything else you would like to tell me regarding the dispositions that are needed when leading a high-needs school for the school to become more successful and raise student achievement? Which of the factors mentioned above stands as the most significant leadership disposition for leading high-needs schools?

## **Appendix B: Request for Alumni Participation**

Dear NLU EDL Alum:

We would like to invite you to participate in a research project supported by National Louis University's Research Residency program, which approved this study designed by the four faculty signatories represented below. The purpose of the project is to gather feedback from our EDL graduates regarding their perceptions of the competencies needed to lead in schools faced with significant challenges, such as high rates of poverty (e.g., a Title I school) and chronically low rates of student achievement (i.e., schools with a grade of D, F, or otherwise identified as turnaround status, transformation status, or differentiated accountability).

If you have recent experience (within the past five years) of leading a high-needs school with significant rates of poverty and chronically low rates of student achievement, we would like to interview you in regard to your thoughts on the challenges that leaders face while leading these types of schools and any dispositions that assist leaders of these schools to be successful. Ultimately, we hope that information we glean from conversing with experienced school leaders will help inform what changes we might make to our EDL curriculum to prepare new leaders for these challenging situations.

If you would like to volunteer for a 30–45-minute interview, or if you have any questions about the project, please reply to this email.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Carol Burg  
Stu Carrier  
Jim Schott  
Dan Buckman

### **Appendix C: Letter of Invitation to Faculty**

Dear NLU EDL faculty:

We would like to invite you to participate in a research project supported by National Louis University's Research Residency program, which approved this study designed by the four faculty signatories represented below. The purpose of the project is to gather feedback from our EDL faculty and graduates regarding their perceptions of the competencies needed to lead in schools faced with significant challenges, such as high rates of poverty (e.g., a Title I school) and chronically low rates of student achievement (i.e., schools with a grade of D, F, or otherwise identified as turn-around status, transformation status, or differentiated accountability).

If you have recent experience (within the past five years) of leading a high-needs school with significant rates of poverty and chronically low rates of student achievement, we would like to interview you in regard to your thoughts on the challenges that leaders face while leading these types of schools and any dispositions that assist leaders of these schools to be successful. Ultimately, we hope that information we glean from conversing with experienced school leaders will help inform what changes we might make to our EDL curriculum to prepare new leaders for these challenging situations.

If you would like to volunteer for a 30–45-minute interview, or if you have any questions about the project, please reply to this email.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Carol Burg  
Stu Carrier  
Jim Schott  
Dan Buckman

## **Appendix D: INFORMED CONSENT**

### **Adult Participant Interview**

Greetings from Dr. Carol Burg, Dr. Stuart Carrier, Dr. Jim Schott, and Dr. Dan Buckman:

We are faculty at National Louis University in the Educational Leadership (EDL) Department. We are asking for your consent to voluntarily participate in a research study we are conducting. The study is entitled: “Developing Leadership Dispositions for Preparing Urban School Leaders in Chronically Low-Performing Schools.” The purpose of the project is to gather feedback from our EDL faculty and graduates regarding their perceptions of the dispositions needed to lead in schools faced with significant challenges, such as high rates of poverty (e.g., a Title I school) and chronically low rates of student achievement (i.e., schools with a grade of D, F, or otherwise identified as turn-around status, transformation status, or differentiated accountability). We would like to interview you in regard to your thoughts on the challenges that leaders face while leading these types of schools and any skills or dispositions that assist leaders of these schools to be successful. As a result of this interview, we hope to determine what changes we might make to our EDL curriculum to prepare new leaders for these challenging situations.

You may participate in this study by signing this consent form indicating that you understand the purpose of the interview and agree to participate in one 30–45-minute interview, with possibly up to five email exchanges to clarify any questions we may have regarding your interview data. We will audio tape and transcribe the interviews. All information collected in the interviews reflects your experience and opinions regarding your views on leading schools that have significant challenges.

Your participation is voluntary and you may discontinue your participation at any time. We will keep the identity of the school and all participants confidential, as it will not be attached to the data, and we will use pseudonyms for all participants. Only we will have access to all the data, interview tapes, transcripts, and field notes, which we will keep in a locked cabinet at home or on a password protected hard drive for up to five years after the completion of this study, at which time we will shred all data, interview transcripts, tapes, and notes. Participation in this study does not involve any physical or emotional risk beyond that of everyday life. While you are likely to not have any direct benefit from being in this research study, your taking part in this study may contribute to our better understanding of the challenges school leaders face and how to support their preparation for these challenges.

While the results of this study may be published or otherwise reported to scientific bodies, your identity will in no way be revealed. You may request a copy of this completed study by contacting us at [cburg@nl.edu](mailto:cburg@nl.edu) or [scarrier@nl.edu](mailto:scarrier@nl.edu).

In the event you have questions or require additional information, you may contact us at 727-412-0800, [cburg@nl.edu](mailto:cburg@nl.edu), or [scarrier@nl.edu](mailto:scarrier@nl.edu). If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that you feel we have not addressed, you may contact the National Louis Institutional

Research Review Board: Dr. Shaunti Knauth, NLU IRRB Chair, shaunti.knauth@nl.edu, 312-261-3526, National Louis University IRRB Board, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60603.

Thank you for your participation.

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Name (Please Print)

---

Signature

Date

---

Researcher Name (Please Print)

---

Researcher Signature

Date

### **Appendix E: Haberman Dimensions Descriptions**

Dimensions of Effective Urban School Leadership Assessed by the Pre-Screener

I. Sensitive to Diversity \_\_\_\_\_ Insensitive to Diversity

Does the respondent understand the pervasive importance of race, ethnicity, class and gender in the process of interacting with all the constituencies involved in the school community, or does the respondent assume that these differences will not affect his/her leadership? This dimension predicts the respondent's ability to be perceived as fair and equitable in an urban school serving diverse children, parents and community in poverty.

II. Creates a Common Vision \_\_\_\_\_ Fosters Personal Preferences

Does the respondent have a strong and persisting commitment to creating a common set of goals and objectives for all school staff, or does s/he believe that it is best for each staff member to decide school goals and best practice for him/herself? This dimension predicts the likelihood that the respondent will create the effective work teams and cooperative activities needed for the school to succeed, or simply seek to make individuals happy by following their preferences.

III. Develops Positive Working Climate \_\_\_\_\_ Enforces Rules

Does the respondent appreciate that the leader's role involves dealing with a complex set of interpersonal relationships, or does s/he see the leader as the final authority in enforcing rules? This dimension predicts the respondent's potential for creating a positive working climate, or having the school function as a depersonalized bureaucracy.

IV. Instructional Leader \_\_\_\_\_ Building Manager

Does the respondent place a high priority on the leader's role in improving teachers' instructional effectiveness, or does s/he see the leader's role in controlling and maintaining the building as his/her highest priority? This dimension predicts whether the respondent will function as the school's leading educator, or as the overseer of the school organization and the physical facility.

V. Data Driven \_\_\_\_\_ Idiosyncratic

Does the respondent use data as the primary basis for setting school policies and procedures or does s/he use school traditions, personal charisma or pleasing staff as the basis for instituting

school policies and practices? This dimension predicts the ability of the respondent to increase the effectiveness of the school in achievement, attendance, suspensions and in other critical areas where the data is readily available.

Questions 89-96

VI. Product Evaluation \_\_\_\_\_ Process Evaluation

Does the respondent focus on results as the fundamental criterion of success, or does s/he believe that procedures followed can be used as the criterion of success? This dimension predicts whether the respondent will maintain a focus on improved learning as the ultimate value to be preserved, or whether the programs in his/her school will be evaluated on the basis of procedures followed and how the programs are implemented

VII. Personal Accountability \_\_\_\_\_ Others Accountability

Does the respondent understand and accept the need for the school principal to bear personal accountability for student learning and other measures of school success, or does s/he believe it is the role of the principal to ensure that only others are held accountable for various aspects of the school's program? This dimension predicts the respondent's willingness to hold him/herself accountable for people and processes which s/he cannot completely control.

VIII. Responsible Leader \_\_\_\_\_ Delegator

Does the respondent understand the leader's role to be primarily one in which s/he will be the responsible authority for performing major functions, or does s/he believe that the leader's role is primarily one of delegating as much as possible to others and overseeing their work? This dimension predicts not only the respondent's leadership style but the degree to which s/he perceives the school leader as directly and personally responsible.

IX. Expanded Principal's Role \_\_\_\_\_ Traditional Principal's Role

Does the respondent understand that the effective urban school principal is the leader of a community based, non-profit organization, does s/he see the role of principal as limited to his/her role and status in the urban school district bureaucracy? This dimension predicts the respondent's propensity to connect the school with the resources needed to serve diverse children in urban poverty, or to be limited to only the district's budget, personnel and resources.

X. Bottom-up Representative \_\_\_\_\_ Top-down Representative

Does the respondent perceive his/her role as primarily representing the needs of the school upward to superiors, or does s/he interpret the role of the principal as primarily representing the mandates and policies of the system downward to the staff? This dimension predicts whether the respondent will protect and enhance effective practices in his/her school or simply follow orders.

XI. Parents with Voice \_\_\_\_\_ Parents as Helpers

Does the respondent understand the need for parents, caregivers and community to be involved in the life of the school as participants with voice, input and even power, or does s/he see the value of these constituencies as essentially supporters of the school program? This dimension predicts the likelihood that the respondent will seek to involve parents and community as genuine partners, or limit them to homework helpers and visitors.

XII. Client Advocate \_\_\_\_\_ Staff Advocate

Does the respondent understand the principal's role as an advocate of children, parents and community, or does s/he see the "good" principal as one who only supports teachers and staff in problem and conflict situations? This dimension predicts the respondent's ability to implement

the school's commitment to serve diverse students and families in poverty and simultaneously represent the professional staff.

XIII. Problem Solver \_\_\_\_\_ Reactor

Does the respondent perceive the role of school leader to be primarily one of active involvement in problem solving, or does s/he see the principal as the legal authority making final decisions from options presented to him/her? This dimension predicts whether the respondent will be a dynamic, creative leader, or whether s/he will passively wait for problems and solutions to be presented to him/her.



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**Appendix F**  
**List of NLU M.Ed./Ed.S. EDL Courses Related**  
**to The Haberman Star Administrator Dispositions**

EDL 520 - Leading Diverse Schools

EDL 521 - Building School-Community Partnerships

EDL 522 - Leading Student-Centered Schools

EDL 523 - Navigating School & Special Education Law

EDL 524 - Negotiating and Resolving Conflicts in Education Communities

EDL 525 - Decision-Making for Educational Systems & Organization

EDL 526 - Realizing Vision Through Technical, Human, and Financial Resources

EDL 527 - Guaranteeing a Differentiated and Coherent Curriculum

EDL 528 - Maintaining Accountability with Data Use and Program Evaluation

EDL 529 - Improving Instruction Through Teacher Evaluation & Professional Development

EDL 573 - Educational Leadership Project

EDL 598 - Administration & Supervision Internship